PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 379

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 2001–02

COMPRISING PERIOD
28 January 2002—8 February 2002

£70

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28 January 2002

28 JANUARY 2002

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2001]

FIFTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 379**

TENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2001–2002

House of Commons

Monday 28 January 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WORK AND PENSIONS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Unemployment (Cardiff)

1. **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff, West): What measures he will take to assist the hardest-to-help unemployed into work in Cardiff, West. [28137]

The Minister for Work (Mr. Nicholas Brown): We have introduced a range of initiatives that are helping disadvantaged groups to move from welfare into work in all parts of the country. In Cardiff, West, long-term unemployment has fallen by over two thirds, and long-term youth unemployment by three quarters, since 1997.

Part of the Cardiff, West constituency will also be one of the areas covered by our new pilot programme, StepUp, to be launched in April. StepUp will provide transitional jobs to act as a stepping stone for some of the hardest-to-help unemployed people moving from benefits into work.

Kevin Brennan: I thank my right hon. Friend for his answer and, in particular, for the pilot scheme that the Government will run in my constituency to help the unemployed.

Does my right hon. Friend recognise that even in areas such as Cardiff, a vibrant, prosperous city with a tremendous economic record under the present Government, there are still hard-core, long-term unemployed people who are difficult to assist, and who really need that helping hand into the job market? Can he assure me that the jobs that will be available under the StepUp programme will be of good quality, so that people are encouraged to enter the labour market permanently once those jobs have ended?

Mr. Brown: Yes, I can. A range of jobs will be available to each client, and will be guaranteed for up to a year. It will be real work, and people will be paid at least the minimum wage. They will be employed, as opposed to on a scheme, and the Department will work with individual clients to ensure that these opportunities lead to further, permanent employment.

Benefit Fraud

2. **Mr. Bill Wiggin** (Leominster): If he will make a statement on the level of benefit fraud. [28138]

6. **Patrick Mercer** (Newark): What targets his Department has set local authorities for benefit fraud prosecutions for 2001–02. [28143]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Alistair Darling): We estimate that £2 billion is lost annually owing to confirmable fraud across all benefits.

Latest results show that in the two and a half years to March 2001 we have reduced the level of fraud and error in income support and jobseeker's allowance by 18 per cent. We expect that good progress to continue.

Today I shall lay before the House a code of practice which governs the use of new powers to obtain information from banks, insurance and utility companies about suspected fraud. Those measures, along with new powers to punish persistent offenders and tougher penalties for collusive employers, will begin to be implemented in April.

Mr. Wiggin: Will the Secretary of State confirm that, according to his own figures, only 1,100 of the 460,000 cases of suspected fraud were successfully prosecuted? That is a success rate of some 99 per cent. *[Interruption.]* I mean a failure rate of 99 per cent. The exact figure is 99.75 per cent. Does the Secretary of State agree that that figure reflects his Department's lax attitude?

Mr. Darling: I was going to say that 99 per cent. sounded all right to me.

As the hon. Gentleman has raised the issue, I will tell him that nearly 27,000 prosecutions, cautions and administrative penalties were applied last year. As I said in my initial answer, the level of fraud and error in the system remains unacceptably high, and we are introducing a number of measures to lower it. As a result of changes we have made to tighten up the system, there has been an 18 per cent. drop in fraud and error in income support and jobseeker's allowance, two of the main benefits. That is encouraging. We must now go on tightening up the system. Under the new Jobcentre Plus regime, we will see people more regularly so that we can check their circumstances, and the information technology replacement programme will mean a steady improvement, year on year, in an inheritance that I regard as thoroughly unacceptable.

Patrick Mercer: In 1999-2000, 50 per cent. of local authorities failed to prosecute a single person for council tax benefit fraud or housing benefit fraud. My local authorities in Newark and Retford tell me that, with changes in housing benefit administration occurring nearly every fortnight, the delivery of the benefit—let alone detection of fraud—is almost impossible. Would the Secretary of State care to comment?

Mr. Darling: Successive Governments have tried to tighten up the regime for administering housing benefit. One of the problems is that it is run by just over 400 local authorities. Interestingly, while some authorities can run it quite well and have a good record, others do not. In some cases, the record has been truly appalling. That is one reason why we sent action teams to improve the performance of a number of authorities, which has resulted in a significant improvement in the administration of housing benefit.

It is up to local authorities whether to refer cases for prosecution; central Government do not control that. I am, however, determined that we should bear down on housing benefit fraud as vigorously as we are bearing down on fraud in JSA and income support. As I said a moment ago, there has already been an 18 per cent. reduction in fraud—something that was never achieved in the past.

Mr. Frank Roy (Motherwell and Wishaw): The Secretary of State will be aware that the only way to tackle benefit fraud is through the hard work of Jobcentre Plus staff, and that today many thousands of those staff are on strike because of fears for their safety at the workplace. Will he do whatever he can to bring both sides together to resolve that serious dispute before it escalates any further?

Mr. Darling: From the figures we have as of lunchtime, fewer people are on strike today than during the previous so-called national strike in December, and significantly fewer offices have closed. The problem that the PCS—the Public and Commercial Services union—has to face is that it does not have the support of anything like a majority of staff in its campaign to retain screens in benefit offices. Today, nearly three quarters of department staff are in work. Critically, the vast majority of staff working in the new Jobcentre Plus offices—the offices that are predominantly unscreened—have been in work since they opened last year.

My hon. Friend is right. The evidence so far shows that with Jobcentre Plus, we see people more often, we can check facts more easily, and we can make benefit payments more accurately than in the past. I want to be clear. The Government intend to roll out the Jobcentre Plus offices throughout the entire office network. We do not believe that the strike is justified. Indeed, the fact that most of the staff in these offices have been in work since they opened tends to suggest that our approach is the right one.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): How extensive is fraud in relation to adopting the national insurance number and the name of another person? What measures are there to combat that? What measures are taken to inform other agencies when it is discovered, such as the police national computer, the Child Support Agency and credit agencies? This is a serious problem facing one of my constituents and, I understand, the constituents of many other people.

Mr. Darling: No matter where it occurs in the system, fraud is extremely serious, although in the scale of things, national insurance fraud is a lot less of a problem than, for example, people who falsely represent their circumstances. None the less, we take it seriously. My hon. Friend may be interested to know that about two years ago, during a pilot project in the Balham office in south London, we carried out far more extensive checks into people's identity. That resulted in a number of false claims being found, people being referred for prosecution and one or two people being deported.

We are ensuring that we tighten up the system across the country. There are more checks, which means that some cases are taking longer to process, but that is inevitable.

On swapping information across departments, we are looking at that. It is not straightforward. There are data protection and legitimate privacy issues to consider but I think that most of us and most members of the public take the view that if one arm of government knows something about someone, it is not unreasonable to expect another arm of government to know the same thing.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): The Secretary of State will know that the local government ombudsman for London has said that the housing benefits administration system is in chaos. Can he give an assurance that that administration will be radically improved, particularly in many London boroughs? Without that, there is no question but that the tackling of fraud will not be at its most effective.

Mr. Darling: As I said earlier, what is striking—this applies to London as much as to the rest of the country—is that some local authorities administer housing benefit well and others, in administration is appalling. I am determined to ensure that we drive up standards in those local authorities where standards are way below an acceptable level. That is the best way to bear down on fraud and error.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): Does my right hon. Friend agree that not all cases of benefit fraud are due to the Conservative party, although we have tried to blame it for everything? Does he agree that perhaps the time has come for us to look at benefit fraud and at what happened in years gone by when the Opposition manipulated the figures and put people on benefit? It is time to get them off.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The policy of the Opposition is nothing to do with the Secretary of State.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): I shall try to attack the Secretary of State as effectively as his own colleague, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson), did.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that two reports from his own Department have shown that the targeting fraud advertising campaign that he launched has succeeded in persuading people that benefit fraud is "easier to commit"? He has spent £16 million on an advertising campaign, the main effect of which has been to persuade people that they can get away with fraud. Unusually for the Government, this an accurate advertising campaign because people are getting away with it, as questions from my hon. Friends have shown. Also, we know that, after all the hype about the targeting fraud website, it has led to just one successful prosecution, and that national insurance fraud—which he dismissed as being not very big in the scale of things—is estimated to be running at £400 million a year.

Why are Ministers making the system so complicated? Would it not be better to get to the root of fraud by simplifying the system so that error does not lead to fraud, instead of having the Government's remorseless preoccupation with making all benefits more complicated, more prone to error and more prone to fraud?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman's argument would have more force were it not for the fact that no serious attempt was made to even measure fraud in the social security system until 1995, about 15 years after the Conservative party was elected to government. Also, there was no systematic measuring of fraud until after 1997, following the general election in that year. In that time, we have put in place a number of measures that, as I have said, are now beginning to bear fruit. The fact that I can tell the House that fraud and error in income support and jobseeker's allowance are down by 18 per cent.—something my predecessors could never have said—shows that our efforts are getting results.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the advertising campaign. The campaign was designed to raise people's awareness of benefit fraud, just as the drink driving campaigns have raised awareness over the years. The research also shows that the public is becoming less tolerant of benefit fraud. It is important that we win people's hearts and minds on this matter because we need public support.

Lastly, on the simplification of benefits, the hon. Gentleman and his predecessors who served in government will know that there is a superficial attraction to standing up and saying that we should simplify the benefits system. However, once it is discovered that such simplifications would involve removing people's right to support, we see—as I hope that he would accept—that the task of simplification is not as straightforward as he makes out. We do not want to end up by taking money away from people who should be getting it. However, we want to maintain our drive to tighten up the system to cut fraud and error, which is precisely what we are doing.

Welfare to Work

3. **Ms Karen Buck** (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): What assessment he has made of the impact of welfare-to-work policies in London. [28139]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): In London, more than 70,000 people have been helped into work through our new deal programmes, including 42,000 young Londoners. In addition, more than 10,000 more have moved into work in some of the most deprived areas through employment zones and action teams for jobs. Altogether, our policies have helped to reduce unemployment in London by more than 30 per cent. since 1997 and long-term unemployment has fallen by nearly 60 per cent.

Ms Buck: Fraud is very important, but it is also important that those people who are entitled to benefits get the help that they need when they require it. It is of some concern to me that despite the national success of the working families tax credit in topping up the incomes of low-income families, Londoners are less likely to receive that benefit. In particular, low-income single parents are half as likely to receive working families tax credit as people in the country as a whole. Will the Government commit themselves to a research project to establish why we have these variations, and to find out how much of it is due to a lack of awareness and how much is due to structural problems that can be removed to make sure that Londoners get the help that they require?

Malcolm Wicks: I know of my hon. Friend's great interest in this matter in her constituency and London as a whole. I shall go through these matters with her to see whether there is a need for research. Across the country—including in London—the working families tax credit has been of enormous help to two and one-parent families. In London alone, some 95,000 families have benefited from the working families tax credit.

In addition, 70,000 people in London have benefited from the national minimum wage. That demonstrates that along with making work possible for Londoners, and everyone else in the country, we also need to make work pay.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Is not the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) right to say that the key to the success of these policies is access? Given that the take-up of working families tax credit in her constituency and others in London is extremely low, will the Minister tell us what will happen when working families tax credit migrates to child tax credit in 2003? How will those who do not have bank accounts receive their credit if the universal bank is not up and running by then? Secondly, with 40,000 of his staff on strike today—a fact dismissed by the Secretary of State—is it not time that the Government and the management spoke constructively to their staff, to enable them to provide the advice that they should be providing to those who need it?

Malcolm Wicks: There was a lot there in terms of quantity, but the hon. Gentleman greatly inflates the number of people on strike. The strike has not been a success, and we urge people to return to work to make a success of what is already a successful project—Jobcentre Plus. We talked about fraud earlier, and just as we need to bear down on fraud—as we are doing—we need to enable people to claim the benefits to which they are entitled, in a variety of ways. We are pleased by the success of working families tax credit, and the new child tax credit will also be a success, but we will look at any sensible ideas for increasing take-up.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): Does the Minister accept that part of the welfare-to-work programme involves an incentive, and that in London and other cities, such as Glasgow, where rent and council tax levels are higher, those in low-paid jobs do not have so much incentive to go into work because they lose their council tax and rent rebates when they do so? Would the Minister be prepared to consider the pilot project suggested by Glasgow city council to waive the loss of rent and rate rebates for a period for people going into work? If that project were successful, and if it were adopted elsewhere, it would undoubtedly assist people in London and Glasgow.

Malcolm Wicks: I recognise that we need to do all that we can to inform people about what will happen when they go off benefit full-time and go back into work. Many people are, understandably, ignorant about those effects. That is why, in Jobcentres and Jobcentres Plus, we do a "better-off calculation", to demonstrate to people exactly how much better off they will be in work. Many are pleasantly surprised at the result. That is because people still receive housing benefit when doing a low-paid job. They are also entitled to the minimum wage, and tax credits bite in with good effect.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): Is not the Minister concerned that so few of those leaving the new deal in London are being taken on by central Government Departments? Is he not also concerned that, since March last year, when the Select Committee said that it was "extremely disappointed" by the failure of Departments to recruit more people from the new deal—and when the Minister's own Department promised to set up special programmes to encourage Departments to recruit more from it—the number being recruited by central Government has fallen still further? A few moments ago, the Secretary of State said that it was important for the different arms of government to work together. Is it not clear that, when it comes to the new deal, they are not? The Government are snubbing their own policies, and other Departments are snubbing the policies of his Department.

Malcolm Wicks: The hon. Gentleman talks from a position of some principle. That principle is that he is against the new deal. The fact is that we have enabled young people to enter different forms of employment in the public sector and in the private sector, and also to take routes into training and education. What the House needs to understand—and what the Opposition do not wish to understand—is that the new deal has been a great success in enabling people in London and elsewhere to get into the world of work.

Pensioners (Hospital Patients)

4. **Laura Moffatt** (Crawley): What additional *(a)* financial and *(b)* practical help is offered to pensioners who are in hospital for more than six weeks. [28140]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): There is no additional financial help, although community care grants may be available to help with fares for other family members to visit a person in hospital. After six weeks in hospital, a person with a basic rate pension would receive £58 a week, or £44.20 if they had no dependants. Housing benefit would remain in payment for people on the minimum income guarantee. In terms of practical help, every patient should have a discharge plan, including an assessment of their future care needs, developed from the beginning of their hospital admission. All hospital in-patients have access to a social worker. From this April, patients in every NHS trust will have access to a patient advice and liaison service to help them with their dealings with the hospital.

Laura Moffatt: I completely understand the principle behind the clawback from pensioners, but I was a nurse for many years and spoke to many couples who had a loved one in hospital, and the extra burden—including, as she rightly said, transport—is often difficult over a sustained period. I hope that the Minister can consider other practical measures to ensure that our pensioners do not suffer if they have to spend an extended time in hospital.

Maria Eagle: I assure my hon. Friend that the Department keeps all matters relating to all our benefits under review—but I must also make the point that in written answers on 8 January to my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Prosser), recorded at columns 699-700W of *Hansard*, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Pensions made it clear that at present we have no plans to make any changes in the hospital downrating provisions. The principle of avoiding double provision is a key cornerstone of the system of national insurance; it was introduced more than 50 years ago, and has been supported on both sides of the House. Indeed, as recently as Thursday, Lord Higgins, who speaks for the Conservative party in the upper House, supported it by suggesting that one way round the problem that arises on the resumption of benefits would be to continue them throughout a hospital stay, but to charge the individual for rent, accommodation and so forth. That is the Tory answer.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Can the Minister give some reassurance to Age Concern in Tiverton? I met its representatives on Friday night, and they expressed concern about the increasing number of elderly people in hospital who are demanding to be sent home just before the six weeks are up. One of the factors behind that is the long delay in getting their benefit books back after they have to surrender them for the adjustment. Is there no minimum turn-round time that the Benefits Agency has to work to? If so, it is not working in my constituency. Will the Minister take a particular interest, and do something about that?

Maria Eagle: I would be happy for the hon. Lady to refer those cases to me so that I can look into them in detail. The Department does have a target for those who are claiming back a benefit. The target for dealing with a new claim for income support and the minimum income guarantee is 12 days, and the latest figures show that in fact we turn such claims round in 9.4 days. For claims concerning changes of circumstance the target is four days, and our performance shows that in fact we turn those claims round in an average of two and a half days. If the hon. Lady is running into problems in her constituency, I shall be more than happy to look into them if she refers them to me.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): Obviously I do not want to raise an individual case, because that sort of thing caused some controversy last week—but is my hon. Friend aware that there is concern, especially among elderly people, who are most vulnerable during a stay in hospital, and who may feel that they will lose all their benefits? Will she examine the situation and make sure that social workers give adequate information to the people who are most vulnerable?

Maria Eagle: I understand the point that my hon. Friend makes; it is important that when people are vulnerable in hospital they get proper advice. However, as I am sure everyone in the House would accept, giving people benefits advice when they are not feeling well could cause confusion and fear. There is no reason why the rules should not be well known—they have been operating for 54 years, since the beginning of the welfare state—and I hope that those dealing with vulnerable elderly people make the position clear to them. It has not changed recently.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): It seems risky being a pensioner in hospital these days. Will the Minister at least acknowledge that there is fresh and growing concern about the hospital downrating rules? They may have been around since 1948, and be based on the principle of avoiding double provision, but will she at least acknowledge that there is a problem in getting clear advice to patients while they are in hospital? Even when they are sick, they may still be worried about their benefit situation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) said, there may be a particular problem in getting people back on to their benefits when they leave hospital. The process needs to be streamlined as much as possible, so will the Minister undertake to discuss the whole project in good faith with Age Concern and others who have direct experience of the human and practical implications?

Maria Eagle: Of course we have ongoing discussions with Age Concern and other organisations with an interest in these issues and we will certainly continue to do so. This rule has been in existence for 54 years; the Conservative party was in power for 35 of those years and did not do anything about it. However, I notice that the Leader of the Opposition's Parliamentary Private Secretary has signed early-day motion 542, so perhaps that signals a change in the Conservative party position. I remind my right hon. and hon. Friends about the Conservative party's views on bed and breakfast in hospital, which was reiterated as recently as Thursday in the other place.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Perhaps we will leave that.

Pensioners (Annuities)

5. **Mr. George Osborne** (Tatton): What plans he has to abolish the rule requiring pensioners to purchase an annuity by the age of 75 years. [28141]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Alistair Darling): It is important that pension funds built up with the support of tax relief are used to provide pensioners with a secure income in retirement. For the majority, buying an annuity is the best way of ensuring that they have a secure income throughout their retirement. We have no plans, therefore, to change that rule. The principle will underline the approach in the forthcoming consultation paper on annuities which was announced in the pre-Budget report last year.

Mr. Osborne: Millions of pensioners will be disappointed with that answer and dismayed if the consultation paper rules out any reform of annuities. If the Government want people to save for their retirement, why do they not trust them to invest their savings in retirement? Will the Secretary of State and the Government support the private Member's Bill on annuity reform that received the overwhelming support of the House on Second Reading?

Mr. Darling: The Tories certainly turned up in force—that is true. The problem with the Bill's proposals and those which I suspect that the hon. Gentleman supports is that they would benefit only a minority of people who have retired. The average pension fund is at present some £30,000. Indeed, in the year 2000, the average amount used to buy an annuity was only £23,000. The proposals in the private Member's Bill and those commonly espoused by the Conservatives tend to be aimed at people who have pension funds of something like £250,000.

The forthcoming consultation document will consider options to make the annuity market work better than it does, but we must have regard to anything that we do so that it does not adversely affect the general level of annuity rates. We need to ensure that we prevent any tax avoidance becoming commonplace because of changes that might be made. We also need to ensure that if tax relief is given to people to save for their retirement, that is what they use the money for, rather than avoiding using the money for their pension and relying on state benefits instead. The hon. Gentleman will see the consultation document in the not-too-distant future, but it is worth bearing in mind how many people would benefit from any proposal. We would not want only a few people to benefit, which is what I suspect the Conservatives have in mind.

Mr. George Mudie (Leeds, East): Does the consultation paper deal with the bizarre and unfair situation whereby, on the death of the annuity holder, the remaining capital reverts to the institution and not the family? If the Secretary of State believes that to be a matter for the insurance companies, will he, in the short term, take steps to change the rule under which the tiny number of schemes that enable people to allow an inheritance to pass to their family can operate only when the money is invested abroad? That seems quite wrong.

Mr. Darling: I shall not go into the detail of what the consultation paper proposes, for obvious reasons. The House will see it in the not-too-distant future. However, if we were to change the rules, with the result that more and more people, on their death, could pass the remaining part of their pension fund on to their children or whoever, there would be less money in the system, which would adversely affect annuity rates for people who are currently pensioners. That is why it is important that any changes that the Government make benefit the majority of people. It would be wrong for us to put in place changes, which I think are supported by the Conservative party, from which only a tiny minority of the population would gain.

I repeat that in the last year for which we have figures, the average amount used to buy an annuity was only £23,000. A very small number of people—something like 5 per cent. of the population—will have pension pots of £250,000 or so. It would be disastrous if we made changes that benefited only a tiny minority of people, making the majority worse off. We certainly do not want to get into such a situation.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): But will the Secretary of State answer this simple question: why should a pensioner be obliged to buy an annuity if he or she has enough income to ensure that they will not be dependent on means-tested benefits? Provided that condition is met, what business do the Government have forcing them to buy an annuity?

Mr. Darling: The reason that people receive tax relief during their working life is to make sure that they can build up a pension for their retirement. Our concern is that if changes were made along the lines that I think that the hon. Gentleman supports, the majority of people would lose out because annuity rates would fall as a result of his proposals. That would not be a desirable course of events because it would mean—all other things being equal—that the state would have to pick up the bill for that change.

No matter what changes we may contemplate in the future, it is important that we bear in mind the fundamental principle that tax relief is given to people so that they can save for their retirement. We do not want to change the rules and find that a majority of people are actually worse off.

Mr. Willetts: It is no good the Secretary of State hiding behind this tax relief. Let me quote from a letter from the former Economic Secretary, who wrote:

> "there is no tax revenue reason why pension schemes should have to buy annuities."

The Secretary of State cannot hide behind the Treasury to explain the policy, any more than Treasury Ministers can hide behind the Department for Work and Pensions to do so. This policy is one on which the Government suffered their biggest defeat in the House since 1997. That suggests that the policy is wrong and that it is about time the Government promised to give a fair wind to the Bill that received its Second Reading only a fortnight ago—a Bill which would tackle, with no losers, a well-acknowledged grievance.

Mr. Darling: To put the hon. Gentleman's latter point in its proper perspective, we are talking about a private Member's Bill and it is certainly true that many Conservative Members happened to find themselves in London at about 2.30 pm on that particular Friday. Such things happen; successive Governments have had that experience and we live with it, as the hon. Gentleman well knows.

On the central point, the Bill's proposals would mean that a 65-year-old man would need a pension fund of about £72,000 to derive an income that would put him above the minimum income guarantee. I remind the House that the average amount used to buy an annuity is nothing like £72,000; it is actually £23,000. The result of the proposals in the Bill that the hon. Gentleman clearly supports would mean that although some people—a minority—might find that they were better off, the majority might very well find that their annuity rates fell. That would not be desirable.

The principles are clear. If people receive tax relief to save for their pension, we expect them to accumulate sufficient to live on in their retirement. We do not want people to avoid using that money for their retirement so that they can pass it on; nor do we want a situation to arise in which the majority of people would be worse off due to the changes that had been made. The consultation document will be put before the House and the general public in the not-too-distant future. No one should be in any doubt that the principle of annuitisation is important for the future of pension provision.

Departmental Accounts

7. **Mr. Richard Bacon** (South Norfolk): If he will make a statement on the extent of and reasons for the irregular expenditure by his Department which has caused the Department's current financial statements to receive a qualified opinion from the Comptroller and Auditor General. [28145]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Alistair Darling): The Department's accounts have been qualified since 1988 for two main reasons. The first is fraud and error. Despite the first-ever reductions in fraud and error, the levels remain unacceptably high.

The second problem is the poor state of the Department's information technology, which makes it impossible to track payments through the system. That problem is being addressed by a multi- million pound investment programme that will steadily replace the Department's out-of-date computer systems.

Mr. Bacon: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his reply. Will he tell the House whether he has a target date for the publication of a set of accounts that are not qualified because of fraud? Does he understand how much hard work goes into earning the money paid in tax that his Department then loses? If he takes fraud extremely seriously, as he said in an earlier answer, will he explain why he has still not answered my written question of 8 January?

Mr. Darling: In relation to the written question, I shall certainly make inquiries to see what has happened.

On the more general point, I have said repeatedly this afternoon that the level of fraud and error in the system is unacceptably high, and has been so for many years. As I said, the accounts of the former Department of Social Security were qualified from 1988—indeed, according to the criteria used by the National Audit Office, they should have been qualified from 1948.

The replacement of our IT systems, now under way, will enable us to track payments more accurately than we have done in the past. We have introduced other measures that have brought about a reduction in fraud and error of 18 per cent. in income support and the jobseeker's allowance. Those measures will be spread across the whole Department and we shall steadily bear down on fraud. But I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that I fully expect the next set of accounts to be qualified, and they are likely to be qualified for some time to come, until that investment and those improvements are fully put in place.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): My right hon. Friend has rightly said that none of us condones fraud. Does he think that there is full compatibility between computer systems in local authorities and various Departments using national insurance numbers to ensure that fraud is cut to an absolute minimum, by using those systems far more effectively than perhaps we have done in the past?

Mr. Darling: I agree with my hon. Friend. The short answer is no, the information technology systems are not compatible at the moment, but that will improve year on year. That is particularly important with regard to housing benefit for local authorities, but we are replacing the Department's entire IT system. That should have happened at least 10 years ago; it is now well under way, and it will have a significant impact on our ability to control fraud and error in the system.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Does the Secretary of State understand that no one will think his Department is acting properly so long as we receive letters from Ministers that include paragraphs and sentences such as this:

> "To take no account of DLA or SDP would have significant expenditure implications for the ILF, and the Terms of Reference of the quinquennial review required of the ILF's policies"?

How on earth is anyone supposed to understand anything that goes on in that Department?

Mr. Darling: I hope that I did not sign that letter. If I did, I shall have another look at it. I do not understand it either, so I shall cause inquiries to be made.

The hon. Gentleman raises a serious point, to which I attach some importance: in the past, too many letters from the former Department of Social Security, and I dare say other Departments, have not been written in a way that people would readily understand. We are making determined efforts to try to improve that, but just occasionally the odd letter slips through the net, and I hope that he will forgive us.

Personal Advice (Job Centres)

8. **Mr. Lindsay Hoyle** (Chorley): What plans he has to increase the amount of personal advice available to unemployed people at job centres. [28146]

The Minister for Work (Mr. Nicholas Brown): The Employment Service and those parts of the Benefits Agency that deal with people of working age are being brought together to form Jobcentre Plus. Some 56 Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices have now opened, providing for the first time a fully integrated employment and benefit service. Reactions from individual customers and employers have been overwhelmingly positive. There will be a significant further roll-out of Jobcentre Plus across Great Britain from April this year.

Mr. Hoyle: I welcome my right hon. Friend's answer, but what extra help and support can be given to those people with disabilities or to carers who wish to go to work? I wonder what we can do.

Mr. Brown: There is a full range of services in the Jobcentre Plus network, and provided by the Department more generally, for those with disabilities and those who care for them. We find that carers tend to worry about their own prospects in the job market, as well as their responsibilities as carers. Very few of them are available for full-time work, but many are interested in part-time work. We also know from survey evidence that about 1 million of those who currently receive incapacity benefit, and, in some cases, disability living allowance, would like to work if they had the opportunity to do so. The purpose of the new, new deal for the disabled, which is being piloted, is to try to help those who are disadvantaged in the labour market into the jobs that, with a bit of help and support, they can get.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): What advice would those in jobcentres give to people such as Mr. Stephen Cann—one of my constituents—and a group of other long-term unemployed people from south-west London, who, having been expensively trained by the Minister's Department for 18 months as driving instructors, suddenly found a few weeks before the test that his Department had arbitrarily abandoned the course? In view of the information that I have given him, will he agree to investigate what seems to be a serious abuse of public money and a waste of people's lives?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for drawing the case to my attention. However, for the sake of completeness, I should point out that he did so at 1.15 pm today. I am willing to consider the individual case, but it is very much the exception and not the rule. I will do what I can to help his constituents, because it is not the Government's intention that people should be left unable to complete their course because of a withdrawal of the project that was facilitating it.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): My right hon. Friend will recall from his visit to the Jobcentre Plus in my constituency that it continues to provide an excellent service despite the fact that industrial action has gone on continuously since last September. Although I accept that there is undoubtedly a political element to the industrial action, does he agree that some of the people on strike have genuine and sincere fears for their safety as they administer the new system? Will he give an assurance and a guarantee that, as Jobcentre Plus is rolled out across the country, instances of misconduct and so on will be closely monitored and that the provisions, such as new security guards and closed circuit television, that have rightly been put in place to replace screens will ensure that those fears are ungrounded?

Mr. Brown: I regret the strike very much. The people who are on strike are our employees and they help to deliver public services. I would very much prefer for us all to work together for a common purpose. That common purpose must be the modified, modernised and unified service that we are providing through Jobcentre Plus. It is the Government's intention to roll out the Jobcentre Plus model right across the country and to maintain the very high standards that we had in place for the pilot schemes. Moreover, early evidence from the Jobcentre Plus premises is that open planning, the ability to make appointments and the modern and proactive way of working are welcomed by clients and have reduced the number of incidents that take place on the premises.

Although it is early days, Jobcentre Plus is turning out to be a stunning success for all those reasons. I urge those Members who have not yet visited a Jobcentre Plus premises to make such a visit so that they can see the differences and changes that we have made by investing public money and so that they understand what we are trying to do. It is not the old service with the screens down, as some allege, but a brand-new service and brand-new way of working in brand-new premises.

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): Is the Minister aware that, in my constituency of Wycombe, there is evidence to suggest that personal advisers have only an hour a week in which to follow up the cases of individual clients? Does he think that that is good enough? If not, what does he propose to do about it?

Mr. Brown: The Government are strongly committed to proactive working with jobseekers. If the hon. Gentleman sends me his evidence about the amount of time that caseworkers can spend on individual cases, I will be happy to consider it. However, I have no evidence to suggest that not enough time is being allowed to deliver the service in the modern way that the Government have set out.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I hope that the Government will be supported in these and similar policies. Does my right hon. Friend accept that, in a significant number of areas around the country, there simply are not enough jobs for the people who want to work?

Mr. Brown: There are localised difficulties in some parts of the country, mainly in those constituencies, such as my right hon. Friend's and mine, that were over-reliant on single industries. Of course, we realise that those communities face special problems, but none of that detracts from the generality of the Government's approach, which is that the jobs are out there and that, by proactive work, we can get the people into them. About 6 million of our fellow citizens changed jobs last year and we know of a third of a million job vacancies in the United Kingdom economy today. The jobs are there; we need to help people into them.

My right hon. Friend is right to point to the difficulties faced in industrial communities that were over-reliant on jobs that were mostly in heavy industry. However, citing local difficulties does not detract from the Government's general approach which has, after all, seen record numbers of people in employment.

Relationships (Civil Registration) Bill

9. **Jane Griffiths** (Reading, East): What assessment he has made of the impact the enactment of the Relationships (Civil Registration) Bill would have upon the work of his Department; and if he will make a statement. [28147]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): The Department is participating in work across Government to review the Bill's implications. This work has just started and therefore we are not yet in a position to reach a judgment.

Jane Griffiths: I thank my hon. Friend for that encouraging reply. He will know that some 88 per cent. of pension schemes in the private sector make provision for unmarried partners. He will also know that in the House last year, hon. Members voted to provide that protection in our households, should we wish it. Does he agree that the continuing deliberations in his Department should take into account the fact that to seek to deny to public sector workers what we have awarded to ourselves is nothing short of bad faith?

Malcolm Wicks: Occupational pension schemes need to make their own judgments and examine the cost implications of those. Our review has only just started. It is important that we think the matter through carefully in terms of trends and many other issues. As I said, we are not yet able to reach a judgment, but the review is ongoing.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): Given the new research from the Office for National Statistics, which shows that children of married couples are half as likely to see their parents separate as children of cohabiting couples, and given that the report on the costs of family breakdown for the Lords and Commons family and child protection group conservatively estimates the costs of family breakdown—not least to the Minister's Department—to be about £15 billion a year, will the Minister be circumspect about the registration of civil relationships, not least because the country is unlikely to be able to afford it?

Malcolm Wicks: Before entering the House, I spent 10 years at the Family Policy Studies Centre examining such issues. I understand that children from all sorts of family backgrounds are often the victims of the revolution that has affected family life in this country and many others. I do not think that the issues are directly relevant to the review that we are undertaking, on which we shall deliver a judgment when we can.

Employment Statistics

10. **Mr. Mark Francois** (Rayleigh): If he will make a statement on the number of people in employment in the United Kingdom. [28148]

The Minister for Work (Mr. Nicholas Brown): The number of people in employment is 28.2 million—a new record level. There are 252,000 more people in work than a year ago, and 1.33 million more than in 1997. We are committed to employment opportunity for all, which is why we have introduced Jobcentre Plus, extended the new deals, increased the number of action teams for jobs and introduced the rapid response and StepUp initiatives.

Mr. Francois: I thank the Minister for that reply. Can he explain why unemployment under both the claimant count measure and the International Labour Organisation's measure has been rising for more than three months? Why is it that unemployment is going up on this Government's watch, and what are they doing about it?

Mr. Brown: It is always disappointing to hear of rises in unemployment, but the hon. Gentleman must put it in context. We have record levels of employment in the economy. Some 6 million people changed their jobs in the last year, reflecting the mobility in the labour market. For the hon. Gentleman to suggest that that is evidence of a growing national crisis is very mistaken.

The Government have the right policies to bear down on unemployment by the proactive management of the labour market. There would be cause for concern if the jobs were not available. However, the Government know of a third of a million jobs that are available in the British economy, and we believe that the total number of available jobs in the economy that are reported to us is about a third of the total.

Mr. David Miliband (South Shields): I hope that my right hon. Friend remembers with fondness his trip to South Tyneside on 7 January. It included a visit to the action team for jobs that is helping to tackle unemployment and raise employment in a part of the country that has not yet benefited as much as it might have from the economic growth of which the Government are justifiably proud. Has he had a chance to think about the plea from that action team to extend its service from just six wards to the whole borough?

Mr. Brown: Yes I have, although I cannot make an announcement on that today. I was very impressed by the work that I saw being carried out by the action team in my hon. Friend's constituency. It deals with an employment base that I know well, as it is very similar to the constituency that I represent on the other side of the river. There are structural difficulties with the labour market and yet local people, making the best possible use of the Government's initiatives, are working hard to overcome them. I congratulate everyone involved.

Private Pensions

11. **Mr. Crispin Blunt** (Reigate): What targets his Department has to increase private pension provision. [28151]

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): As I said in November—it seems such a long time ago. *[Laughter.]* A civil servant with a sense of humour. As I said in November, we are committed to encouraging private saving to meet the long-term challenges of an ageing population, and we remain committed. That is why we are introducing the pension credit, making sure that it pays to save, and why we have introduced stakeholder pensions, which are a secure, value-for-money method of making private provision. We have launched the simplification review to reduce the layers of regulation which increase costs; we have replaced the minimum fund requirement; and we are implementing the recommendation of the Myners review. Our pension education campaign is driving home the message that saving now is the best way to guarantee security tomorrow.

Mr. Blunt: I think that that means the Minister accepts that the success of private pension provision is an essential national economic interest, not only for the future wealth of pensioners but because it has to date given the United Kingdom vastly more resources to invest in the UK and around the world than are available to equivalent countries in the European Union. All that is threatened by the triple whammy of increased regulation, the taxation of pensions and the fall in annuity rates. Does the Minister accept that if policy does not change, we will be on our way to a long-term calamity of missed opportunity in this area?

Mr. McCartney: As far back as the 1960s, generations of colleagues on this side of the House have been in favour of a robust private sector. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the last Conservative Administration, rather than bolstering savings for pensions, got involved in the mis-selling of tens of thousands of pounds worth of policies. It has taken this Government to replace that resource because of what the Conservatives did and the shambles that they left behind.

As I said in my earlier reply, we are sympathetic on regulation, which is why we have set up the Pickering review. We are sympathetic about changes in the market, which is why the Sandler review has been set up. Not only are we sympathetic but we want to work with the industry, which is why both reviews are very open to the industry and the organisations that represent current and future pensioners. At last we have a Government who have a long-term vision for pensions, both in the public and the private sector.

Paul Holmes (Chesterfield): What measures will the Government take to deal with the abuse of final salary pension schemes? In the past eight months, workers at two companies in my constituency have discovered that their final salary schemes have become almost worthless. Last week, in an Adjournment debate, we heard about the problems that have arisen throughout the country concerning United Engineering Forgings, which has gone through exactly the same process, along with five or six other companies including Chesterfield Cylinders in my constituency. No laws were broken; it was effectively legalised robbery of private final salary pension schemes into which my constituents had paid, in some cases for up to 35 years, only to find that most of their money had gone when it came to the pension scheme paying out. That has also happened to other firms—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. McCartney: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman puts in for an Adjournment debate, so that we can openly debate the specific circumstances. If he wants to raise issues concerning a particular company, he is welcome to write to me. We take strong action on these matters, which is why we have OPAS, the Office of the Pensions Advisory Service, and OPRA, the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority, and we have set up a quinquennial review on pensions. We are committed to ensuring that we assist pensioners by trying to rub out fraud wherever it takes place.

Benefit Fraud

12. **Angela Watkinson** (Upminster): What progress has been made in reducing benefit fraud since June 2001. [28152]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear earlier, we have already delivered an 18 per cent. reduction in the level of fraud and error in the payment of income support and the jobseeker's allowance—that is against a target of 10 per cent.—and we expect that good progress to continue. From April, we will begin to implement new powers in the Social Security Fraud Act 2001 which will further strengthen our fight against fraud.

Angela Watkinson: The level of benefit take-up in my constituency is remarkably low compared with the level of need, which is due in part to the complexity of the application process and to the complexity of individuals' own circumstances. Does the Minister recognise the strong link between the reduction in benefit fraud and the release not only of additional funds for genuine claimants but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman) pointed out earlier, of additional time to enable social security staff to deal with the very complex needs of genuine claimants?

Malcolm Wicks: The purpose of Jobcentre Plus is to do precisely that. We need to ensure that everyone behaves responsibly by claiming only the benefit to which they are entitled and no more, and that everyone is clear about the fact that they have the right to claim their entitlement. That is our aim throughout our entire modernisation programme. However, let there be no mistake—fraud is a major problem. We are not complacent, but the targets have been exceeded and we are beginning to win the war against the fraudster. The whole House must join in that endeavour, so that the money raised by taxpayers can be spent on the priorities, not on the fraudster.

Reconstruction of Afghanistan

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): I would like, Mr. Speaker, to report to the House on the Afghanistan reconstruction conference which was held in Tokyo last week. The conference marked the turning of the focus and attention of the international community on to the reconstruction of Afghanistan. I believe that we now have an important opportunity to provide the people of Afghanistan with the real chance of a better future.

The conference lasted from 21 to 22 January and was attended by Ministers and representatives from 61 countries and 21 international organisations. It was co-chaired by Japan, the United States, the European Union and Saudi Arabia. Chairman Hamid Karzai led a strong delegation from the Afghan Interim Administration, I led the United Kingdom delegation, and there were delegations from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Asian Development Bank, the Islamic Development Bank and United Nations agencies. Kofi Annan also attended and addressed the conference. In the margins of the conference, experts met to discuss military demobilisation, military and police training, de-mining and narcotics.

Chairman Karzai, who performed impressively throughout the conference, outlined current and future priorities for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. A 21-member commission is to be set up through the offices of the UN to oversee the emergency Loya Jirgah process, which will lead to the establishment of a full transitional Government in five months' time.

The Interim Administration's priorities for the next few months—on seeing the list, one understands the task to which we must rise—will be to expand emergency assistance programmes; to establish an effective Government administration; to provide peace and establish the rule of law; to ensure that as many children as possible, especially girls, are in school when the new school year begins on 1 March; to begin to reconstruct the country's shattered infrastructure, in particular, roads, electricity and telecommunications; to rebuild an agricultural system and eliminate poppy cultivation; and to accelerate mine-clearing.

The conference was clear in its conclusion that women's rights and women's empowerment should be fully honoured and mainstreamed throughout all programmes during the reconstruction process. Chairman Karzai stressed the Interim Administration's commitment to responsible economic management, transparency, efficiency and accountability. He also made it clear—and we strongly agree with him—that Afghan ownership of the process of reconstruction will be vital to its success and to the full implementation of the Bonn agreement.

We have the best opportunity in a generation to bring about development and lasting stability in Afghanistan. We must build on the lessons learned from previous efforts to reconstruct failed states such as Cambodia, Kosovo, Sierra Leone and East Timor. That experience makes it clear that the United Nations must play a pivotal role, and that we must continue to strengthen the capacity and effectiveness of the UN system to undertake the task.

The conference recognised and greatly appreciated the role that the special representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, has played and his continuing role in promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan. We will need to continue to support his efforts and those of the United National Development Programme, which has been appointed to co-ordinate the early recovery efforts on behalf of the UN system.

It will be crucial to maintain and enhance the existing humanitarian effort while putting in place arrangements for long-term reconstruction. UNICEF will lead the effort to reopen schools. The World Health Organisation and UNICEF will work with the Red Cross to improve health care, and the UN mine action service will lead and co-ordinate the de-mining effort. The World Food Programme will continue to supply food for 6 million people; it will also develop food-for-work schemes across the country so that local communities can begin to rebuild, plus feeding schemes in schools that are focused especially on encouraging girls' attendance.

We must also make urgent efforts to strengthen the Interim Authority and build their capacity to lead the reconstruction effort. To take that process forward, a common trust fund will be established and we will work to encourage co-ordinated support for the Interim Authority's strategy, rather than a proliferation of donor projects provided directly by different countries, which might undermine the Interim Authority.

The preliminary needs assessment undertaken by the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the UNDP to prepare for the conference concluded that Afghanistan's funding requirements would amount to just over $10 billion over the next five years. At the conference, $4.5 billion from 36 countries was pledged, including $1.8 billion for 2002, which was more than was requested for that year. I announced a commitment from the UK—funded from the Department for International Development—of £200 million over the next five years. In addition, my Department will make substantial contributions through the EC, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. This commitment is additional to the £60 million that we have allocated in the current financial year for humanitarian and recovery assistance.

Since my last statement to the House, much has been achieved in Afghanistan. The conference in Tokyo was an excellent example of how the international community can achieve results when it works collectively. However, there is still a great deal to do. The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan remains fragile and it is not yet clear whether there will be a fourth year of drought, but there is a real danger that there will be. We should strongly congratulate the UN system and particularly the World Food Programme on having averted a major humanitarian catastrophe in Afghanistan, and we must be clear that these efforts will have to continue for some time while arrangements for long-term reconstruction are put in place.

The most urgent issue that now needs to be addressed is the need to provide security across Afghanistan, and begin the process of demobilisation and disarmament and the building and training of an Afghan army and police force. As a first step, the UK has offered to work with the Afghan Interim Administration on a scoping study. The greatest danger to the future of Afghanistan is the risk of mounting disorder, criminality and faction fighting, which will create an obstacle to the reconstruction effort throughout the country.

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With the Taliban removed, the Interim Administration in place and the widespread commitment by the international community to the future of Afghanistan made clear in Tokyo, there is real hope now for a better life for the people, and especially for the children of Afghanistan. We must not fail to grasp this opportunity.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): I welcome the statement and thank the Secretary of State for letting me have a copy of it in advance.

The £200 million announced in Tokyo to fund reconstruction in Afghanistan is extremely welcome. Many were quick to suggest that the west would bomb Afghanistan and then abandon it again. It is encouraging to see that that is not the case.

I share the right hon. Lady's belief that the people of Afghanistan now have a chance of a better future. We should pay tribute to all those who are engaged in liberating Afghanistan from the Taliban and al-Qaeda. I wish them success in completing that task.

When I was in Pakistan, local Afghan aid workers impressed on me the need to work with and through the new Administration. Does the Secretary of State accept that with the difficulties facing Afghanistan, reconstruction will fail unless the basic infrastructure of the new Government is in place? Given her high praise for Hamid Karzai, which I am sure is entirely justified, does she accept that reconstruction is something that is done with a country and not to a country?

Our key concern is that Afghanistan should see the pledges of reconstruction money turned into reality simply and effectively. Is the right hon. Lady satisfied that the reforms to EU development assistance are sufficiently well advanced to make that a good vehicle for a significant proportion of our aid giving?

We welcome the shift in emphasis in EU development assistance towards poor countries like Afghanistan. Learning the lessons from Kosovo, what assurances has the right hon. Lady received that this assistance will take on board the regional context? Many of the surrounding countries are poor and fragile. For example, only today, the entire regional government of Kurdistan resigned. Does she agree that intervening unilaterally in one country could destabilise others in the same area? The quality of co-ordination of the aid efforts will be key to the success of reconstruction. Can the Secretary of State reassure the House that DFID's staff deployment will be sufficiently senior to ensure prompt and effective decision making?

The Secretary of State will be aware that more than 4 million Afghan refugees are in Iran and Pakistan. Remarkably, since 1998, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has repatriated 4.6 million Afghan refugees. Could the Secretary of State confirm whether there is provision in the reconstruction package for the repatriation of refugees? Looking at the long-term rehabilitation of Afghanistan, the international community will need to consider debt relief. Even before 11 September, Afghanistan had substantial overhanging debt. Can she give assurances that she will look imaginatively at ways of helping the new Afghan Government to deal with debt relief? In that regard, I welcome the news that a trust fund is to be established.

The Secretary of State twice mentioned the need to stamp out opium production. Does she accept that getting proper irrigation systems in place should be prioritised so that alternative crops can be grown? As I am sure she is aware, I am determined to help land mine victims in Afghanistan. I welcome the news of the involvement of the UN mine action service in what she described as accelerated land mine clearance. However, I draw her attention to the problems of land mines in the border region between Pakistan and Afghanistan; there is a real fear that as Afghan refugees return through those tribal areas, more may become land mine victims.

We welcome the commitment to women in the reconstruction process. What assistance could be given to Afghan women refugees in this country to encourage them to return and play an active part in restoring their country's fortunes? Finally, I welcome once again the Government's statement and the results of the Tokyo conference. If we can reconstruct Afghanistan properly, that will be another victory for the war on terrorism.

Clare Short: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, and agree with her. If she remembers, at the beginning of the crisis, there were some elements or loud voices in the United States, but not in the Administration, who said that nation building was none of our business. Anyone who took that position is now seeing the error of their ways. Terrorist groups, criminals, drug dealers and disorderly forces who want to be destructive and spread hate and violence in the world are nurtured by, and hide themselves in, failed states.

We always need the capacity to prevent such action and to build efficient modern states that are part of the international community so that it is not vulnerable to terrorist organisations such as those responsible for 11 September. In the case of Afghanistan, everyone should be haunted by the great error that was made after the Soviet withdrawal, when everyone left and armed groups took over the country; there was no order, leading to the rise of the Taliban and everything that has flowed from that. We owe it to ourselves and the people of Afghanistan not to make that error again.

The hon. Lady asked whether the reforms for which we have been working hard since 1997 in the European Union's development efforts are sufficiently advanced to trust that they will make a contribution in Afghanistan. A serious reform effort is in place, but it needs to be fully implemented. However, we were committed to a much bigger proportion of our funding going through the European Commission by the previous Administration. We therefore worked hard to get the Commission to commit to considerable spending in Afghanistan, as a proportion of our money had to go through it anyway and could well have been spent on less needy countries. The Commission is not the most efficient operator, but at least we should direct the money to the right sources. We should try to collaborate with the Commission to make sure that the money that has to be funnelled through it is spent well in Afghanistan; that is the task in which we will be engaged.

I agree with the hon. Lady very much that Kurdistan, Uzbekistan, Turkistan—all the "Stans"—are in enormously bad shape. Some of them are poor, highly indebted and full of instability. Just as we have got a chance in Afghanistan and Pakistan, we need to work with the "Stans" to try to lift that world region, overcome the problems of terrorism and conflict and give all the people a better chance. My Department is looking to make a bigger effort in co-ordination throughout the "Stans" in the hope that that part of the world will have a better future.

I promise the hon. Lady that my staff will be deployed at the right levels. I have said it before, but it really is true: they are respected and honoured throughout the international system and I am sure that they will make a leading contribution in Afghanistan. We shall try not just to introduce a UK programme, which we would do well, but get behind the Interim Authority and build up their capacity and work with the World Bank and the UN to get the co-ordination effort going properly, which is a more difficult but important task that must be carried out.

On refugees, the UN humanitarian agencies made a separate appeal for short-term help. We will have to assist refugees to return home, but they should not be forced. The big job is to build up the country. Living in refugee camps in Pakistan is a miserable life and I am sure that people will want to go home, but they must be supported until they are ready and then be helped with getting home and reconstructing their houses and agricultural lands.

I do not believe that Afghanistan has a large debt problem, but I shall look at that again. It has been so cut off from the international community for so long that it has not racked up lots of debts and the subject has not been mentioned by any international agency in preparing for reconstruction, but I shall consider the question and write to the hon. Lady.

Fields have already been planted with opium this year and we need to move quickly to ensure that the crop is not brought to market to carry on the corruption that drug dealing leads to. I agree with the hon. Lady that we need to restore irrigation. Lots of irrigation systems were destroyed during the bombing in the war against Soviet occupation, but destroying the irrigation alone is not enough, because that could lead to better poppy cultivation.

We must offer people alternative crops and a better legitimate life so that they do not want to be part of an illicit and corrupt drug-dealing life. These are very poor people who do not use drugs, which became the only alternative crop for them to keep their families alive. We must make them a better legitimate offer that they want to be part of.

Afghanistan was littered with land mines before the recent crisis and a high-quality UN operation was already working there. Now the conflict is over, it has a real chance to work throughout the country to clear up all the land mines. The operation assesses where the mines are and has programmes to warn refugees—a massive effort will be made. There is a genuine chance to clear the country of mines, if we can prevent it from returning to conflict.

The hon. Lady's last point was about helping skilled women refugees in this country to return to their country. The International Organisation for Migration has set up a register of all Afghans—most educated Afghans have left the country and are refugees across the world—to record their skills and talents and to link them with the needs of the new Administration so that people can be helped to return home permanently or temporarily to assist with rebuilding their country.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): My right hon. Friend's statement will be welcomed on both sides of the House. She mentioned the rule of law. Will the barbaric practices of cutting off hands and stoning people to death for alleged sexual reasons finally be ended? Would it not be a good thing for those practices to go for good in a liberated Afghanistan?

Clare Short: Yes indeed. The whole country has been liberated and it is absolutely clear that people from all parts of Afghanistan are overjoyed that the Taliban no longer rule. Some of the most barbaric practices that came in with the Taliban are already disappearing, and they were never supported by the people of Afghanistan. I completely support my hon. Friend's point.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): I thank the Secretary of State for letting us have sight of the statement in time for us to be able to comment on it and I welcome greatly her awareness of the needs of the "Stans"—I also refer to those countries as such. The whole of that area of central Asia is suffering the same drought from which Afghanistan has suffered. I welcome her statement that they will get help too and that the drought has been taken into account, but, mindful of the appalling health statistics and, in particular, maternal and child mortality rates in Afghanistan, what proportion of aid will go on health care?

Lastly, it is outrageous that the money for reconstructing Afghanistan is coming from the Department's budget, not the Treasury contingency reserve. Is the right hon. Lady not angry that, once again, her Department alone has to pay for damage inflicted on behalf of the international community?

Clare Short: I very much agree with the hon. Lady's first point. This new situation is a real opportunity for the whole area: Pakistan, Iran and all the "Stans". There is oil and gas in that part of the world, but they have not been able to get it out because pipelines could not be built as there has been so much disorder. There is now a real chance that all those countries can be helped to build up their economies. The problems in Afghanistan were spreading and corrupting the state, which led to growing drug use in all the neighbouring countries. The whole region has suffered from desperate poverty, so the reconstruction programme represents an important opportunity for it.

I cannot at the moment tell the hon. Lady how much will be spent on health care. The World Health Organisation, UNICEF and the Red Cross are already moving rapidly to expand immediate health care and immunisation. The Red Cross has been helping land mine victims for some time. There will be an immediate effort to improve health care while the Health Ministry and the country's long-term, sustainable health care system are being built up. As the work goes on, I shall be able to give the hon. Lady the figures that she has requested.

I need to explain how my Department's budget works. We have a contingency reserve within the Department that we deploy as emergencies arise in the world. Of the

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£60 million that we have found since 11 September, £10 million or £20 million was contributed by the Treasury, but the rest came from my Department. The sums that we are now deploying come from my Department. That is right, provided that we have enough in our contingency reserve. If there were crises all over the world we would need additional funding. Let us hope that there are not.

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her considerable achievements in Japan, and on her positive and continuing support for women's rights. Does she share my concern that the Minister for Women in Afghanistan is working out of her front room with one cell phone and one personal computer, and has no staff and no resources? Can my right hon. Friend tell us when Sima Samar will get the resources to build up that critical Ministry within the Interim Administration?

Clare Short: Yes. I had a meeting with Jim Wolfensohn while I was in Tokyo. The UK and other countries agreed that we will immediately resource the Ministry for Women's Affairs in Afghanistan, and the preparations for that are going on as we speak.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): The results of the Tokyo conference are very welcome, as is the United Kingdom's contribution. Is the Secretary of State aware that when the Select Committee on International Development was in Brussels last week, European Union Commissioners made it clear to us that for the EU's contribution to Afghanistan it had to raid every cupboard, and the larder is now bare? Afghanistan is not the only failing state. Does not that show the need to ensure that the EU development budget is as poverty-focused as the UK budget? It seems daft that we give money through the EU to countries such as the Czech Republic and to support the Moroccan fisheries agreement when many countries in Africa are, in their different ways, in as dire need as Afghanistan.

Clare Short: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Under the Cotonou agreement the European Development Fund is poverty-focused, because it is for Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific regions. People who speak for the Commission always say that that is its poverty focus, but the other half of its development budget is focused on Europe's middle-income countries, which is money not well spent. There is an underspend on Asia, which is why the Commission has had so much difficulty making money available for Afghanistan. The balance of the spend is going even further away from poverty. We are making a major effort to reform that process, and I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's support. We must seek support across the European Union. The transfer of resources to middle-income countries does not help reform. They should look after their own poor, and they need help to restructure so that they can do that, but the resource stream should go to poor countries that need investment to improve their performance.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Does my right hon. Friend agree that a much larger international security force needs to be deployed throughout Afghanistan? It is not sufficient to have that force in Kabul alone. It should be deployed throughout the country, so it must be increased. As my right hon. Friend knows only too well, aid is still not reaching parts of Afghanistan, because of the difficulties of security. Every night, children die in camps because of inadequate aid.

Clare Short: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. As I have said, insecurity, criminality and fighting between factions pose the greatest threat to our ability to deploy resources well, start rebuilding the country and give people hope for a better future.

Throughout the crisis, when the press pretended to know all there was to know about Afghanistan and people tended to repeat what the press said, it was widely suggested that it would be entirely unacceptable to deploy an international force in Afghanistan. In fact, the deployment has been welcomed massively in Kabul: people desperately want the security that an international force will bring.

The suggestion that there should be an international force in all major cities is not an easy proposition, but the Interim Authority have called for that. We should respect the proposition, examine it, and see whether the international community can respond to it. At the same time, however, we must get on with the job of demobilising all the armed factions and building an Afghan army. We want those people to hand over their weapons in the hope of becoming part of an army, or a proper police force, and indeed taking other jobs.

That is the real hope for the future. We need to consider how the international force can be enhanced, and how, as rapidly as possible, we can demobilise the factions and create legitimate security forces led by Afghans.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): Does the right hon. Lady agree that, although it is obviously vital in the short term that Afghanistan's rather antiquated irrigation system should be repaired—notwithstanding the fact that it is one of the chief causes of rivalry between the tribes—what Afghanistan needs in the longer term is a much greater supply of water and power? It so happens that its geographical configuration—the positioning of its rivers, valleys and mountains—is ideal for the building of power dams like the Kariba and Aswan dams. Will the right hon. Lady point out to our American allies that when President Roosevelt launched the new deal he put the Tennessee valley dam system at the forefront of it, and that by spending a good deal less than they have spent on bombing Afghanistan, the Americans could give it a proper dam system?

Clare Short: I agree that Afghanistan needs a new deal. These are hard-working, enterprising people who have managed to cope in the most difficult circumstances. It was Afghan lorry drivers who kept food moving throughout the crisis and Afghan workers who continued the emergency humanitarian effort when all the international staff were withdrawn.

I agree that our efforts should be focused on empowering Afghans to run their own country, and giving them proper irrigation and power systems. I do not know enough about the geography to know whether dams are appropriate, so I cannot comment on the soundbite, but I concur with the broad sentiment.

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The human infrastructure is vital. Can my right hon. Friend tell us a little more about the register of refugees?

Because of the disorder, instability and insecurity of the past 20 years, many professionals have fled Afghanistan—who can blame them?—and found more comfortable lives outside their country. What incentives can be given to such people, including those in the United Kingdom, to return to Afghanistan—if only for brief periods—and give of their talents?

Clare Short: This is a feature of failed states. Most educated Sierra Leoneans are not in Sierra Leone; many are in Britain, making important contributions. Because of Guyana's history from the 1950s on, many highly educated and indeed political Guyanese are in the UK rather than Guyana. They are welcome, and they make an important contribution in our country; but the presence here of an educated group who are the first people needed to restore a country are not in that country when reconstruction begins.

Afghans working in the World Bank have gone back, and are starting to help support the reconstruction effort. Afghans all over the world are being asked to register their skills on the register from the International Organisation for Migration. The aim is to provide a gateway to deliver information about all the projects and recruitment taking place in Afghanistan.

We will do our best to facilitate the recruitment of Afghans. Many who have been away for a long time and have children at school will find it impossible to uproot themselves and go home, but many will want to engage for a time in the reconstruction of their country, and the necessary arrangements are in place.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I welcome the content of the right hon. Lady's statement and the great progress that seems to be being achieved. I have two brief questions. It is obvious that Afghanistan cannot wait to have an Administration who develop the capacity and competencies necessary to build the infrastructure that can reach down to local level. What steps are being taken to ensure that the aid moneys will reach community levels as well as the Interim Administration? Can she say anything about the role that Afghan civil groups, the ordinary people of Afghanistan, including women, will have in the way those moneys will be spent?

Clare Short: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. It is important for the authority of the Interim Administration and the success of the Bonn process—going from a transitional Government to elections, including all the people of Afghanistan and all the ethnicities so that there is a stable long-term future—that the Interim Administration deliver across the country to all localities. We are very aware of that but all the administrative structures have been broken. What is needed is easy to conceptualise but not so easy to achieve.

It will be possible—the United Nations system is lined up for this—to go into a humanitarian-plus phase. The World Food Programme, for example, will say to every community, "What do you want to rebuild?" It will look for groups, particularly women-led groups because they tend to be the most practical in local communities, and ask, "Is it the school or road you want to rebuild?" Then food for work could be introduced. People could start rebuilding across the country. Similarly, schools could be opened across the country, with food provided for children who go to school; that tends to incentivise girls to go to school.

Already there is an effort to pay civil servants across the country. The Interim Administration are paying, but I was insistent in Tokyo that we ensure that those civil servants are doing something real. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are aware of the point that he makes and determined to deliver to the localities so that money is properly spent.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East): I welcome the positive and constructive role that my right hon. Friend and her Department are playing in reconstructing Afghanistan. I welcome too the fact that one of the objectives that came out of last week's conference in Tokyo was the elimination of poppy cultivation. Has she seen recent press reports that there has been a step increase in the planting of poppy fields in Afghanistan while attention is elsewhere, and apparently open trading of heroin in Kabul market? Will she impress on the Interim Administration the fact that that is wholly unacceptable?

Clare Short: I have already said that more poppy has been planted. If the House pauses and thinks for a minute, that is inevitable. These are people with nothing: no seed, no tools. They have been growing poppy to survive; they have not been using it. Without some external intervention, they have nothing else to plant and no other way to make a living.

There is no doubt about the commitment of the Interim Administration. They made that clear in Tokyo but they need the capacity. They have banned the cultivation of poppy but need the capacity to intervene. That crop needs to be rooted out. Local people must be offered an alternative. Have we not learned from Latin America that we cannot just destroy a crop and offer onions, or whatever it may be? We must offer people a legitimate life that will be better than the illegitimate life: the chance for their children to go to school, the chance to begin to get public services.

I agree with my hon. Friend that this matter is urgent. We are focused on the urgency but we must help the Interim Administration to do something about it, not just shout at them. They are determined to stop it, but capacity is their problem.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): I too warmly welcome the Secretary of State's statement. Are there any early lessons to be learned yet from the delivery of aid, which seems to have been very varied across Afghanistan? For example, Herat seems to be the success story. Is that because the local governor is Ismail Khan? Is it because Iran is rather more logistically effective at getting aid through than what she called the various "Stans", which are less developed?

Clare Short: I follow these matters closely, but it is not my understanding that things are particularly better in

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Herat, which we know was a fine, ancient and civilised city that has now been destroyed. Communities everywhere are restoring themselves, but I am not aware that things are better in Herat. My own view is that no one can praise the UN system enough for the way in which it has coped through the crisis. Just think; some 6 million people daily are absolutely dependent on the food trucked in by the World Food Programme as the crisis, the fighting and the bombing have been going on. The system has held up and the food has been getting in. Afghan drivers have been taking food in and reporting on where it is safe to go and on whether the warehouses are working. When warehouses were looted, the World Food Programme took the food directly to local communities to distribute.

The system has held up; that is a phenomenal achievement, but we must all keep that going as we build the long-term reconstruction. In some areas there is still conflict, and there has been criminality, with food supplies being stolen. In some remote communities, there are some very hungry children. I am not saying that everything is perfect, but the catastrophe that, without the conflict, might well have occurred has been avoided. The UN is to be praised, but there is an awful lot to do to make sure that we build on what has been done.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): May I add my congratulations to those of my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) on the remarkable part played by my right hon. Friend and her officials at the conference in Japan? I thank her for her warm commitment to women's rights and to ensuring that the women's Ministry has rather more facilities than clearly it has at the moment. Although, as she has made clear, a great number of Afghan experts have had to flee the country, will she confirm that there are still people in Afghanistan who can make a contribution, most particularly in health care and education? Is it part of the UN's programmes in these areas as far as possible to incorporate that home-grown ability, particularly in employing women in these areas?

Clare Short: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. It was not just me in Tokyo who was committed to women's rights, as one might have expected. That commitment was felt very strongly across the board at the conference by all sorts of Governments and by the Interim Administration. That does not mean that the work will be done without more pushing, but the commitment was very strong, which is a good thing.

Afghans have kept the whole humanitarian effort going in the most difficult situation. After 11 September, when all the international staff were withdrawn and the Taliban said that even using the telephone to keep in touch with the humanitarian agencies could result in a life sentence, Afghans kept things going. It would be intolerable—we have seen this in other states—for all the international staff to come in, with their Land Rovers, their UN equipment, their housing and their high salaries, while the locals are marginalised. We have seen that before, time and again. We must avoid that in Afghanistan and we must build on the local staff, who have performed heroically. They will reconstruct their country, and they must not be marginalised.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Does the Secretary of State appreciate that those of us who have consistently supported intervention—whether in Kosovo, Sierra Leone or, more recently, in Afghanistan—are always confronted by a particular argument, which is that when the fighting is over, our forces will be turned into permanent policemen? In view of her answer earlier to her hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), about the need to have more forces in all parts of Afghanistan to maintain security, what contact is she having with her counterparts in other European countries to see if they can help in that policing, given that most of them contribute a lot less to the fighting than the United Kingdom has had to?

Clare Short: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it has been honourable and essential for us to intervene in Kosovo, Sierra Leone and Afghanistan. There are other failed states in the world that are causing enormous suffering to their peoples and endangering the future security of the world. They include the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola, Sudan and, although it is much smaller, Somalia. It is part of our task in the 21st century to have the capacity to bring these conflicts to an end and to build effective modern states that will deliver order to their people and co-operation with the international community. We must, therefore, be able to engage and disengage with them, and to show that this is a sensible process.

In Sierra Leone, our forces are fewer in number but they have been engaged in building a new Sierra Leone army that is disciplined and properly responsible to the political authority there. The training team has now become an international training team. Something very similar has to happen in Afghanistan. The United Kingdom will hand over the lead of the international force to another country—Turkey is being talked about, and Germany might also take over the lead in the future. The question of whether countries will be willing to commit more forces so that the international force can maintain a presence in all the major cities has not been resolved, and will be an urgent matter for international discussion.

As in Sierra Leone, we must start the training of the Afghan army and the Afghan police force. The Germans are taking the lead on police retraining; we have taken the lead on a scoping study. The way out—the exit strategy—is to build the Afghan army and police force, and we must get on with that immediately.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): I welcome what my right hon. Friend had to say about the register of skills, and about other steps that are being taken to help refugees to return. People should not, however, be forced to return, given that the situation in Afghanistan is still fragile and that there is not yet security across the whole country. Will my right hon. Friend take the time to draw that to the attention of her colleagues in the Home Office, who seem to be considering returning asylum seekers to Afghanistan?

Clare Short: I would be happy to ask my officials to draw my remarks to the attention of the Home Office.

We are talking about a lot of different people in this context. The most needy are probably the millions of poor people living in very poor conditions in camps in Iran and Pakistan who will want to go home if things get better and who will need help to do so. They should not, however, be forced to go home before the appropriate conditions are in place to receive them. Other Afghan people are spread across the world. There are a number of them in my constituency, some of whom have been given full refugee status—as my hon. Friend knows, that means that they will make their own choices—and some of whom are still asylum seekers. We shall all have to make sure that their interests are properly protected.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): The right hon. Lady has given an impressive account of co-operation and conciliation in Afghanistan. What lessons learned there can now be applied to the middle east peace process? Does she agree that the failure of that process threatens not only the peace process in Afghanistan but the stability of the Arab nations in the area? She spoke about the pivotal role of the United Nations; does she recall that there are United Nations resolutions relating to Israel and Palestine that have not been implemented? Should there not now be just as strong a focus on Israel and Palestine as on Afghanistan?

Clare Short: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. The Prime Minister made that clear during some of his early travels, trying to consolidate the coalition so that the world would hold together to deal with the al-Qaeda problem in Afghanistan. The problem in the middle east is the cause of a great deal of suffering and death. The road that it is on, with both sides inflicting and suffering terrible injury, represents a tragedy that only deepens the bitterness and that must, in the end, be turned around. Both sides must find peace for all those people to have a future. It is a desperate situation, and we all need to work together to make things better.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that this is the biggest cause of anger and bitterness in the Arab and Muslim world. We must all commit ourselves to redoubling our efforts to turn the tragedy around and to give young Palestinians and Israelis the chance of a peaceful, better future.

Mr. Piara S. Khabra (Ealing, Southall): Will the Secretary of State tell the House how many women have been nominated to the Administration that has been set up in Afghanistan? Will she also tell us what will be the role of women in the Loya Jirgah, which is a very traditional institution that is 100 per cent. male dominated? The Loya Jirgah will play an important role in the setting up of a democratic Government in Afghanistan.

Clare Short: I cannot remember the exact number of women Ministers in the Interim Administration.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Hilary Benn): Two.

Clare Short: I met one of them, the Health Minister, in Tokyo. She is a surgeon, a professor and a general. She is quite a powerful woman; I saluted her, literally. I do not think that anyone would take her lightly.

As I understand it, Ambassador Brahimi is about to make an announcement about the make-up of the commission that will prepare the Loya Jirgah. Each of those bodies is widening the ethnic representation and making it more proportional, to get some legitimacy into the new institutions. The announcement has not been made yet, but it is imminent; I know that there will be some women on the commission, but I cannot give my hon. Friend a number today. I very much agree with him that the next step will be to make sure that women are properly represented in the Loya Jirgah—the big informal consultation across the country that will agree on the transitional Government. My hon. Friend makes his point well, and it is important; there has been some progress, but we need more.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): I welcome the emphasis that the Secretary of State put on the need to eliminate poppy production. Can she give more details of how it can be eliminated in practice, and of how we can create a mechanism to incentivise farmers to go into food production, and also create a market so that they can get a price for the food that they produce? How concerned is she that there may be Northern Alliance leaders who are still involved in the drugs trade? Could that not undermine the effort to eliminate poppy production in Afghanistan?

Clare Short: I do not know any particulars about those who have made lots of money out of the drugs trade, but I am certain that they are still out there, and that they would wish to continue their activities. Of course, well governed states are the enemy of drug dealers who want to make vast sums of money, because to do that they need disorder and corruption. I am sure that those people are out there, and we must ensure that the space that they have to operate in is destroyed.

I want to be completely honest in answering the hon. Gentleman's question: there is not a firm strategy in place to deal with the poppy crop that has recently been planted and is still in the ground in Afghanistan. I promise him that we will engage both the Foreign Office and my Department in trying to ensure that such a strategy is in place.

There have been proposals to buy up the crop as soon as it is harvested, but that tends to be a disastrous strategy, because if we buy up a crop in a very poor country, what will the people with neighbouring fields think about growing next season? There is an urgent need to root out the crop so that it is not harvested—but then we have to offer people the chance of a better future.

The lesson of the anti-poppy work throughout the world is that bombing and destroying crops and then offering people seeds for another crop, but not a better, legitimate life, is not enough. We need to offer people the package. People do not want to grow drugs and be marginalised, and come under attack from their own army and police force, either in Latin America or in Afghanistan. If people can have legitimate crops and get themselves an income, put their children in school, and have health care and a vote in the governance of their country, they will all choose that—and we must put in place a package that makes them want to choose that. The need is extremely urgent, but that package is not in place yet.

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's contribution, and

[Mr. Stephen McCabe]

her statement today. In the context of the prospects for peace and reconstruction work, how concerned is she about the weekend news reports that intelligence agents and military officials from Iran are operating, especially in the Herat area, with a view to undermining Chairman Karzai and the prospects for central Government authority?

Clare Short: I met the Iranian Foreign Minister in Tokyo. The situation in Afghanistan has caused enormous destabilisation in Iran, with very large numbers of refugees and a drugs problem that has spread to Iranian young people, because of all that traffic. The Iranian Government are therefore very supportive of the Bonn agreement, and anxious that the process should be successful. They have made a big pledge of financial commitment to the reconstruction effort, and are highly engaged.

There are strong relationships between Herat and Iran. The people are related ethnically, by language and by the tradition within Islam, so that is natural. There have been suggestions that there may have been some unhelpful activity, but that is denied. I believe that the Iranian Government want to make a success of the process, and we need to work with them to ensure that it is a success.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): May I join in the almost universal and, in my case, heartfelt and genuine welcome for the Secretary of State's commitment to the reconstruction of Afghanistan? What mention was made of democracy in Tokyo? We hear about the Loya Jirgah and the commission. Does she believe that there is an appetite among the people who will make up the Loya Jirgah for proper, democratic and legitimate representation? Of course it is difficult, but there is no reason why the ordinary person in the street, however ill educated, male or female, should not be allowed to express their views on how they are governed.

Clare Short: I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman. That is the underpinning objective of the Bonn process, but it is a question of getting from here to there. We do not have the time or the organisation to have instant elections that would be representative across the country. The Interim Authority is slightly representative, although not perfect, but it is what Ambassador Brahimi could do to get agreement out of Bonn. The commission will be more representative of all the various groups in Afghanistan, and then the Loya Jirgah will have discussions with the elders and leaders of the whole country. A full Interim Administration will follow, and then elections.

We need a process of widening legitimacy and inclusivity, while taking enough time to have proper, legitimate elections, which require a census and electoral registration. What I have described is the intention of the Bonn agreement. Provided that we reinforce the Interim Authority and the people of Afghanistan see the process delivering for them, we will end up with a legitimate, functioning, democratic, representative Afghan Government.

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): I add my welcome to the Secretary of State's statement. The right hon. Lady mentioned internal security concerns in Afghanistan. Is she in favour of broadening the remit of the troops already there to safeguard the delivery of humanitarian aid and, critically, to ensure that the aid that is there gets to the people who need it as soon as possible?

Clare Short: The remit of the forces in Afghanistan is determined by Security Council resolutions. There has to be consensus across the international community to move these matters forward. I would not like to elaborate on any modification of the Security Council remit in specific terms. The big question is whether the international force will deploy to other cities in Afghanistan and whether the will and resources are available for it to do so.

My view on the military engaging in humanitarian efforts is that the military should do what the military can do and humanitarians should do what humanitarians can do. We should not muddle the two, but they can often be complementary. The most important thing is to bring order and then humanitarians can operate. Part of bringing order is to get the trust of the local community, and UK troops tend to be very good at that, partly because of the lessons learned, painfully, in Northern Ireland.

My Department provides funding for small projects that the troops tend to carry out with local communities, such as fixing up schools and arranging games of football with the children. That increases the troops' authority and legitimacy and provides a sense of well-being. That is the best way to organise these matters, and UK troops are the best in the world at that kind of peacekeeping and working with local communities.

Orders of the Day

Civil Defence (Grant) Bill

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

New Clause 1

REPORT ON CIVIL DEFENCE REVIEW

'Before 1st April 2002, the Secretary of State shall lay before both Houses of Parliament a report specifying the implications of the Government's civil defence review for the operation of this Act.'.—*[Mr. Beith.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.23 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 1, in clause 2, page 2, line 24, leave out "2003" and insert "2004".

Mr. Beith: The significance of the date proposed in the new clause is that that is the beginning of the first financial year to which the Bill applies—namely, the coming financial year. Amendment No. 1 returns to an issue of great concern in Committee—that is, whether the Bill could be delayed for a year while we absorb the lessons and conclusions of the Government's civil defence review.

People outside this place, as well as local authorities, will be surprised to learn that the Bill is not a product of 11 September or of the Real IRA threat, but of the court challenge mounted by the Merseyside fire and civil defence authority that demonstrated the complete legal confusion about the basis on which civil defence moneys are allocated. The authority challenged the whole funding basis.

However, the matter is hardly urgent—unlike some of the issues raised by 11 September. The Bill has been around since last June. Despite all that has happened since then, and despite the fact that the Government have set up—rightly—a major review and consultation process on civil defence and emergency planning, they have plodded on with the measure.

The new clause is sensible and would ensure that the civil defence funding system was designed to fit whatever emerges from the review. It would fit the future pattern of civil emergency planning, which will soon be decided. As long ago as 28 November, the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office said of the review that

"a clear consensus is emerging".—[*Official Report*, 28 November 2001; Vol. 375, c. 1016.]

That was some months ago, but the speed of the Bill's progress does not offer an entirely reliable guide as to how soon we might receive a statement from the Government on their proposals.

The consensus was supposed to be emerging on the issues raised in the consultation document that the Government published last August. Since then, several things have happened that might influence the review and the necessary funding arrangements. There were the dreadful events of 11 September, which caused everyone in Britain suddenly to start thinking about civil defence. It is at least partly true—although it may be unkind—to concede that civil defence has a low priority for many people. They see it as something of a joke—as some sort of "Dad's Army"—despite the fact that individuals in local authorities are working hard to maintain a proper emergency planning system and sometimes have difficulty in convincing even their local government colleagues of the importance of that work. No one can ever really know which contingency will require the operation of emergency planning.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that civil defence emergency planning has not been at the forefront of people's minds. It has been difficult for those of us who represent high-risk constituencies to raise the profile of such planning in this place. Why is he arguing for delay in respect of these powers, which clearly stem from a court decision? Would not delay mean a vacuum?

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman must wait a little so that I can develop my argument. I know his constituency area well and I entirely sympathise with him; there is considerable danger of attack on installations in that area and that is why he takes a close interest in the matter. Indeed, I shall refer later to a question that he put recently on the subject.

The measure seems to be putting the cart before the horse, however. If substantial new arrangements for emergency planning are to be devised, we need a funding system that will fit them. Civil defence has not been abandoned since the Merseyside court decision, when an out-of-court settlement brought the matter to an end. The Government have not stopped signing cheques for civil defence, although they have become rather worried at the size of the amount on some of the cheques. That is partly because local authorities realised that recent events required them to initiate more extensive emergency planning work and rightly expected a reasonable contribution from the Government. We are not talking about front-line funding for the fire brigade or the police force, but funding for people back in the council offices. They are not thought about much, but they have to work out contingency arrangements so that the fire brigade and the police force can be deployed with the necessary support from other services. Those things do not happen by accident or by magic; they require planning.

If the Merseyside settlement had brought all that to an end, we should have been dealing with emergency legislation by the next week. The Government have found a way to proceed, and they should continue on that course for a little longer in order to get the arrangements right. That is the basis of my argument.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): As someone whose constituency is very close to Heathrow airport, I would argue that it is better to take time, as the right hon. Gentleman suggests. The status quo will continue while the review is being carried out. Does he agree that the effect of the Bill might be to reduce the amount of money available, so the status quo is better than a reduction?

4.30 pm

Mr. Beith: Yes, indeed. That is a perfectly reasonable argument. I shall shortly address the question of whether less money will be available as a result of the Bill, but I return to the basis of my argument for the new clause—at the very least we need to know the implications of the Government's review for the Bill, and it would be better if those new arrangements could be put in place before fitting the funding around them. I was reviewing what has happened during this process.

Let us remember that all this started long before 11 September, and one of the effects of the events of 11 September, as I was saying, was to put in everyone's mind a sense that these are important matters and that they should perhaps be given more time and greater priority than they have been given hitherto. Hon. Members and people in the country started to ask questions about the preparedness of our civil emergency services.

Other events had a similar effect, although they were of a different kind. There was discussion in Committee about flooding and flood emergencies, about which the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) has a particular interest, as do others along the Severn, for example. Their great concern is that the civil emergency planning machinery is brought into play to marshal forces to deal with floods.

In many constituencies, including mine, the foot and mouth crisis vividly brought home the dangers of not having sufficient emergency planning in place. During the foot and mouth emergency, we saw deficiencies and difficulties of all kinds. Many local authority staff found themselves quickly transferred to emergency work for which they had no previous experience. Local authority trading standards departments became the animal movement licensing offices for the system set up for foot and mouth disease, so they probably had to abandon much of their normal trading standards work to deal with unfamiliar work, and some of them worked valiantly.

Even officers from the Inland Revenue were brought in, to help staff round-the-clock operations at emergency control centres. Again, they did unfamiliar work, much of which was not planned. In the north-east of England, which I represent, we did not have our own emergency control centre; we had to rely on that at Carlisle, where resources were already concentrated. Everyone acknowledged that that was a disaster and a wholly unsatisfactory way to deal with the crisis in the north-east of England. No plans were in place to set up an emergency centre in Newcastle, although one was eventually set up with considerable difficulty. That helped to show the need for more emergency planning for the sort of administrative arrangements that need to be created in various kinds of emergency.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I appreciate what the right hon. Gentleman says about foot and mouth disease. Clearly, that was a major disaster, particularly in Northumberland, in Cumbria and in the constituency that he represents. However, on the basis that such emergencies occur, we hope, only once in a lifetime—indeed, the previous occurrence took place 34 years ago—what training realistically could be undertaken by local authorities to ensure that staff would not be inevitably transferred from trading standards or other sub-departments to deal with that specific problem, rather than a general emergency issue?

Mr. Beith: We in Northumberland may take some wry amusement from the suggestion that foot and mouth has broken out once in lifetime; it has broken out twice in a lifetime for us. It happened in 1967, when a lot of lessons were not learned, and we want them to be learned this time.

Clearly, every local government officer cannot be trained for every role that he or she might have to take up in an emergency, because the training depends very much on the character of the emergency. A major chemical explosion affecting a large area would give rise to different needs from those involved in closing roads and footpaths in the foot and mouth crisis, or closing off areas because of a terrorist attack. They all give rise to different problems, but devising a mechanism by which people can be put into different posts and trained rapidly is the sort of thing in which emergency planners have to engage, and they do so regularly.

The local authorities with which I am familiar have certainly run emergency planning exercises and conferences for many years, but the reaction to the events of 11 September, and the experience of floods and especially foot and mouth disease, made them all feel that they needed to gear up their arrangements and to have more standard procedures ready, all of which require preparation. Each new wave of staff entering post needs to be familiarised with those arrangements; they cannot be put in place simply. People cannot say, "If we need them, we will go and get them," as they did with the green goddesses for the fire brigade. They must be sure that the new generation of staff are familiar with what they might have to do and with what sort of arrangements have to be made.

All sorts of difficulties were revealed by the incidence of foot and mouth. For example, sites for the mass burial of carcases were rapidly identified with no proper arrangements for consulting the local community being made. All sorts of problems resulted from that, but local authorities, at least, have learned some lessons. Northumberland has held a county council inquiry to try to fill the gap left by the Government's failure to hold a public inquiry and that useful exercise has brought to the surface some of the lessons to be learned about features of emergency planning. Such experiences have structural implications for the composition of emergency planning teams. The teams may require more permanent emergency planning staff or more staff whose designated duties include emergency planning.

Mr. Miller: The right hon. Gentleman referred to public consultation. Although in some respects I accept his remarks, does he not accept that post-11 September, some of the issues relating to the emergency planning that identifies specified sites are best dealt with outside the public domain?

Mr. Beith: That is most certainly the case. If I had not known already, my experience on the Intelligence and Security Committee would have provided me with many reasons to be aware of that point. It means that local authorities must have staff who are experienced and can be trusted with relevant information that cannot be placed in the public domain. All that requires care, and to do something on an absolutely secure basis often takes a little longer and requires a little more effort and organisation than if it were carried out on a more general basis.

The Bill's original purpose was to allow for a return to a previous level of funding. That was the way that some of us, including my colleagues and those Conservative Members who served on the Committee, saw it. The idea was not dreamed up out of our imaginations, but clearly resulted from the statement of the Home Office Minister who was in charge of the Bill when it was published last June. He said:

> "This short, technical Bill would enable us to return to the funding levels for the Civil Defence Grant."

That created a feeling of concern among emergency planning officers, because that would have involved reducing this year's expenditure of about £18.5 million to the £14 million of the previous year.

The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) has done us a service—admittedly, a planted service, but none the less valuable—in asking a question that extracted from the Government an indication that, for the coming financial year, they do not propose after all to make the cut that was presaged when the Bill was published, but keep expenditure at roughly its present level.

However, the answer was intriguing in that it left doubt as to whether there would be a formula for the figure, and that provides another argument in favour of my new clause and amendment. If the Government cannot decide whether to use the formula that they are creating under the Bill or to continue as they are at present by informal consultation with local authorities, what is the panic and rush? Let us do the job properly by considering the results of the civil defence review.

Having made the decision that resources will not be cut and will remain at about £18.5 million, the possibility emerges that the Government will say, "Will someone please give us a formula that will enable us to distribute this money in the same proportion as it is distributed now?" I do not know how they will do that, so they had better consult the people who were in what was the Department of the Environment who worked out the standard spending assessment. However, that is an entirely facetious suggestion, because I would not let the authors of the SSA loose on any other aspect of government if I could possibly help it.

This case conjures up the sort of mathematical poser in which one says, "This is the answer, now give us the question." If £18.5 million is the answer, will it be distributed in the way that negotiation and discussion between authorities and the Cabinet Office have determined so far or will a formula be introduced so that the same sum of money is distributed to authorities according to new and no doubt excellent principles that would undoubtedly result in less being available to some authorities and more being available to others?

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that there is something to commend in the findings of the Emergency Planning Society, which has asked the Government to commission an independent inquiry into the appropriate level of costs for the services?

Mr. Beith: We would all feel much more comfortable about such an important matter if we knew that the total amount had been independently determined by another voice. That is not necessarily the only way to achieve an outcome, but I would not complain if the Government chose to take that course. The new clause and the amendment in particular would enable the Government to do that. It would give them a bit more time to maintain the present arrangements, which is, after all, what they have really said that they will do.

I have conjured up the possibility that they might redistribute the £18.6 million according to a new formula, but I suspect that they will simply freeze individual local authority grants at this year's levels. To do anything else would be to invite difficulty, and I shall be interested to hear from the Minister on that. If the Government freeze funding, there is no reason why they should not establish a better mechanism to decide the amount. Again, however, that should be in the light of the civil defence review.

Mr. Wilshire: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will take my criticism of him in the spirit in which I mean it, but he was nothing like rude enough about the SSA approach to spreading money around the country. Does he agree that it is daft to apply that approach to this case, because it implies that the money will be spread around all authorities? My experience of flooding and other disasters is that they do not spread themselves across every county council and borough in the land. Instead, they are focused in an area. Although that area needs a lot of money, others do not need any.

Mr. Beith: I am not sure that I entirely agree with the line of the hon. Gentleman's argument, although I agree that no criticism is sufficient for the SSA mechanism. I merely did not want to stray too far from what is appropriate in the debate. Were the money to be distributed according to that formula, the impact on Northumberland and Somerset, to give just two examples, would be appalling if we consider the disparities in education spending between those authorities and the national average, all helpfully set out in another parliamentary answer last week that reveals the true horror of the SSA.

Areas that face a particular threat will have special emergency planning needs. The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston referred to that and it is also relevant to the concerns of the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) about Heathrow. In general, however, planning, unlike front-line facilities, such as the police and the fire brigade, needs to take place in every local authority. Any local authority might have to cope with the impact of an emergency. For example, an obscure local authority that never thought that it would face an emergency could find itself coping with a major rail crash caused by a terrorist attack on the railway system, just as police forces that were not geared up for anything so dramatic as terrorism are having to get help from elsewhere to conduct inquiries in their area into a group of terrorists that has disappeared into it. The ability to plan and to obtain help exists in all authorities.

There is no point devising a formula unless we know what it is. As there is little likelihood that the Government will devise one for the financial year 2002-03, what is the urgency of passing the Bill in its present form? If the new clause were included in it or accepted in principle by the Minister, which would not be difficult to do, Parliament

[Mr. Beith]

and local authorities would at the very least have before them an indication of the implications of the defence review for the funding of emergency planning. Local authorities will have an idea of that when the magical consensus is set out. However, what constitutes that consensus will probably be determined by the Government. Local authorities and emergency planning officers will have to work within that, but they need to know the implications for their funding.

Better still, the amendment, on which we might vote later in our proceedings if we do not get satisfactory answers, would confer the year's delay that so many hon. Members in Committee thought would be a good way to deal with the problem. It would enable us to absorb the full implications of the defence review and to mould a funding formula that arises properly from that. It might be that we can mould a different mechanism—after all, the Government may learn something from the consultation in which they have engaged in the past year.

4.45 pm

That process was described in Committee, in less than flattering terms, as "somebody from the Department getting on the phone to the local authority and arguing over the figures." Nevertheless, the Government may learn from the process that there is an alternative to a formula that imports none of the horrors of the SSA and enables the Government to take account of circumstances in individual areas. Whatever seems appropriate, the result could be much better determined with a year's delay. At the very least, we need to know the implications of the civil defence review before we embark on this financial year.

This is important work. It has been an unglamorous part of work in local authorities and central Government for the happy reason that for several years we did not have to cope with many major civil, military or terrorism-related emergencies. In recent years, we have had to cope with increasing numbers of terrorist emergencies, as well as significant civil emergencies. That has all demonstrated the need to reconsider the way in which we deal with such matters.

The Government have recognised that and have acted by initiating a consultation process. Their action on funding should be part of that, not a rushed attempt to cobble something together simply because the old funding system could no longer be sustained on legal grounds. The world has not come to an end, and emergency planning has not stopped, as a result of that legal settlement. We could continue on the present basis for another year and, in the meantime, absorb the results of these important discussions.

Mr. Miller: I appreciate the tone in which the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) spoke to the new clause. I followed his arguments in part, but I disagree with his conclusion.

Paragraph 4 of the Bill's explanatory notes says:

> "A Review into . . . emergency planning is under way, the result of which is likely to be emergency planning legislation."

The right hon. Gentleman seeks to pre-empt that review and force out several of its results, whether or not it is ready, by 1 April. He made the point that there are continual changes in the nature of potential civil emergencies. On the threat from terrorists, it is acknowledged that the entire world changed after 11 September.

Mr. Mark Field: There is little doubt that, since 11 September, many parts of the country have been on a heightened alert. However, many local authorities, particularly those in central London such as the City of London and the city of Westminster, which I represent, have been able to cope relatively well and with relatively little upheaval for much of the residential and large tourist populations because the world did not change to such a great extent. Over the past 30 years, people have become accustomed, particularly in mainland Britain, to confronting the terrorist threat. Important as these provisions are, we should not operate on the pretext that the world has changed for ever.

Mr. Miller: I shall not get drawn too far into that discussion, Madam Deputy Speaker, or you will rule me out of order, but I have to disagree with the hon. Gentleman. The nature of warfare has changed since 11 September, and I suspect that the Intelligence and Security Committee, on which the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed sits, has been discussing that in great detail.

Our constituents are affected by many circumstances other than that change. The right hon. Gentleman spoke about the effects of foot and mouth disease in his constituency. I respect those observations because, fortunately, my constituency—indeed, the whole of north Cheshire—escaped the ravages of that terrible disease. I also respect his observations about flooding: although in the past 12 months we have had a few localised incidents in which many residents faced severe problems, they were nothing compared with the floods in Worcester and elsewhere. However, a recent series of incidents centred on chemicals sites in and around my constituency illustrates the need for continuous review of the nature of the planning process in each area of risk.

The nature of the risk changes constantly. In my constituency, that change is due in part to the actions of businesses in changing their product mix. Huge advances in chemicals safety have been made in the past 20 years, but even though the risk has become more remote, one must always pose the series of questions that start, "What happens if?" Another factor that comes into play is the increase in air traffic in the north-west.

Last year, two incidents occurred that might well have sparked the need to put emergency services on full alert—indeed, they were partially mobilised. The first resulted from the actions of fuel protesters who blocked the entrances to one of Britain's major hazard sites, with the result that the fire authorities could not gain access. Emergency planners started to consider the options. Some months later, animal rights protesters playing the same game tried to blockade Ellesmere Port's Stanlow refinery.

Opposition Members might have found some weak excuses to support the fuel protesters, but I suspect that they would not have supported the animal rights protesters. The Opposition cannot have it both ways—both incidents caused the same sort of emergency.

Mr. Collins: Given his earlier remarks about petrochemical plants in Cheshire, the hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to hear that when my office contacted the Cheshire county emergency planning officer to ask his views on the Bill, he raised precisely those points. Does he, as a Cheshire Member, agree with that officer that the grant mechanism that the Government should draw up should take into account the different degrees of threat affecting local authorities, and should not simply be per capita or based on acreage?

Mr. Miller: If I can do so without stepping outside the context of the Bill, I will deal in some detail with that argument because there are some important points to be made.

As the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed said, we are shifting from an arcane formula that was subject to challenge—one that I understand resulted in an out-of-court settlement—and now we need stability pending the implementation of a new system. That new system must emerge not from the Bill—it would be unreasonable to expect that of the Government—but from the emergency planning review itself. I support the concept of the Bill as a means by which to deal with the here and now, not the long-term future.

The long-term future needs to take into account all the outcomes of the review. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will give an assurance that the review will include consideration of the ways in which public resources can be used more effectively cross-departmentally so that we do not have the sort of nonsense that is set out in a letter from the Civil Aviation Authority, which tells me that it is all right for aeroplanes to circle the Stanlow refinery in a holding pattern because that is a convenient area in which to hold them. Holding them out on Liverpool bay would be considerably safer. I see the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Flook) laughing. I think that he agrees with my observation. We need that sort of joined-up thinking from the Cabinet Office after the review. Heads must also be knocked together to some extent.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's point that if a long-term review is about to come out, it is sensible to get all our ducks in a row, as it were. But what has he to say about the fact that the Ministry of Defence, in the short to medium term, is producing an extra chapter for the strategic defence review arising out of the events of 11 September? That will come through quite quickly. Is not the proposal of the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) sensible, given that the conclusions of the MOD study will become available in the extra year, even if we have to wait longer for the final results of the long-term review?

Mr. Miller: I am glad that there is some recognition among Opposition Members that my earlier point was correct, and that the events of 11 September changed things.

Many of the risks are real, as is shown by the incidents that have occurred: foot and mouth, floods, the serious explosion at Associated Oxtel, a leak from GATTX, and the actions of fuel protesters and animal rights activists. These are real issues that affect my constituents.

A new dimension will have to be considered. I suspect that part of it will have to be dealt with by the Committee that is chaired by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed with a high degree of confidentiality. As I have said, I am dealing with the here and now.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): The hon. Gentleman refers to the here and now, and we all understand that. I accept that there have been changes since 11 September. However, reviews are taking place that take into account responses since that date.

Are we not putting the cart before the horse? I take the hon. Gentleman back to what was said in Committee. My hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) asked:

> "As part of the wider review, is it possible that the new system that will be implemented by the Bill will be abolished and reviewed again?"—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E,* 11 December 2001; c. 23-24.]

The Minister replied, "That is possible". Is not what we are now doing a waste of time and money, if in a year's time we may find ourselves considering these matters all over again?

Mr. Miller: I think—I believe that the right hon. Member for Berwick–upon–Tweed agreed with the observation—that we do not spend enough time considering potential civil emergencies. Even if the Bill has a short life, I consider that it is necessary in the context of the here and now. It would be far better to get the issue out of the way by focusing the attention of the entire House, including Members with military expertise and those with expertise in agriculture or river systems, for example, on it. The same goes for industrial experts who can deal with potential chemical risks. We must work together to try to find a consensus on the right way forward.

5 pm

Mr. Adrian Flook (Taunton): Would not capping the amount of money that goes to civil defence, as the Government propose, make it more difficult to decide how much money there should be for, say, safeguarding installations?

Mr. Miller: I told the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) that I would come to that and its relationship to the standard spending assessment. Before doing so, I shall conclude my point about why we need to introduce the Bill, then consider how to join up facilities better.

I shall give a simple example. The Highways Agency needs to engage in such debates. A few years ago, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Weaver Vale (Mr. Hall), a swing bridge on the A56, which passes over a canal, was scheduled to be repaired. I remind the agency, through my hon. Friend the Minister, that it is still scheduled to be repaired. At the time, a foam tender located at a fire station could not have covered emergencies to the east on the motorway network, so there were discussions about whether it should be moved further from a chemical plant, which would delay its response to emergencies there. Such an absurd situation begs the question why all the agencies do not co-ordinate to ensure that they take the best decisions, not the piecemeal decisions of the past.

[Mr. Miller]

In response to the hon. Members for Westmorland and Lonsdale and for Taunton, the creation of the SSA resulted in a series of rank absurdities. Members who can remember that far back will know that the SSA was introduced at the same time as the unified business rate and coincided with the poll tax, which got all the headlines. Areas such as mine suffered a net loss because of the loss of rates from the chemical industry, and faced serious financial problems. Opposition Members who look carefully at the arguments on the SSA made by counties like Cheshire will acknowledge in hindsight that it was not smart to penalise authorities that had savings or to shift resources without considering the special requirements of some parts of the country.

I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to find a long-term formula in the review that moves away from the presumption in the SSA. Its replacement, which, we hope, will soon come out of the review, should refund moneys spent on emergency planning to local authorities and be commensurate with the realities on the ground, which vary. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed pointed out that foot and mouth has affected his constituency twice during his time in Parliament. However, equally long-serving Members who represent other parts of the country have not experienced such things. He will never experience in his constituency some of the risks and incidents that have occurred in my constituency. Flexibility must therefore emerge from the review, but we must be wary of making a premature response. Opposition Members would rightly chide my hon. Friend the Minister for the obvious weakness if the Government simply said, "This Bill is the here and now and also the long-term future."

However, we need to find a mechanism to achieve a stable situation so that a proper debate on shifting to a more rational basis for the formula can take place. I therefore urge the House to reject the new clause and amendment No. 1. I shall not repeat the arguments, but I hope that the House develops a consensus around a more sensible way to proceed well before 2004.

That begs the question whether there is such a mechanism. The answer, of course, is yes. A review is being undertaken and we are told, without ambiguity, that it is likely to result in emergency planning legislation. It is difficult to assume that any such legislation would not have money implications, so the logic of pushing decisions related to the Bill further into the future does not stand detailed examination.

Against that background, although I urge the House to reject the new clause and the amendment, I ask the Cabinet Office to listen seriously to my arguments and those made from both sides of the House about the funding mechanism that will emerge from the review. Important issues will affect a significant number of constituencies up and down the country and events can occur as a result of the entirely unforeseen. Despite all the defence expertise of the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field), he could not have foreseen the events of 11 September. Equally, issues surrounding foot and mouth, flooding and human error could not be foreseen and affected areas that, traditionally, were not high risk.

I hope that the Government provide reassurance that, in considering long-term plans, we shall move from piecemeal operation, with Departments acting in isolation, to a more responsive formula that takes the known risks into account, but provides enough flexibility to allow for the unknowns that are, sadly, with us.

I hope that the Bill becomes law in approximately this form and that we get it on the statute book as quickly as possible. We must then focus the attention of the whole House, not just the handful of Members here, on the important longer-term issues.

Mr. Wilshire: I shall focus on amendment No. 1 and I hope that the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) does not press ahead with the new clause, because that might prevent us from voting on the amendment. I hope that there is a vote, because the amendment is the important measure.

All the key decisions about the review and the Bill appear to have been taken before 11 September. The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) expressed surprise that Opposition Members agree with him that 11 September is important. I am pleased that he agreed with us that 11 September was important. The significance of the Bill for me is that it had its origins before 11 September, which was not that long ago. The implications of those events were so enormous that taking until at least 2004 to conduct a review will be the reality, not just what we ought to do.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): Is not there a contradiction in the hon. Gentleman's argument? The implications of 11 September for emergency planning were profound. Some of the assumptions that underpin such planning may have shifted and the threat of terrorism may have upped the ante, so we need to act quickly. It is right to close loopholes and undergo reviews, and we may want to consider other issues in the future, but to argue that we should wait until 2004 when we may want to deal with some profound issues quickly is perhaps contradictory.

Mr. Wilshire: If that were the case, the hon. Gentleman would be right, but I do not accept that there are loopholes. If there are, this measure seems to close only one by ensuring that there cannot be any more money. In fact, there will not be as much.

Mr. Collins: My hon. Friend may have noticed that the Government, in their explanatory notes, say:

> "The Government believes the effect of the . . . Bill will be to prevent unexpected increases in costs".

It is quite clear that that is what the Bill is about.

Mr. Wilshire: My hon. Friend is right. I agree with the hon. Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight) that other issues will need to be addressed, but my argument and that of the Liberal Democrats is that, while we are addressing the issues that the hon. Gentleman is concerned about, we should maintain the status quo. As my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) said, as a result of the Bill we will have the money we need—rather than less money—while we examine the loopholes.

The then Home Office Minister, the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien), told a conference in 2000 that in the Government's judgment £14 million was enough. That was a long time before 11 September. If £14 million was adequate then, it patently is not adequate now. The Bill will drive us back to the standard spending assessment approach. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed made it clear that that approach was wrong, but it is the only approach that we will have for the moment. If we go back to the old way of doing things while the review takes place, we will adopt an SSA approach to a system that even the Government accept must be replaced. They are busily trying to come up with a new way of distributing money. It is self-evident that we should wait until we have a new way of distributing money before we proceed with any measure that will limit the amount that we spend on civil defence.

The stupidity of the SSA system is notorious, and there are a thousand and one examples of why it should be scrapped as quickly as possible. I can give one such in my county of Surrey. The SSA allocates money to the fire service throughout the country, but it takes no account of the length of motorway in each county. Surrey has a huge chunk of the M25, including sections that have the most accidents, yet no account of that was taken in the allocation to the fire service, which was expected to provide emergency cover for road accidents. If that is the way the SSA works, heaven help us if we go back to applying it to civil emergencies on the scale of the events of 11 September.

I know that cash is a finite item, and I accept the argument that we should not spend money that we do not have, but one of the realities of civil disasters and emergencies is that they demand large spending immediately. We should not take a cash-limiting approach and say, "This is how much we have got, so if, God forbid, a vast number of people are killed we can clear up only so much and not the rest because we will have run out of money." I do not believe that such an approach would commend itself to the British people, let alone to the House of Commons.

Jim Knight: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could help me. I agree with his comments on the SSA. The Dorset SSA is appalling, and I am sure that we would all argue that our own SSAs do not work because the system is a bit of a joke. However, nowhere in the Bill does it say that the Government cannot increase funding. It just says that the Government should

"determine the aggregate amount of grants to be made".

That does not restrict the Government, but the important point is that it does not deliver a blank cheque to local government and everyone else. We need to close the loophole that currently allows a blank cheque to be written. The hon. Gentleman, who may have memories of being in government himself, will surely accept that that is dangerous.

5.15 pm

Mr. Wilshire: I accept the principle that it is necessary to be very careful with blank cheques. My hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale will deal with instances in which money will be cut. I can only say, on the basis of my experience of local government—for instance, on a fire brigade committee—that there may sometimes be an argument for, as it were, a limited blank cheque. From the moment that a disaster occurs, we cannot afford to sit down and say "We will respond, within the limit made available by the Government." That is not the way in which disasters should be handled, but if I understand the Bill correctly, it will force us into such a position, at least until the Government have completed their review of SSAs.

Mr. Miller: With respect, I think that the hon. Gentleman has misunderstood the Bill. It is about the planning process. No one is saying—no Labour Member has ever argued, and the hon. Gentleman's party never argued when in government—that local authorities faced with serious emergencies such as those that he cites should not respond adequately to meet public needs at any given time.

Mr. Wilshire: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. Perhaps the Minister will tell us that the Home Office view—expressed in 2000—that £14 million was enough has now been scrapped. Perhaps he will tell us, in that case, how much more will be provided. Until I hear how much more will be made available following 11 September, however, I will take it that £14 million is all that is available, and that is not adequate.

Mr. Miller: I refer the hon. Gentleman to what the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said about a written answer that I was given last week.

Mr. Wilshire: I look forward to reading what was said.

Mr. Collins: My hon. Friend will doubtless agree that Labour Members are making an extremely powerful case for amendment No. 2, which proposes that only increases can constitute in-year alterations to legislation. We look forward to their support in the event of a vote.

Mr. Wilshire: My hon. Friend has a great deal more courage than me. Although I was aware of amendment No. 2, after 14 years I have learned that those who stray on to an amendment that is not in the group under discussion are rapidly told off. I may say something about amendment No. 2 later.

A review is being conducted, and is not yet complete. The civil contingencies committee, heaven help us, has set up 10 working groups. I gather that a while ago it had managed to examine 300 plans, with plenty more to go.

I think that I understand the way in which the official mind works, and the way in which the official machinery grinds away. Ten working groups will probably take until at least 2004 to finish their work. If such groups are set up to review all these issues, it is only sensible to let them finish before changing legislation.

Another factor that is causing confusion, which provides yet another reason for delay and for supporting amendment No. 1, is the transfer of Government responsibilities from the Home Office to the Cabinet Office. What little evidence I have been able to find suggests that that is causing difficulties. I mean no criticism, but when a complicated issue is being transferred between Departments, it seems eminently sensible to let that be completed, and to allow time for the whole process to be researched and bedded down, before legislating.

Let me give an example of the current difficulties. In my constituency, one upshot of 11 September was that Heathrow airport suddenly found that many people were

[Mr. Wilshire]

stuck there because aircraft over the Atlantic had been grounded. Thousands of people had to spend the night at the airport. It was not long before every hotel in the area was full; it was not long before every hotel in the region was full; and it was not long before Heathrow Airport Ltd made a request to Hillingdon borough council, because the terminals are in Hillingdon. Heathrow estimated that at least 2,000 extra beds were needed urgently, over and above what was available; otherwise, it was the park benches or the uncomfortable seats in the terminals at Heathrow.

The best that Hillingdon could do within its planning arrangements at the time—again, I mean no criticism of Hillingdon—was to find 150 beds. It did the obvious thing: it contacted neighbouring authorities, my own included. That yielded another 150 beds. In the end, a number of my constituents got involved. When there were no more beds to be found and the emergency planning system could not find any more, my constituents and other people's constituents around the airport said, "Come and sleep in my spare bedroom." Ultimately, that was how the crisis was solved.

Given the fact that the Government are changing Ministries to handle such a situation, and that councils have not had any experience of that scale of disaster, it seems sensible to wait for all the reviews, including the ones that local authorities must carry out, to finish before passing legislation of this sort.

Mr. Mark Field: My hon. Friend has given a very good, practical and specific example from the past few months. Does he agree that if this whole process is to be, as it is at the moment, demand rather than needs-led, we need at this juncture to have an entire rethink, which will inevitably take some time? It is particularly important to gain a sense of perspective beyond what has happened just in the past four months and look towards getting some pattern—inevitably, it will be a flexible pattern—into place for the years ahead to ensure that we have the right formula.

Mr. Wilshire: My hon. Friend is right. He may be amazed to discover that the Government agree with him. They set up their 10 working groups to carry out exactly that process. He is right to say that it should be completed before we embark on legislation of this sort.

As I have said, I am not sure that new clause 1 commends itself to me that much, but I want to support amendment No. 1. I sincerely hope that we will have the chance to do that. I make only one criticism of it; it is in the same spirit as my previous criticism of the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed. I consider that 2004 may be too soon and that the date should be later but in the absence of a chance to vote for an even later date I would be happy to support him.

Jim Knight: Like most hon. Members here, I have concerns about emergency planning. I sit on the Select Committee on Defence, which as I am sure the House is aware, is reviewing the defence and security of the United Kingdom and emergency planning. The civil contingencies secretariat is very much part of that review but I support this legislation because it is right to end the blank cheque to local government.

With all due respect, amendment No. 1 is bizarre. It says in effect that, in 2004, the Government will be able to limit spending by making an assessment but in the meantime the loophole remains and local authorities can spend what they like: we will just have to foot the bill as the Government.

Mr. Beith: I think that the hon. Gentleman slightly misunderstands the present situation. He is surely not suggesting that the Government are allowing local authorities to spend whatever they like. In fact they are engaged in regular consultation with local authorities to try to ensure that the funding that they provide is appropriate to an authority's needs.

Jim Knight: Different people have given me different interpretations of the system. I have spoken to some people who are basically saying that currently it is so confused that they can go ahead and spend and Government will have some obligation to reimburse.

Mr. Flook: It is not as simple as that. The first £25,000 is paid for by the local authority, and if that is a shire district that is a substantial amount. Under the Bellwin system, above £25,000, only 80 per cent. is clawed back, so local authorities are responsible for large elements of the money.

Jim Knight: I accept that, but there is a danger that if we leave open the loophole, local authorities—seeing 2004 on the horizon—will have a spending bonanza, buying everything that they need to cope with a threat.

Mr. Mark Field: The hon. Gentleman takes a cynical view of local authorities. I suspect that, like me, he has been a member of one and remembers the mad dash in the 11th or 12th month of a year to see which road-widening scheme, for example, is required. I can appreciate that the Government, understandably, take the view that they want to cap expenditure, to an extent, and do not want it to spiral out of control. But does not the hon. Gentleman see that given that the average over the past three or four years has been around £14 million, and is to be nearer £18 million for this year, and given all the disaster and emergency planning that has had to be planned for during the past 12 months, most people outside would think that a relatively small increase from £14 million to £18 million was reasonable—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. Interventions should be much briefer.

Mr. Field: Does the hon. Gentleman feel therefore that—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I call Mr. Knight.

Jim Knight: I shall try to pick away at what the question might have been. I would not be happy to see funding continue at £14 million and I am happy to see that increase.

Mr. Wilshire: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Jim Knight: I have been generous in giving way and I would like to make progress. However, I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, who has such a pleading face.

Mr. Wilshire: I am only asking the hon. Gentleman to extend to me the courtesy that I extended several times to him. I warn him that I may have several more interventions to come. I thought that I was cynical but I have heard a level of cynicism from him that I could not surpass. His suggestion that local government will have a spending spree over the next couple of years if we pass the amendment, and will stoke up natural disasters so that it can put in bills, is the sort of cynicism that I am surprised to hear.

Jim Knight: I have spoken to the chief fire officer in Dorset and to chief executives of local authorities, and they have a number of concerns relating to various threats. My constituency office is on a site that is regulated by the nuclear installations inspectorate which, in turn, is policed by the nuclear police. They have concerns in terms of biological, nuclear and chemical threats. If every authority thought that it needed more suits, showers or other things, the bill could get out of control. We may need an assessment of where the risks really are in order to balance the priorities. That is not total cynicism, but I know how strapped for cash local authorities can be. If they see a window and a chance to get what they need, they might leap through it without looking first.

I have concerns about the amendment tabled by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), which are along the same lines as those expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller). The amendment tries to anticipate the review and does not deal with the Bill. I agree with my hon. Friend that the Bill is about the here and now and deals with the problem that arose in Merseyside. After 11 September, the review is vital for England and Wales. We desperately need it, and we must look also at statutory powers and the levels of funding that underpin those powers. We will need legislation; perhaps not just one Bill, but others.

I do not have a problem, as Conservative Members seem to, with the notion of closing a loophole, finishing a review and proposing legislation that arises out of the review.

5.30 pm

For example, I was sent a letter by the chief executive of Purbeck district council regarding local authority responsibilities in relation to marine pollution. I am responsible for most of Poole harbour. Let me correct myself; happily, I am not responsible for it personally, but most of Poole harbour lies within my constituency, as does the Wytch Farm oil plant, which is run by BP and located in a highly sensitive area that has just been granted world heritage status by UNESCO.

The authorities concerned with these sites, including the Environment Agency and the county council, should agree a joint memorandum of understanding about the responsibilities assigned to them in the national contingency plan, but, because they have no statutory powers—and they certainly have no finances with which to produce such a memorandum—they have not agreed to sign it. A recent emergency planning exercise in the harbour—entitled Poolespill—examined the possibilities of major oil pollution on the world heritage coast. That exercise revealed all sorts of problems that need to be addressed, and I sincerely hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will listen carefully to Opposition Members, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston and me, when we argue for more finance as a result of the review.

I hope that the Minister will also consider the powers that the various authorities hold. The fire authority does not have the power to deal with anything other than putting out fires at the moment. It is still covered by out-of-date legislation, which needs to be updated to deal with the threats that have arisen following 11 September, and with other forms of accident response.

I am sure that many hon. Members have attended many pleasurable party political conferences in Bournemouth, and I hope that all parties will continue to return to Dorset for their conferences. My guess is that those conferences represent the biggest risk of large-scale terrorist attacks for Dorset, and it is worth reminding the Minister that, although the police are reimbursed for the cost associated with political conferences, the fire authority is not. The fire authority incurs significant extra costs related to the running of the conferences in Bournemouth—two were held there last year. The Department of Health has now contracted fire authorities to carry out the necessary decontamination in the case of a chemical or biological attack, but I do not know whether they would be reimbursed for that work.

I am grateful for your indulgence, Madam Deputy Speaker, in allowing me to run through some of the reasons that I would like more statutory powers and more finance to come out of the review. The Bill is needed to close the loophole revealed by the Merseyside case. We need the legislation now, without further delay, but I am looking for a commitment from those on the Front Bench that proper resources and statutory powers will come out of the emergency planning review.

Mr. Collins: New clause 1 has enabled us to have a useful discussion about the current status of the Government's civil defence review, which, of course, started long before the events of 11 September but has no doubt been greatly informed by them. I have some questions for the Minister about that. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire), however, that amendment No. 1 has the stronger case behind it. It is similar to points that my right hon. and hon. Friends and I raised at earlier stages of the Bill's consideration, and were it to be pressed to a Division, we would be inclined to support it.

I strongly endorse the tributes paid—on both sides of the House, I am delighted to say—to the work of the emergency planning officers. They are not the most glamorous of our public servants, and they do not have television series such as "London's Burning", "Casualty" or "The Bill" made about them. None the less, they play a very important role in the provision of emergency services in this country. Whether they are involved in military operations or emergency responses, it is the logistics and the pre-planning—the work done in advance—that can make all the difference to the effectiveness of the ambulance men, fire service personnel or police officers on the ground, and it is important that we should all pay tribute to their work.

It is also worth noting that since we had a bit of a discussion between the parties about the level of the Government grant—the Minister is smiling now—we have seen an interesting example of a rare but not entirely

[Mr. Collins]

extinct event in British public life: Parliament working. The Minister appears to have listened to the representations that were vigorously made to him by the Opposition parties, both on Second Reading and in Committee, that he should not continue with the policy, which he inherited from his Home Office colleague, of reducing the grant from about £19 million to about £14 million in the coming financial year.

I do not know whether the Minister had a tussle with the Treasury or whether it was simply an easy conversation with an old pal, but we congratulate him on having succeeded. That is why we are not expecting a 25 per cent. cut, as we were at an earlier stage.

However—the Minister would not expect such an encomium to conclude without at least one "however"—there are still a few points on which it would be helpful to have clarification. When the Bill was introduced, the explanatory notes said that expenditure in the present financial year was expected to be about £19.5 million. Last week, however, in the welcome parliamentary answer to the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller), it was said that in the next financial year expenditure would be roughly the same as in the current financial year—£18.6 million.

When the House decides whether it should support amendment No. 1, which would postpone implementation of the Bill, it would be helpful to know whether £18.6 million is a revised, updated and more accurate assessment of expenditure in the current financial year, or whether we are still facing a reduction. As the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) rightly said, it would also be helpful if the Minister clarified the basis on which that figure was calculated. Parliamentary representations are a splendid basis on which to take public expenditure decisions, but they are not always the most stable and predictable indicators for local authorities, so it would be helpful to know how the figure was produced.

Secondly, will the Minister confirm that even if spending in the current financial year will be £18.6 million rather than £19 million, the Government's proposed grant for the next financial year, although not a swingeing cut, as was at one time feared, is still a freeze? There certainly will not be an increase, so it is difficult to say that changes have been made in response to the events of 11 September.

In that context, does the Minister recognise that the reason why many people outside the House would think it appropriate for the Bill to be passed only if a delaying amendment such as amendment No. 1 were made is that there will be incredulity at the idea that the Government are introducing legislation on emergency planning and civil defence that is not wanted by emergency planning officers at this stage, and which makes it possible for the grant to be capped, at best, if not reduced in real terms?

Is the Minister aware that I have seen a copy of a letter sent to him a couple of weeks ago by the honorary secretary of the Emergency Planning Society, who wrote from the emergency planning unit of Hampshire county council:

> "The overall effect of floods, fuel supply problems, foot and mouth and the increased terrorist threat have demonstrably increased the workloads of local authority emergency planning officers . . . We believe there is now a significant shortfall in the numbers of personnel required to prepare and maintain plans, provide adequate training and respond to emergencies of an increasingly more frequent nature".

In other words, there is considerable concern among the professionals who have to deal with emergency planning about the amount of grant that the Government provide even now—although I repeat that £18 million or so is obviously preferable to £14 million or so.

Mr. Miller: As the hon. Gentleman is praying in aid that letter, with its reference to fuel supply problems, will he now condemn the people who sought to create emergencies in my constituency?

Mr. Collins: I am not sure whether we should go too far into who was responsible for what in connection with the fuel shortages in September 2000. I shall take the hon. Gentleman's attack on successive Labour Budgets in the spirit in which it was intended.

I suspect that the most the Minister will be able to say is that the Government have, on reflection, decided to keep spending roughly at present levels. However, it is notable that even at present levels of funding, there are difficulties. For example, the county emergency planning officer of Oxfordshire says that internal funds have been spent on planning for the countering of a toxic chemical threat. In other words, the local authority had to transfer resources from other areas of its expenditure to deal with that crucial and worrying aspect of the post-11 September threats, because present funding levels were not adequate. Similarly, the officer for Gloucestershire is worried that many members of the public assume that there are large numbers of men in suits, as he puts it, ready to deal with threats of toxic or chemical warfare, when in fact there are not.

Amendment No. 1 has particular merit, in that the context in which such decisions are being taken will presumably be much clearer in a year's time. A number of Conservative and Liberal Democrat Members have made the case for a delay for reconsideration, because we are still in a position of flux. When the Bill was originally introduced, the events of September 11 had not occurred. When the Bill had its Second Reading and was then considered in Committee, the war in Afghanistan was at an earlier stage. We still do not know the exact nature of the external threats facing our country after the successful and wholly admirable actions taken by the United States Government in Afghanistan draw to a close. However, we do know that in some respects the position is even more worrying than before. I do not wish to dilate at any great length on the discovery of British citizens in Afghanistan who had been serving with Taliban forces. It is simply enough, for these purposes, to recognise that the Government, in drawing up the Bill, cannot have been aware that there would be a number of British citizens, normally resident in this country, prepared to support a terrorist threat from that quarter. That is necessarily a matter of concern.

I do not propose to go into the matter in any further detail, beyond using it as an opportunity to ask the Minister if he could address some of the issues relating to the review and the territory that it will cover. The review is intended to be fairly broad and all encompassing. The emergency planning officers who are deeply sceptical about the Bill are strongly in favour of the Government's review and hope that it will be undertaken swiftly.

When does the Minister expect to conclude the review? When do the Government propose to introduce legislation on the back of it? It is clear that a strong consensus exists in central and local government that new legislation will be required comprehensively to overhaul and replace the Civil Defence Act 1948. Have the Minister and his colleagues had full and detailed consultations with other Governments about the conduct of the review? Has he sought the views of Tom Ridge, who has been put in charge of homeland defence by the United States Administration? Is there not an important European Union dimension to this? We are clearly facing common threats and there may be a case at least for pooling experience if not for a joint response.

I should like to add my congratulations to those expressed earlier in the debate to the people who worked as trading standards officers and emergency planning officers at the height of the foot and mouth crisis. My county of Cumbria was the worst affected in the country. About half the cases in the United Kingdom were in Cumbria, and an awful lot of people worked extremely hard. Can the Minister tell us, either now or later—I appreciate that he may need to write to some of us—whether the Cabinet Office's review of emergency planning will be closely linked with the work being done by the various Government-established inquiries on the lessons of the foot and mouth crisis? In particular, will the Cabinet Office ensure that there is a published contingency plan in the event of a further outbreak of foot and mouth?

How will the review address the post-11 September concerns that many right hon. and hon. Members will have on behalf of their constituents who live near nuclear power stations? Sellafield is not in my constituency but it is in my county and—as one of my constituents rather chillingly pointed out—only 25 miles away as the fall-out flies. In the light of the events in New York a few months ago, what will the review have to say in respect of air and other defences for such facilities?

5.45 pm

Many people who have contacted me or my office—including professional emergency planning officers—have stressed the importance of the Government rapidly introducing what they describe as "positive legislation". Those people regard the Bill as a negative measure. They do not think that the timing is appropriate—that is why amendment No. 1 has so much to commend it.

I am thinking in particular of the words of Patrick Cunningham. He is the chief emergency planning officer for Durham and Darlington, but he contacted my office on behalf of the Emergency Planning Society. He said that the figure of £18.6 million—the increased figure that the Minister may be about to tell us reflects the seriousness with which the Government have approached the problem—

> "was set in March, and does not take account of the increased workload of emergency planners due to foot and mouth, flooding, more recently the increased terrorist threat . . . The Bill is particularly disappointing for practitioners after all that has happened this year. There is 100 per cent. support for positive emergency planning legislation arising out of the emergency planning review, but we are told that it may take three or four years to get that . . . We are crying out for positive legislation but instead they"—

the Government—

> "are insisting on pushing through this piece of negative legislation."

The hon. Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight) drew attention to the possibility that, without legislation or if the legislation were delayed, as it would be by amendment No. 1, local authorities might go on a spending bonanza. Mr. Cunningham, who understands precisely how the system works at present, points out:

> "The legislation sends the wrong message at the wrong time and suggests that they mistrust emergency planning officers by saying that if we are allowed to apply for funding we will apply for too much."

The point is that at present the officers can apply for funding only for precise and specific purposes and it must, in most cases, be negotiated with the Government in advance. That is why it would be more appropriate for the present arrangement to continue until the international situation is clarified and the overall Government review of the relevant legislation is concluded.

Mr. Miller: Will the hon. Gentleman give us an insight into the view of the official Opposition on which formula might replace the current one? That might enlighten our debate.

Mr. Collins: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that question, although I was under the impression—perhaps mistakenly—that all my remarks clarified the view of the official Opposition on these matters.

As the hon. Gentleman will recall from my comments in Committee, our position is that while Her Majesty's Government say that the scale of the international crisis facing our nation is such that the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998 must be suspended—for reasons that the Home Secretary has explained and which I do not question—it is inappropriate to introduce legislation that would at best cap in real terms and at worst reduce in real terms the amount available for the vital national function of emergency planning. As the hon. Gentleman well knows, we are talking not about billions or tens of billions, but about a few million pounds.

I hope and believe that we are also talking about a short time frame—months rather than years. It would thus make more sense to us—as it does to the Liberal Democrats—if the Government paused and reflected on the fact that emergency planning officers overwhelmingly do not want the measure now. They are saying clearly, "Please bring in overarching, positive legislation to put things on a proper basis before you make changes to the operation of the funding formula that will not be regarded with enthusiasm."

I close my speech simply by saying that we hope that the Government's review will be completed speedily and that the Minister will make it clear that much more positive legislation will be introduced, ideally in the current parliamentary Session, but certainly no later than next Session. In particular, as we have been discussing the review, I press the Minister to tell the House whether he can guarantee that legislation to restructure the Civil Defence Act 1948 will be introduced before this Parliament is concluded.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie): We have been debating new clause 1 and amendment No. 1 for some time and many

[Mr. Christopher Leslie]

issues have arisen. I shall try my best to address many of them, not least because certain hon. Members seem a little confused about the Bill's purpose, so I should like to elaborate on it and perhaps remind them of the debates that took place in earlier stages. It is interesting that the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) now speaks for the Liberal Democrats on the Bill, given that the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) did so in Committee, and the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) on Second Reading, so there may have been a reshuffle.

Mr. Beith: There has.

Mr. Leslie: I missed it. I apologise to the right hon. Gentleman and congratulate him on his new position. I am sure that the usual courtesies will apply in future debates.

Mr. Wilshire: The hon. Gentleman may care to predict who will handle the debates on any Lords amendment to the Bill on behalf of the Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): Or even on Third Reading.

Mr. Leslie: Or even on Third Reading, as my hon. Friend says.

Mr. Mark Field: Perhaps the Liberal Democrats have the hon Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden) in mind as a replacement in the next reshuffle.

Mr. Leslie: I am afraid that I cannot recall that constituency at the moment.

We need to focus on the Bill's purpose. It primarily deals with the consequences of the Merseyside legal challenge, which prevented the Government from following the normal practice of local government expenditure—instituting a formula to distribute money across all 179 different authorities entitled to receive the grant, which led to the demand-led system that we discussed a little earlier. It seems strange that there is a reluctance, especially among those on the Liberal Democrat Benches, to apply a formula for the distribution of grant. Various tests certainly have to be considered, and local authorities cannot make unreasonable demands. Even so, I had hoped that the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed would have considered previous debates in which we explained the necessity of having a nationally strategic approach to the distribution of money to ensure relative fairness and equity across the country in the way that the grant—a relatively small sum—is distributed between those local authorities.

Mr. Beith: Of course, I carefully read the reports of the proceedings in Committee and on Second Reading, and I referred to them in my remarks, as well as to the forecast made by the Minister's predecessor, who was in the Home Office, that the Bill would enable a reduction from £19 million to £14 million in the amount spent. However, does he not recall the answer given to the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) in which it was not made clear whether any formula would be applied in the coming financial year? It merely said that £18.6 million would be the approximate figure. The Government have clearly not decided whether to use a formula in the year that we are discussing.

Mr. Leslie: Of course, I recall the answer that was given to my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller)—I gave it. The right hon. Gentleman wonders whether we intend to impose a formula for the next financial year, but that is essentially the entire purpose of the Bill. As I shall say in discussing amendment No. 1, we need to have a framework for the next financial year, so that we can ensure that the money is distributed fairly. Without that framework, we shall continue with the haphazard, demand-led system, which is not compatible with a nationally strategic approach to distributing the grant.

As hon. Members on both sides of the House seem to acknowledge, the Civil Defence Act 1948 is relatively anachronistic; it was drafted after the second world war and focuses primarily on hostile attack. We acknowledge that there is now a need for significant reform, and it is perfectly fair to discuss new clause 1, under which the Government would have to publish the report by April, in the spirit in which it was tabled—to maintain the momentum to publish that report—but I would not want it to be enshrined in legislation for obvious reasons.

The discussion document on the emergency planning review was published in August, and the consultation ended on 31 October, although some of the comments that have been made in the Chamber today are entirely relevant for consideration. More than 260 responses to the consultation have been received, and I have been considering them, the funding mechanisms that we have been discussing, the co-operation that we can achieve between the different authorities and how we can aim for greater consistency of approach between them—the issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston.

The consultation exercise has been extremely useful and has yielded a lot of new information. We have held discussions with our European counterparts, as well as internationally, about which the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) asked. I hope that, in so far as we can, we can comply with the code of conduct on consultations and publish the responses in the usual way. We now intend to set up a project team in the civil contingencies secretariat to work on the next steps and to consider the strong duty of partnership that we seek to develop—about which my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight) asked—and further, deeper reforms and legislation may be required. I cannot give specific commitments on the timing of any legislation or on what parliamentary time is available, as the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale knows. We will have to discuss those matters, and we shall make an announcement on when and if we can do so.

We shall continue a dialogue with all the stakeholders involved, particularly the Emergency Planning Society and the Local Government Association, and I shall certainly report to Parliament on the progress in due course. There is no need for a formal, imposed primary legislative duty to be placed on me to report. I shall try my best to keep my word and to inform and update Parliament. That is why new clause 1 is unnecessary, and I urge the right hon. Gentleman to withdraw the motion.

Under amendment No. 1, the Bill's implementation would be delayed for a year. The Liberal Democrats tabled a very similar amendment in Committee, which was voted down on that occasion. Amendment No. 1 is essentially contrary to the Bill's purpose. It would prolong the demand-led system and prevent a nationally strategic approach from being introduced. The emergency planning review is, of course, extremely important, but the civil defence grant needs to be paid for ongoing work in the next financial year.

We cannot ignore the fact that the next financial year is approaching relatively swiftly, and we need to ensure that our house is in order before then. We need to return to good budgeting practices as soon as possible, and sticking with the haphazard, demand-led approach would be an abdication of our national responsibilities. We have to act responsibly and maintain discipline over public expenditure, however small the sum involved. I intend to publish the Government's plans for a formula shortly, following the consultation that I intend to undertake. The formula is likely to be similar to earlier approaches that have been used.

The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale asked about money. As has been mentioned earlier, on 23 January I announced that, subject to the Bill being passed, we intend to maintain the total grant at this year's level—currently estimated at £18.6 million. Representations have been made for more money—a natural phenomenon, which we have noticed in many other circumstances elsewhere—but it is fair to say that a 28 per cent. increase on last financial year is reasonably generous and should be welcomed as far as possible.

The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale mentioned a technical point in relation to £18.6 million sum. I shall try my best to explain why that is the right figure, even though £19.7 million was mentioned in the explanatory notes. He may recall that, in Committee, I talked about the practice of paying 90 per cent. in September or October, and 10 per cent. for accounting purposes in the subsequent financial year. We now know that the 90 per cent. figure comes to £16.7 million, so the rough estimate is that the final figure is likely be £18.6 million. The figure remains an estimate but it is as near as possible to the final figure.

6 pm

Mr. Collins: The Minister will know that emergency planning officers will pore over these proceedings with particular interest, so will he clarify two points? First, if it turns out that the figure of £18.6 million is slightly below actual expenditure in the current financial year, will he assure us that whatever formula the Government use will ensure that the finance available in the next financial year will be varied accordingly? Secondly, will he tell us which financial formula he has used to work out the figure? That question was asked by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and it is nice that the Minister has come up with a formula that appears to be almost identical in cash terms in one financial year after another. What is the basis for it?

Mr. Leslie: As I was trying to explain, we now know that payments of £16.7 million were made in October, which is 90 per cent. of the likely total. That brings us close to the figure of £18.6 million. However, that does not mean that we have a formula for the next financial year. That is what we are working on now, and that is the purpose of the Bill. I have referred to the aggregate grant level and, in seeking to resolve the question of finance, the figure of £18.6 million is likely to be the same as for this financial year.

Mr. Beith: Is the formula, whatever it is, designed to preserve roughly the distribution that authorities have now or is it likely to lead to a redistribution of the £18.6 million figure between authorities?

Mr. Leslie: As I was saying, we must consult on the formula that we intend to use. We intend to use a formula to distribute the grant and that is why we are trying to pass the Bill. If we move beyond this legislative stage, I will be able to consider which formula to use. As the right hon. Gentleman will know, the emergency planning review is considering whether the standard spending assessment is the best way of distributing the money and we have considered the representations that have been made. He winces and I take that as one such representation.

We should use an approach similar to that which existed before the Merseyside legal dispute, and I shall consult the Local Government Association on that. We could discuss formulae until the cows come home, but I am not sure how feasible or realistic it would be to base the formula not on acreage or on a per capita assessment but on, as has been suggested, the threat assessment for each authority. I should like to use something that is similar to, and that could build on, the approach that was used previously.

We are not so close to the next financial year that we cannot establish a formula approach. It is important that we have equity and fairness so that all local authorities believe that the system for allocating the grant is transparent. Shortly after the Merseyside legal challenge, local authorities were notified that new arrangements for 2002-03 were our target. The Government's intention has been plain from the outset.

I hope that I have dealt with most of the points raised in the debate. I urge the right hon. Gentleman to withdraw his new clause.

Mr. Beith: I may be able to help the Minister in one respect if not in another. He asked me why I was the Liberal Democrat spokesman on the Bill. In addition to my happy duty shadowing the Deputy Prime Minister—although not in all his travels—it was thought that I should take on the rest of the Cabinet Office responsibilities that are nominally his. That is why I have a role on this Bill.

Reading between the lines, the Minister made it pretty clear that the figure of £18.6 million will be retained for the coming year and that he will devise a formula that will probably not disturb the distribution between authorities. In other words, the Government will probably invent a formula that fits the facts that already exist. If that is so, we do not need a formula and there is no problem with waiting until the following year in the way suggested by amendment No. 1.

Such has been the wide support expressed in the House for amendment No. 1 that I will ask you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to agree to a Division on it at the appropriate

[Mr. Beith]

stage. I wish, however, to withdraw the motion on new clause 1, because the Minister expressed his intention to keep the House informed on the progress of the review. I would have been happier if we could be absolutely certain that that would happen. None the less, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 1

CIVIL DEFENCE: GRANTS

Mr. Collins: I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 1, line 21, at end insert—

> 'only in respect of an increased determination'.

The debate on the amendment will enable the Minister to place on the record the Government's view of a point on which many local government emergency planning officers have sought clarification. The amendment would add a few words to proposed new section 3(3)(b) and would limit the powers that the Bill otherwise gives to the designated Minister to

> "vary a determination by a further determination"

so that, in the words of the amendment, that could be done

> "only in respect of an increased determination".

There is much understandable concern among emergency planning officers that the Government may choose, on what local authorities may perceive to be wholly arbitrary grounds, to reduce a grant allocation in a financial year and after local authorities have begun to spend money on the basis that they would receive a certain level of grant to underpin it. At various points, the Minister has been at pains to assure Members of the House and members of the Committee that considered the Bill that such unworthy thoughts would not even cross his mind and that he would never want to do that.

The matter was discussed in Committee and I pay tribute to the Minister for writing to the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten). In the letter, which was copied to members of the Committee, the Minister was at pains to say that it was highly unlikely that the Government would ever consider cutting local authorities' grants in the middle of the year. The only reason that they needed the power would be to take account of unexpected contingencies in which he implied the Government would seek to provide additional help.

That formulation caused considerable interest in the emergency planning department serving Herefordshire and Worcestershire. Its emergency planning officer wrote to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) and, in an interesting choice of words, said that the copy of the letter to the hon. Member for Winchester was extremely interesting. With a degree of irony, the emergency planning officer added:

> "Being naive politically and legally, I had to wonder, if the purpose of Section 3(3) is to enable Central Government to be able to make extra payments in unforeseeable situations, why it could not have been framed to say that, rather than the wording currently in the Bill, which could equally reduce grant at a whim?"

That struck me as an extremely good question. If there has merely been an oversight on the part of the parliamentary draftsmen, it will be easy for us to correct the matter on Report to ensure that the Bill fully reflects the Minister's intentions. Therefore, I genuinely hope to hear the Minister tell us that, on reflection, he accepts the aims of amendment No. 2. Even if he feels for some reason that escapes me that the amendment is technically defective, I hope that he will agree to the issue being reconsidered in another place.

However, on a crucial matter of emergency planning, I certainly do not wish to hear that the Government plan to retain the power to cut a grant in the middle of the year. Local authorities incur expenditure on the basis that they will receive a certain level of grant and that grant should not be cut in a way that they cannot possibly foresee, so I hope that the Minister will not oppose the amendment on anything other than the most narrow technical grounds. If he does, we should like to know why, contrary to the view of many emergency planning officers, he believes that it would be sensible for him to have such a power.

It is important to reflect on the fact that local authority emergency planning officers are already extremely worried about the consequences for staffing levels, for funding provision and for their ability to conduct operations on the current basis, let alone on what might come into effect if the Bill is introduced without amendment No. 2. Does the Minister agree with the Emergency Planning Society that we are talking about "an increasingly important service"? Does he also agree with it that local authorities across the country are increasingly having to subsidise their emergency planning functions from other elements of the council tax and other resources that are available to them? Is he aware that a number of local authorities have said that current funding levels are so difficult to predict and inadequate in their scope that some of them may have to pay for up to 50 per cent. of all their emergency planning functions from their own resources?

I hope that the Minister will assure us that the Government will at least reflect carefully on the strong views that have been expressed by many county emergency planning officers who are genuinely and powerfully concerned about the flexibility that the Government are taking for themselves in proposed new section 3(3). A large number of local authorities believe that that is the heart of what they describe as negative legislation and that it will have extremely damaging consequences for them.

On Second Reading, the Minister specifically stated that he believed that the merit of the Bill was that it offered stability for local authorities. I see that he is nodding to confirm that that remains one of the objectives. I am sure that he would therefore agree that, in terms of stability for local authorities and their ability to plan ahead, it would be far better to tell them that if there are to be any changes in the amount of grant that is allocated to them for a particular financial year, between the start of that year and its end, they will only be by way of extra resources that are provided in case of unexpected and worrying developments. They need to know that they will not face a reduction or even a clawback of a grant allocation that has already been made available.

Local authorities are worried. That concern has been expressed by, among others, the chief emergency planning officers of Cumbria, Cheshire, Essex and Durham. There are large-scale worries. Will the Minister address the merits of the amendment? In particular, if he is not prepared to limit his power to cut a grant in year, so to speak, will he explain the precise circumstances in which he will use the power? If he insists on retaining it, there will be widespread concern in local authorities that he could simply use the power arbitrarily. It would be helpful if he agreed to publish a code of practice under which ministerial decisions exercising such a power would be limited or preferably removed altogether.

6.15 pm

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Amendment proposed—

Richard Younger-Ross *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is a great help to the Chair if hon. Members indicate that they wish to participate in the debate because otherwise we might have swept on.

Richard Younger-Ross: I shall redress that next time I want to speak.

I shall be brief. My first knowledge of civil defence was as a boy scout. It was not so much the motto "Be prepared", which would be a good motto for civil defence, but partaking in a Civil Defence Corps exercise, that gave me an understanding of what was required to be prepared for a civil emergency.

The local authorities that I have spoken to and others that I have heard from are concerned that if the grant is fixed at £18 million and the needs of only some authorities are taken into account, there will be winners and losers. In Committee, the Minister referred to

"increases or reductions in grants".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E,* 11 December 2001; c.8.]

Can he assure local authorities that their grants will not be reduced? They think that they have only just managed to secure adequate funds for the needs of civil defence.

We want the determination of grant to be upwards to recognise current needs. We do not want a "Goosey-Goosey Gander" approach that leads local authorities upstairs and downstairs; nor do we want civil defence to end up like Jack and Jill, to continue the nursery rhyme. Rather than a brown paper and vinegar solution, we need a well thought-out and exercised plan. As a country, we tend to be under-prepared for disasters. We have only to consider the problems of the railways when the wrong leaves or the wrong snow are on the line. It is important that we do not have the wrong measures in place when a disaster strikes. All authorities need to have well-exercised plans and well-trained staff and to have the funding to put their plans into effect.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I do not want to detain the House unnecessarily. I merely ask my hon. Friend the Minister to look closely, during the time that it takes for the Bill to complete its stages here and in another place, at the work of the Staffordshire emergency planning service. It has written to me and I understand that the chairman of the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire fire authority has written to the Deputy Prime Minister. We have a wonderful record of joined-up processes to consider the whole issue of civil defence in Staffordshire. There are genuine concerns about the level of grant should there be any large-scale change to the formula on which funding is allocated. Will my hon. Friend look closely at the work that has been done in Staffordshire and consider how that can be retained without any loss of service?

Mr. Leslie: I shall look with care at the representations made by my hon. Friend's authority. Indeed, last week we announced the funding allocation for the next financial year, and we have tried to maintain the level as close to £18.6 million as possible.

Amendment No. 2 attempts to ensure that the grant can only ever increase. I reiterate that the £18.6 million—or whatever closely similar amount is determined once the estimate is resolved—is a significant increase on last year's grant. Indeed, in Committee the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) said that if I promised to provide a grant that is maintained at this year's level, most hon. Members' objections would melt away. I hope so.

The debate on the amendment echoes what was said in Committee on the flexibility powers that are given to Ministers, who will be obliged to exercise discretion reasonably. They must base decisions on relevant matters and use powers with due care and consideration. I am afraid that I must inform the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale that there are technical reasons why the amendment is severely deficient. It would have a number of perverse consequences. I tried to explain that currently, 90 per cent. of the grant is paid in September or October, and the remaining 10 per cent. in the subsequent financial year, when the moneys spent have been verified by the district auditor.

The practice of not paying the last 10 per cent. of a grant until audited accounts have been presented would be inhibited if the Government had limited powers to deduct or disallow expenditure from the outstanding balance if that expenditure proved not to be for the purposes for which it was intended. That is National Audit Office best practice, and I am advised by my officials that it would be compromised by the amendment.

Mr. Collins: I have no reason to challenge what the Minister said about the amendment's technical merits, but he will be aware that we are talking about the Minister's power to vary the determination of the grant, not about how local authorities spend money within that target. Why is it a good idea for Ministers to have the right to set a certain level of desired expenditure in a financial year and then cut that amount during that same year?

Mr. Leslie: The hon. Member for Teignbridge (Richard Younger-Ross) was talking about whether a formula would create winners and losers. Of course, all formulae have that consequence; it is in the nature of allocating resources from a national to a local level. If we manage to return to a formula, we will try to make it as fair and equitable as possible and we will publish it, but it will undoubtedly create winners and losers.

The amendment is wrong in principle because it is not responsible budgeting to enshrine in statute an ever increasing grant. We need to retain the ability to make choices and decisions about public finance. Flexibility and discretion in a national strategic framework are especially important in civil defence. As the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale knows, the previous Conservative Administration steadily reduced the civil

[Mr. Leslie]

defence grant, presumably to reflect the fact that the world was more stable and secure after the cold war. It is a depressing outlook if, as he thinks, we will for ever require inexorably heightened civil defence.

An amendment in the name of a Conservative Member that is, essentially, a no-cuts amendment reminds me of my early days in politics, when the funding, or underfunding, of services was central to national debate. It is charmingly counter-intuitive. I am not sure what Lady Thatcher would say about a no-cuts amendment. Indeed, I wonder whether that particular spending commitment has been cleared with the shadow Chief Secretary, the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow). Perhaps the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale might like to give a similar commitment on funding for schools and hospitals. This no-cuts approach is enlightening, and I find this new development in Conservative policy very interesting.

There are good principled and technical reasons for opposing the amendment, and I ask the hon. Gentleman to withdraw it.

Mr. Collins: I am grateful for the Minister's remarks. Without going into the byways of wider public expenditure policy, I point out that he seems determined to retain the right to tell local authorities at the beginning of the financial year, "You may spend X," and in the middle of the financial year to say, "I am terribly sorry, but you may spend a great deal less than X, and we may claw back some of that amount." We are not convinced by his argument and wish to press the amendment to a vote.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House proceeded to a Division: Ayes 156, Noes 257.

Division No. 142] **[6.24 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Baron, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Pugh, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Randall and
Mr. Julian Brazier.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin

Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Galloway, George
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Humble, Mrs Joan
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ruth
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Lucas, Ian
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and
Jim Fitzpatrick.

Mr. Fraser Kemp (Houghton and Washington, East): The Ayes to the right 257, the Noes to the left 156

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Have I been given the correct information? Will the Tellers come to the Table, please?

We will have the result again.

Mr. Kemp: The Ayes to the right, 156; the Noes to the left, 257.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Ayes to the right were 156, the Noes to the left 257, so the Noes have it, the Noes have it.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is furthest from my mind to challenge your ruling in any way, but I am intrigued to know what reason you had to believe that the Tellers were not giving correct figures. Presumably, it is for none of us to judge who may have gone through the Aye Lobby or the No Lobby. I accept that you were using your judgment at the time you stopped the declaration of the result of Division in mid-flow, but is there any precedent for doing so? On what basis did you see fit to challenge the figures given by the Tellers?

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When you respond to the right hon. Member for Bromley and

[Mr. Gerald Kaufman]

Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), I hope that you will explain to him that this is as great a triumph as the Conservatives are going to have in this Parliament.

Mr. Wilshire: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes, although the point of order is beginning to peter out.

Mr. Wilshire: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope that you will take the comments of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) as frivolous. The point of order deals with a serious matter and a clear explanation would be of enormous help, because a result was read out by a Teller. This has never happened in my 14 years in Parliament. Is the result the one read out by the Teller, or that read out from the Chair?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It was apparent to me that something was irregular. The winning Tellers, who traditionally stand on the right, were reading out something that did not correspond with their position. They noticed that and a correction has been made. I am advised that this is by no means the first time that such an error has occurred.

Clause 2

GENERAL

Amendment proposed: No. 1, in page 2, line 24, leave out "2003" and insert "2004".—*[Mr. Beith.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 157, Noes 261.

Division No. 143] **[6.40 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Baron, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
(Rushcliffe)
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt H[illegible]ric
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Bob Russell and
John Thurso.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Benn, Hilary
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin

Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Galloway, George
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Humble, Mrs Joan
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ruth
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Lucas, Ian
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Squire, Rachel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and
Jim Fitzpatrick.

Question accordingly negatived.

Order for Third Reading read.

6.52 pm

Mr. Leslie: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

In the vast amount of time that we have for Third Reading, I wish to point out that the Bill is a modest yet important measure, designed to re-establish good practice in the budget-making process in a small area of policy—the funding of emergency planning preparation in local authorities throughout England and Wales. It does not specify the sums of money to be allocated in the next financial year for civil defence grant; it is concerned solely with the mechanism and framework for doing so, allowing Ministers legally to set a grant in the first place.

We are endeavouring to re-establish a fair and equitable means to distribute the grant; that is the Bill's precise remit. However, it also provides a number of useful opportunities to pay tribute, as Opposition Members have done, to the sterling work of emergency planning officers the length and breadth of the country. In Committee and on Report, we considered questions of finance and money. Following the Merseyside legal challenge, which caused the demand-led system to be imposed, the Government now estimate that the level for this financial year and the next will settle at about £18.6 million, up from £14 million in the previous financial year.

I was pleased to announce in a parliamentary answer last Wednesday that following negotiations, we have completed our consideration of what is necessary and

[Mr. Leslie]

affordable. We have decided to maintain the total grant at about this year's level, currently estimated at £18.6 million, which is a satisfactory outcome to negotiations. We are looking at maintaining the 28 per cent. increase on the figure of £14 million for the previous financial year. Fears voiced earlier of cuts have proved groundless. The next stage is to decide how the grant will be distributed and what formula is to be used.

Much attention has focused on the discretion given to Ministers in the Bill, and I have sought to give assurances about those provisions. I have written to Committee members giving examples of legislation in which different formulae are applied to local authorities; I have also provided information about the formulae that might be applied in the distribution of grant. I can reassure the House that powers in the Bill are not unprecedented, will be used reasonably and will be based on rational judgments.

I am minded to use a formula to distribute civil defence grant, and anticipate that it will build on the one used most recently; I am still working on the details with officials. We will shortly be able to consult the Local Government Association in a genuine but rapid round of consultation; I am eager that local authorities should know their allocations as soon as possible. An emergency planning review is under way; assumptions have altered, and threats have changed since the Civil Defence Act 1948, which is no longer an adequate foundation. We need to bring civil defence functions more within the delivery of mainstream local government services. We aim to co-operate closely and develop our plans with local authorities and other representative bodies.

Future comprehensive reform may aim at improving the consistency of approach across the country and promoting best practice. Partnership and community leadership by local authorities is extremely important. Life in the United Kingdom is normally prosperous, peaceful and calm, but we always need to guard against those abnormal and rare threats which may endanger the life of the community, including the hazards of major accidents; the ravages of natural disasters; and the consequences of a deliberate hostile attack.

The Bill provides the means to fund part of that battle—advanced planning and preparation for civil contingencies at the local level. It may seem a technical measure, but it is essential that the whole nation is ready to cope with whatever eventualities befall us. Our debate today has highlighted the dedication and value of those involved in day-to-day civil contingency planning. I am glad that, should the circumstances ever arise, there are people with a wealth of skill and ability throughout the country who are ready, willing and able to deal with emergencies. It is for the sake of continuing a national strategic approach to civil defence funding that I commend the Bill to the House.

6.57 pm

Mr. Beith: The Bill is not needed because the figure for the next financial year has already been announced. If the Bill is used, it could result in some emergency planning authorities getting less money in the coming year than they did this year. The matter could, and should, be dealt with when the Government's civil defence review is completed and legislation is introduced to implement it.

6.57 pm

Mr. Collins: There are 34 county emergency planning officers in England and Wales; no fewer than 24 have expressed strong opposition to the Bill. Patrick Cunningham, chief emergency planning officer for Durham and Darlington, says:

> "We are crying out for positive legislation".

However, all that officers are getting is "negative legislation" which, Mr. Cunningham says,

> "sends the wrong message at the wrong time."

Other professionals on whom we and our constituents rely for protection in a national emergency have variously described the Bill as a disaster, a disgrace and peculiarly ill-timed. It is the wrong legislation at the wrong time; we will oppose it.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 262, Noes 155.

Division No. 144] **[6.58 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Benn, Hilary
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Galloway, George
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda

Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Humble, Mrs Joan
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ruth
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S D[illegible])*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Lucas, Ian
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Squire, Rachel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and
Jim Fitzpatrick.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Baron, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
(Rushcliffe)
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Pugh, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas

Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Randall and
Mr. Julian Brazier.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

City of London (Ward Elections) Bill

As amended, considered.

7.10 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am aware that one of the original petitioners to the Bill has written to you, because the amendments tabled by the promoters would dramatically change the Bill. Mr. Matson has written to you asking that the Bill be referred back to Committee, as those amendments are significant. That would enable him and other petitioners to raise their petitions once more and examine the Bill in detail. I wondered whether you had replied to Mr. Matson, and whether you could share that reply with the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I am grateful to the hon. Member for giving me notice that he intended to raise that point of order. My reply to Mr. Matson is being despatched today. Obviously, it is a matter of judgment whether the Bill would be changed by the amendments to the extent that the hon. Gentleman suggests. In practice, when the question of revival was considered, the Bill on which I had to adjudicate was precisely the same Bill as was brought before the House in the last Parliament. That was the only issue. Of course it is open to Members to table amendments, and it is a matter for Mr. Speaker's judgment as to whether such amendments fall within the scope of the Bill. That was the judgment made in this case. I have advised Mr. Matson that, if there is a matter against which he wishes to petition, he will have an opportunity to do so when the Bill goes to the other place.

John McDonnell: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My point also relates to a matter raised by Mr. Matson in his earlier petitions, and to a statement that has been consistently made to the House since the Committee's original determination to refer the Bill back to the House with its recommendations. The City of London corporation promised the Committee that a package of reforms would be implemented in tandem with this legislation. Not a single one of those reforms has been processed, yet time and again they are referred to in the promoters' statement.

Will you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, examine whether it is possible to encourage the City of London corporation to implement those reforms, because they will bear heavily on the consideration of the Bill in this House, just as they did with the Committee, as reported in its statement?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is certainly not a matter for the Chair. Debate on such matters would be outside the scope of the Bill.

New Clause 1

EXCLUSION OF CROWN BODIES

'A government department or other body exercising on behalf of the Crown functions conferred by or under any Act shall not be treated as a qualifying body within the meaning of this Act.'.—*[Sir George Young.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we shall take amendments (a) to (d) and (f) to promoters new clause 1, amendments Nos. 33 and 35, promoters amendments Nos. 1 to 4, amendment No. 47, promoters amendment No. 5 and amendments (b) to (d) thereto, amendment No. 52, promoters amendments Nos. 6 to 8, promoters amendment No. 149 and amendments (a), (b) and (d) to (l) thereto, amendments Nos. 60, 68, 69, 71, 74, 75, 77 to 79, 81 to 84, promoters amendments Nos. 10 and 11, promoters amendment No. 12 and amendment (a) thereto, amendments Nos. 90, 92, 95, promoters amendment No. 13, amendments Nos. 97 to 99, 101, 102, promoters amendments Nos. 15 to 17, promoters amendment No. 18 and amendment (a) thereto, promoters amendments Nos. 19 and 20, amendment No. 125, promoters amendment No. 21, amendment No. 126, promoters amendments Nos. 22 and 25, amendments Nos. 131, 133 and 143, and promoters amendments Nos. 26 to 30.

Sir George Young: With your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to comment on the promoters amendments in the group that you have heroically read out. In the debate on the revival motion on 15 November last year, I referred to the promoters' intention to bring forward amendments to the Bill. I said that

> "amendments will be introduced to remove the proposed voting entitlement based on the rateable value of premises and replace it with a scheme that relates voting entitlement to the number of people who work on the premises."—[*Official Report*, 15 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 1034.]

The new clause and the promoters amendments that we are now considering implement that undertaking.

John McDonnell: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir George Young: May I make a little progress? I want to get out of the station before I stop at the first red light. I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment.

To secure the changes needed to relate the right to appoint to work force numbers, it has been necessary to make a number of changes to the Bill. However, many are consequential, and I shall focus on the amendments that are central to the changes. I should then like to touch on some of the amendments that the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) has tabled.

John McDonnell: Could the right hon. Gentleman advise us why these amendments were not available to us during the debate on the carry-over? Why was there such a flurry last week? Amendments were tabled and withdrawn within two hours of the deadline, offering little opportunity for consideration by those who may wish to amend the amendments. The City of London corporation has had four years to produce the Bill.

Sir George Young: When I spoke in November, I said that amendments would be tabled to change the basis, and it should have come as no surprise to the hon. Gentleman that such amendments have indeed been tabled. He should welcome them, because the changes that have been made by the corporation take a giant stride towards the case that he has been making for many years. I hope that he will not be churlish about the changes to the Bill. He has that churlish look on his face, so I shall move straight on.

7.15 pm

John McDonnell: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is that parliamentary language?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have heard much worse.

Sir George Young: The hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington is definitely not looking churlish at the moment, and I commend him for the good humour that he is now displaying.

New clause 1 would perform the same function as clause 6. It would exclude Crown bodies, such as Government Departments, from the Bill by providing that they should not be treated as qualifying bodies. No right to appoint would therefore arise. The change is needed because the existing clause relates the exclusion of the Crown to property that is recorded as such on the local non-domestic rating list. The use of the rating list was appropriate when the right to appoint was linked to rateable values. With the disappearance of that link, reference to the local non-domestic rating list is no longer apt. Amendment No. 19 is consequential, and removes clause 6.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): I assume that the thrust of the right hon. Gentleman's amendment is to ensure that a United Kingdom Government Department or Crown body could not participate in these new arrangements. What is the position of foreign Governments who may own property?

Sir George Young: I am not sure whether they have any property that qualifies. I think that there is an amendment about the European Union, and having made inquiries, I am not sure that it has a building that would qualify. We will make diligent inquiries to see whether foreign Governments own accommodation in the City.

John McDonnell: I am surprised that the right hon. Gentleman, who is sponsoring the Bill, is not aware that this legislation, if carried, would enable foreign Governments who have property in the United Kingdom to exercise a vote through various bodies. They would own property and they would employ staff.

Sir George Young: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that comment.

Amendment No. 1 would remove the definitions of "hereditament" and "non-domestic rating list".

Mr. Dismore: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir George Young: I should like to make a little more progress.

With the change from rateable values to size of work forces as the parameter by which the extent of the right to appoint arises, those definitions are no longer needed.

Amendments Nos. 2, 3 and 4 would change the way in which "occupation" is defined to take account of the removal of any reference to "hereditaments".

[Sir George Young]

The term "premises", which is a standard legislative term, is substituted, as "hereditament" is used in rating legislation but not more generally. Entitlements to appoint are no longer ascertained by reference to rateable values, so a rating term is inappropriate.

Amendment No. 5 would insert "workforce" as a principal definition in the Bill by relocating the definition currently set out in clause 4(2). That relocation is appropriate as a matter of drafting, given the adoption of the work force criterion to generate the right to appoint in place of rateable values.

Promoters amendments Nos. 6, 7 and 8 make changes to clause 2(2) consequent on the removal of references to rateable values and hereditaments. The practical effect of the subsection is unaltered. Promoters amendment No. 149, originally tabled as No. 9, is central to the changes now being proposed. It would add a new section, 6(1)(c), to section 6 of the City of London (Various Powers) Act 1957, which deals with electoral qualifications, and provides for the entitlement of a qualifying body to appoint any individual to be decided on the basis of the size of the work force.

New subsection (1A) sets out the extent of the entitlement. For a work force of up to five, one person may be appointed. Each additional five members of the work force will generate an entitlement of one additional appointment, up to work forces of 50. In the case of work forces over 50, the entitlement is tapered. The work force must increase by a further 50 before an entitlement to make an additional appointment arises.

The taper was selected to avoid dominance by larger firms, and to achieve a total electorate that would not produce a larger component of business voters than the Bill does now. In fact the projected figure declines by about 1,500, giving a total City electorate of approximately 38,500.

Dr. Rudi Vis (Finchley and Golders Green): Will the right hon. Gentleman remind us of how part-time workers will be treated?

Sir George Young: I think that they will qualify if the premises involved are their principal place of work.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Paragraph 9 of the statement given us by the promoters states:

> "Residents are currently concentrated in four wards in the City. The wider reforms"—

which we are discussing—

> "provide that the residential vote will continue to dominate in those wards."

Can the right hon. Gentleman, either now or later this evening, tell us what estimates have been made of the ratios involved in the four wards?

Sir George Young: I do not carry such important statistics in my head, but I will ensure that the hon. Gentleman receives them. The key point is that the boundaries are being changed so that the domination of the residential vote can be retained in the four wards, thus leaving the balance unchanged.

John McDonnell: I raised the issue of boundary changes in my point of order, because one of the corporation's commitments was that they would be implemented. That commitment was given three years ago to Committee members who are present now, but no attempt has been made to protect residents. Is that not an act of bad faith on the corporation's part?

Sir George Young: I do not accept that criticism. I understand that the boundary changes are going through, although they are not included in the Bill.

Under proposed subsection (1B), the entitlement of any qualifying body to make appointments would be confined to situations in which the full five, or 50, increase in the size of the work force was satisfied. Remainders are ignored. A work force of nine, for instance, would generate an entitlement to one appointment, because the full step of five additional members of the work force above the one appointment generated by a work force of up to five had not been satisfied.

The quantitative assessment of the outturn in terms of the number of business voters has been a substantial obstacle to the adoption of a work force-based entitlement. Only through the results of a comprehensive land use survey in which the corporation has been engaged over the past four years—a process involving personal visits both to individual City businesses and to correspondents—has the development of the scheme now envisaged being possible. The survey will need to be updated on a continuing basis through the development of an occupiers' database. That represents a substantial ongoing commitment on the corporation's part.

The promoters still think that rateable values would have provided the most readily available and easily validated basis for the entitlement to appoint. I note that the Government's recent White Paper, "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services", anticipates the use of rateable values for the voting mechanism for business improvement districts. The promoters have, however, sought to respond to the continuing objections of the Bill's opponents in Parliament to a property-based system.

The City of London Labour party petitioned against the Bill when it was introduced. I hope that I will not offend my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) if I read a short passage from the evidence given to the Select Committee by Mr. Christopher Haines, chairman of the City of London Labour party, to which the corporation responded by tabling the new clause and amendments. He said:

> "We have commended to the Corporation an alternate proposal, that votes should relate to the number of staff employed by bodies within the City, a system we refer to as a payroll vote. We do not by that mean that it is based on the amount of the payroll but rather that the company would qualify for a number of votes depending on how many people it employed within the City, not the total throughout the country. We believe that this would more closely reflect the democratic position of this country as a whole and we understand those traditions are that votes are based on people, not on buildings and not on taxes".

Mr. Haines went on to point out that such changes should be part of continuing reforms, and that changing the present Bill to achieve the system he proposed would result in substantial amendment. Members will have observed the number of amendments tabled by the promoters. I can tell them that they have been discussed with the officers of the City of London Labour party, who have responded constructively.

The new scheme maintains—albeit on a different basis—arrangements for the appointment of individuals. I want to say something about that in the context of amendment No. 149. Members should realise that we are not talking about nomination or appointment to the City's governing body. The individuals appointed will become part of the electorate who, with the existing business voters, will be able to participate in the City's ward elections. Using the jargon, one could say that they would form part of the electoral college comprising all the City's voters, who will decide by secret ballot who will represent them on the City's governing body.

The hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington asserts that there should be no element of appointment or nomination. The link between those who pay for local services and the entitlement to vote in local elections has long been recognised. It is axiomatic that people liable for council tax in any local authority area will have a residence there, and will thus be able to vote for their local council.

I accept that since the advent of the national non-domestic rate, there has been no such link between payment for local services and the local authority for businesses. The City's position, however, is different. Businesses in the City are uniquely subject to local rating powers. When the national non-domestic rate was being developed, officials at what was then the Department of the Environment calculated that without the local business rate arrangements, City residents would face yearly tax demands of £9,000 each.

These local business rate powers are not limited to businesses that currently have voting rights; they apply to all City businesses. The Bill as redrafted, however, does not simply give businesses that pay the right to a vote. It links the new entitlement to their work forces, and provides for appointments to reflect the composition of those work forces.

Phil Sawford (Kettering): I recognise that this represents a fundamental shift from votes for property to an arrangement based on the numbers who work in that property, but there is a whole body of electoral law applying to the normal democratic process. There are many questions relating to part-time workers, the number of registered electors, how we will be able to verify the information and whether these will be British citizens who would be entitled to vote in other elections. Amendment No. 149 shifts the goalposts without setting out the mechanisms. That is what concerns me on the democratic deficit side.

Sir George Young: That is a criticism that the Bill's opponents made when it was in its previous form. There are very good reasons for not setting out in detail the issues to which the hon. Gentleman refers. We are talking about a legal minefield. I believe that some 50 per cent. of legal actions, in the case of industrial ballots, relate to the operation of the law. I think it much better to set out the broad principle that the electorate should reflect the composition of the work force and leave the rest to the good sense of businesses, rather than embarking on a marathon of complex legislation that will end up before the courts. That was in the Bill before, and is unchanged by the shift to which I referred.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): May I pick up the point made by the hon. Member for Kettering (Phil Sawford)? I hope that the question raised by the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) will be answered, if not this evening, then at some point in the near future when we have the statistics to hand.

There is no doubt that the local councillors who will be elected in four largely residential wards will be elected by residents. Whatever formula is used, there is no question of residents' positions being usurped by a block business vote. There is a protection for local residents.

7.30 pm

Sir George Young: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that clarification.

Mr. Dismore: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir George Young: I should like to make a little more progress.

The further consideration, which all those who have an interest in making the system work acknowledge, is that it should be simple to operate. Some of the amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington and his colleagues anticipate elections about elections by a system of proportional representation through electoral colleges or ballots, which involve such complexity that they would be guaranteed to ensure that the new system was still-born. That may indeed have been the intended consequence.

Amendment No. 10 deals with the situation where premises cross ward boundaries. In such cases the premises will be treated as being located in the ward in which the greater proportion of the premises is located. That achieves the same result as formerly provided for by clause 3(5).

Amendment Nos. 11, 17 and 20 simply change "hereditament" to "premises", to reflect the fact that the scheme is no longer based on rateable values. As I have said, "premises" is a standard legislative term.

Amendment No. 12 reproduces paragraph 13 of part 2 of schedule 1 to the present Bill. There are no changes in drafting and the purpose remains the same: to prevent the possibility of "double counting" or an entitlement to appoint individuals arising twice in respect of the same premises.

Amendments Nos. 13, 16 and 27 deal with a consequential drafting change to refer the reader to the 1957 Act rather than the current Bill and to take account of the other amendments to clause 3.

Amendment No. 15 takes account of the incorporation of the definition of "work force" in clause 2. As the term is to be defined as part of clause 2(1), there is no need for it to be repeated at clause 4(2).

Amendment No. 18 is a consequential drafting change to reflect the change from "hereditament" to "premises". It substitutes "premises" for "hereditament" and reorders the concluding words of clause 5(5).

Amendment No. 25 removes schedule 1 entirely. The schedule sets out the entitlement to appoint voters relative to the rateable values of premises. With the change to a work force-based system, it becomes redundant.

The remaining amendments—Nos. 21, 26, 27, 29 and 30—are consequential, but I should refer to amendment No. 28, which concerns the repeals schedule. It may not be clear to the House that this is a repeal and not, I hasten to add, a reintroduction of a £10 rateable value threshold. With the change to work force size as the criterion for the

[Sir George Young]

number of appointments, the references to specific rateable values which were necessary as part of the scheme set out in schedule 1 become redundant.

Andrew Mackinlay: I wonder whether the right hon. Gentleman could enlighten us. Are places of worship treated as properties? Is there a distinction between Church of England properties, which arguably may be Crown properties, and others? He has referred to Crown properties; no doubt he can answer that point. What would be the position of other denominations that are not part of the established Church?

Sir George Young: I understand that Churches are either unincorporated or incorporated bodies and that those who work within premises owned by Churches would be eligible, although some of the amendments tabled by Labour Members would exclude them.

Mr. Dismore: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir George Young: Perhaps I can deal with any other points if there is time at the end.

I should like to deal with the other amendments that have been selected with the promoters amendments in this group.

Amendment (a) leaves out reference to bodies other than Government Departments exercising Crown functions under Acts of Parliament from the proposed exception. It is not immediately apparent what bodies are being referred to by the amendment, but presumably they would be Crown bodies other than Government Departments exercising functions under provisions other than Acts of Parliament—perhaps royal charters or the royal prerogative.

Putting aside that ambiguity, it is not clear why those particular species of Crown bodies should be outside the exception proposed. If there were any such bodies in the City, and the promoters do not know of any, they would achieve a privileged status as against other Crown bodies exercising Crown functions. That would be illogical and I advise the House to reject the amendment.

Amendment (b) points in the reverse direction and extends the exception by excluding Government-appointed bodies from the Bill's provisions. "Government-appointed" is not defined, but presumably the amendment refers to quangos. The promoters have received no representations from such bodies that their work forces should be excluded, and on the principle of inclusivity, on which the definition of "qualifying body" is based, the promoters would be reluctant to take that course. The effects would certainly be capricious. To take an example at random, there would be no obvious reason to exclude the Advisory Committee for Disabled People in Employment and Training, a quango, if it opened a City office, so I invite the House to reject amendment (b).

Amendment (c) extends the exclusion from the Bill's provisions to any institution of the European Union. There are no such institutions known to the promoters in the City, and none proposed, which is no doubt why no representations have been made in respect of them. Even if such institutions were present in the City, it would not necessarily follow that their work forces should be excluded. Be that as it may, I advise the House, in the well-worn phrase, that the amendment is unnecessary. I invite the House to reject it.

Amendment (d) raises the interesting proposition that the Secretary of State should be put in charge of deciding who should be able to appoint people by giving him the power to decide which bodies will be "qualifying bodies". That does not seem an attractive or even—dare I say it?—democratic proposal. It may be said to turn the City into an oversized quango; if so, it would be inconsistent with amendment (b), so I ask the House to reject that.

Amendment (f) seeks to exclude from amendment (b) the London Development Agency. I have already commented on that amendment but perhaps I should add that apart from the dangers of inequality of treatment to which I have referred, it appears to overlook the fact that, unlike regional development agencies elsewhere, where members are appointed by the Secretary of State, the members of the London Development Agency are appointed by the Mayor under the Greater London Authority Act 1999.

The other amendments cover familiar territory: the requirements for electoral colleges, for ballots and for proportional representation. A variety of amendments would render the Bill bureaucratic and unworkable. Some exclude voluntary organisations and even trade unions. The amendments have been debated extensively on other occasions and I do not propose to weary the House by repeating the arguments against them.

John McDonnell: I say in passing that we were promised amendments when the carry-over debate occurred in November, but we had no sight of any amendments until Wednesday of last week. Then, one hour and a half before the closing deadline for any amendments to the amendments to be tabled, those amendments, among them the key amendments, were withdrawn and replaced. That is inappropriate behaviour when it comes to democratic and open government.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Would my hon. Friend care to speculate on why the flurry of amendments were tabled at the last minute?

John McDonnell: Far be it from me to allege that the promoters are trying to wrong-foot opponents of the Bill.

Phil Sawford: It did not work.

John McDonnell: It did not. However, it smacks of either incompetence or conspiracy.

The amendments fall into three blocks. First, new clause 1 excludes Government Departments and agencies and various other bodies from participation in City corporation government. It could be seen as a tidying-up measure, but it is sinister in its implications and extremely important. That is why we need to spend some time on it tonight.

The second block is the promoters amendments, which are a charlatan attempt by the City corporation to deceive the House and naive Members that a compromise is on offer. It supposedly liberates the workers of the City corporation and provides them with an unfettered right to democratic participation in the processes of the City corporation elections. I wish to demonstrate that that is far from the case. It is a cynical manoeuvre to con the innocent, to exploit the feeble minded by sleight of hand and to ride yet again on the backs of the workers who work in the City of London area. Bizarrely, linked to that block is a series of amendments that installs within the operation of the City of London corporation a block vote on the backs of the workers of the City of London area, which is exercisable by individual company bosses. We have seen it before.

Ms Abbott: I am listening with great attention to my hon. Friend's speech, which is remarkably succinct, given the gravity of the proposal before us. He referred to the feeble-minded. Can he give the House an assurance that, in referring to the feeble-minded, he was not referring to any of the occupants of the Treasury Bench?

John McDonnell: How could I? *[Interruption.]* I will rephrase that. I can give that assurance; how could I refer to occupants of the Treasury Bench in that way?

The third block is made up of amendments tabled by myself and comrades, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) and others. We propose a genuine compromise of reform; the opportunity of a real partnership approach to the City of London corporation and its governance; and a stakeholder system of democracy for the City area. Many, if not all, the amendments have been discussed previously, but this is a new Parliament and we have new Members addressing a unique problem. Much of what has been said in the past is relevant today, but we will seek to ensure that we are succinct in the debate.

New clause 1 sets out to ensure that

> "A government department or other body exercising on behalf of the Crown functions conferred by or under any Act shall not be treated as a qualifying body within the meaning of this Act."

It replaces the exclusion section contained in the previous legislation, which was based upon the exclusion of Government Departments or those that exercise Crown functions and hold rateable value within the City of London corporation. The clause is an attempt to prevent Government Departments and all agencies carrying out or exercising functions of the Crown from participating in the governance of the City corporation in a way that other bodies will be entitled to under the Bill; that is, by nominating a qualifying voter.

I oppose the new clause, and I will set out my reasons why. My amendments try to limit the damage of the new clause. They also seek to extend the geographical impact and clarity of the new clause. I want to democratise its implementation by giving Government Departments and other agencies the right to a vote. However, I accept that, in many ways, Mr. Speaker, in his selection of amendments, has grouped together the thread of democracy within the amendments to see whether we can have a principled vote this evening on the issue of workers democracy.

My amendments seek clarity by updating the new clause in line with the new structure of government for London, and include a reference to the London Development Agency, which came out of legislation passed in the previous Parliament to establish the Greater London Authority and the Mayor for London.

Let me now examine the genesis of the new clause, which began in Committee. In the evidence provided by Tom Simmons, the chief executive, reference was made to the various consultations that took place on the new legislation. The proposal came from the original discussions; I agree with the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) that it was contained within one of the petitioner's statements with regard to the extension of the vote based upon the individual workers being counted. However, I do not believe that the construction of the City of London Labour party was to deny the workers the right to a vote.

The genesis of the new clause was not contained in any of the consultations that took place by the City of London corporation with the residents of the corporation area. There was none, and I do not believe that there has been any since then. In the evidence given to the Committee, Mr. McLeod—who was representing the City of London corporation—set out in detail the consultation arrangements that then took place.

7.45 pm

After the report went through the court of common council, there followed a period of extensive publicity and consultation. Mr. McLeod said that the proposals had received quite wide media coverage, but that the main thrust of the consultative effort was a publication called *City View* which, in a sense, was the corporation's own newspaper. Throughout those consultations, there was no reference to any debate on whether there should be a clause excluding Crown property. I certainly cannot find any reference to any discussion to a proposal to exclude the workers of Government Departments from participating in the discussions on the City corporation's government by allowing them to have a vote as part of being a qualifying body.

Mr. McLeod said that 65,000 copies were directly circulated to residents, non-residents, voters on the voting lists and businesses within the City. Again, none of those copies or any future documents contained any reference to such a clause setting out the exclusions. It appears that there was some reference made in the court of common council on reports laid before them.

Again, the clause was never referred to in any of our carry-over debates. There is an extensive list of the debates that have taken place throughout this process. I can find no reference in any of those discussions to this matter being raised. It was never included in any consultation document submitted to the Government. A list of documents and representations were presented to us at an earlier stage by the promoters; none of them includes a reference to the new clause.

The precedent has been set that amendments such as this are tabled without consultation or reference, or at the last minute with little chance to table an alternative amendment.

Mr. Dismore: The intervention earlier from my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) has some force; perhaps I can put the point to my hon. Friend again. Why does he think that the new clause has been tabled in this way, bearing in mind the long history that he has outlined?

John McDonnell: I want to outline the genesis of the new clause and to try to reach an understanding of why it has been tabled so late. I am perplexed. Reference was made in Committee to setting out the exclusion order that

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the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions was suggesting. That reference was made to a Committee in 1999. It is now 2002; we received the new clause five days, or two parliamentary days, before this debate.

The amendment was not referred to in the special report on the Bill that was presented to the House. If any members of the Committee concerned are present tonight, I would be happy to allow an intervention to allow them to confirm that it was; but it was not. That was reported on 21 April 1999 and presented as an agreed report on 15 June 1999.

Paragraph 1 of the report explained clearly that the Committee had considered the Bill and found that the measures that it proposed were broadly justified in order to correct anomalies in the existing business franchise. There was no reference to exclusion orders for Government Departments in the report. Clearly, the Committee did not consider that the purpose of the report would be to outline the issues as set out. However, it is interesting that, in one of the discussions in the Committee, there was reference to the new clause being inspired by the DETR, and that officials themselves had called for the amendment to be put before the House in some form.

Ms Abbott: I am reluctant to interrupt my hon. Friend's flow, but why would DETR officials have been responsible for the genesis of the new clause?

John McDonnell: I shall come on to that matter shortly, because it is covered in the report.

In the Committee, reference was made to the DETR having looked forward to tidying up the exclusion of Government Departments at some stage. I refer my hon. Friend to page 20 of the report of the Committee's consideration of the Bill. This became the issue of the Bank of England. It was argued that the Bank of England, as currently constituted, pays rates and would possibly have a vote. A member of the Committee asked whether the Bank of England paid rates, whether it would have votes and whether there would be a nomination. A witness to the Committee said:

> "I am advised that the Bank of England, at the moment, would be entitled to put somebody forward. I am also advised that we have been asked by the DETR to make a change in the Bill to deal with the Crown property. There has actually been a change in the law relating to Crown property as it was when we started out, so we are going to have to make a change to deal with that which would take the Bank of England outside."

It is, therefore, clear where the original exclusion order came from.

At no time during the debate on the Floor of the House was that matter referred to. We are now entering our fourth year of discussions on the Bill, and at no time during that period have we been told that that was the motivation behind the original clause 6. In fact, quite the reverse is the case. We were told nothing about the matter. The Committee may well have considered that it would be important to look at the Crown property issue, as it related to the Bank of England or to any other Government Department or agency located within the City of London corporation. I do not believe, however, that the Committee considered it important to extend the definition of the exclusion of Crown property by such a broad, sweeping amendment as new clause 1. The Committee's consideration of this part of the Bill is notable for its brevity. Its discussion about Crown property being excluded took up two paragraphs, and that was that.

Let me express my worries about the new clause in relation to the old clause. This could be described as the Eddie George exclusion clause, because it is deliberately designed to exclude the Bank of England and other Government bodies. It is an attempt to exclude the very body to which the Government have entrusted large sections of the management of our economy, and a large remit in terms of the pursuit of corruption, financial mismanagement and the lack of probity in financial institutions. This measure excludes Government agencies such as the Bank of England and the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions from having any role in the City of London corporation's governance.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): I am very interested in what my hon. Friend has been saying in the last few minutes. I am unhappy about the voting proposal being based on the number of employees, although it is, perhaps, a tiny improvement on basing it on rateable value. I see a good argument for having Government employees and the employees of public bodies within the new arrangement as a leavening to ensure that the new body is much more broadly representative of the interests not just of the City of London but of the country as a whole. The City of London plays an important part in our economy, and it is right that there should be some Government involvement, and public employees would make a valuable contribution in that context.

John McDonnell: I must explain to my hon. Friend that I am still addressing new clause 1. There are another 30-odd amendments that I want to deal with in as much detail as I can because they are equally important. He is leaping ahead slightly in relation to my amendments (a) to (d) to new clause 1, which deal with some of the matters that he has raised.

Mr. Dismore: I can see why my hon. Friend suggests that my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) is leaping ahead on that matter, but I do not think that he is, because he is addressing the issue that goes to the heart of what the promoters amendments are about. Does this not reveal the internal contradictions of those amendments, in that they are trying to base a franchise on the number of workers—in which case, surely it is in the interest of every worker to be represented and not be disfranchised because of whom they work for—yet the workers do not get a vote at all because it is still the bosses who will get the vote?

John McDonnell: Exactly, but the point that I am trying to make is that this is not a naive new clause. It will divide public sector workers from private sector workers, and act as a figleaf so some bosses can say that they qualify for votes on the basis of their employees, but not if they are public sector employees. That is bizarre.

Ms Abbott: As my hon. Friend unrolls his remarkably succinct exposition of his objections to the new clause and amendments, I must intervene on the Eddie George exclusion clause. I am confounded and baffled by the institution of our highest paid public servant—a very great man—being excluded in this way. Will my hon. Friend speculate on whether this could be an underhand attack on that great man by the euro-fanatic institutions in the City, because of his recent wise pronouncement on our entry into the euro?

John McDonnell: I understand the closer working relationship that my hon. Friend has established with Eddie George over the years, and what she says is partly in line with my argument. This is not so much a conspiracy theory as a conspiracy proposition proven by fact. The new clause is not naive; it is a conspiracy. DETR officials have connived, either innocently or misguidedly, with the City corporation to exclude the Bank of England from having a role in the corporation.

Andrew Mackinlay: I am following the drift of my hon. Friend's argument. I find it deeply offensive that McDonald's has a vote, but beefeaters do not. Beefeaters attract people to the City, being a proud symbol of the City of London. They also have a view—they are articulate fellows, from my recollection—yet they will be unable to make any contribution to City government as employees, although the person in the burger bar will.

John McDonnell: Let me give another example. Arthur Andersen, the accountancy company, will have a vote—indeed, it will have more votes as a result of the proposed system—but the Bank of England will not have any.

Mr. Hopkins: Will Arthur Andersen be representing the interests of what remains of Enron?

John McDonnell: It is interesting that Enron is not located in the City of London.

Mr. Mark Field: I am not a shareholder in Enron, although I hope to have the opportunity to say a few words as I have undertaken a certain amount of public consultation on this matter, as I promised to do in our debate on 15 November. Given the rate at which the hon. Gentleman is going through his notes, that might be difficult, however. As a matter of fact, Arthur Andersen may have some small sub-offices in the City of London, but most of its offices are based in the city of Westminster.

John McDonnell: That is helpful, because I have obtained from the House of Commons Library a list of the top 100 employing companies in the City of London corporation. I shall not read them all out, but my understanding is that Arthur Andersen and Company is located at 20, Old Bailey, London EC4M 7AN. It is listed here as a firm of accountants—although some would describe them otherwise—with 1,000 employees. I leave it to hon. Members to calculate how many votes that would create.

Mr. Field: The company does, indeed, have some employees in the City, as I said in my previous intervention. The majority, however, are based in the Surrey street area, which is outside the boundaries of the City of London.

John McDonnell: I would be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would place on the record how many employees of Arthur Andersen and others are located within the area. Under the proposal that he may support if he does not support my amendments—although I shall be surprised if he does not do that—Andersen would, I think, gain one vote for the first five employees, 10 for the next lot up to 50, then one for every 50 after that. That could mean that Andersen would run the City of London corporation—indeed, it may well be doing so already.

8 pm

Ms Abbott: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Fortuitously, my hon. Friend has brought with him a list of the 100 top employers in the City, and as that is the electoral franchise that we are debating, would it be appropriate for him to read the names of those 100 companies into the record?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): That is not a point of order but a matter for debate.

John McDonnell: I am tempted to do that, but instead I shall try to ensure that a copy of the list is laid before Members as soon as possible. I requested the list from the Library, and it was supplied by the corporation of London's economic development unit, which I thank for that information.

Mr. Dismore: This all goes back to the Eddie George exclusion clause. I am interested in the list that my hon. Friend has produced. Are there any foreign banks, especially state-owned foreign banks, on it? It would be bizarre if they had a vote in the City yet the Bank of England did not.

John McDonnell: What interests me is that the Bank of England, which is located in Threadneedle street, has 3,000 employees—so if it were given the right to vote rather than being excluded, it would be a significant voter for the City of London corporation.

Let me read out a few names. I dare not even mention Barings bank, although it is located in the City. [HON. MEMBERS: "Go on."] I shall not press the matter, but I would be grateful if one of my hon. Friends could find someone to photocopy the list.

Let me go back to my argument on new clause 1, and why I think that it is an attempt to exclude the Bank of England. If the Bank of England had any sort of access to the governance of the City of London corporation, it would have a responsibility, or feel a sense of duty, to reach a more thorough understanding of the corporation's finances and management, and would investigate them.

The new clause excludes the Bank of England from any role in examining the City of London's "City cash". That is the name of an account held by the City of London corporation, but the accounts are neither published nor audited by the district auditor. If the Bank of England were not excluded by this incredibly damaging new clause, surely Eddie George would want to bring to light the mysteries of the City cash.

I raised the subject of the petition from Mr. Malcolm Matson in a point of order, because it was he who, in his excellent Fabian pamphlet of a few years ago, outlined the noxious basis on which the City is funded by the

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secret City cash. That is why we want Government Departments and the Bank of England involved in the governance of the City of London. We want to expose those secret sums, which, unlike any other local government funds or budgets, are not under the scrutiny of the district auditor.

I received a letter on that subject from a Mr. Streeter, who pointed out the origins of the City cash, and explained why the new clause had been drafted to ensure that the Bank of England and others were excluded from participation.

I shall give a small example. Some of the revenue income from the City cash—£1.2 million—is expended on feasting, and £250,000 was spent on a boardroom for the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The new clause was tabled to ensure that the Bank of England and others have no role.

Mr. Hopkins: This may sound like a light matter, but there is a serious undertone.

John McDonnell: It is serious.

Mr. Hopkins: My hon. Friend referred to feasting. I suppose that by that he means good meals. Just before I came into the Chamber, my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) told me that he recently had a very good dinner at the Mansion House. Is that the sort of dinner that is meant by feasting?

John McDonnell: Is my hon. Friend raising a matter of privilege on the Floor of the House? Is the City corporation wining and dining Members of Parliament to influence their votes? Surely not.

Mr. Mark Field: I am tempted not to respond every time, but, as I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows, one of the ceremonial roles of the corporation of London, on behalf of the City—indeed, on behalf of the nation—is to stage dinners for state visits. Obviously those are expensive, but there is no doubt that they are also extremely useful in exporting the United Kingdom as an entity to the countries that the state visitors come from.

Those dinners are not restricted to a small clique of individuals. In my capacity as a local MP I have attended two state dinners in the seven months since my election, and it was clear that many hundreds of people from all walks of life are invited—across the political divide, and from the business community throughout the United Kingdom. There is no doubt that the City of London performs a good ambassadorial role in that way.

John McDonnell: I have no doubt about the role that the City corporation plays in eating for Britain.

Mr. Dismore: Perhaps I should declare an interest, because a couple of years ago I went to a dinner. I think that it was for the judges, although I have not been invited back because I did not wear the right clothes. My hon. Friend may rest assured that that did not influence my approach—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Interesting though this may be, we are moving away from the new clause.

John McDonnell: I agree, Madam Deputy Speaker. Like me, you have probably never been invited—or perhaps you have.

Let me explain the role of the Bank of England. Would it have much authority or influence if the amendment to exclude it were rejected? I have outlined the top 100 companies, and the Bank of England, with 3,000 employees would have, according to my calculation—although I am open to correction—about 69 votes.

That may not sound a considerable number elsewhere, but in the City of London it is. Judith Mayhew was elected chair of policy and resources in December 1998 with 27 votes, so we can see how 69 votes would be important in influencing the direction that the City of London corporation would take.

Let us compare the old clause with the new. If the new clause were adopted, it would exclude a whole range of bodies, but if it were rejected it would allow a range of expertise—the Bank of England's economists, investigators and accountants—to set about the City of London corporation's creative accountants' abilities and abuse of power.

Another body that the new clause would exclude is the Crown Prosecution Service, which is also located in the City of London. I do not have the list in front of me but from memory, the CPS has about 600 employees in its City of London offices, and I calculate that it would therefore qualify for about 16 votes. Why does the City of London corporation want to prevent the Crown Prosecution Service from having a role in its governance?

The role would be only to nominate voters for elections to the City corporation. It would not necessarily mean serving on the body, only nomination. I am deeply suspicious—

Ms Abbott: As it happens, I have a copy of the list of the top 100 employers in the City in front of me, and it is true that the Crown Prosecution Service employs 600 people. Under the terms of the new clause that my hon. Friend is debating so ably, the CPS would not have a voice, yet sleazy institutions such as Arthur Andersen and all types of foreign-owned companies would.

John McDonnell: That is why I am deeply suspicious of the new clause. I am deeply suspicious of any organisation that seeks to promote a wide-ranging amendment to exclude from any dealings that it has with the outside world the very organisations that have the expertise to root out fraud and corruption, criminal activities, financial mismanagement and economic incompetence. I would have thought that any organisation would welcome the participation of those Government agencies.

Phil Sawford: My hon. Friend referred to the special report from the Committee, on which I served. The report says:

> "the electoral system within the City of London is flawed in a manner and to an extent which could not be addressed within the powers of the Bill presented."

Does he think that the amendments make the Bill any better? He referred to the numbers of votes that the Bank of England and the CPS would have. We learned in

Committee of three wards with no electors at all, so 69 votes could represent a bigger swing than I had in Kettering.

John McDonnell: I would not like to delve into the politics of Kettering, apart from commending the voters' good sense in electing my hon. Friend.

The Committee was not alerted to the fact that excluding such bodies means that expertise within the City of London boundaries would be excluded from participation in the good governance of the City of London corporation.

Mr. Dismore: In his list of the bodies involved in enforcement, my hon. Friend missed out the judges in the Old Bailey and the other law courts in the City. The courts are very important institutions, and we all know how many City spivs have ended up in front of a judge at the Old Bailey. Does my hon. Friend agree that judges should also have a part to play?

John McDonnell: My hon. Friend and I clearly have differing views of judges and their ability. I am not sure whether the City of London corporation would benefit from the involvement of Old Bailey judges.

Andrew Mackinlay: Could my hon. Friend or the Minister throw any light on this point? I see that the Bill's promoter is not in the Chamber. *[Interruption.]* Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa. The right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) crossed the Bar of the House a moment ago.

I have read and re-read the new clause, which says:

> "A government department or other body exercising on behalf of the Crown functions conferred by or under any Act shall not be treated as a qualifying body".

It appears that most of those employers, albeit private companies, have had conferred on them by an Act duties and responsibilities that they are fulfilling on behalf of the Crown. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman can help, because that is nonsense; the new clause is sloppily drafted. A lot of people who think that they will get a vote will not if new clause 1 is accepted.

John McDonnell: My hon. Friend is about 20 pages ahead of me. I will come to that point in due course. This is a poor draft. The previous draft had some relevance because it was based on rateable value. Because the redrafting has been left to the last minute, it is very poor, and I would sack the parliamentary agents responsible.

There is a contrast between the City of London corporation excluding certain bodies yet being desperately keen to extend to others a massive number of votes. It is a disgrace. We have mentioned some of those who will gain if the new clause is accepted. There is a lack of balance. Certain bodies that could root out fraud and corruption would be excluded while others, including Arthur Andersen and Barings, which have been associated with unacceptable practices, would be given additional votes. I am staggered that firms would be extended wider voting rights or could maintain existing voting rights while bodies that are legally respected and supported in many ways by the Government and both sides of the House for their probity would be excluded.

8.15 pm

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman will be relieved to hear that the Bank of England would not be excluded under new clause 1.

John McDonnell: That is interesting. The import of the report was that it would be excluded. That makes the draft even worse. Are we saying that the Bank of England is not a

> "body exercising on behalf of the Crown functions conferred by or under any Act"?

The Bank of England is formally constituted; it exercises functions under the Bank of England Act 1998. I think that the right hon. Gentleman is seeking to confuse the House because that is inaccurate, although he may not be doing so deliberately. I ask him, because he has introduced such an element of confusion into the debate, to withdraw the Bill, seek legal advice and publish it. I say that with the greatest respect because we all hold him in deep affection—*[Interruption.]* All right, affection. Our confidence in him as an interpreter of legislation has been undermined by that statement. I am amazed that he should tell me that the Bank of England is not a

> "body exercising on behalf of the Crown functions conferred by or under any Act".

I am happy to seek legal opinion on that statement, to be paid for by the City of London corporation.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): At some stage, I hope that my hon. Friend will reflect on the verification of the numbers ascribed to each of the major employers in the City of London. It is difficult to know where those numbers were conjured up from. The Labour party has had its own experience of verification of the block vote being an important aspect of democratic accountability. We are in danger of seeing the reintroduction of the block vote, in this case for the City of London.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Mr. John McDonnell.

John McDonnell: I invite my hon. Friend to expand on that point at a later date, because it is an invaluable contribution to the debate.

Under the old clause, exclusion was based on property or rateable value—the hereditament—as against the qualifying body status based on the definition of a body corporate or an unincorporated body other than a partnership. Is the new clause superfluous? I am unsure whether a Department can be defined as a body corporate or an unincorporated body. Perhaps the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire will clarify that point. It may be relevant and required if we are seeking to bar from qualifying body status all those bodies and agencies that exercise functions on behalf of the Crown but that are not Departments. There is a breadth in the new clause. In passing, I wish that we could amend the legislation by referring to Government functions rather than Crown functions, which are a Bagehotian fiction.

The complexity that exists today in defining the scope of Crown exclusions, which has never existed in the past, arises from the reform, over several decades, of how Government perform their functions. The complexity, which has ensnared the new clause, is based on the devolution of Government functions to agencies and other

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bodies, including private companies. That is the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) raised. Government is no longer so simple that we can draft a new clause that is all-encompassing yet at the same time restrictive.

Mr. Hopkins: I have a very simple approach to words—I read what they say. The new clause refers to

"exercising on behalf of the Crown functions conferred by or under any Act".

Some four years ago, along with other right hon. and hon. Members, I voted through the Bank of England Act 1998. It conferred specific responsibilities on the Bank of England in relation to interest rates and inflation. I cannot see how that can be separated from the new clause.

John McDonnell: May I refresh my hon. Friend's memory? I think that we voted against the measure.

The new clause would exclude any body from exercising functions allocated by the Crown under legislation. The delivery of Government functions is complex and I shall offer some examples that might be caught by the provision.

Mr. Dismore: Before my hon. Friend gives those examples, may I ask him to speculate on the case of people who work for London Underground? The legislation on London Underground is incredibly complex and is something of a moveable feast, depending on whether the public-private partnership goes ahead, whether the company should be transferred to Transport for London or whether it retains its current status—in effect as a Government function. Will London Underground workers move in and out of the franchise?

John McDonnell: That is a good point. It relates to one of my two examples—the other is Railtrack. The case of London Underground is more complex because of the nature of the public-private partnership that the Government want to impose on the people of London.

British Rail was established by statute and exercised its functions on behalf of the Government and would thus be caught by the provision. Railtrack is a private company but it exercises functions on behalf of the Government, so is it caught? What is Railtrack now that the Secretary of State has taken control of the company? Is it a public body or a private body? Is it caught by the provision or is it excluded?

The clause is a minefield because it is so badly drafted. Let us consider London Underground where there is that interesting moveable feast. If the PPP is established and takes over sections of the underground, the companies participating in the PPP constitute bodies corporate exercising functions on behalf of the Government under legislation and could thus argue that they are caught by the provision. However, some parts of those companies will exercise other functions—as is normal in private companies—so how much of the company will be caught by the provision?

Will workers engaged in the PPP work of a company be excluded while workers who serve other interests in the same company escape the provision and thus be counted in the allocation of votes for the City of London corporation? The complexities of that exclusion call for significant amendment.

Ms Abbott: I do not want my hon. Friend to lose his thread but does he agree that the exclusions are even more glaring and byzantine when we consider who is included? The biggest single employer in the City of London is Merrill Lynch—a US-owned company. Lloyd's of London is also included. That company was a very cesspit of corruption in the '80s. The starving widows and orphans of former Lloyd's names can tell the tale, although I do not want to get into a discussion of what happened at Lloyd's in the '80s.

Another organisation that would be included under the new clause is Bloomberg, so a financial institution owned by the mayor of New York would have more say in the governance of the City than our own Eddie George who is as British as roast beef.

John McDonnell: The issue is well rehearsed. We are disputing those exclusions. Labour Members consider that there are established bodies—corporate or unincorporated—that exercise Government functions and have thus been excluded. There is an element of confusion among Opposition Members. May I suggest that the way forward would be for the Bill's promoters to produce a legal opinion that can be tested by the House and by independent legal advice? The amendment has put us in a quagmire of confusion.

Mr. Dismore: In relation to London Underground, there is a problem arising from the removal of the word "hereditament" and the reinsertion of the word "premises". We are probably on common ground if we say that a tube tunnel is not a hereditament but it is certainly a premises. Will tube drivers be included for part of the time—while they are in tunnels—because they would be working in premises in the City?

John McDonnell: That is a novel concept.

I have another serious example. A number of my constituents pass my way only once a year—they are travellers. They operate as a business. Will they qualify under the provision on a particular day if they are in a particular area? It is bizarre.

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the reason that many foreign firms are in the City is precisely because the City is such a successful international financial centre? Many of those firms own British companies; for example, Merrill Lynch bought Mercury Asset Management—a well-known British firm. Such firms are in the City because of its success and because of the contribution that it makes to the UK economy. We are lucky to have so many of them in this country.

John McDonnell: The hon. Gentleman has fallen into the same trap that caught many Members when we first considered the Bill in 1998. I do not blame him for that. There is conflation between the City of London corporation and the City. One is a group of masonic diners; the other is a group of organisations and companies that earn much of the wealth of this country in a particular field of activity. I hope that the hon. Gentleman can make that distinction in future. We are debating not the future of the City and its financial institutions, but the governance of the City of London area which is not properly exercised because it is not representative.

Mr. Mark Field: Just as it would be crass to suggest that the City of London and the corporation are intertwined and are one and the same—an argument that no Conservative Member would make—so it is unfair to suggest that the corporation has no part to play. Some of the corporation's leading lights play a large role on the international stage. They travel worldwide; for example, Judith Mayhew, who is head of policy and resources, spends much of her time abroad. The Lord Mayor has an enormously busy diary, representing the City of London and the corporation abroad where he tries to get as much business as possible. Indeed, several of the common council men—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind all hon. Members that interventions must be brief.

John McDonnell: I understand the point that the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) was making. Most of us have much respect for individual members of the corporation, especially progressive members such as Judith Mayhew. Indeed, a couple of years ago, in this place, I invited her to join the Labour party because of the progressive work that she was doing at the corporation. Unfortunately, she cannot constrain the freemason backwoodsmen who currently populate most of the City of London corporation. That is why we need definite reform.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will my hon. Friend confirm what I believe to be the case from the intervention made by the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) that the City corporation is the only the local government body anywhere in Europe that has direct business representation on it and proposes to extend the franchise to business? No other successful or unsuccessful city in the world has that kind of curious relationship with a limited number of financial institutions.

John McDonnell: I confirm that that is true, but it would have been incredibly helpful and reassuring if the City corporation had accepted an amendment that my hon. Friend tabled previously, under which there would have been a declaration of interest involving the membership of freemasonry lodges by City corporation members.

8.30 pm

Ms Abbott: With reference to an earlier point, it is significant that, when an hon. Member has to cast his mind about for a singularly intelligent and forward-thinking member of the City government, the first name that comes to mind is that of a woman who was born in the antipodes. The fact is that 99 per cent. of the City corporation's role is as a freemasons' diner.

John McDonnell: If I can move on—

Mr. Mark Field *rose*—

John McDonnell: If the hon. Gentleman wants to rise to that, I shall not stop him.

Mr. Field: I rise only to say that the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) makes my point for me in a way. In any other council in the country, Judith Mayhew would be commonly called the leader of the council, so it was obvious that I would refer to her involvement and her great contribution to corporation and City affairs.

Mr. Dismore *rose*—

John McDonnell: I want to finish my last point on new clause 1 before moving on to the amendments that I have tabled. I want to put on the record very clearly the fact that we need wider instruction, debate and legal advice on the matter because new clause 1 would muddy the waters about what is excluded and what is not excluded. It does not relate to modern government.

I shall briefly explain the history of the problem. In earlier times, Crown property was excluded because it was owned by Departments, and Departments were the only bodies that exercised Crown functions. Before the second world war, several boards were established, which confused matters, so the definition of Crown exclusion was extended to those boards. After the second world war, the waters were muddied even further by the introduction of nationalised industries, so Crown exclusion was extended to them. But that has all changed now.

Under the Thatcher Government, privatisation, devolution, the establishment of agencies, the proliferation of quangos and the development of semi-autonomous bodies, the definition of Crown exclusion had not kept pace with government. That is the problem with new clause 1. In the 1980s, that delegation of functions was so vast that a proper debate on Crown exclusion needed to take place, and I am afraid that the Bill has been hoist on that petard. New clause 1 is confused and does not relate to the modern world of the delivery of government.

Mr. Dismore: No doubt my hon. Friend will recall the continuous line of cases in which it was decided that the national health service is a Crown body, so all the NHS workers in the City would be excluded, but those who work in private hospitals, presumably would not. Is that equitable?

John McDonnell: I am trying to make exactly that point, and it is exactly the problem that I am trying to redress in my amendments. I should like now to move on to the amendments that I have tabled.

Ms Abbott: To illustrate that point, the workers at Moorfields eye hospital—all 900 of whom are hard-working and devoted City workers—would not have a say, but employees, such as stock jobbers and those of foreign-owned banks would.

John McDonnell: Exactly. My hon. Friend makes a valid point. Some hon. Members wish to denigrate public sector workers and to exclude them from the calculation yet again.

Mr. Mark Field: There is a reason why the employees at Moorfields eye hospital would not qualify—it is not based in the City of London.

John McDonnell: Unfortunately, that hospital is on the list supplied to us by the City of London corporation, and I can provide the hon. Gentleman with a copy of that list in due course.

Mr. Hopkins: This point was made a few minutes ago, and I have wanted to intervene since then, so I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. The hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) seemed to suggest that, because the Mayor of London does good ambassadorial work for the City of London elsewhere, we should accept an essentially undemocratic form of governance in the City of London. All over the world in democratic countries, mayors are generally elected by democratic, universal suffrage. Why should the City of London be an exception?

John McDonnell: That is useful precedent—I have tried to argue in Hayes and Harlington that there is no need for elections and to install me for life. New clause 1 needs to be rewritten.

Mr. Alan Simpson: May I ask my hon. Friend to clarify the assertion that was made by the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field)—that the reason why the staff at Moorfields eye hospital would not be entitled to vote is that they are not part of the City of London? If my hon. Friend looks at the list of firms and institutions that operate in the City, he will be able to confirm that Moorfields eye hospital is, in fact, listed as operating in the City and employing 900 staff within its remit.

John McDonnell: New clause 1 will exclude those Government Departments, agencies or bodies carrying out Government functions. In answer to a query, the House of Commons Library gave me the following response:

> "As requested, a list of the largest 100 companies in the City of London, by employment, supplied by the Corporation of London economic development unit".

There is a reference to using the document with care because the number of employees has not been updated. It may be a mistake by the corporation, which is hardly surprising given its accountancy techniques.

New clause 1 needs to be rewritten and redrafted. My amendments would do that, and I want to explain the meat of them. I accept that, even if my amendments are accepted, the new clause will result in a field day for the lawyers of the many bodies that exercise Government functions in some form, but which are not governmental bodies themselves. Challenges will be made.

A class of bodies exists that has a status that is something between governmental and non-governmental organisations. I suggest a nomenclature of semi-autonomous bodies—SABs. Amendment (a) would deal with that group of organisations and it would delete from new clause 1 the words

> "or other body exercising on behalf of the Crown functions conferred by or under any Act".

That means that only Government Departments would be excluded from the right to be described as qualifying bodies, and thus nominate voters in City of London corporation elections.

The amendment is a compromise. If a Government Department is located in the City, that Department and its workers should have every right to a say in key issues affecting the working environment. However, they are excluded under the new clause. Why should those Department employees be so excluded? It demonstrates yet again a form of discrimination against the public sector and public sector workers. Why do some Conservative Members continue to amend legislation in such an anti-public sector fashion? Amendments (a) to (e) would redress that wrong.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Is the hon. Gentleman not aware that 300 nurses who live in Bart's hospital are included in the City's franchise?

John McDonnell: They are included as residents, but they would not be included within the franchise as workers. The bulk of people who work in the public sector within the City corporation boundaries would be excluded.

Andrew Mackinlay: Surely it is because none of those 300 workers has any chance of becoming Lord Mayor. That is the rub, whether under the existing arrangements or this monstrosity of a Bill. The hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) seems to think that it is outrageous that such a person might be entitled to become Lord Mayor.

John McDonnell: It would be fantastical were any worker elected as Lord Mayor under the current arrangements. We have yet to see an example of a worker leading the City of London corporation.

Mr. Dismore: I want to follow the point made by the hon. Member for North Wiltshire. If, as he says, the nurses to whom he referred have a vote as residents—although I think that he is wrong—they would also have a vote, albeit indirect, as workers. In effect, they would have two votes. What kind of democracy is that?

John McDonnell: It is a bizarre democracy. That is why this new clause is so anomalous.

Ms Abbott: My hon. Friend observed in his lucid and concise speech that there has been no example of a worker becoming Lord Mayor. Is there an example of someone becoming Lord Mayor who was not a freemason?

Mr. Alan Simpson: Or a millionaire.

John McDonnell: Indeed—or a millionaire. It is difficult to determine because of the refusal by City of London members to accept the introduction of a declaration of freemasonry.

Andrew Mackinlay: Just like Opus Dei.

John McDonnell: I agree that there should be a similar registration for Opus Dei.

I asked why Government Department employees should be excluded from the franchise. If this is a radical and reforming Bill, as has been proposed in other places, to extend the franchise on the basis of the number of workers, why are public sector workers discriminated against? Amendments (a) to (e) would at least introduce increased inclusivity, and less exclusivity.

I accept that amendment (e) has not been called, but amendments (a) to (d) have. Even without amendment (e), there is an argument in favour of amendment (a). If a Department is located in the City, it should have every right to participate in the governance of the area, but the new clause would bar Ministers and permanent secretaries from participating and voting for members of the City of London corporation. So it keeps Stephen Byers and Gordon Brown out of the corporation's governance. I do not however want to comment on that.

Amendment (a) would soften the harshness of the dictum of the new clause and would allow all those bodies—public, private and public-private partnerships—to participate in the governance of the City corporation area in which they are located and have a work force, even though they may be carrying out some functions of the Crown bestowed on them in legislation by the House. Not to accept amendment (a) would be an affront to the House. Parliament has passed legislation to confer functions on a body and has expressed its confidence in it. I would expect no new clause or subsequent amendment to undermine the confidence that the House has in such a body.

Without the amendment, the new clause signals that although we have faith in a body to do what is in some cases our dirty work, we do not have sufficient faith in it to participate in the governance of the area in which it is located. However, we do have sufficient confidence in private companies that we have not entrusted with public duties and functions. In some instances, we would have to distinguish between private companies that operate under legislation and private companies that do not, and we will discriminate against those in which we have expressed confidence by bestowing contracts on them.

There is another anomaly to consider. Does the new clause bar the many private companies that we have entrusted to carry out the statutory functions of the district auditor from participating in the governance of the City corporation? A number of accountancy bodies in the list of the top 100 companies operate and bid for contracts as district auditors in local government. They would be caught by the exclusions in the new clause because they exercise functions as bodies corporate on the basis of legislation and of the powers conferred on them. The new clause is tantamount to saying that we have confidence in companies that operate as district auditors in local government, but that they cannot participate in the governance of the City corporation.

Mr. Dismore: I see that Deloitte and Touche is on the list, the auditors in which the excellent Mr. John Magill was a senior partner. He was instrumental in exposing the scandal at Westminster council of Dame Shirley Porter gerrymandering homes for votes.

John McDonnell: It is a bizarre commentary on the new clause that the very people who have exposed corruption in local government would be caught by its terms and refused a role in the governance of the City corporation. Perhaps it is a fear—again, I relate this to the City cash—that if such bodies participate in the governance of the City of London they would expose some of those issues to daylight as a result of functions exercised on behalf of the Crown.

Mr. Hopkins: The amendments, which I, too, have tabled, are an attempt at least to improve the new clause. However, I would prefer to go further and delete it entirely. If all employees and organisations were included there would be no need to have a distinction and the lawyers would not have a field day. On reflection, does my hon. Friend think that we have gone far enough?

John McDonnell: To be honest, my amendments attempt to make the new clause work, but I am struggling. I agree with my hon. Friend. Without amendment (a), a vista of legal challenges will follow by bodies that are exercising Government functions and are excluded.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend makes an important point about legal challenges. The City includes the Temple, and barristers sometimes work for the Government—effectively exercising a government function in defending the Government in cases of judicial review—and sometimes for the other side. How would my hon. Friend's analysis accommodate the position of a barrister defending the Government in a judicial review who was suddenly asked to prosecute a judicial review concerning the interpretation of this very legislation?

8.45 pm

John McDonnell: My view is that the lawyers affected would be those who participate in challenges to the enactment of the Bill. They would be denied the human right of participation in the governance of their area on the basis of a spurious clause that tries to exclude them from engaging in a practice in which they pursue their living. I find that extraordinary.

I turn now to amendment (b), in my name. In case amendment (a) is too sweeping and would allow too great an extension to bodies linked to central Government, I have offered the House another amendment. It would limit and better define the impact of new clause 1, but maintain some flexibility. I request now, Madam Deputy Speaker, that when we come to vote, the amendments be voted on separately because they present alternatives to one another. However, I realise that if those votes are allowed, they will not take place until after we have discussed the next group of amendments.

Amendment (b) would insert the words "government appointed" into the new clause, so that it would read:

> "A government department or other government appointed body exercising on behalf of the Crown functions conferred by or under any Act shall not be treated as a qualifying body within the meaning of this Act."

The aim is to limit the range of the new clause. I tabled the amendment in a spirit of compromise and clarity. It would enable the new clause to exclude Government Departments and bodies whose boards were directly Government-appointed. It is an attack on cronyism in line with the attacks on the Government by the Leader of the Opposition. I agree that there is an important part of the Bill that we need to consider, and I think that we will reject the concept of boards packed with Government-appointed cronies participating in the governance of the City corporation. It will be tempting to Members of all parties.

Mr. Dismore: I see what my hon. Friend is trying to do but I am not sure that his amendment would achieve that, since it does not say "directly appointed". My concern is that the new clause could exclude those who

[Mr. Dismore]

are vicariously appointed, and that would apply to NHS workers. There is no doubt that NHS boards are appointed by the Government and the boards appoint their staff, but those staff could be excluded.

John McDonnell: I offer the amendments as options on a sliding scale of impact and compromise, and I ask my hon. Friend to take amendment (b) in that spirit.

Ms Abbott: I have listened with care to my hon. Friend's succinct and carefully marshalled arguments, and the whole House is united in its admiration for the spirit of compromise in which he has tabled the amendments. Does he agree, however, that given the gaping holes already emerging in the Bill, it is not too late for the promoters to withdraw and redraft it?

John McDonnell: I hope that as a result of the debate, if my amendments are carried, we will have a better Bill, but it will not be a good Bill. It should be withdrawn, and legal advice should be sought about some of the comments made by Conservative Members, because they are now in dispute. I urge all Officers of the House to examine the Bill with regard to the point made by Mr. Matson, the petitioner. The Bill is complex and it is so different from the original draft that it should go back to Committee for examination.

Phil Sawford: I served on the Committee that considered the Bill over five or six days. We were informed from the outset that we could work only within the parameters of the Bill presented to us. The special report says that

> "the Committee could only consider the Bill on its own merits, and . . . the wider reforms discussed could not be a matter for its formal consideration or jurisdiction".

The matters that we are discussing this evening—my hon. Friend's serious concerns—were never subject to scrutiny. This is a completely different Bill. My hon. Friend suggested earlier that it should begin its passage again because the very first amendment, new clause 1, deals with matters that were never considered in Committee.

John McDonnell: I agree wholeheartedly. Although clause 6 of the original Bill, which includes the exclusion of Crown property, was considered in Committee, we are not now excluding Crown property; we are excluding people. We are excluding Government Departments and their employees—individuals. If this were a Government Bill, individuals would be able to claim that it was a hybrid Bill; it would go through the procedure that is now prescribed for private Bills, as we have just determined, and the Government would be forced to announce changes at the earliest opportunity. The changes that we are discussing were never announced.

Mr. Alan Simpson: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's analysis, but does he accept the point made by our hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Phil Sawford)—that the excluded are not only those who are workers in parts of the institutions operating in the City, but those who currently have rights as residents in the City? They have locus standi to object, and they objected to the Bill when it was first presented. Unless they have the right to—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

John McDonnell: That was indeed a long intervention. Let me be clear: there are now issues in relation to which the clause is the key to the whole Bill. The clause becomes essential to the future of the Bill, which is why I spent some time on it, but there are 30 amendments of equal import that we need to discuss tonight. The Bill is falling apart before us, which makes a reference back to Committee critical. That is no jest—the Bill needs proper examination. We are falling into the trap of making poor legislation.

The amendment tackles the issue of appointed boards. I accept that there is a problem of allowing Government-appointed boards to have a role in the City corporation; therefore the amendment is designed to ensure that those who, because of their direct Government patronage, owe allegiance to central Government are not allowed to participate in the governance of the City corporation, or exert an influence as a result of that patronage on the City corporation in its elections. Amendment (b) limits the exclusion order in new clause 1 by deliberately not encompassing those bodies that exercise Government or statutory functions, but are not directly appointed by the Government.

Would a state school fall within the remit of new clause 1? If my amendment were accepted, it would not, because the board of governors is not directly appointed by the Government. However, under new clause 1 alone, it would be, because it carries out a function under legislation. The new clause must be re-examined, and my amendments enable us to consider how to ensure that the Bill will work. I do not want schools or health bodies that can participate in the good governance of the City corporation to be excluded. They should be represented.

I am sure that within the City corporation are many arts or charitable bodies that undertake Government functions.

Mr. Hopkins: My hon. Friend knows that I am deeply unhappy about the undemocratic nature of the proposals. However, if the other bodies that he has just mentioned were included, it would bring a little pluralist competition and balance to the arrangements. From time to time, countervailing voices might be heard, instead of only the commercial voice of business.

John McDonnell: That is true. Ameliorating the effects of the clause would enable that variety of voices to be heard.

Many long-established charitable bodies now carry out Government functions: for example, the London Community Foundation now administers the children's fund, which was established by statute, throughout London. Unless my amendments, especially amendment (b), are accepted, such bodies, whose boards are not directly appointed and are therefore independent, but which carry out Government functions, would be excluded.

Mr. Dismore: Will my hon. Friend explore the argument about arts bodies? At the Barbican are all sorts of bodies that receive central Government funding: for example, the Royal Shakespeare Company receives substantial sums from the Government through various arts bodies. How does he envisage their being affected by either new clause 1 or his amendments, bearing in mind the direct and indirect relationships we have been discussing?

John McDonnell: My amendments give the option to ensure that such bodies—I do not believe that the

Barbican is so caught because it is exercising a function under the City corporation and is funded in that way, so I do not think that it is exercising a Government function—address the general issue of providing more flexibility.

Amendment (d) has been alluded to by the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire, the promoter, and I believe that it provides the maximum flexibility. However, it is necessary to have confidence in government to endorse it.

Andrew Mackinlay: I left the Chamber recently to clarify the position of the Temple and the Inns of Court with the Library. I note that the Temple church and the master's house are held in common. Otherwise, each inn has its own hall. Can my hon. Friend throw any light on whether they are enfranchised under the proposed legislation? More importantly, does each set of chambers have a vote? To me, as a layman, we are talking in that context about a business, but probably that is not the correct status. Perhaps there is a legitimate interest, but what are the limits? If my hon. Friend cannot throw light on these questions, I hope that the issues will be flagged up by the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field), when he has a go.

John McDonnell: It would be invaluable—I shall give way to an intervention on this matter for an undertaking—if the impact of the Bill were to be modelled for us. In other words, it would be invaluable if we were given exemplifications of what would be excluded and what would not. It was the Committee's role to examine the model and ascertain whether it worked. However, the Bill has been so dramatically changed that the model has not been presented to anyone. The situation is rather like that of the person who understood the origins of the Schleswig-Holstein question. Lunacy is beginning to enter into the debate.

Amendment (d) would provide the maximum flexibility but it requires confidence in government. It would allow the Secretary of State to determine what is "a qualifying body". Why is that important? The amendment would overcome some of the issues that have been raised so far. The right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire suggested that the amendment was an iniquitous measure that would give power to the Secretary of State to intervene. I believe that it would introduce flexibility and accountability.

The amendment would provide that a body—a Government Department or anyone exercising the functions—would not be treated as a qualifying body

> "unless it has been declared by the Secretary of State to be a qualifying body".

In other words, a Secretary of State could designate a school or hospital outside the exclusion. In that way, the Secretary of State would have the power to ensure that responsible bodies were not excluded. That would enable him or her to exercise such discretion when they saw fit. It would also provide accountability to the House. In this context, it would be the first stage of accountability to the House.

Mr. Hopkins: I strongly support my hon. Friend's most recent point about the Secretary of State's involvement. I would reinforce it by saying that the amendment at least brings government into the picture, to an extent. Without such involvement, the new arrangements would create a City of London that would be rather like Monaco or San Marino, or some such semi-independent state surrounded by a major country. The degree of independence would be unacceptable in a unitary democratic state of the sort in which we live.

John McDonnell: The point behind such flexibility is that it acknowledges that governance changes over time. As agencies change and are established in the exercise of government functions, the Secretary of State would be able to identify whether they could be appropriately excluded from new clause 1. In that way, we would gain flexibility. For example, the involvement of the Bank of England in the governance of the City of London may well be worth while for a limited period to enable its finances to be sorted out, but after that, not; the Secretary of State could therefore designate it as not excluded by the court.

9 pm

Mr. Dismore: Initially, I was taken by amendment (d). However, suppose in a far-off scenario that the Labour party is no longer in control and an extremely centralising Conservative party is in office. Could not the Secretary of State declare his own Department a qualifying body, and would that not lead to the danger of central Government being directly involved in local government?

John McDonnell: That is exactly why I said that the amendment needs a leap of faith from the Government. The Secretary of State could designate his Department, or numerous Departments, as outside the exclusion order so that they could participate.

The Secretary of State may wish to put certain matters on the agenda of the City of London corporation, including corporate governance and financial reform, so he would want to determine that certain Departments and Government agencies are not excluded and are qualifying bodies. That would give any Secretary of State the opportunity to influence the governance of the corporation and move it towards a reform agenda; virtually every other power that has been exercised to encourage the corporation to reform has failed. The amendment therefore provides an opportunity to introduce good governance in the corporation.

It is true that certain pressures could be applied, but that would be done openly through the electoral process, rather than through secret meetings and behind-the-scenes pressures, which Governments and Secretaries of State have applied in the past. To take the example of the City cash, a Secretary of State could designate Departments to influence the corporation's governance and introduce reforms. There are immense opportunities for any legislation to be hindered, delayed or even defeated by either House of Parliament. The Lords, who have often populated the City of London corporation—many of them serve as its aldermen—seek to block the legislation that we are trying to impose on the corporation, so we may well want Secretaries of State to have influence at the grass roots, which would welcome instigated reform, rather than reform from above.

My amendment would allow the Government, via the Secretary of State, to designate a range of Departments, Government agencies and bodies as qualifying bodies,

[John McDonnell]

enabling them to nominate voters who in turn can vote for a slate of reforming representatives to tackle any issue on which the corporation backwoodsmen remain intransigent. The amendment is therefore powerful; it may be a tortuous route, but such a power may be useful in future. I urge that it should receive consideration, and not be given up, underestimated, turned away or rejected lightly. It does not propose an abuse of power, but its proper exercise. Even without a big bang confrontation, it may well be best to give the Secretary of State flexible powers to define or designate a qualifying body.

There is considerable uncertainty about the changing structures of the Government and the bodies that they set up, or on which they rely, to deliver the functions that they perform under statute. The amendment would give the Secretary of State discretion and, in doing so, would prevent legal challenges—or at least provide a mechanism to minimise them—to the status of Government-linked bodies in future.

Amendment (c) would insert the words

"or any institution of the European Union"

in the Bill. It seeks to prevent any EU institutions having a direct role in the governance of the City of London. That matter was raised in Committee; I refer Members to page 20 of the Committee report for 5 May 1999. The argument went that European Union bodies were exempt from paying rates and paid a contribution in lieu of rates, so did not appear on the rating list and did not qualify to vote. That was a delicate and diplomatic way of excluding European institutions, but it did not prevent the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development from securing £1.2 million for refurbishment of its City offices. When the system of voting is based no longer on property but on employees, the fine argument that European institutions are thus barred is not tenable. The further argument, advanced on the Floor of the House, that currently there are no European Union bodies in the City of London area, bears some examination. Even if there are none at present, there could be some in future.

It could be argued that EU institutions are exercising functions on the Crown's behalf, as conferred by legislation such as the Maastricht treaty et al.

Mr. Hopkins: My hon. Friend and I number among those who are concerned about Britain's future in the European Union. Indeed, there is something of a competition between the eurozone and the City of London in pursuing business in the financial world. If we are not careful, EU influence in the City could prove unhelpful to our economy and to the City's future success.

John McDonnell: Because of the confusion arising from the move from rateable value to voting on the basis of employees, the legislation could enable EU institutions to set up bodies in the City of London area and thereby exert an influence. I find that amazing.

I do not want to stir up the European debate, but, at various stages, the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor) has edged towards me in the Tea Room. It is worrying, nevertheless, that there is no such specific exclusion of EU institutions.

My amendment makes explicit what might not be sufficiently clear in new clause 1—that EU institutions are not entitled to participate in the governance of the City of London corporation. It could be argued that the new clause already excludes such participation, but I do not accept that. I do not believe that many such institutions can be regarded as Departments—certainly not of this sovereign Government. Moreover, they exercise not Crown functions but EU functions. My amendment makes the matter explicit by excluding those institutions, and I urge hon. Members to support it.

Mr. Dismore: Will my hon. Friend comment on the position of European Economic Area bodies, which are not EU bodies per se, but can play an important role in economic and financial affairs?

John McDonnell: My amendment would ensure exclusion of their participation in the governance of the City of London corporation. There might be an argument that those receiving EU funds are exercising—albeit tenuously—functions of government conferred on them by previous legislation passed by this House. My amendment makes it explicit that they would not so participate.

Phil Sawford: The point of the amendments is to focus on people rather than premises. I might be sympathetic to my hon. Friend's views on Europe, but would not the amendment exclude from the franchise British citizens who do a good, honest day's work in the City of London? Although there might be a conflict of interest in that regard, I am not sure that we can justify excluding such people from the vote.

John McDonnell: That is a valid issue to raise at this point, but unless my amendments are adopted and we accept the principle of balloting the work force, those workers will be excluded anyway. Amendment (e) would have addressed that issue, but it was not selected and therefore is not open for debate.

The amendments that we are discussing demonstrate the importance of ensuring that the new clause is clear. There is a wide range of arguments in favour of democratising, and to some extent constraining, this power. They go to the heart of the Bill, but the fundamental question in all the amendments is who should be eligible to vote in the governance of the City of London corporation. If, like me, hon. Members believe in universal suffrage, they will support a number of the amendments that I am coming to, which would provide for ballots rather than appointments.

The basis of universal suffrage has always been one person, one vote. If hon. Members believe in universal suffrage, they should support any extension of suffrage beyond the residential and oppose those who seek to build votes on names of workers rather than giving them a ballot. If, in the spirit of compromise, they want a negotiated settlement between all the combatants in the dispute over the City corporation franchise, like me they should be willing to examine as many compromise options as possible. The Bill, if amended as many of us wish it to be, could be a decisive agreement on the future franchise of the City corporation, and would decommission some of the corrupt practices that have gone on.

The compromise that I have repeatedly suggested is based on mutual esteem, as set out in my amendments. It recognises that all the stakeholders in the City corporation should have a say in the democratic structures and procedures of their area. At present, there are limited rights for residents, for some businesses and for a group of elected-for-life aldermen, but there are no rights for the workers of the City, who create the wealth on which the City relies and of which it extols the virtues. In our amendments, we seek to install that right.

New clause 1 unamended would exclude the public sector from participating in the democratic processes of the City corporation, and would prevent that sector from having any effective say. If we are successful in introducing a ballot of workers in the exercise of the franchise based on the numbers of workers employed by each company, unless we amend new clause 1 we will exclude the public sector. That would prevent the people who work in the public sector and provide such valuable services from making a valid contribution to City governance.

If we extend the franchise based on employment, and amend the democratic processes of the City corporation, we will create a divide between public sector employees who, by being employed by bodies excluded under new clause 1, will have no participatory rights, and private sector employees, whose employment will gain them the right to vote, or at least the right to be counted. That cannot be acceptable.

Under clause 4, a qualifying body is entitled to appoint a number of persons and ensure that they reflect the composition of the work force, so the City of London corporation moved some way towards reflecting the work force, although not in a ballot. However, that is not so for public sector workers.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend talked about involving all the stakeholders, and he focused on the residents and the business voters via the workers. I want to put to him a point that I raised in one of the previous debates on the Bill. What about the City's customers? If we are genuinely talking about a stakeholder democracy, surely the customers must have a say as well?

John McDonnell: Shareholders of individual companies may have some influence over businesses. I cannot find a mechanism for customers that could be built into this structure, although I deal with the issue of contractors in later amendments.

It is unfortunate that new clause 1 would create a split between the public sector and the private sector, which does not reflect the real work involved in the delivery of public services and services generally in the City of London corporation.

Because a sliding scale of reforms is involved, I suggest that the proposals be voted on separately.

9.15 pm

Mr. Alan Simpson: I am sorry to be pedantic. My hon. Friend listed 100 major City institutions and the number of employees—[HON. MEMBERS: "He did not."] Well, he mentioned them, and made copies of the details available to Members.

How do we know that the number of people registered as employees is the genuine number of employed people? What mechanisms will allow us to establish whether these are made-up numbers, genuine numbers or simply bought numbers, in an obscure voting process?

John McDonnell: That is a valid point, with which I will deal in due course.

In our last debate, the argument advanced against basing voting rights on the number of workers in a company was that, according to the City corporation, there was no operable way in which the number of employees could be established and registered. Now it has come up with one: it took four years, but we are nearly there. All we need do is establish a registration system based on the number of employees and their entitlement to vote, and one of my amendments deals with that.

Mr. Dismore: I will not refer to voters, because the people I refer to are not exactly voters, although they are part of the franchise. Does my hon. Friend think that they should be treated in the same way as the franchise in the rest of the country in terms of age, nationality, citizenship and so on, or does he believe, as the City seems to, that anyone should be able to vote?

John McDonnell: I am trying to arrive at a simple mechanism to allow the voters—the workers in a company, that is—to be properly registered. The Bill as presented by the corporation attempted to reflect the composition of the work force. I have tabled amendments to try to encourage that, and to find a practical way of doing so.

Jeremy Corbyn: I thank my hon. Friend for trying to clarify the point, and I am sorry to have missed his opening remarks.

Is the proposal based on the ordinary place of work of an individual employed by a company, on that person's permanent place of work, or on the place where the payroll is drawn up? There are people, especially in the public sector, who travel a great deal in the course of their jobs. That probably applies almost as much to those in the private sector. It will be impossible to identify a place of work definitely and to establish that someone is on the payroll unless all names and numbers are made available.

John McDonnell: The City corporation's amendments deal with some of my hon. Friend's points, and my amendments aim to construct a further device to give us some security in that regard.

Let me deal with promoters amendments Nos. 1 to 4 and 5, to which I have tabled amendments (b) to (d). The promoters amendments place emphasis on the occupying of premises. We are moving away from the link with hereditaments to qualification based on occupancy. It is proposed that the reference to rates should be deleted, but I should have thought that, if the reference to the 1957 Act remains, some definitions in the Bill should be retained. Let us, however, concentrate on the concept of "occupying". Some of the amendments introduce that concept to emphasise physical presence on the premises. Amendment No. 3 substitutes "premises" for "hereditament", and amendment No. 4 refers to "occupying for relevant purposes"—such purposes being defined in lines 15 to 18 on page 2 of the Bill.

However, the inclusion of "relevant purposes" in this instance is bizarre. It seems to refer to everything from religious worship to prostitution, which could be called a calling or a profession. Which is which?

Hon. Members should not be deceived by the amendment. It does nothing to insist on personal occupation—on someone being in physical occupation as

[John McDonnell]

we would normally understand that term. A company can still qualify by occupation through a director, officer, employee or agent of that body, or through a holder of any paid or unpaid office. The amendment to emphasise occupation by personal or physical presence is undermined by including such a wide range of people. It is a misguided approach.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend has raised an interesting point that begs an important question: who does the appointing on behalf of the companies? Presumably, some of the directors on the executive board may in some circumstances be said to be working in the particular building concerned and may be involved in appointing the electors, but a company is its shareholders. They may theoretically occupy the building through the company but in practice never go within 100 miles of it. Who is actually the occupier for that purpose?

John McDonnell: That argument was raised earlier. We have the concept of occupying premises and employing workers to qualify the body to gain votes, but those votes may be exercised by an individual. That is the block vote. There is no reference to shareholders being involved in that decision-making process.

Jeremy Corbyn: Could the provision apply to people who work for a major company, are based overseas but are on the payroll of the head office? Their votes would be taken into account even though they may not have even been in this country for years.

John McDonnell: The definition of occupancy is so watered down by the amendments that there is potential for absent landlords to exercise votes in that way. I urge the House to reject the amendments because they are worthless.

Mr. Dismore: To extend that point, is this not similar to the Irish peerage of the 19th century? Peers who never went anywhere near Ireland had their seats in the House of Peers as it then was and were part of the legislature. They had no contact whatever with the area that they supposedly represented, except perhaps for screwing the peasants to get money out of them.

John McDonnell: I want to move later to an amendment that addresses that point. The promoters amendment to clause 5(5) weakens the link even further.

I ask the House to reject amendments Nos. 1 to 5 because they are worthless. The promoters amendment No. 5 introduces the definition of work force. It designates the work force as

"those persons whose principal or only place of work"—

my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North raised this point—on a particular day, "the qualifying date", is ordinarily the premises concerned. On that day each year, the employees of a particular company could ordinarily work at that premises. On every other day of the year, they could be employed elsewhere. They could be working anywhere.

Mr. Hopkins: In extreme circumstances, could we not find that a company had a very small office with a very small number of people, a large number of workers working remotely at screens, and a large number of representatives overseas and all over the country? On one day, they could all come together in that tiny office to make up the qualifying vote.

John McDonnell: That is one of the abuses that has been used so far in the governance of the City corporation: the registration of people at premises at which they do not work except on a particular day. The Committee tried at length to eradicate some of those abuses. On every other day of the year, these people could be employed elsewhere. The company could bus them in on the one day to boost its voting capacity in the City corporation.

Jeremy Corbyn: Companies would not stoop to that.

John McDonnell: They have stooped to that already.

Jeremy Corbyn: I cannot believe it.

John McDonnell: Look at some of the exposures of previous years.

The new clause also identifies that the people concerned must be persons who work for that body. The entitlement is based upon the number of employees who work for that body on a particular day. The day before, they could be working for anyone. On the day in question, a company could recruit a massive number of temporary workers to boost its voting entitlement, paying them nothing. They could be part-time workers—

Mr. Dismore: On two-hour contracts.

John McDonnell: Exactly. On that day, the company could boost its voting entitlement only to lay off those people the next day, having gained significant voting capacity within the City corporation.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend is outlining an important flaw in the proposals. As far as the electorate in the real world is concerned, we have moved away from a formal date for compiling the electoral register. We have moved towards the concept of the rolling register, which means that people can register to vote and participate in local and national democracy as and when they change address. Should we not have something equivalent for the City?

John McDonnell: There are fundamental issues at stake here, and there is a large potential for abuse. I understood the City corporation's argument that there might be problems in registering workers at a particular point in time at any particular premises. But what annoys me is that these problems could have been ironed out over the last four years of the debate; we could have set up a system of registration to overcome the problems.

Mr. Dismore: Surely compiling a register on a given day in the City of the number of employees concerned—bearing in mind the huge amount of technology available—cannot be any harder than a trade union compiling a list of its members for when it has to have a ballot for industrial action.

John McDonnell: I do not think that it is, and that is why one of my amendments places trade union registration at the heart of the Bill. It is the simplest way of identifying who is working where and who qualifies.

Mr. Hopkins: Does my hon. Friend agree that there are at least two possible ways of overcoming this? The first is to have a register that is made up once a year, with a registration officer—from the Electoral Commission, perhaps—who does spot checks from time to time. The second is to have a reasonable occupancy level at a particular office. If an office can accommodate 10 people but 100 are registered there, clearly something is amiss.

John McDonnell: There are common-sense ways of dealing with the abuse and fraud that could result from the system, and the new clause would leave the system open to the most appalling abuse. It is not a fantastical scenario either, because it is based upon existing gerrymandering practices in the City corporation.

Mr. Dismore: Surely a way round that point is to look at the Offices, Shops and Railway Premises Act 1963, which laid down a minimum floor space that an individual office worker should have to occupy. If it turned out that a company tried to register more people than its office space allowed, it should be prosecuted for breaching the legislation.

John McDonnell: I know that a proposal was drafted at one point—one that I was often induced to support by the City corporation—to use rateable value for calculating employers. That could be a fall-back position for a system in which we enforce standards upon employers and identify gerrymandering. The new clause has the potential for gerrymandering, a time-honoured tradition that the City corporation has sought to stamp out.

9.30 pm

Andrew Mackinlay: The debate is clearly focusing on how we satisfy the need for probity and a proper ethical process in relation to who should have a franchise. Will my hon. Friend consider tabling further amendments to the Bill, not to make the hefty tome that is the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 apply to the City of London corporation but to enable the Electoral Commission to deal with the matter? There is a rich seam of further thoughts for Parliament to consider in relation to whether aspects of that Act could be incorporated into the Bill. The Act has a great many provisions.

John McDonnell: Exactly. I hope that the Bill's promoters will realise the errors of some of their amendments. If they do, it will give us the opportunity to pull back the Bill and table such amendments. In my own small way, may I refer my hon. Friend to amendments (b) to (d) on page 127 of the amendment paper, in which I try to address some of the abuses that have been mentioned?

Phil Sawford: I have to say to my hon. Friend yet again that there was no discussion in Committee of how to verify these matters, or of how the registers would be drawn up. Nor did the petitioners have the opportunity to discuss the matter. On the question of numbers, and in reflecting on another major financial centre, I looked on in horror as it was explained on television that 50,000 people worked in the twin towers of the World Trade Centre. It was with relief that we realised that the actual number was significantly less, but that illustrates how we can judge such numbers by the size of a building and then discover, through a tragedy, that nothing like that number of people is inside.

Andrew Mackinlay: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I understand that, as Chairman of Ways and Means, you have an ongoing discretion in relation to some of the matters relating to this Bill, and that it is open to you to consider at some stage the prudence of this matter continuing in Parliament. I understand that you have, either directly or indirectly, some leverage and discretion in that matter. Bearing it in mind that the Bill started its life and completed its Committee stage before Parliament considered and enacted the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, would I or any other hon. Member be competent to put a representation to you on this question, and would you consider one? Events have overtaken us in the area of electoral law, and you might consider this a matter that should properly have been taken account of in Committee. I am not asking you to consider my submission tonight; I am just asking whether this is something of which you could legitimately take cognisance.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I cannot deal with hypothetical situations, but it is always open to hon. Members to make representations either to the Speaker or to the Chairman of Ways and Means, whoever is appropriate, at any time.

John McDonnell: On that point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you may take it as read that representations will be made on this matter.

My amendments (b), (c) and (d) try to address the prospect of manipulating the count of employee numbers by insisting that the employees who make up a work force are genuine—that is, that they have worked for the company or qualifying body for a period of not less than 12 months. I accept that that does not completely reflect some of the practices operating in the City of London corporation area, because there is a high turnover in certain sectors. Nevertheless, this is a common criterion used to avoid the manipulation of ballots. It is used in legislation elsewhere, and also in the Labour party for the selection of candidates for local councils and for Parliament. Someone has to have been a member of the party for at least 12 months before the start of the selection process.

The amendment will give some security to the process. I accept that for it to operate, there would have to be some form of registration of the employment in question. I repeat that the City of London corporation has argued in the past that that would be impossible, cumbersome and administratively costly, and therefore could not be introduced—yet it is inevitable if the system is to be based on the number of people employed by a particular company on a particular day.

I am dealing now with some of the amendments that I have tabled to the amendments. I have yet to deal with my proposals for reform, so I do not expect a vote to be called.

The registration system is hardly difficult or impossible to construct. It has to carry only three pieces of information: the name of the employee, where he or she is employed, and the company that he or she works for. However, one further piece of information would be required: how long the person has been employed by that employer. That would not be an impossible task for modern systems.

Jeremy Corbyn: I agree with my hon. Friend, but will he make it clear whether he is talking about the

[Jeremy Corbyn]

individual's ordinary and permanent place of work, or the place where people are based and from which they could be sent to work elsewhere? In the big consulting companies that we have talked about, such as Andersen and others, people are not in the office very often, because they are always being sent off somewhere else. Would those people have a vote or not?

John McDonnell: I believe that we must insist upon there being deemed to be one sole base from which people work. That is in the spirit both of the legislation and of our amendments. Again, if continuing amendment is needed to ensure that the system works, the legislation could be amended, or we could amend the code of conduct that will be published to ensure that registration takes place properly.

I offer amendment (c), which says that the people concerned should be members of a trade union, as a way of overcoming the problem of registration. In principle, I believe that all workers should be members of a trade union; I am a member of Unison, and many other Members are members of other unions. The amendment would serve as an incentive for employers to promote trade union membership, and for employees to join a trade union.

The important thing, however, is that amendment (c) would also offer a readily available method of registering the numbers employed at a particular workplace on a particular day. I accept that trade union membership records are not infallible, but they are a useful form of information about who is employed by a firm, where and for how long. They are now recognised in statute in connection with industrial action and ballots, so there are systems already in place, based on trade union membership, which could assist us in the registration process.

The TUC and the individual trade unions operating in the City—it is usually the MSF, or Amicus, or whatever it is called now—would be only too pleased to assist in developing a reliable registration scheme for use by the City corporation. That would produce a valuable partnership between unions and employers operating in or based in the City.

Amendment (d) sets out the need to recognise that not all employees are directly employed. People are often contracted to supply services to particular bodies. The reason for tabling the amendment was that it would insert the words

"or who are contracted to supply services to that body".

That would reflect part of the debate that took place in the previous Parliament. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) took part in it, although he is not in his place now; I know that he has been unwell. My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) also spoke, and chastised me for my failure to pay any regard to workers who were not directly employed by a City-based firm but were contractors. You will recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that that was described as the "white van man" argument.

Let me put the record straight.

Mr. Dismore: The "white van man" argument is part of it, but more important is IR 35 man or woman. I do not wish to pursue the arguments about IR 35 now. However, those contractors, who are self-employed but effectively still work for these companies, are a clear example of people who would not be caught within the present definition put forward by the City but ought to be included in the franchise.

John McDonnell: Under my amendment, they would be included. It would cover the full range of people who are currently employed on a contract basis to supply services. I understand and appreciate the concern that has been expressed. The issue is complex but it could be overcome.

Jeremy Corbyn: What proportion of the working time of people on IR 35 would have to be spent with one company based in the City for them to qualify for a City vote?

John McDonnell: With respect to a code of practice on registration at some future date, we would argue that, as in the other clauses, the principal employment would be the relevant one. We based that on the majority of time employed on a particular contract.

This is a difficult area, and it is difficult to cater for the full range of activities and employment in the City. The amendment seeks to reflect the modern reality of work and trade in the City area. Many workers are not directly employed; they often work for themselves or are under contract to a company that could be described as a qualifying body. Many may be contractors, but their contract status is often with one or two firms at most. They operate virtually like direct employees, so under the amendment they would be covered by the Bill.

If there is to be an allocation of votes in the City based on employment, this type of employment and employee should be recognised. Not to do so would be to fail to relate to the modern experience of employment in the City.

I turn now to my amendment No. 52 and promoters amendments Nos. 6, 7 and 8. I shall discuss the amendments together as they relate specifically to occupancy. I find clause 2(2) virtually incomprehensible. Even taking into account amendment No. 6, I take it to mean that although definitions of occupancy in clause 2(1) have the emphasis correctly on personal and physical presence, those caveats are virtually meaningless for unincorporated bodies. That is why amendment No. 52 seeks to delete subsection (2). Under the subsection, it does not seem to matter whether the owner or the tenant is in occupation. Amendment No. 52 would delete the subsection as it is contrary to everything that has gone before and the emphasis on connection to place or occupancy by physical presence.

Amendment No. 7 would insert "doing" after "to be" in line 20. It would, if amendment No. 52 is accepted, become superfluous. Amendment No. 8, would also be superfluous if amendment No. 52 is accepted.

Amendment No. 149, which is the promoters' main amendment, was outlined by the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire. It would amend section 6 of the City of London (Various Powers) Act 1957 dealing with qualification of voters at ward elections. My understanding is that there are three categories of voters—the owner-tenant, the resident and now the new voters, the qualifying bodies occupying premises. However, under amendment No. 149, the qualifying bodies will gain votes based upon their occupation and employment.

Jeremy Corbyn: What does my hon. Friend mean by an owner-tenant? Is that the owner of the freehold, the owner of the leasehold or the tenant of a sub-lessee or a head-lessee? Who gets a vote?

John McDonnell: In my understanding, ownership or tenancy would qualify.

Qualifying bodies are the key to amendment No. 149. Does occupation of those qualifying bodies actually mean—

Sir George Young *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House proceeded to a Division.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I ask the Serjeant at Arms to investigate the delay in the No Lobby.

The House having divided: Ayes 205, Noes 46.

Division No. 145] **[9.45 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Bailey, Adrian
Baldry, Tony
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burnett, John
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Caplin, Ivor
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Denham, Rt Hon John
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Dowd, Jim
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John
Healey, John
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hoban, Mark
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jamieson, David
Jenkin, Bernard
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lansley, Andrew
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Letwin, Oliver
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
MacDonald, Calum
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
Malins, Humfrey
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Quinn, Lawrie
Randall, John
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Rendel, David
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rosindell, Andrew
Sayeed, Jonathan
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tami, Mark
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Touhig, Don
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Viggers, Peter
Ward, Ms Claire
Watkinson, Angela
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Wilkinson, John
Wills, Michael
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Hugh Robertson and
Mr. Mark Field.

NOES

Austin, John
Barnes, Harry
Berry, Roger
Burgon, Colin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Clapham, Michael
Coleman, Iain
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dobbin, Jim
Etherington, Bill
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Hermon, Lady
Hinchliffe, David
Hopkins, Kelvin

Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
McDonnell, John
Mackinlay, Andrew
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Mole, Chris
Perham, Linda
Pike, Peter
Pollard, Kerry
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Pugh, Dr John
Rapson, Syd
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sawford, Phil
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wareing, Robert N

Tellers for the Noes:
Jeremy Corbyn and
Mr. Andrew Dismore.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question put accordingly, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 200, Noes 46.

Division No. 146] [10.2 pm

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Bailey, Adrian
Baker, Norman
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burnett, John
Butterfill, John
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Caplin, Ivor
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles
(Norwich S)
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Denham, Rt Hon John
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Dowd, Jim
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gilroy, Linda
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John
Healey, John
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hill, Keith
Hoban, Mark
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lansley, Andrew
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Letwin, Oliver
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
MacDonald, Calum
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
Malins, Humfrey
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Paice, James
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pike, Peter
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Quinn, Lawrie
Randall, John
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Rendel, David
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rosindell, Andrew
Sayeed, Jonathan
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Spicer, Sir Michael
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tami, Mark
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Touhig, Don
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Viggers, Peter
Ward, Ms Claire
Watkinson, Angela
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Wilkinson, John
Wills, Michael
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Mark Field and
Hugh Robertson.

NOES

Austin, John
Barnes, Harry
Berry, Roger
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Burgon, Colin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Clapham, Michael
Coleman, Iain
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
Dobbin, Jim
Etherington, Bill
Flynn, Paul
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Hinchliffe, David
Hopkins, Kelvin
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
McDonnell, John
Mackinlay, Andrew
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Mole, Chris
Pollard, Kerry
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Pugh, Dr John
Rapson, Syd
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sawford, Phil
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis

Steinberg, Gerry
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wareing, Robert N

Tellers for the Noes:
Jeremy Corbyn and
Mr. Andrew Dismore.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause read a Second time.

It being after Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed Thursday 31 January.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

Barcelona Process and Assistance to Palestinian Society

That this House takes note of European Union documents numbers 11381/00, the Commission Communication on "Reinvigorating the Barcelona Process" and 14778/00 relating to the Special Report by the Court of Auditors on the management by the Commission of the programme of assistance to Palestinian Society; and welcomes the Government's approach to EC assistance to Palestinian society and supports the Government's continuing commitment to the Barcelona Process.—*[Dan Norris.]*

Question agreed to.

CONVENTION ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

Resolved,

That, in the opinion of this House, Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory and Ms Gisela Stuart should be the national parliamentary representatives from this House to the Convention on the Future of Europe.—*[Dan Norris.]*

Public Transport (Pensioners)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dan Norris.]*

10.14 pm

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing this debate to take place.

I congratulate the Government on many of the measures and the assistance that they have so far provided for pensioners—for example, the minimum income guarantee, the increase in the basic state pension, the £200 winter fuel payments, and the free television licences for all those aged 75 or over. In my view, that last measure should be extended to all pensioners. I shall continue to pursue the matter with support from hon. Members on both sides of the House. It is important that there should be equality between all pensioners.

I welcome also the free pass that entitles all pensioners to half-price concessionary travel on buses, which was introduced in 2001. However, many pensioners are dependent on public transport and live on extremely limited incomes. Transport costs take a significant part of pensioners' disposable income. The need for free public transport is important, especially if one lives outside town areas and in remote villages, where the costs are even greater. There are areas that have never benefited from municipal transport, and we have always been envious of towns that had that facility. Unfortunately, that benefit did not extend to most parts of Lancashire.

The need for free concessionary pensioner travel has been recognised in Scotland and Wales and in many metropolitan areas within England. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister is well aware that in Wales concessionary fares are within the remit of the Welsh Assembly. We welcome the Assembly's efforts on behalf of pensioners. It was after the 1999 elections that the Assembly decided to adhere to the decision that it would bring free travel into Wales in April this year. It is important that from April this year a pensioner can travel on buses throughout Wales. That is something of which we are envious in England.

I look to Scotland, where Fife has always allowed free travel for pensioners. Strathclyde has low travel costs. Scotland now has the ability to consider the introduction of free travel for those who are blind, disabled or pensioners. Once again, we must recognise that the poor relations will be English pensioners.

London is a good example of somewhere which offers something positive to pensioners. The standard concession in London for elderly, blind and disabled people crosses 33 boroughs. The scheme provides for free travel for pass holders on buses, the underground, the docklands light railway and other rail services. Free travel is available on buses from 9 am to 3 am the next day from Monday to Friday, and at any time on Saturday, Sunday and public holidays.

Free travel on railway services in the London area is available from 9.30 am from Monday to Friday until the last train at any time on Saturday, Sunday and public holidays. Once again, that is a benefit for pensioners within London.

[Mr. Lindsay Hoyle]

Greater Manchester adjoins my constituency, which is in Lancashire. There, we look across the border with envy because although Manchester does not offer free travel to pensioners, it offers travel all the way across Greater Manchester at a cost of only 40p.

Mr. David Crausby (Bolton, North-East): My hon. Friend will know that I represent a Greater Manchester constituency, albeit on the northern fringe. My constituents have concessionary travel, but effectively in only a southerly direction. If they lived in the centre of Greater Manchester, they would have concessionary travel in all directions. Does my hon. Friend agree that even within Greater Manchester there is still a postcode lottery?

Mr. Hoyle: I recognise that. My hon. Friend makes a valid point. He represents a constituency that is on the edge of the area. He has Lancashire to one side and Greater Manchester on the other. I understand that there is a lottery in terms of where a person lives in Greater Manchester, and I appreciate the importance to his constituents of ensuring that there is free travel and doing away with the 40p charge. However, I am still envious of what my hon. Friend's constituents enjoy. At the same time, I am aware that if they travel towards the west, the east or the north, they will suffer from the problem of paying much higher fares.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): As the hon. Gentleman knows, I represent a Cheshire constituency to the south of Greater Manchester. My constituents feel aggrieved that they cannot benefit from the 40p charge to which he referred. If there are to be concessionary fares for the retired, they should be universal throughout the United Kingdom and not available, in the main, only to those who live in metropolitan areas. Does the hon. Gentleman, for whom I have great regard, agree with me?

Mr. Hoyle: The point of this debate is to ask for universal free travel throughout the United Kingdom; that is the starting point, and we have got to ensure that that happens. I shall look at the interest expressed by the hon. Gentleman; his constituency is near to mine and he could probably enjoy the benefit of free travel so, of course, I take his concern to heart.

I shall talk about Greater Manchester for a little longer. Perhaps the Minister will consider a 40p charge for people in Lancashire as a stepping stone. Free travel is obviously a major step, but a concessionary fare would be welcomed by many pensioners who do not have the benefit of city schemes. Free travel would be welcomed by 15,500 pensioners in my Chorley constituency. Concessionary schemes are excellent, but we must bear in mind the costs borne by pensioners in towns such as Chorley, even with the half-fare pass. Pensioners in Chorley still have to make a difficult choice; they can have a half-fare pass, but it cannot be a combined pass for rail and bus—it is one or the other. That is sad; we should aim for the goal of schemes which cover any form of public transport.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Crausby) said, a half-price ticket from Chorley to Bolton—a matter of miles—costs a pensioner £1.90. Pensioners can travel across London for free; they can travel all the way across Greater Manchester for 40p. There is therefore a great difference for pensioners who do not get the benefit of such schemes. There is a strong case, not only for free travel for pensioners, but for stricter regulation of prices charged by private bus and rail operators. A half-price pass can leave pensioners facing high transport costs if prices continue to rise as they have been.

I have been approached by many pensioners who are concerned about the cost of travelling by bus and train, particularly when they hear that friends and family who live in Greater Manchester receive good treatment compared with the people of Lancashire. Better rail concessions are needed. Once again, there are varying rates for pensioners, depending on where they live. In London, travel is free; in Manchester, it is 40p. We can do much more to end those anomalies for pensioners.

Given the Government's commitment to an integrated transport system, it would make sense to introduce competitive concessionary rates or, if not, off-peak free travel for pensioners; we should aim to move towards free transport and introduce a combined pass for pensioners so that they can switch between rail and bus. If we are to encourage people to use public transport, we must make it easy for pensioners to use a combined pass that would allow them to travel anywhere on any form of transport; we must achieve that objective. For all those dependent on public transport, travel often involves using more than one form of transport and changing buses, which is costly with a half-price pass.

I am aware that my proposals would be expensive, with a possible additional cost of £300 million if free transport were introduced. However, as I have said, it could be introduced in stages over a number of years; the money would be well spent and the initiative would be welcomed throughout the United Kingdom. At the end of the day, off-peak free travel would not cost very much. We subsidise many of those routes; off-peak trains and services are empty. Why not make a start and allow free off-peak travel for all pensioners throughout the UK? We should consider the benefit of doing so.

In conclusion, we can see the benefits of free travel for Londoners; in April, free bus travel across Wales will be introduced. Cities throughout England have various schemes. My hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Laxton), when leader of Derby city council, introduced free bus travel in Derby. However, Derbyshire has only half-fare passes, which is anomalous; there is struggle between the country and the city, which we must resolve. Surely it is time to ensure that villages enjoy the same benefits as cities and towns. They miss out on many opportunities, but we have a chance to take a positive step towards equality.

I find it interesting that the Government say that they will give the private Member's Bill on age equality a fair wind, but once again we see that there is no equality for pensioners. There ought to be equality for pensioners and we can make a start tonight. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will take on board a lot of what is said and give it a warm welcome. A great deal could be done for very little money and, by working through the Minister's good offices and through the Treasury to consider funding, we could achieve a better quality of life for all pensioners throughout the United Kingdom.

We must emphasise there should be equality for all pensioners, whether they live in Wales, Scotland or England. As a start, they should have the benefit of free off-peak travel or a limited Greater Manchester-type 40p scheme, but let us ensure that we head towards free concessionary pensioner travel.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): I applaud my hon. Friend's initiative on free travel for pensioners, which my area had for four years in the early 1990s with assistance provided through the local council. Quality of travel is the other issue, however, and my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) would tell the House that Stagecoach's cuts in services in our area do nothing to help pensioners and nothing to achieve the free travel that they seek.

Mr. Hoyle: I agree. Stagecoach operates in our area as well. I say to my hon. Friend that we ought to make a start. If buses and trains are running around empty, the scream goes up that they should be removed because nobody uses the service that they provide, but people would begin to use them if we provided free travel. That should develop increased provision for rural areas, because at least services would be justified. We must justify the subsidies that we offer and introducing free off-peak travel for all pensioners is the way to do it.

That is a clear means to ensure that remote areas have services and that people will use them. Those involved in local government always argue, "We've done a survey and we have worked out that one person uses this service one day a week." We all recognise that that is not acceptable, so we must persuade people to use services and give them a choice by providing public transport. If pensioners who want to visit the nearest town or to see friends know that they can travel free off-peak, they will use those services, which will justify the subsidy.

We must ensure that transport becomes more sustainable by carrying more and more people. The Government would welcome such an increase, and that could be achieved by getting away from the old, dangerous British Rail mentality. The usual story was, "We're not making enough profit, so put the prices up. The numbers that we carry don't matter." That myth went out years ago. All it meant was that the number of people using the services declined.

We want to get away from that attitude, but a half-fare pass would not achieve that. If prices go up every year, the service becomes more costly for pensioners, so free off-peak travel is the best way to ensure equality for pensioners, not just in our region, the north-west, but throughout England and the United Kingdom. That would not cost a great deal, but it would make a start on achieving equality for all pensioners. I believe that all old-age pensioners should have that benefit.

We ought not to shy away from that important issue. I know that the Minister will listen carefully and I am sure that she will take on board the points that have been raised. Pensioners are struggling, not just in Chorley, Macclesfield, Bolton, Rochdale and Derby, but throughout England. London pensioners would say, "We have a good service, but why don't our cousins in other parts of England have the same benefits?" They recognise that difference. If those pensioners want to travel outside London, why should they not be able to do so for free? The limited scope should be extended, and the benefits given to all.

I cannot think of any pensioner organisation or any pensioners who would not support this proposal. The clamour of support from my constituency has allowed me to introduce this debate. It is important that the debate has taken place. Hon. Members who have turned out to listen are fully supportive of my proposal. We look to the Government to ensure equality for all pensioners throughout the United Kingdom. We look forward to positive action from the Government, which they have taken on other pensioner issues.

10.30 pm

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): I congratulate the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle). I regularly agree with him on many issues, and this is yet another. I believe that our pensioners deserve better. One way to enhance the lives of many pensioners is to give them access to travel, and there are many advantages in doing so. It would enable pensioners to travel, go for days out or go shopping, and we would save a lot of money by promoting active lives for pensioners, thus reducing costs for the health service. Furthermore, if pensioners travelled, they would spend money and would thus improve their local economies.

I feel strongly that the postcode lottery must be dealt with, because it is utterly wrong that people who live on one side of a border get the advantage of a free travel pass, whereas those on the other side do not. I could mention many examples of that. The hon. Member for Chorley referred to Greater London, which has a freedom pass that allows pensioners to travel from one end of London to the other. I represent the Romford constituency, which is on the edge of London going into Essex. The problem is that people who live in Romford can travel free to Brentford in the west of London, but not to Brentwood, which is five miles up the road. They can travel free to Harrow but not to Harlow, to Southgate but not to Southend.

I should like to see a universal, freedom bus pass for all pensioners. That would have economic and health advantages. Pensioners have fought for this country and paid their taxes, and they deserve better in their later years. I congratulate the hon. Member for Chorley on raising this issue. I assure him of my full support for everything he said, and I look forward to the Minister's response.

10.33 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) on securing a debate on this important aspect of older people's needs. I am aware of the interest in free travel for pensioners, which is probably why there are other hon. Members present in the Chamber, not just him and me. My hon. Friend and I have corresponded on this subject, as have a number of other hon. Members on both sides of the House. I hope that my remarks will go some way to addressing the points that he has raised.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right to recognise the progress that the Government have made in improving the lives of pensioners. A number of measures, such as bus passes and the winter fuel allowance, have made some of the biggest differences to older people's lives.

[Ms Sally Keeble]

Concessionary fare schemes offer cheap travel on local transport for people who are economically disadvantaged. They are a clear demonstration of our commitment to fighting social exclusion. We want to ensure that bus travel remains within the means of those on limited incomes. I am very much aware of the fact that for people on lower incomes, especially older people, buses are the most frequently used form of transport. My hon. Friend might also reflect on the fact that other people who are socially excluded have great difficulties travelling, and affordable and accessible bus transport is important for them, too.

As my hon. Friend said, because of the particular importance of transport to older people, last spring we implemented the provisions in the Transport Act 2000 requiring local authorities to offer a minimum of 50 per cent. reductions to elderly and disabled people using local bus services. People with disabilities, of course, also experience problems when travelling.

The necessary travel passes must be issued free of charge. Let me say to the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) that although there is only a 50 per cent. reduction in the fare, it is important for people to know that they should not have to pay for their pensioners' travel passes.

Our changes currently benefit some 5.5 million pensioners and 1.5 million disabled people in England and Wales. This will be the first time many of those people have benefited from any travel concession, and the new arrangements are a real advance on what they had before.

Provision for travel concessions is contained in three Acts—the Transport Act 1985, the Greater London Authority Act 1999 and the Transport Act 2000. As I have said, local authorities in England and Wales must arrange for older and disabled people in their area to receive at least a half-fare concession. There is nothing to stop authorities providing a more generous scheme. Indeed, as Members have said, some already do, especially in London.

The 1985 Act gives local authorities discretion to offer more generous concessions on bus and other public transport services—including local trains, metros, light rail and ferries—as well as concessionary travel outside their boundaries, if they so wish. Many authorities already offer local concessions on other modes of public transport. As my hon. Friend says, many also offer transport cheaper than at half price. Obvious examples are London, Merseyside and the west midlands, where free travel is offered not just to pensioners but to people with disabilities.

Some Members mentioned better schemes in Scotland and Wales. Decisions of that sort must be made by devolved Administrations. One consequence of devolution is that those Administrations will sometimes make decisions that differ from those made by the Government in England.

As my hon. Friend said, concessionary travel schemes are important because they allow some of the most socially excluded people, especially pensioners, a chance to travel which they might not otherwise be able to afford. The Government, however, cannot ignore the resource implications. There is no doubt that concessionary fares are expensive for them. Of course it is an attractive option to go further with our statutory half-fare minimum requirement, but making the standard even more generous—perhaps by providing completely free travel—would increase the cost of concessionary travel considerably. As my hon. Friend said, it would raise the total cost of bus travel by some £300 million. That would be in addition to the £490 million that local authorities in England are already spending. Whether authorities offer pensioners free travel on public transport is wholly at their discretion.

My hon. Friend mentioned rural transport, perhaps because of the position of pensioners living in villages. Concessionary fare schemes are not all that we provide to help to subsidise bus services. Only last Friday, the Government announced spending of some £30 million on a series of new rural services under the rural bus challenge scheme. That is extremely important, not because it provides extra concessionary fares but because it provides new and innovative services that meet the needs of some of the most disadvantaged people in rural areas. Some services have been particularly designed to meet the needs of pensioners. The need to be taken to hospital is one of the most obvious. Mobile services are also provided: instead of people being taken to services, the services are taken to people in country areas.

I therefore urge my hon. Friend and others to look carefully at the thoughtful work that the Government are funding local transport authorities to do to make absolutely sure that lack of transport is not a barrier to pensioners and other people with mobility problems using services, going shopping or going about their day-to-day life.

It is undoubtedly true that free or low-price rail travel would produce benefits for passengers, but a huge subsidy cost would arise from such a policy, to be met by the Government and consequently by the taxpayer. As all hon. Members well know, our policy is to stimulate investment in improvements in capacity and quality of rail services, through a mixture of public and private investment. There are no current plans to introduce free or low-price travel generally.

Some train operators promote widespread reduced fares to attract passengers to rail services. For example, the senior railcard is available to people aged 60 and over. That costs £18 a year and offers one third off most rail fares. All train operators are required by the Strategic Rail Authority to participate, and the scheme is run by the Association of Train Operating Companies. The terms of the senior railcard must be no less favourable than under British Rail and may not be amended without the SRA's agreement.

Further recognising the need for pensioners to be able to make long-distance journeys at lower prices, which is important if they are to enjoy the same rights as other people, we announced in November our agreement to a proposal under which coach operators would provide half-price fares to older and disabled passengers on long-distance scheduled coaches in England. In return for those fare concessions, operators would for the first time receive a fuel duty rebate. That will be an important step in taking travel for pensioners forward.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley probably knows, our Travel Concessions (Eligibility) Bill will equalise the entitlement to concessionary travel for men and women at the age of 60. Again, that will improve the position of pensioners.

I am not unsympathetic to the aims of my hon. Friend, but we must look at the financial implications of providing wholly free travel and balance the available funds with the many other competing demands on the public purse—not just services generally but the demands of different people to be able to travel at a reduced price. For example, there is always pressure to include groups such as school children, students and young people. My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) recently introduced a ten-minute Bill to allow local authorities to extend schemes to people aged up to 25.

I hope that my remarks demonstrate how seriously the Government take the needs of older and disabled people. We have taken and continue to take measures to improve their quality of life and to ensure that transport does not act as a barrier to people enjoying their right to move properly around this country and enjoying a good quality of life.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seventeen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 29 January 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LAND AT PALACE AVENUE, KENSINGTON (ACQUISITION OF FREEHOLD) BILL

Read a Second time, and referred to the Examiners of Petitions for Private Bills.

LONDON DEVELOPMENT AGENCY BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Wednesday 6 February.

MERSEY TUNNELS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 7 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Local Government Deregulation

1. **Ms Meg Munn** (Sheffield, Heeley): What deregulation he proposes for local government services. [28435]

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Nick Raynsford): The Government set out their radical and new vision for local government in the recently published White Paper, "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services". It contains a wide range of deregulatory proposals to eliminate unnecessary red tape and to give local councils greater freedom to innovate and to respond to the needs and aspirations of their communities.

Ms Munn: I thank my right hon. Friend for his answer. To be a high-performing council and to benefit from this deregulation, what level of importance is placed on consulting and involving residents and tenants in developing and planning services? What expectations does my right hon. Friend have of comprehensive and meaningful consultation with tenants on housing stock transfer?

Mr. Raynsford: The Government want to see all local authorities striving for excellence both in service delivery and in effective civic leadership. That means engaging their local communities in effective partnerships and in talking through issues of concern to individual groups in the community.

Consultation with tenants' groups about proposed stock transfer, consultation with other community groups about regeneration schemes and building together local partnerships that will discuss how the community can best address the problems that it faces are all fundamental parts of our vision for effective local government. I hope that my hon. Friend's authority will adopt this approach, and every other authority too.

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley): I admire the Minister's ability to keep a straight face when he gives such an answer. It is astonishing gall to hear about this sort of deregulation from a Minister and a Government who have loaded local government with volume after volume of regulations. Is it not correct that the Audit Commission has doubled in size because of the inspections that it has to carry out? Some of the deregulation that the right hon. Gentleman talks about will require more regulations so that there can be regulation or deregulation, and the cost will land on the taxpayer, who is already facing a £600 million bill for inspection on best value alone.

Mr. Raynsford: As is too often the case, the hon. Gentleman is wide of the mark. We are introducing a series of deregulatory measures, many of which will sweep away some of the pernicious consequences of the Conservative Government's period in power. In particular, there were the extraordinary centralist controls over borrowing by local government, which were imposed by the Government of whom he was a member. We shall give local authorities freedom to borrow within prudent limits so that they can take responsibility for their decisions. That is all part of a process of allowing decision making to go back to where it should be, which is at local level.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Is it not the case that for local authorities to benefit from the proposed deregulation, they will need a decent grant settlement? Has my right hon. Friend received representations from especially county district authorities about the extremely disappointing finance which was announced recently? Will he see me in relation to that in my capacity as co-chair of the town and country group of MPs in this place?

Mr. Raynsford: It is a slightly curious perception that there is a disappointing settlement when it involves a 7.5 per cent. increase in grant to local authorities. By comparison with the period when there was a Conservative Government, when local authorities often saw no increases and in some instances cuts in grant entitlement, we have given real-terms increases year on year to local government, culminating in a 7.5 per cent. increase, which is three times the rate of inflation. By any standards, that is a good settlement for local government. We hope that local government will respond appropriately.

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): This Labour Government have piled more and more regulations and burdens on to local authorities without providing proper funding. Does the Minister agree with what his colleague, the secretary of the county councils' Labour group, recently wrote about this year's council tax rises? He said that

> "9.9 per cent feels like safe ground, with 8.9 per cent. looking attractive"?

Does the Minister think that 8.9 per cent. looks attractive to the average pensioner?

Mr. Raynsford: No, I do not, and it is not necessary for me to do so. As I have made clear, the settlement put in place by the Government amounts to a 7.5 per cent. increase. Substantial increases will go to county councils, which will receive a minimum of 4 per cent. That is well above the rate of inflation, and is guaranteed by the floors that we have put in place. It compares very markedly with the cuts in grant and in standard spending assessments introduced by the previous Government. It is not surprising that the Opposition are nervous about council tax increases. The Government are giving a decent settlement to local authorities, and we expect them to respond accordingly.

London Underground

2. **Harry Cohen** (Leyton and Wanstead): What recent decisions he has made in respect of the future of London Underground. [28436]

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): London Transport is responsible for the implementation of the plans for the modernisation of London Underground. Given the importance of ensuring that the contracts provide value for money, I decided in October last year to obtain independent advice from Ernst and Young on this issue. I intend to publish this report next Thursday, 7 February, which is the day we expect London Transport to make its in-principle decision on whether the contracts achieve value for money.

Harry Cohen: Are not the final bid contracts shaping up to be a potential disaster, for London Underground, for London's fare and council tax payers, and for public control over the system? Will not the private contractors be completely in the driving seat? They will be able to perform worse than they do now and still get big bonuses, to tap the public purse for cost overruns and 30 years of profits, and to renegotiate after seven and a half years from a monopoly position. They will also be able to set their own priorities, not the public's. If my right hon. Friend is so confident about the contracts, will he put all the relevant data in the public domain, and have a debate in the House before he signs on the dotted line?

Mr. Byers: The modernisation of the tube will bring in some £13 billion of investment over 15 years. I hope that my hon. Friend will recognise that what London Underground desperately needs is that level of investment. There has been chronic underinvestment in the London underground for generations, and we are going to change that. However, we must ensure that we get value for money. We are talking about billions of pounds of investment, and we must get a return for every pound that we spend on the underground.

I assure my hon. Friend that London Underground will remain in the public sector, and publicly controlled. The private sector will work for a publicly controlled London Underground, so our modernisation proposals do not include any privatisation.

As for holding a debate on the modernisation plans, I assure my hon. Friend that all the relevant information will be put into the public arena. London Underground has agreed to do that next Thursday, 7 February. There will then be a three-week consultation period, involving the Mayor of London and Transport for London, and all of us will have the opportunity to take part. If you are agreeable, Mr. Speaker, I hope towards the end of next week to be able to make a statement to the House on how the Government intend to take matters forward.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Will the Secretary of State confirm that, in opposition, the Labour party was critical about the level of investment in London Underground under the previous Conservative Government? Will he confirm that investment since 1997 has been far below that achieved in the equivalent period before 1997?

Mr. Byers: I think that the issue is whether—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] I shall answer the question in my own terms, as the House would expect. The choice is between a future made up of all our yesterdays, with people blaming each other, and £13 billion of investment going into London Underground. As Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, I want the latter, and ensuring that it happens is my obligation and responsibility. My duty is not to try and rewrite history, but to look forward and deliver the investment that London and Londoners so badly need.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Does not the future of the underground depend on good industrial relations? Are the Government committed to the view, which is attributed to the Prime Minister's press secretary, that they should in future support compulsory and binding arbitration in public transport disputes?

Mr. Byers: The Prime Minister's official spokesman—indeed, the Prime Minister himself, which is probably more important—*[Interruption.]* The Prime Minister has said very clearly at the Dispatch Box that we believe that arbitration is the best way forward in these continuing disputes. For that simple reason, it is in no one's interest, whether we are talking about London Underground, South West Trains or any other company, to have strike action. Passengers will look for alternative modes of transport, which would be bad for the railways and for the underground. Arbitration is about the justice of a case; strike action is just about strength. It is about time that both parties put the interests of the travelling party first. That is what the Prime Minister has said, and it is what I say.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): May I take it that the answer to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) is that the Government have underspent, underestimated and underperformed by some 30 per cent. in relation to the underground? The right hon. Gentleman talks about what will be produced next Thursday. Will he produce plan B?

He will recall that he said to the Select Committee that he was working on a plan B to use if the public-private partnership did not work. He said that they were working on it, they had time available to them and referred to the middle of January or thereabouts. Will he, in his statement, tell us what the alternative is to PPP? Will he confirm that the B in plan B stands for Lord Birt?

Mr. Byers: This is a serious issue, about how we can secure the £13 billion of investment in London Underground. I will meet the obligation that I gave the Select Committee about ensuring that there will be a plan B ready in case we need to use it. Unlike the Conservative party, we are approaching this not from a position of dogma, but with regard to what is in the public interest. That is why we have said clearly that these contracts will need to satisfy the value-for-money test because the public interest must come first. I want to see a good deal for Londoners. That means getting the £13 billion of investment going in over the next 15 years. It means seeing a level of improvement that the tube has been crying out for years.

Next week, people will have a choice. Those who block the modernisation proposals will be the wreckers, while the reformers will want to go ahead with modernisation and change. We must ensure that safety is not compromised, there is no privatisation and there is value for money. Then we will see the investment in the London underground that is so badly needed.

Metropolitan Line

3. **Mr. Gareth R. Thomas** (Harrow, West): What action he is taking to improve the performance of the Metropolitan line. [28437]

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): The performance of the Metropolitan line is an operational matter for London Underground, but I recognise that it has been declining in recent years. The significant improvements in performance, which we all want for the tube network, can be secured only through stable, long-term investment. That is what the Government's plans for a publicly run, privately built tube will deliver.

Mr. Thomas: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Is he aware of the importance of the Metropolitan line to those living in the west Harrow, north Harrow, Pinner and Rayners Lane parts of my constituency? Although I welcome the news of the announcement which may be made next week, will he ensure that the Met line is targeted for early investment, not least because its rolling stock is the oldest in the network?

Mr. Spellar: I could hardly fail to be aware of the importance of the proposals to my hon. Friend's constituents precisely because he is so assiduous in presenting their case. We recognise that the age of the stock means that newer rolling stock will be required, as is also the case for many of the other lines on the network. That is why we have been exploring these proposals and look forward to the announcement next week.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): I am sure that my long-suffering Metropolitan line travellers will be very reassured by the Minister's answer. Will he confirm that even within the current time scale for his botched PPP—whatever that time scale might be—it will take between 10 and 15 years before new signalling and the infrastructure on the Metropolitan line will be modernised?

Mr. Spellar: The programme on all the lines will take effect over a period of time and will include the replacement of signalling where required and, of course, the replacement of rolling stock. There will also be improvements to stations. Detailed proposals will be set out when the announcement about the London Transport decision is made next week. Like the hon. Gentleman, we look forward to the discussion and debate that will follow, but it would be premature to go into detail about the various lines until that announcement has been made.

Council Housing

4. **Mr. Alan Simpson** (Nottingham, South): What plans he has to provide assistance to local authorities to increase the stock of council housing. [28438]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): Finance for the provision of new social housing is mainly made to housing associations through the Housing Corporation's approved development programme. Local authorities can also fund provision through their housing capital programme, although we expect that to be done through housing associations as they offer better value for money.

An amount of £2.6 billion has been provided to support housing investment by local authorities in 2001–02. That is three times the amount allocated in 1997–98.

Mr. Simpson: In 1991, under a Conservative Government with no particular love of the public sector, local authorities were still able to build a grand total of 16,550 council houses. In the last complete year for which figures are available, we have allowed councils to build only 361 council houses. Just to complicate matters, 600,000 families found themselves involved in stock transfers because the rules of the housing game have been so stacked as to force local authorities to sell off one set of council tenants to fund the housing improvements of another. Will the Minister and her team look again at the rules in the housing system to ensure that we once again have a Labour Government who are unashamed to be a direct provider and supporter of the delivery of council houses?

Ms Keeble: We have a Labour Government who have as their absolute priority the combating of homelessness and the provision of decent homes for people. Our target is to provide 100,000 new or improved homes. We have a commitment to bring all social housing up to a decent standard. We have a commitment to provide a homelessness directorate—that will come on stream in April. We also have a commitment to provide people with a choice of housing, either from local authority or housing association stock or in various forms of shared ownership.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): What message of hope can the Minister give my constituents? There are 1,400 families on the waiting list, but last year the local authority and the housing association were able to allocate only 200 homes.

Ms Keeble: If the hon. Gentleman looks back over the records of applications and acceptances by local authorities for the past decade, he will find that figures for homelessness are now lower than they were a decade ago. He will also find that, because some of those figures are indeed increasing again, we have taken steps to deal with the problems and the figures will improve.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I welcome the extra investment in council housing that the Government have overseen. I welcome, too, the distinct improvements that I have seen in the condition of council housing in my constituency. However, there is some concern in my constituency about the steep increases in council rents that the Liberal Democrat-controlled city council is busy blaming on the Government.

Ms Keeble: If my hon. Friend is talking about rent restructuring, I assure her that the Government have recognised the need to limit rent increases in areas of high value, and we have taken steps to ensure that those rent increases are kept to a minimum, although of course local authorities always have discretion and I appreciate the problems produced by the decisions of the Liberal Democrat council in her area.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): The Minister makes great play of plans, aspirations and her aims for the future, but does she not understand the basic arithmetic that the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) laid out so well? In the last three years of the Conservative Government, we built 150,600 new dwellings, but altogether in their first Parliament, the Labour Government have built 95,500—a decline of 40 per cent. in the amount of social housing provided by the Government. How can she possibly stand at the Dispatch Box and claim to be the friend of homeless people when the fact is that the Government are building far fewer houses?

Ms Keeble: My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) mentioned figures starting in 1991. In 1991–92, 139,630 homeless families were accepted by local authorities. Last year, when we were supposed to have a record increase in homelessness, that figure stood at 114,350, so the figure is now very much better than it was 10 years ago. In addition, we are now tackling a backlog of poor-standard housing that was a legacy of the Conservative Government's underinvestment.

Mr. Speaker: I call Sally Keeble—my apology, Karen Buck.

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): I am honoured by the mistake.

The stock of council housing in the London borough of Westminster was severely depleted by Shirley Porter's homes for votes scandal. Will my hon. Friend assure me that she will give the council's new leadership all possible support to get back the £27 million owed to the people of Westminster, to be spent on increasing the stock of affordable housing? Does she think it extraordinary that we have never heard a single word of apology for that scandal from Conservative Members?

Ms Keeble: I completely agree with my hon. Friend's remarks about an apology from the Conservative party, and I pay tribute to those Labour councillors in Westminster who pursued Dame Shirley Porter for many years. My hon. Friend has a particular interest in homelessness in London, so may I take the opportunity to point out that there were 38,220 homeless families in London in 1991, and that that figure is now down to 29,630?

Local Government Reform

5. **Mr. Stephen O'Brien** (Eddisbury): If he will make a statement on his proposals for reform of local government. [28439]

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): Last December's White Paper sets out the Government's agenda for delivering better quality public services and strengthening local leadership. It contains a wide range of proposals to give councils greater freedom to respond to the local needs and aspirations of their communities. It marks a new stage in relations between local and central Government, recognising that we both have a shared interest in delivering high-quality public services.

Mr. O'Brien: Will the Secretary of State confirm that Labour's manifesto stated that the Government would review two-tier authorities in the light of any introduction of regional assemblies? In other words, will Cheshire county council have to be abolished if an unwanted north-west regional assembly is introduced?

Mr. Byers: The Labour manifesto was very clear where we spoke about the need for local people in the regions to decide whether or not they wanted elected regional assemblies. We said that they would be able to do that only if there was a predominantly unitary system because we do not want to have an additional tier of local government, but there is no agenda for the abolition of Cheshire county council, or any county council. I should not pre-empt the White Paper, but nothing will be imposed; it will be for local people in a region to make their own decision. That is what the devolution of power is all about. I know that it is difficult for Conservative Members to understand that, but we on the Labour Benches understand it, and it is what we intend to do.

Mr. Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): When considering the reforms in conjunction with the welcome proposals to deal with the hundreds of thousands of abandoned cars that litter our streets, will my right hon. Friend consider arguing in his discussions with the Treasury that councils that operate blitz schemes, such as that in Medway, where 700 cars were cleared away in seven weeks, should be allowed to claw back some of the revenue—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question is about the reform of local government.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Would the Secretary of State be surprised to hear of a council that had undertaken two separate referendums on the new form of executive government in its area and then decided to reject the results of both referendums? Would he find that a little unacceptable in those circumstances?

Mr. Byers: If the hon. Gentleman draws my attention to the specific local council, I shall certainly look into the details. The Government take the view that we want modernisation and changes to take place in the governance of local authorities, but we do not want to impose them. We want to give local people a genuine choice. If local authorities ignore the wish and the will of local people, the Government will take action, but only if there is a clear demonstration that local people want to embrace change.

Social Housing

6. **Mr. Terry Rooney** (Bradford, North): What measures he is taking to improve the management of social housing. [28440]

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Nick Raynsford): Under best value, all social landlords are expected to seek continuous improvements in standards of housing management with their performance subject to inspection. Our new financial framework for local authority housing encourages robust and innovative management. In parallel, the Housing Corporation is introducing a new regulatory code and inspection regime for registered social landlords.

Mr. Rooney: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. In accordance with Government guidelines, local tenants in my local authority were consulted by postal ballot on the future management that they wanted. Some 82 per cent. said that they wanted to stay with the council, but the Tory-Liberal alliance then decided ideologically to go for stock transfer. Since then, it has spent £750,000 putting one side of the case. That amounts to political electioneering. Does my right hon. Friend not think that both sides of the argument on each of the options should be put to tenants so that they can make an informed decision?

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend makes the absolutely valid point that tenants should decide in a ballot on the future management arrangements for their homes. It is right that information should be made available and we encourage it to be provided impartially and objectively. Ultimately, it is for the tenants to decide.

In respect of Bradford, I am sure that my hon. Friend will welcome the fact that, as a result of the Government's substantial increases in investment, Bradford city council now receives under the housing revenue account something in the region of £13.5 million for the maintenance of its housing stock. That is approximately £500 for each property per annum. That is an indication of the Labour Government's commitment to improving the management and maintenance of council housing.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Does the Minister recall the Prime Minister's speech on the 30th anniversary of Shelter? He vowed:

> "Our approach will be founded on the basic aim of ensuring that everyone has the chance to a decent home".

Why then has the number of social housing units—in the four years before 1997 compared with the four years after 1997—gone down by 37 per cent. when the number of empty council houses in the period of the Labour Government has gone up by 7 per cent? Staggeringly, the number of people in bed and breakfast during the period of the Labour Government has also gone up by 152 per cent. Is that not an indictment of the Secretary of State's Department's failure to live up to the high ideals of the Prime Minister or to protect the most vulnerable in our society?

Mr. Raynsford: On the contrary, it is an indication of the hon. Gentleman's ability to find details that he is very happy to quote without looking at the bigger picture. If he looks at the wood rather than the trees, he will see that there has been a two and half fold increase in investment in tackling the problem of underinvestment in social housing. The investment has predominantly gone in to tackling the appalling backlog of sub-standard housing that was left behind by the previous Conservative Government and that totalled £19 billion of overdue repairs. That problem is now being put right. Equally, substantial increased investment is coming in through registered social landlords to increase the output of new social housing.

The hon. Gentleman would do well to remember the overall picture. It is one of a Government committed—as the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble) said—to tackling homelessness, to reducing the number of people living in sub-standard housing and to offering genuine choice of a decent home to all our people.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): Will my right hon. Friend consider the problems that negative subsidies have caused my authority in the management of its social housing? They mean that rents will have to be increased to meet the extra costs that the Government charge. Will he consider the representations received from Wakefield district council on the very question of negative subsidies and on the help that is required to repair and to improve the condition of council houses?

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend will be aware that as a result of the new major repairs allowance introduced by the Government less than a year ago, there is a substantial increase in the direct funding for the maintenance of housing stock. The overall subsidy system seeks to achieve a fair distribution of subsidies between authorities throughout the country so that those that are able to meet their costs help those that are still in need of substantial additional funding. That is the natural corollary of a fair national system to tackle need wherever it arises. However, we shall certainly pay attention to representations from my hon. Friend's authority and others.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Is the Minister aware that I spent part of yesterday visiting constituents in Terrington, St. Clement who complained about the dumping of rubbish on the edge of a housing association estate, opened a few years ago by one of his predecessors? In one location, I saw beds and chairs. About the only thing I did not see were fridges, and no doubt they will arrive next week. The residents said that it is difficult to find out whom to contact about the problem because many housing associations, although doing an excellent job, can be remote. What advice will he give my constituents?

Mr. Raynsford: I was not aware of where the hon. Gentleman was on his constituency visit yesterday. My guess is that his constituents would not particularly welcome his remarks, which might act as an incentive to the dumping of fridges in that area. They should be looking for effective action to deal with the problem of antisocial behaviour. That is exactly why the Government introduced antisocial behaviour orders and have been encouraging all local authorities to deal effectively with antisocial behaviour by council tenants and others who are making their neighbours' lives a misery.

7. **Margaret Moran** (Luton, South): What measures he intends to take to monitor the number of evictions by social housing landlords. [28441]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): My Department is currently discussing with the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Court Service ways of achieving a better breakdown of the data that they are currently collecting on possession orders by social landlords. That will make it possible to monitor the trends much better and to improve our understanding of the causes of homelessness.

Margaret Moran: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply and welcome the proposals to reinstate the collection of statistics from registered social landlords on the number of tenants evicted and the reasons for their eviction. I am sure she is aware that on Friday the Lord Chancellor's Department issued figures that show a 12.2 per cent. increase in the number of tenants evicted. Does she agree that, for some social landlords, eviction and subsequent homelessness is the first rather than the last resort? Will she also consider ways in which we can introduce new projects, especially mediation, to prevent eviction and homelessness so that we retain families in their own homes?

Ms Keeble: There are two points about the figures. First, we need to understand why people are being evicted, and there is some discussion of whether that is because of rent arrears or antisocial behaviour. Secondly, my hon. Friend is right: we need to know better how to deal with some of the problems that lead up to eviction. We are considering some of the different projects, including one in Dundee and one in Bolton, to ensure that we learn lessons from them that we can apply elsewhere.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Will the Minister give an undertaking that no one is evicted from social housing as a result of a failure by authorities to process housing benefit that is due to a tenant? If she cannot, will she issue an instruction, or take whatever other action is required, to ensure that from now on no one, whether in council or housing association property, is ever evicted because of such a failure?

Ms Keeble: We are getting the figures broken down to see which evictions are due to rent arrears and which are due to antisocial behaviour or to other types of action. Obviously we do not know how many of those might be due to unprocessed housing benefit claims. Action is being taken to deal with the problems of processing housing benefit, and we hope that that will not remain a reason for people to be evicted.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): May I raise a problem found in my constituency, in villages such as Grange Villa, where private landlords are buying property—in some cases, entire streets—to house people who have been evicted by the council and social landlords? The majority of those people are on housing benefit, and landlords pay no regard to the problems and chaos that they cause in small communities such as those villages in North Durham. Can steps be taken to enforce a code on such landlords?

Ms Keeble: My hon. Friend has identified an extremely important problem. First, we are considering licensing private sector landlords, which will hopefully ensure that they take some responsibility for housing management and do not indulge in benefit grazing, as I think it is called. Secondly, we have set up a research project into ways of dealing with antisocial behaviour, particularly in private sector housing. We recognise that there is a problem of antisocial people being dumped in private sector housing where landlords take no steps to try to manage their behaviour.

Road Building

8. **Mr. Andrew Stunell** (Hazel Grove): If he will make a statement on which road-building proposals are being considered by his Department. [28442]

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): A number of road-building proposals are being appraised within multimodal and road-based studies set up as a consequence of the 1998 roads review. Decisions on those studies will be announced as they are made. In addition, local authorities recently submitted road proposals for funding by central Government as part of their local transport plans. The latest local transport settlement was announced on 13 December.

Mr. Stunell: May I draw the Minister's attention to the outstanding decisions that are awaited on the south-east Manchester multimodal study and tell him that my constituents are desperately keen to hear the Government's decision? Can he give me a date or a timetable for that decision, so that I can put my constituents' minds at rest about the fact that the Government are serious about investing in multimodal studies?

Mr. Spellar: I cannot give an exact date, but I am aware of the concern that the outcomes of the multimodal studies should be implemented as soon as possible, not least because although there has, quite properly, been an in-depth evaluation, the problems exist now. However, I anticipate that a local Liberal Democrat councillor will put out a focus leaflet opposing the road, and then we will be told that local Liberal groups make decisions based on local circumstances. If the hon. Gentleman assures me that that will not be the case, I will look on the matter even more favourably.

Dr. Jack Cunningham (Copeland): Will my right hon. Friend look thoroughly at proposals currently affecting the A595 trunk road, the only trunk road serving Copeland and many hundreds of square miles of west and south-west Cumbria? Will he ask the Highways Agency to expedite the announcement, made by his predecessor last year, that the Parton to Lilly Hall improvement would go ahead? Will he also ask the agency to desist from proposing to de-trunk the rest of that sole trunk road in west and south-west Cumbria, particularly as to do so would be to negate the many excellent initiatives taken in his Department and others, including those on market towns, on the diversification of rural economies and on the development of tourism? Is not it nonsensical and unacceptable that an executive agency should be taking decisions that negate ministerial decisions and Government objectives?

Mr. Spellar: I am sure that my right hon. Friend is well aware that local authorities in the area hold differing opinions, not on extra investment, but on de-trunking and on the right route down which to proceed. That matter needs to be resolved by discussion, perhaps in the first instance with the Highways Agency. However, I am certainly prepared to receive representations from my right hon. Friend and his constituents to enable us to make the right decision in this case.

Mr. Archie Norman (Tunbridge Wells): May I draw the Minister's attention to the appalling state of the A21 arterial route to Hastings, a relatively deprived area? I remind him that this Government cancelled the Weald and Downlands design, build, finance and operate project in 1997, and since then we have had review after review—I think that this Government have review disease when it comes to road building—but no action. The record of fatalities and the increasing congestion on the road are simply appalling.

Last July, the Secretary of State committed himself to two further reviews, of Castle Hill and the route south of Pembury. We have not heard a dicky-bird since then. Can the Minister now tell the House when those reviews are expected to report, whether the reports will be published and when we can expect to see some action?

Mr. Spellar: The hon. Gentleman made great play of this Government's behaviour; I do not recall his lot doing much on the A21 in the previous 18 years. However, he is right to draw attention to that road; I acknowledge that he was gracious enough to say that when we looked at the area, although we did not go ahead with the Hastings bypass, we agreed to undertake further studies of the A21 because there are fairly strong opinions on the subject, as he is aware. On the one hand, there is a considerable environmental lobby, which is concerned about areas of natural beauty and the landscape; on the other, there is a real need, which I appreciate and understand, to improve access to Hastings and the surrounding area, as well as the safety of that road. That is why we ordered further studies; I shall write to the hon. Gentleman with details of the exact timetable.

Mr. Ivan Henderson (Harwich): I welcome the £0.5 million investment in Jaywick Sands, in my constituency. A major road reconstruction has just begun at Jaywick, which the Government introduced under the local transport plan. Will the Minister take a special interest in the future of Jaywick? Many other roads need to be reconstructed; some streets still have no street lighting, proper drainage or footpaths. Is my right hon. Friend aware that if the Opposition had had their way and been elected, they would have reversed the Government's policy on local transport—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Mr. Spellar.

Mr. Spellar: The previous environment spokesman indicated clearly that the Conservatives wanted to move away from local transport plans, the benefits of which my hon. Friend has rightly identified in many areas, not least his own. I shall certainly take account of his representations; I hope that he will follow them up with a letter to me on the details of the subsequent proposals so that we can give them further sympathetic consideration.

Mr. Speaker: Don Foster.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath) *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Foster: I should be grateful, whichever Minister is going to reply, for confirmation that there is a significant difference between the strategic plan of the Strategic Rail Authority and the 10-year plan. The strategic plan suggests that there is a—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Perha[illegible] should apologise to the hon. Gentleman; I called him a bit too soon.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): It is said in press reports that Ove Arup has now worked out what needs to be done to the M6 as part of the multimodal study of routes from the west midlands to the north-west. With all that information going to the Minister, can he tell me once and for all when the study will be produced so that those of us in the north-west who occasionally try to get through Birmingham on the M6 may do so with greater certainty that we will reach our destination?

Mr. Spellar: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that as a result of the Government's authorising the Birmingham north relief road—soon to be the M6 toll road—he will have an alternative route for getting round that blockage; I hope that he is suitably grateful when he uses it in future. He is right to draw attention to significant interest in the west midlands multimodal study and the midlands/Manchester study, which both look at road and rail access. As he knows, those studies have already reached initial publication; we then consulted the appropriate regional bodies. As I said in an earlier response, I accept that the public have been waiting a considerable time for the final reports. We need early decisions; then we must award contracts to deal with the considerable congestion experienced not only by the right hon. Gentleman, but by midlands and north-west industry. That is an important consideration, which is why we shall take action.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): In 1996, after four years of protest and the blighting of many homes, a proposed outlying route to ease congestion on the Gateshead western bypass was abandoned. Is the Minister aware that residents whose homes had been purchased by the Highways Agency in preparation for the building of that road were offered the chance to repurchase? They were given a written assurance that they could do so safe in the knowledge that the road proposal would not be revived. Can my right hon. Friend explain why that proposal is back on the agenda and why those who accepted the Department's word back in 1996 are having their lives blighted all over again?

Mr. Spellar: My hon. Friend has to accept that, given that those studies are independent and will put options to us, it would be slightly odd if we pre-determined all outcomes before the work had been undertaken. I am however fully aware of the controversy that arose in the Newcastle area when the western bypass was last proposed. I am aware of other proposals for work in that area to deal with what is widely recognised as a bottleneck on the A1 around Newcastle, and with considerable local traffic too. I undertake to give my hon. Friend's points consideration. I hope that he will also write to me on behalf of his constituents, outlining the concerns, so that that can be taken into account when we are evaluating the multimodal study with a view to taking action.

Strategic Rail Plans

9. **Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight): How much *(a)* private capital he expects to be needed and *(b)* public funding he expects to provide to fund his strategic rail plans. [28443]

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): We are planning for total rail expenditure over the next 10 years of £64.9 billion. That comprises private sector funding of just over £34.3 billion and Government support of just over £33.5 billion. The figure includes £3 billion of Government revenue support for private investment. I am also pleased to be able to inform the House that the total transport 10-year plan financial envelope has been increased by £2.2 billion, from £179.7 billion to £181.9 billion.

Mr. Turner: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer, but where is the private sector investment going to come from? Is he aware of recent reports that the amount of money available for the private finance initiative has almost halved over the past 12 months, not least because of his mishandling of those who had invested in Railtrack? What would he say to pensioners and others in my constituency about that? Would he have been willing to invest his pension fund in Railtrack?

Mr. Byers: There are two issues. The first is in relation to private sector involvement in rail and the 10-year transport plan generally. We saw just 10 days ago, with the GNER extension, £100 million worth of private investment going into that two-year franchise. A number of new franchises are being negotiated at the moment, which will secure hundreds of millions of pounds of private sector investment in our railway system.

On the second point about shareholders in Railtrack, I know that the Conservative party position is that Railtrack shareholders should receive compensation from taxpayers.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): No.

Mr. Byers: If that is not the case, we look forward to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) saying so. We know that £1 billion from taxpayers would need to be made available to compensate Railtrack shareholders, and we will not make that money available because, as applies to all shareholders, their investments can go down as well as up.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Since my right hon. Friend will be aware of the extraordinary accounting that led Railtrack to come up with figures for things such as modernisation of the west coast main line that proved not only wholly inaccurate but very misleading, will he assure us that the money that will be pledged by Her Majesty's Government, which is so desperately needed, will be based on accurate figures and not those of the companies concerned?

Mr. Byers: Clearly, one of the real challenges for the administrator and the successor to Railtrack will be to ensure that their forecasts are accurate. That is one reason why we want the successor to concentrate on renewals, operation and maintenance, and not to be involved in major infrastructure projects, which to a large extent were the undoing of Railtrack, as it was unable to control its costs. So it is important that we learn the lessons of the failures of Railtrack and ensure that they are not repeated. That is what we intend to do when we come to consider the proposals made to us by the administrator.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): As I gave the Secretary of State advance notice of my question, will he confirm that the Government are beginning to have cold feet about the likely investment in the railways from the private sector, that the strategic plan shows a £4.5 billion reduction in the anticipated money from the private sector compared with the 10-year plan figures, and that the Government intend to make up that £4.5 billion from public sector investment? Given his welcome announcement today of the additional £2.2 billion going into the 10-year plan, will the Secretary of State acknowledge that that still leaves the 10-year plan £2.3 billion short for non-railway matters, and will he therefore tell the House where that money will come from? Will it come from the road-building programme, at a time when we have the highest backlog of road repairs and maintenance, or will it come from the buses, the day we are told that our bus services are in crisis?

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman had clearly prepared that question before he heard my reply. As I had had early warning of his question, I tried to make sure that in my reply I answered the points that he intended to make. As a result of the additional £2.2 billion that is being put into the 10-year transport plan, we are able to use some of the unallocated provision to support rail, and with the additional money that I announced today, we do not have to take money from the roads, buses or local transport budgets. I had hoped that the hon. Gentleman would applaud the fact that we have that extra investment to support the 10-year plan, and that as a result, we will be able to deliver the significant improvements that our transport system needs.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): I welcome the additional investment, which I am sure will make a substantial contribution to clearing up at least some of the mess left by the Conservative party. Will my right hon. Friend consider the proportion of that investment devoted to transport—specifically, rail—in the west midlands? There is much disquiet in the region about that. Does my right hon. Friend agree that unless we get our rail infrastructure right in the west midlands, it will be a problem not just for the west midlands, but for the entire transport route from the south-east to the north-west and beyond?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend is right to point out the importance of Birmingham and the west midlands as a hub for travel, not just in England, but throughout the United Kingdom. He will no doubt welcome the commitments made by the cross-country services to increase both frequency and capacity, which will assist the west midlands significantly. Through the local transport schemes, we are looking closely at how we can provide additional help and resources through projects for the commuter lines into Birmingham. When my hon. Friend has had an opportunity to study the detail of the proposals, he will see that the west midlands will benefit significantly from the implementation of the strategic rail plan.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): Will the Secretary of State explain to the House how £33.5 billion plus £34.5 billion add up to £65 billion?

Mr. Byers: It is £64.9 billion, actually. The reason is that £3 billion is netted off. If it were not, we could be accused of double counting. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] And clearly, the hon. Lady has not seen table A2 in the original 10-year plan. If she had, and in particular if she had seen the footnote to table A2, she would see that £3 billion has been netted off to ensure that there is no double counting.

Mrs. May: If the Secretary of State wants to avoid double counting, he should say that the public sector investment is £30 billion, not £33 billion. He admitted today that he lost £2 billion of funding for Railtrack, that his figures have included double counting, and that nearly £68 billion is less than £65 billion. I can only assume that he is going to Edexcel for advice on how to do his maths.

With train delays up 75 per cent. since the right hon. Gentleman pulled the plug on Railtrack, train passengers want to know when the trains are going to run on time. Will the Secretary of State tell the House how much of the investment in the strategic plan for the railways will be spent directly on improvements to track and signals, leading to increased capacity for passenger services?

Mr. Byers: The figures are outlined in the strategic plan, and the details are in the proposals on the franchising system. I would have thought that the hon. Lady would applaud the fact that an extra £2.2 billion is going into the 10-year transport plan. That money will be made available to improve the transport system. The real issue that the people of this country face is whether the Conservatives would take that money away; under this Government it is going in. The hon. Lady cannot give a commitment to match our levels of spending on transport. Indeed, although the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) said on the "GMTV" programme that he was able to match that money, he was then slapped down by a representative of Conservative central office, who said:

> "Eric Pickles does not believe that his remarks amount to a spending commitment."

That is because the Conservatives cannot make a spending commitment. We can, and that is what we are doing. We are investing in rail and in transport, because that is what the travelling public deserve.

Farming and Food Commission Report

3.30 pm

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey) (*by private notice*): To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will respond to a question on the report of the policy commission on the future of food and farming, of which I have given prior notice.

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): The independent policy commission on the future of farming and food, chaired by Sir Don Curry, delivered its report to the Government this morning. Copies of the report have been placed in the House Libraries and in the Vote Office.

The commission was set up in August of last year in fulfilment of a manifesto commitment, and I would like to offer the Government's sincere thanks to Sir Don and each of the commission members for the very hard work that they have put in over a short but effective period of consultation. Some 1,000 organisations and individuals have offered their views, and to undertake an exercise of this type in five months is indeed a tall order and a considerable achievement.

I very much welcome the report and the valuable ideas that it contains. The commission has delivered what we asked of it: a clear vision of a sustainable, competitive and diverse farming and food sector, playing a dynamic role in the rural economy and delivering effectively and efficiently the environmental outputs that society demands. We wholeheartedly support its broad analysis and conclusions.

The key themes identified in the report seem to us to be the right ones. The year 2001 was a desperately difficult one for farming and rural communities. Foot and mouth was a catastrophe, but, as the commission's report makes clear, farming's problems are wider and of longer standing. To make farming viable again, it is vital that we improve the links between farmers, their markets and their consumers, and reinforce the relationship between farming, the countryside and the environment.

I am sure that the House will understand that, having just received the report, I am not in a position to give a view on each of the many specific and detailed recommendations that it contains, but I shall pick out some of its key proposals.

Reform of the common agricultural policy, which the report advocates, is, of course, our long-standing strategic aim, and I am pleased to see that the report endorses our strategic objectives in that area. The report rightly points out that we already have some mechanisms in the CAP that allow us to transfer CAP moneys out of production subsidies into broader rural land management and environmental directions. Modulation is one such means, and the report makes ambitious recommendations to step up drastically the role of modulation. The Government accept that we should explore the use of such mechanisms, and endorse the need seriously to consider such shifts.

The commission notes the vital role of farming in contributing to a healthy and attractive environment. Under the England rural development programme, we already have many schemes in place to enhance and protect the environment and the countryside. The commission's view is that we need to go further. Its proposals for a broad and shallow agri-environment scheme are timely, as we are just embarking on a major review of such schemes.

The report makes it clear that if we are to have a profitable industry that is capable of thriving without production subsidy, the industry needs to take action to improve its own performance—for example, by cutting costs, by adding value, and by diversification—and that the role for Government is as a partner in, and facilitator of, that process. The report states, however, that the impetus must come from the industry itself, working within the food chain as a whole. That is why I am pleased that the report proposes the creation of a food chain centre to bring together all parts of the supply chain, with the aim of monitoring and improving competitiveness.

In other areas covered by the report, such as genetic modification, scrapie eradication, sheep national envelopes and animal disease insurance, the commission appears to have made recommendations that work very much with the grain of what we have been trying to achieve. The report makes it clear that its recommendations apply not just to the Government, or, within the Government, just to my Department, but we stand ready to work with the food and farming industries as they address the challenges that they face, because we need farming to succeed.

We all need time to consider how best to proceed and to assess the report's financial and other implications, but it is our firm intention that ideas such as those advanced by the commission will make a substantial contribution to a new strategy for sustainable, diverse, modern and adaptable farming that is integrated with the rest of the food chain, and which takes into account the needs of the environment and of the rural economy.

We intend to launch such a strategy later this year—perhaps towards the end of the summer—when detailed policy measures have been developed and drawn up. We will engage stakeholders across the country in that process, which will begin in March, when I hope to meet leaders of the farming and food industries, and of environmental, consumer and rural interests, to discover how best to drive forward the commission's agenda. I will announce further details in due course.

Mr. Ainsworth: I thank the Secretary of State for her response.

Like you, Mr. Speaker, I thought that the Curry report was a report to Government, but it has turned out to be more of a report to the media. Details of its content began appearing in last week's newspapers, and by this morning's departmental press conference, it had been so well trailed that it rather lost the element of surprise. Will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to express concern at the leaking of much of the report's content, and to assure the House that her Department was in no way responsible? When did she first see the report?

Having said that, I congratulate Sir Don Curry and his team on producing a substantial report against the Secretary of State's near-impossible deadline. Had the Government not been in such an unseemly hurry to divert attention from their miserable handling of the foot and mouth crisis, they might have got a better result. There are certainly aspects of the report that we can all welcome, such as its emphasis on the way in which all countryside activities are linked. We welcome its recommendation for major improvements in product labelling, for which the industry and consumer groups have repeatedly called. When will the Government finally act? The report also makes welcome suggestions on encouraging marketing, co-operation between farmers and local consumption of local products. Will the Secretary of State confirm not only that she supports those ideas, but that she intends to make them a reality?

The report also refers to the need for reform of the common agricultural policy, on which the Secretary of State touched. Almost everyone agrees that this discredited, out-of-date and bureaucratic structure, which has failed farmers, the environment and consumers, has had its day. When will the Government stop talking about reform and take a lead in Europe in making the changes that we need? Will she confirm that, under CAP rules, the report's proposal to shift subsidies from food production to environmental schemes could lead to everyone paying more tax—not less—to subsidise farming, while farm incomes continue to fall?

Does the Secretary of State accept that if farm incomes continue to fall, the rural environment and the whole countryside will be dragged down in their wake? Does she agree that, although the report is described as radical, no truly radical changes can be made until the CAP in its present form is swept away? Has she discussed the report's financial implications with her Treasury colleagues? What will she do about the fact that it applies only to England? Is it not a serious weakness that it does not apply to Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland?

Has the Secretary of State noted what the report says about the pathetic state of our import controls? Will she confirm that, as matters stand, we could import foot and mouth again tomorrow? Will she take urgent action to address the situation? Will she be cautious in accepting proposals for new regulations? The farming industry is already on its knees, and the last thing that it needs in its fight to return to profitability is more red tape.

Who does the Secretary of State think is responsible for the present state of farming in this country? Well, we know. We know because she touched on it at her press conference this morning. She said—I hope that she will confirm the accuracy of this—

> "In a sense all of us as a society are to blame because the farmers are responding to signals that society has given them."

So we are all guilty.

We know that the Government like to shift the blame for everything that goes wrong to someone else, but this is plumbing a new low. Was it society that totally mishandled the foot and mouth epidemic? Has society been responsible for our animal health record, described in the report as "abysmal"? Was society in charge when farm incomes dropped for the fifth year in succession? Was society responsible for bungling the research into BSE in sheep? Has society introduced swathes of new gold-plated regulations?

Is it not the case that it is not society that is to blame, but the Labour Government—a Government who have betrayed the countryside, and lost the confidence of rural Britain?

If change is to happen, it will require trust. If it is to be effective, the Government will need to win back the confidence of rural people. In the medium term, they will be judged by their response to the report. Does the Secretary of State agree, however, that in the short term the most positive step she could take to restore the faith of rural Britain is the ordering of a full, independent public inquiry into the miserable handling of the foot and mouth disaster?

Margaret Beckett: I make that about 16 questions. I suspect that if I tried to answer them all, you would not be very happy, Mr. Speaker.

The hon. Gentleman asked when I first saw the report. I do not recall precisely, but I assure him that it was long after the leak appeared in the newspaper. He touched on a number of other issues, including product labelling and other matters mentioned in the report, and asked when we would make them a reality. As I have said, the report was published only this morning. The Government intend to look carefully at its many detailed recommendations, and to discuss with the widest range of interests how we should pursue them.

I thought it a bit rich for the hon. Gentleman to ask why we did not stop talking about CAP reform and take a lead. His Government had 18 years in which to take a lead. It is no good Opposition Members pretending that they can run away from every bit of their legacy, because they plainly cannot.

The hon. Gentleman is right to say that farm incomes are too low, and have fallen. The report clearly states not just that something must be done to make farming more prosperous, but that much of what must be done is in the hands of the industry itself, and that the issues, difficult as they are, must be addressed. It also states that we all want a prosperous farming industry and farming community, not least because without prosperity and profits we shall not obtain the relevant investment. I welcome that comment.

The hon. Gentleman made a couple of other rhetorical allusions to sweeping away the CAP. He also asked why the report referred only to England. Those were its terms of reference, if he recalls. The authors reported on the position in England because—in case he has not noticed—agriculture is a devolved responsibility in Scotland and Wales.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned import controls. While I accept that we need to do more—and we are working on it now—the import control procedures have been substantially strengthened since we inherited them from the Conservatives. He cited what the report says about the "abysmal" record on health, without seeming to recognise that at least part of the background to those remarks is the BSE crisis, which certainly did not occur when this Government were in power.

There was a great deal of rhetoric about how society is not to blame. It is possible that not every Member has had time to look at the report. It says that there is much that is wrong in British farming, that much of what is done today is very damaging to the environment, and that the structure of production subsidies has partly created and partly exacerbated the problem. It also says, however—I for one welcome this, although I do not say that everyone will—that we ought not to blame farmers for that.

I was asked who, in that case, we should blame. The hon. Gentleman does not wish me to blame the structure of the CAP, to which his Government signed us up and which they failed to reform. I presume that he does not want me to blame the signals from the production

[Margaret Beckett]

subsidies, although the commission blames them. I assume that he does not want us to blame farmers; every time anyone says anything that could conceivably be taken to mean that not everything in British farming is wonderful, he says, "Don't blame the farmers." It appears that he wants the Government to take all the responsibility for the events of the past 50 years. I am disinclined to do that. *[Interruption.]* It is tragic, but we have not been the Government for the past 50 years. If we had, perhaps we would not be in such a mess.

The hon. Gentleman went from complaining that we were in too much haste to get the report to calling for a full, independent inquiry. He was not sure whether the report was welcome or radical. We understand the National Farmers Union's reservations about modulation, but it welcomes much else in the report. Every other organisation that has commented on it welcomed it. For example, the Country Land and Business Association says that it is visionary. Only the Conservative party is desperate to be negative. That is because it wants to drag us back to the days of the foot and mouth epidemic.

The report is about looking forward. It is the hon. Gentleman's tragedy and that of his party that he is incapable of doing that; he wants to look only backwards. People throughout the farming community, not least younger farmers, are anxious to achieve broad consensus about the future. I cannot believe that the hon. Gentleman has not come across them. They are making decisions, such as whether to restock if they lost their livestock, now. They are deciding about their future. The last thing that they need is to hang around for two or three years while we hold a full-scale, judicial public inquiry, which would have to take recommendations about the future into account.

The Government brought the inquiry process forward and made sure that the commission reported as early as was reasonable. That was the right decision, as time will show.

Dr. Jack Cunningham (Copeland): We should thank Don Curry and the members of the commission for producing a visionary report. It sets out an excellent vision of a sustainable future for agriculture in all its forms. It is underpinned by the hard realities that we need to face to implement it.

What proposals does my right hon. Friend have to increase modulation? That would be a sensible, practical and quick method of effecting an important recommendation. I suggest that she takes no lessons from the Conservative Opposition on reform of the common agricultural policy. They failed abysmally to effect any reasonable reform, and when the Government took office in 1997, we found that former Conservative Ministers were not even on speaking terms with their opposite numbers in Europe.

Margaret Beckett: My right hon. Friend is right. It has long been a mystery to me that the Conservative party believed that it could make progress on agreement in such circumstances. I welcome his praise for the commission, and he is right to say that its report is rooted in reality. Although some people will be at variance with the recommendations about how we should tackle the issues, I suspect that few will quarrel with the analysis of what is wrong and the reality that we face.

I understand why my right hon. Friend urged me to move swiftly to increase modulation, which constitutes our maximum freedom of manoeuvre. As I suggested, the Government will consider the commission's recommendation. However, I know that his long and deep acquaintance with the subject means that he will understand and share our view. We have some anxiety about the amount of inflexibility and administrative complication in the scope for modulation as it stands. We want changes and improvements to be made as quickly as possible. That would make it easier to tackle some of the issues.

Andrew George (St. Ives): There is a great deal to welcome in the report of Sir Don Curry and his group. Although I suppose that there is bound to be an element of trading blame, I think that that can wait for another day. The report is positive about the future and contains many policies and initiatives on which we should work fast because they should be implemented as quickly as possible. Indeed, most of the questions that arise from the report are about the speed with which they can be implemented. I suspect that there is broad cross-party support for many of the proposed initiatives, so rather than trade blame, we should concentrate on moving quickly towards what is a very positive vision for the future of agriculture and rural communities.

I should like to warn the Secretary of State about phrases such as "restructuring of agriculture". Often, that term is a euphemism for getting rid of smaller farmers, almost as if the expectation that farmers will leave the industry is pre-ordained by God and not a product of policy. Unless we want the countryside to be turned into prairie and ranch—I do not think that we do—we must recognise the importance of small family farms in our landscape and rural communities. I hope that she will take that point on board in implementing the policy.

Inevitably, much emphasis is placed on CAP reform. I am glad that the Government now support extended modulation in agriculture. That is where the Liberal Democrats have been coming from for some time. However, the question is how quickly it can be implemented and where the Government are with reforming agriculture. We need to complete the process as quickly as possible. Does the Secretary of State believe that the proposed extension of modulation to 10 per cent. by 2004 is too modest or too ambitious a target for the Government?

With regard to payments in euros—something that my party would be expected to recommend—does the Secretary of State believe that that change can be introduced very quickly? What procedures will be necessary for its implementation? Does she believe that support for marketing is compliant with the Government's approach in the code of practice, which needs to be reviewed in respect of the supermarkets' attitude and practices concerning farmers? Finally, does she agree that a great deal more needs to be done to ensure that we stop illegal meat imports? I do not think that she has properly addressed that issue.

Margaret Beckett: I know that Sir Don Curry will be grateful for the hon. Gentleman's welcome of the report. I share his hope that, in time, there will be cross-party support for many of the commission's recommendations. Its members served not as representatives, but as individuals with a rich variety of experience and expertise. It is encouraging that they were able to reach common ground and we hope that more common ground can be identified in future on their proposals.

The hon. Gentleman asked a number of questions about speed, the structure of the industry and so on. The commission was very clear that it believes that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to the problems of farming and that it has no preconceived ideas about what the pattern of farming should be. Certainly, it does not envisage the disappearance of all small farms, and neither does it necessarily envisage concentration into a small number of large units. However, it indicates that it believes that the future structure of the industry should be driven by the decisions of the individual businesses within it and proposes a substantially increased programme of advice and support—issues that we shall have to consider. It also believes that it is right not only to remove production subsidies, which it believes are damaging, especially to the environment and to the future of farming, but to be prepared to support environmental programmes and steps of that sort. I think that it holds the view—certainly, this would be my reaction—that that is exactly the sort of project that is likely to assist small farmers, not least in areas such as that of the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Gentleman invited me to speculate on issues such as the detailed recommendations about the euro and the 10 per cent. modulation in 2004. We shall need to consider those issues with all the stakeholders. Only then can we say what moves we can make, and how speedily.

There are those who, understandably in present circumstances, have reservations about modulation. Elsewhere in Europe, there are discussions about the possibility of compulsory modulation. We should seek to ensure that such proposals do not appear in a form that those concerned would find difficult to implement.

As the hon. Gentleman says, there is a range of other issues, such as marketing and codes of practice, that we can address over time. The Government hope to address such issues when we bring forward our proposals.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): There are some outside the House who think that the Government have a secret agenda. My right hon. Friend mentioned BSE, but added to that was the experience of salmonella, E-coli, listeria and foot and mouth. Have the Government any plans now, or in future, to license all farmers?

Margaret Beckett: No, we do not have such plans. However, my hon. Friend identifies an issue that concerned the commission. It said that we should take steps—I cannot remember the exact phraseology—to ensure that high standards are met in terms of food safety and environmental considerations. If I recall correctly, it suggests that while production subsidies are part of the structure of the CAP and continue to be paid—it would wish to see them phased out—there should be criteria that relate to standards, including food safety standards. That is an issue that we will consider with great interest.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): Perhaps I should make it clear that Sir Don Curry and I are not related.

At the heart of the report is a recommendation to go further in the shift from production support to support for environmental and rural development programmes. First, where on the Richter scale does the Secretary of State put the probability of securing the match funding for increased modulation from the Treasury in the course of the review that is about to be undertaken? Secondly, many of the programmes are small, difficult to monitor and intensive in the use of administrative resources. It is difficult to know whether they are giving value for money. There is also the problem of measuring outputs.

Does the right hon. Lady agree that we should work out exactly what we want in the way of public good from agriculture, what we are willing to pay for it and how we deliver it? Does she agree also that we must take care that we do not replace one abuse with another and end up with a mountain of schemes that may be of poor quality, however well packaged in green?

Margaret Beckett: The right hon. Gentleman makes an important and powerful point. I was pleased to see him at the commission's press briefing this morning.

The right hon. Gentleman is right to identify that the commission strongly recommends that we shift resources away from production subsidies and support into support for the wider environment and rural schemes. He is right, too, to say that there will be a need, if we can convince people that it is the right direction to take, for proper structures and monitoring.

I do not disagree with anything that the right hon. Gentleman has said, but as he will recall the commission said that it believes that the existence of current subsidies and their structure does practical and real damage both to farming and to the environment. I suspect, although I did not hear anyone put the question this morning, that the commission would argue that there is in any event a good case for phasing out the present subsidies. I believe that it is much of the view, however, that there are other things, in the context of the environment and in other areas, that farming communities undertake that merit public support. I agree that it is not a simple issue and that there needs to be careful consideration.

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): I also welcome the work done by Don Curry and his colleagues. In taking forward the commission's recommendations, does my right hon. Friend agree that regional development agencies will play an important role in integrating the rural and farming areas that they cover with their overall regional economic strategies? May I encourage her to give strong support to some of the regional food organisations, such as Taste of the West and others? They have been very good at identifying new opportunities for farmers, thereby helping them add value to their products and become more profitable.

Margaret Beckett: As always, my right hon. Friend shows her great experience and expertise in this area. Many will agree with her about the role of the RDAs, and about the need to work with the grain of what has already been happening with local farmers markets, particular schemes regarding local or locality produce, and the regional food organisations. The commission identifies such matters as worthy of interest and support in the future, and I anticipate that that recommendation will receive a considerable welcome too.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): As the chief executive of Sainsbury's was one of the commissioners, I was

[Mr. Michael Jack]

surprised to see that only one of the document's 164 pages is devoted to the relationship between the farm sector and the supermarkets. Will the Secretary of State say which of the report's recommendations will lead to a fairer distribution of the price realised for UK-produced farm produce? Many farmers feel under-rewarded for their efforts, and I should be interested to hear the right hon. Lady's view.

Secondly, does the Secretary of State believe it appropriate for the Treasury to involve itself in the proposed hedge fund for euros, in connection with farm payments from the European Union?

Margaret Beckett: The right hon. Gentleman asks which recommendations are likely to lead to a fairer distribution. If he has had time to glance at the report he will be aware already that the commission makes a range of recommendations that it believes will help to keep a fairer proportion of the price with the original producer. Those recommendations cover matters such as marketing techniques, the formation of co-operatives and ways in which people can work together to identify possible opportunities and how they should be addressed. I therefore would not pick out only one or two recommendations, as the commission makes a range of recommendations specifically related to the matter that the right hon. Gentleman raises.

The Government will seriously consider the commission's suggestions on the handling of the euro and all the other recommendations in the report.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): When it comes to asking questions of my right hon. Friend, it has been very useful to have both the report and the press release. At the weekend, I read about the 105th death from variant CJD. In memory of those who have died, and in consideration of their relatives and of the public at large, does not it behove us to move as quickly as possible to assure people that the food that they buy is safe and wholesome? We should move ahead with that straight away, but opinion surveys continue to show that the public are more interested in the cheapness of food than in its quality. Is not that a problem? The report recommends promoting local food supply chains and the continuation of work to ensure food safety at the national level, but should not work be done to persuade people that they get what they pay for, and that they should want to pay for the quality and safety of their food?

Margaret Beckett: I understand the point that my hon. Friend makes, and the House will agree about how seriously we must take the appalling consequences of the BSE epidemic. However, such strong moves have been made in this country to tackle the problem that British beef is probably safer than any other country's.

My hon. Friend is right to say that we need to move ahead, but the surveys to which he referred sometimes give mixed signals. It is true, of course, that price is the main determinant, but my hon. Friend will agree with the commission in identifying that people also have other concerns. Whatever price they pay for food, people have a right to expect that it will meet the basic minimum standards of safety and health. No matter how low the price paid, we should not be saying that it is acceptable to have food that is not of a suitable quality for human consumption.

There could be a marketing advantage, to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin) referred, in hallmarking some of the quality and traceability of local produce. There are things that we can do. I accept my hon. Friend's point that, as ever, a balance must be struck between the lowest price and the right standards, but we must strive to achieve those standards.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): The Secretary of State will be aware that, following the outcome of the WTO ministerial conference at Doha, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said of CAP reform:

> "We have long regarded this as essential so that British consumers can benefit from cheaper food prices."

We are sending consumers mixed messages. In contrast to the approach that cheaper food is best and is what the Government want, many of the proposals in the report, although very good, do not make food cheaper. We are in danger of ending up with a food supply whose indigenous production is of a very high quality, protected by safeguards and high safety standards, but which is affordable only by the few. The many will have a lot of cheap imported food, the genesis of which is questionable.

Margaret Beckett: The hon. Lady, who is experienced in these matters, will know that the mechanism of the common agricultural policy keeps prices high—artificially high, if necessary. As a consequence, throughout the history of the CAP, food prices in Europe have been kept much higher than they needed to be on the world market. That, no doubt, was the thinking that lay behind the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

It is true that the commission talks about better value. There will be times when we believe that the pressure on prices could decrease. This is a mixture: we want British farming to produce food of an even higher quality that it can market successfully on that basis, but we do not want it to lose markets unnecessarily because it is undercut by food imports that do not meet the standards that we believe are necessary.

The hon. Lady may have overlooked the fact that my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment was also part of the Doha delegation dealing with issues of the environment and standards. One of the safeguards that we are beginning to build into international negotiations is the fact that we do not accept that there has to be a trade-off between liberalised, properly free trade and sufficiently high standards. It is part of our responsibility as a developed nation to help raise the standards of others to a level that we find acceptable.

It is not easy; these are difficult issues and choices. However, we must ensure that the choice is not as stark as the hon. Lady says, so that we can be confident that British consumers buy food that they can be safely recommended to eat.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): May I tell my right hon. Friend that this report will be widely welcomed in my Teesdale constituency, especially by hill farmers and those from less-favoured areas? As they strive to recover from the devastation caused by foot and mouth disease, they will want to know how quickly we can expect money to be diverted from subsidising food and invested in environmental and rural development projects.

Margaret Beckett: My right hon. Friend, not for the first time, puts his finger on the nub of the question that a number of farmers in areas such as his will be asking. He will know that we have a certain amount of room for manoeuvre within existing structures, but it is limited. He will also know that, as I identified earlier, concerns have been expressed about the flexibility and attractiveness of some of the schemes under which we can use such resources. I assure him that we are mindful of the concerns of people in areas such as his. We are keen to ensure not only a prosperous and viable future for them, but to do so much more efficiently, and with less distortion of food prices and the food supply, than under the current structure.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): The report refers to the problems with the over-30-months rule. The rule has significantly damaged our traditional beef industry. The best beef, in terms of taste, environment and welfare, is reared traditionally, and that takes more than 30 months. Will the Secretary of State consider extending the 30-month period as soon as possible? I appreciate that we must retain confidence in our beef industry, but I hope that she will consider extending the period.

Small tenant farmers have suffered dreadfully over the past few years? Is there any chance of an early retirement scheme, or a retirement scheme, for those people?

Margaret Beckett: I know that the hon. Gentleman fully understands and accepts that I entirely take his point about the over-30-months scheme, but the Food Standards Agency has made a strong recommendation and at present we clearly want to do what is right to restore confidence and to ensure that we take the right steps. I believe that the agency is keeping the issues under review—and so, in consequence, are we—but I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman at present that there is an early likelihood of the move that he seeks being made.

Equally, I know that he will be pleased that the report shows understanding of the concerns and problems of many tenant farmers. I fear, however, that the commission does not recommend an early retirement scheme, although it makes recommendations on how we might encourage more flexibility and more new entrants. I hope that people in the industry will look with interest at those schemes and proposals to see whether they can work within them.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): My right hon. Friend will be aware that under the present system of agricultural support—which we inherited—when there is a surplus of sheep on the market and a plummeting price at the farm gate, farmers improve their incomes by producing even more sheep. That is clearly unsustainable and I wish my right hon. Friend well in reforming that element of agricultural support.

Is my right hon. Friend aware that if there is one lesson that we in the High Peak—like the rest of rural Britain—have learned during the past year it is that agriculture, tourism and other elements of the rural economy are completely interdependent? That knowledge must underscore all decisions that are made about planning for the future of the countryside.

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. He is right: that idea clearly underpins all the thinking in the commission's report. The report shows clearly the interdependence of the various interests in the countryside and the way in which those interests need to be addressed and kept in balance.

My hon. Friend also rightly identifies at least one of the perverse incentives that have been built into the present system of funding. I am sure that he is aware that the recent negotiations that we undertook on the sheepmeat regime gave us some freedom, as a result of which we set up a national envelope of funding. Member states have some discretion over the steps they take, and we are consulting on the use of that freedom at present.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): The Secretary of State has reasonably pointed out that she cannot respond in detail to everything in the report as it has only just been published, but may I draw her attention to page 85, where the report endorses the findings of the taskforce for the hills, issued last March? Does she intend to implement the report's findings? Will she give a message of hope to hill farmers in Cumbria and elsewhere who have suffered so badly because of foot and mouth by saying whether she supports the report's central recommendation, endorsed by Sir Donald, that measures need to be taken to raise hill farmer incomes?

Will the right hon. Lady also address herself to page 35 of the commission's report, which endorses the report of the milk taskforce? Will she talk to her colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry to ensure that the competition authorities do not block necessary collaboration in the dairy sector?

Margaret Beckett: We will look at the reports in the context of the commission's comments and observations. The hon. Gentleman notes in particular the fact that the commission would like to see improvements in the financial circumstances of hill farmers. I understand why he does so, given the circumstances in his constituency. However, it is only fair to the rest of the farming community to point out that although the commission believes that improvement is necessary, it has concerns about income levels across farming, and wants farming to return to secure and viable profitability.

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the commission's very welcome recommendations on the organic sector and the need to continue to support the sector? In framing her strategy for organic farming, will she consider the organic targets campaign, which is supported by 100 organisations, the majority of Back Benchers and seven major retailers, which seeks to get 30 per cent. of agricultural land under organic farming by 2010?

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend will know that we are discussing what more we can do with a number of those groups. She will also know, because she is an assiduous attender at our Question Time, that we continually identify the fact that there is a market for

[Margaret Beckett]

organic produce in the United Kingdom that British farming is not able to satisfy at present. We believe that that is a clear example of a market opportunity.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): I, too, hope that there will be cross-party agreement on many of the proposals, not least because many of them have been advocated by me and other colleagues on the Conservative Benches for some time. The Secretary of State is right to say that such change will take time and, obviously, she has to negotiate CAP reform with others, but there is one particular recommendation that she could act on today. It is not a new recommendation, but I urge her to consider it with some urgency—it is that on regulation.

The taskforce recommends that

"an annual aggregate compliance costs figure"

should be calculated to underline what it costs British agriculture to comply with all the regulations imposed on it, ultimately by the House. However, the calculation should include not just a compliance cost, but a comparative cost to show what those regulations involve not just in developing countries, but elsewhere in Europe. One of British farmers' biggest concerns is that they have to compete with other farmers from elsewhere in the world who send their produce to market in this country, but who do not have to comply with the same burden of regulations. She could address that issue immediately, and I hope that she will.

Margaret Beckett: I am sorry that I must slightly take issue with the hon. Gentleman, although I agree with much of what he says and am grateful for his observations. I certainly agree with him that we have to do as much as we can to address the regulation issue. Obviously, in many circumstances—food safety, the environment and so on—we need such regulations and they must be observed, but we must try to find ways to minimise the burden, particularly on individual farms and businesses, and we are considering whether we can take steps to simplify that.

I believe that I am right to say from memory that the commission suggests, for example, that we might make more use of the information that is collected every year for the integrated administration and control system in order to fulfil some of those other needs. We shall have to consider whether that will work, whether it is sufficient and whether it is a practical way forward, which is why I said that I must take issue with the hon. Gentleman. I fear that that is not something that I can do tomorrow, but I certainly agree that we need to consider it very carefully.

I am not instinctively opposed to the idea of trying to assess the burden of regulation annually; I just have a horrible feeling that it would be probably a lot harder to do and a lot more time consuming—perhaps without as much return as one might hope—than it would appear at first sight. However, I absolutely share the hon. Gentleman's view that we have to minimise the burden of regulation as much as we can, that we must handle it better than we have under successive Governments and that we must ensure that our farmers operate on a level playing field. It is sometimes said that no one else observes such regulations, but that is perhaps a little over-done. I certainly accept that, although we want British farming to be of the highest quality and the highest standard, we want it to be competitive.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I welcome the commission's report, especially its emphasis on the link between food production and health and education and the strong recommendation that goes through it in relation to increased collaboration, which my right hon. Friend has mentioned on several occasions. Can I rely on her and her hon. Friends to lead the movement towards greater co-operation in this country, in which respect we are markedly different from our European competitors? In particular, is that not the way to save smaller farms and tenant farms?

Margaret Beckett *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I realise that this is an important subject. I want to call every hon. Member who wishes to speak. The House's co-operation and very brief questions and answers will enable me to do that.

Margaret Beckett: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's welcome of the contents of the report. I assure him that the Government are mindful that much of the answer lies in greater co-operation, especially for smaller farmers. I hesitate to say that we should lead that co-operation, although I am conscious that for a considerable number of years many have been arguing that we should do so.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): May I refer the Secretary of State to page 130 of the report, which says:

"We therefore recommend that the Government should, with its partner administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, modulate production subsidies".

That has angered the National Farmers Union of Scotland, the National Farmers Union in Wales and the Farmers Union of Wales. They all say that the suggestion undermines policies being pursued in the devolved Administrations. Bearing in mind the remit of the commission, is that interference or a misunderstanding of its remit?

Margaret Beckett: The hon. Gentleman asks me a question that only the commission can answer. It was charged with looking at the future of farming in England, and I am sure that it will be dismayed if it has distressed those who take part in farming and agriculture in Scotland and Wales. Clearly, it felt that it must indicate broad views about the general direction of policy, which it thought had a wider application.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Is it not a sad reflection that the commission, which was set up by the Government, had to make the following recommendation to the Secretary of State:

"The Government should make a clear statement of its support for farming as sustainer of the rural environment as well as food producer, and properly reward the industry for its role in managing the countryside. It should make clear the key role of farming in delivering our vision"?

Margaret Beckett: With respect, the commission is saying that people in the countryside and rural areas are not sufficiently highly regarded and well rewarded—

Mr. McLoughlin: By the Government.

Margaret Beckett: The hon. Gentleman mutters, "By the Government", but, as he has looked at the report, let me point out to him that the commission is saying that the problem is the result of a long-standing failure, which it believes we should all address.

Charlotte Atkins (Staffordshire, Moorlands): Does the report recommend how farmers might work more effectively with the tourism industry? During the foot and mouth outbreak, farmers were all too often set against the interests of the tourism industry and the leisure industry, to the great detriment of the rural economy.

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the interdependence of farming and rural tourism. The report does not suggest the specific steps that should be taken, but it clearly identifies mutual interests and the fact that they can only be addressed together.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton)—who is at Stoneleigh today—and I met members of the National Farmers Union and many small farmers in Macclesfield on Saturday, where we had a three-hour discussion. We discussed the report, because of the leaks that had taken place. Will the Secretary of State accept that those farmers, who were predominantly small farmers, were especially worried about bureaucracy and form-filling? They estimate that every small farmer spends one full day a week dealing with bureaucracy and form-filling—and they work seven days a week. Will she accept that they are concerned that there should be adequate inspection of food coming into the country, especially meat products, which is inadequate at the moment? Will she also consider seriously whether we should reduce food production when it is estimated that, in eight years' time, there will be a world food shortage? Is that planning for the future?

Margaret Beckett: Nobody is talking specifically about reducing food production per se. What is being said is that the structure of incentives gives a perverse incentive to produce food that people do not want and cannot consume. Most of us think that that is not sensible. However, I entirely share and accept the point that many small farmers, like other small business men, are especially worried about bureaucracy. The hon. Gentleman will know that many of the requirements that have to be implemented are not within the Government's control. We are talking, and are prepared to continue to talk, to people in rural areas and in the farming industry about what we can do to simplify and slim down the requirements placed on them for information.

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Does the Secretary of State accept that there is a growing awareness in the countryside of the need to change the way in which support to farmers and the wider countryside is given? Is not the lesson from foot and mouth disease, and, indeed, from the Curry report, that urban visitors contribute a great deal to the economy of the rural landscape? Surely it is right that we support farmers to lift the landscape and enhance the environment so that we bring people into the countryside. Those are considerations for the public good. The challenge is how we measure and pay for them.

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend is entirely right. To an extent, he reiterates a point made by the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), who chairs the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee—that we must consider how to identify, address and measure the public goods that are under consideration. As Sir Don Curry said at the press briefing this morning:

> "We were talking not about subsidy but about support."

That is an indication of the change that he is trying to pursue.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Given that no fewer than five ex-Agriculture Ministers have spoken, may I urge the Secretary of State not to accept the mea non culpa excuses that we often hear from former Ministers? In particular, I draw her attention to the fact that the industry is almost uniquely affected by Government policy. One of the few defects of the report is that it makes few international comparisons, presumably because of the time scale of the inquiry. Is it not true that many of our competitors, especially in Europe, have been more successful in averting the disasters of foot and mouth, BSE and so on, and in encouraging a co-operative movement, to which the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) referred? Is that not an important connection, from the producer right through to the consumer, which gives a better return to the producer?

Margaret Beckett: The hon. Gentleman is right that there is often a much more extensive network of co-operatives across Europe. He is being a little unfair to the commission because that was part of the thinking that lay behind some of its observations—I assume from the intervention by the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) that page 35 is relevant to this—on the need to stimulate more co-operation and its wish to see obstacles to such co-operation removed. The hon. Gentleman is also right to say that the industry has a uniquely strong relationship with the Government. Part of the commission's recommendation is that that relationship should become more arm's length and not so directly related to production levels.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): May I welcome in particular the section in the recommendations on upland areas such as those in my constituency? Each upland area is unique and there is great expertise—I think in particular of the North Yorkshire moors national park—in stewardship schemes and the enhancement of the local environment, built up over the years within the national parks. Does my right hon. Friend envisage a role for the expertise of the national parks in helping the recommendations to come to fruition and to aid my constituents in those areas?

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend makes an important and powerful point. He is right about the expertise and experience. We hope to draw on as much of that as possible, across the board, when we make the Government's proposals to take forward the strategy identified by the commission. As I said, the commission is adamant that there is no one-size-fits-all solution. My hon. Friend is right about that. It is clear that there will be different opportunities and different problems for farmers in different circumstances and in different parts of the country. That is why it is so important for people to address the problems that they actually face, rather than a generic set of problems that are said to beset all farmers.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): Is the Secretary of State attracted to the idea of increasing modulation payments—and I apologise for using that awful term—to 10 per cent? Will she ensure that the payments are applied equally to all farmers, because at the moment the system discriminates against the larger, more efficient farm, which is exactly the kind that we want to encourage? Will she ensure that if more money is raised for the rural development programme, it is spent in the farming economy, possibly through agri-environment schemes, and not allowed to leach into the wider rural economy?

Margaret Beckett: I thought for a moment that I was going to be able to welcome everything that the hon. Gentleman said, but I cannot agree with the second part of his remarks. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping) made clear a few moments ago, we are more aware now than we have been for a long time of the interdependence of people in the rural economy. Part of the thinking that lies behind the commission's work is that if we help the wider rural economy, we may do more to help the farming community than we do simply by steering various forms of support directly to it.

I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman's concerns about the possibilities for modulation. We must approach the issue with great caution and sensitivity because—I do not know whether the House is fully aware of this—there are those in the European Union who not only support greater modulation but believe that it should be made compulsory. I have an instinctive anxiety about making such programmes compulsory, but I have an even greater anxiety about making programmes of the kind that we have now compulsory. That is why we are anxious to organise a body of support to insist that any possible modulation programmes are much less bureaucratic and much easier to access and that they offer much greater flexibility. Certainly, it will be a key negotiating goal of the Government to ensure that if such steps are taken, whether compulsorily or not, we deal fairly with farmers across the board. We are mindful of the difficulties that might otherwise ensue.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): Will my right hon. Friend give a particular welcome to the report's idea that the marketing of locality foods should be made more mainstream? Will she acknowledge that in many places a great deal of work has already been done in that respect, supported by regional development agencies? Can she clear a space in her diary around June to support the launch of the "Made in Lancashire" food label?

Margaret Beckett: Obviously, as someone who was born in Lancashire, I have a weakness for my hon. Friend's suggestion. I certainly share his view that all the commission's recommendations about the marketing of local produce and the identification of locality foods represent an opportunity for the farming community to add a valuable string to its bow. However, on his specific proposal, all I can say is, "If only I had a space in my diary in June."

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): Will the right hon. Lady proceed with caution following the answer that she gave to the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock)? I was telephoned this morning by an organic farmer in my constituency, Mr. Graham Boffey of Poplars farm, who was most concerned about the report's recommendations. He can only sell 50 per cent. of his organic herd's production in the organic market, and the rest has to go into the general milk pool. Will the right hon. Lady offer him some reassurance that the Government will proceed with caution to avoid undermining the existing market organic farming by encouraging further production on that basis?

Margaret Beckett: The hon. Lady correctly identifies a problem because, as I am sure she is aware, the only area of organic produce in which we have over-supply is milk production. With great respect to all those who seek developments in organic farming, I say to her that I am very mindful of the dangers that she identifies. I have said to several promoters of organic farming, with which I have no difficulty, that I am not in the business of encouraging the over-production of organic food any more than I am in the business of encouraging over-production of any other kind of food.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Is not the heart of the report on page 109, where the three major results of farming policy are identified as a degraded environment, huge, unaffordable farm taxes and subsidies and some of the highest food prices on the planet? Why is it, when the average British family paid £450 in farm subsidies in 2000, and probably £1,000 last year, that farm incomes are so low and that the price of food in the United Kingdom is twice that in New Zealand, where subsidies to farmers were abolished 16 years ago?

Margaret Beckett: As my hon. Friend will recall, I said that one part of the report with which few people would probably quarrel was the commission's analysis. Certainly, the commission and my hon. Friend correctly identified some of the problems that we face. How we got to be in that position is a matter of argument and dispute, but there is little doubt that the problems have run alongside the common agricultural policy, and are now part of it and its future.

On the comparison with New Zealand, I was most impressed by a recent lecture given by a New Zealand farmer, not because I believe that we have the same opportunities as people in New Zealand—our circumstances are totally different—but because he identified the dramatically changed and worsening marketing position of New Zealand agricultural produce. The people of New Zealand decided to look hard at fresh marketing opportunities; they took action to phase out subsidies and addressed those opportunities directly. The issues are not identical, and nor are the answers, but that is very much the course of action that the commission is urging British farming to take.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): On page 124, the report addresses an issue of concern to young Herefordshire farmers and me. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Government will follow the report's recommendations and sponsor the National Farmers Union

> "to create and manage a matching service to bring together new entrants with retiring farmers who do not have identified successors"?

In the interests of brevity, a yes answer would be fine.

Margaret Beckett: Of course we shall look at that proposal with great care.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): Clearly, the best long-term support for British farming is well-informed active consumers insisting on high-quality English food. Does the Secretary of State agree that consumers and farmers need clear labelling, including country of origin? What will she do to encourage retailers? Will she look at the proposal on page 45 that local shops stocking local foods get rate rebates, which would be of benefit to both farmers and consumers in my constituency, where there are many local shops?

Margaret Beckett: As I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows, although he may not like to acknowledge it, the Government have already taken many steps to alleviate the impact of rates on small local shops, especially isolated shops in small communities. On labelling, I accept the commission's concern and accept that we need to do everything that we can to get clear labelling and clear rules on labelling. Without wishing to end on a sour note, I am glad that the Opposition have converted to clear labelling, which I fear they opposed in government.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): The Secretary of State will be aware of my registered interest in forestry. Does she agree that it is a pity that there is not more mention of woodland in the report, especially in the context of farmers taking up the farm woodland premium scheme? Is she aware that many farmers in my North-West Norfolk constituency reckon that the current scheme is much too bureaucratic and complicated? For example, there is a need for a full archaeological survey under the scheme, which is surely unnecessary. Does the right hon. Lady agree that it is much better for farmers to plant trees than to set land aside?

Margaret Beckett: I have some sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's remarks. Some things have been done in response to work set in hand by the previous Government, but he will know that we are more afforested now than we were 100 years ago, so we are going in the right direction. The particular issues raised by the hon. Gentleman, and his complaints, are obviously part of the review that is looking at all those areas. As someone who once thought of becoming an archaeologist, I have some sympathy with concerns that have been identified, but I entirely share the hon. Gentleman's view that there is much to be said for encouraging woodland. That involves looking at regulation and the burden that it imposes—an issue which the Government are addressing.

Point of Order

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As you know, Members look to you as the guardian of the interests of the House, so I wonder whether I could draw to your attention a matter of considerable concern to me.

You will have heard the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions announce earlier this afternoon an additional £2.2 billion of spending on public transport. In fact, he did so in response to a written question that I tabled a couple of weeks ago, which revealed a technical error in the Department's accounting.

I have two concerns. One is that that written answer made it clear that the £2.2 billion was part of new money announced by the Secretary of State two weeks ago. Therefore, this afternoon's announcement of new money was no more than a repeat of what was said two weeks ago. Secondly, the way in which the Department responded to my question caused me great concern. The response was delivered in this morning's post, as opposed to last night's, which would have been the norm, and was given after the Department had briefed the media on the problems exposed. If I write to you with the details of the case, will you look into it on my behalf and suggest how I should respond?

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should write to me; that might be the best idea.

Road Safety and Speed

4.40 pm

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make further provision for road safety measures in residential areas and for the indication of speed limits.

This Bill is one of those pieces of proposed legislation that are designed to address an historical absurdity in highways law, although it is also intended to contribute to tackling the danger that speeding drivers represent in built-up areas. Its origin lies in one of those "You cannot be serious" conversations that I had with a group of constituents and a local county councillor a few months ago. They were concerned about the level of speeding on local roads and told me that it is illegal to erect repeater signs in 30 mph zones in built-up areas such as those in my constituency and those of many hon. Members.

Repeater signs—the small round signs mounted on lamp posts and other roadside posts—can be used to remind drivers of 40 or 50 mph speed limits, and indeed in national speed limit zones, but cannot be used in 30 mph areas. Even if there are regular problems with people failing to realise that there is a 30 mph speed limit, local authorities are forbidden by law from erecting repeater signs. Everyone to whom I have related that fact has expressed astonishment that that is so. I very much hope that hon. Members will today agree with me on the matter.

That legal point, buried in past legislation, may seem small—until one considers that in the past three years 65 per cent. of serious road accidents in this country have occurred within 30 mph speed limits. That is a huge proportion of the accidents that lead to the deaths of more than 3,500 people a year and cause serious injury to nearly 250,000 people—many of them children.

Any hon. Members who have been to the cinema in the past few weeks will have seen a graphic advertising campaign about the dangers of driving even 5 mph over the speed limit. That extra 5 mph can mean that a car takes 21 ft further to stop than if it had been travelling at 30 mph—potentially the difference between life and death for a small child who runs out from behind a car.

No legislative measure can remove the risk of accident and injury to small children, but we all know just how easy it can be for a small child to slip from a parent's hand and run out into the road. A few weeks ago in my constituency, there was a tragic case of just that happening, and a young girl was killed. There was no suggestion in that case that the speed travelled by the driver involved was instrumental in the tragedy, but the case brought home to me and to many parents in my area just how real the risks are.

I suspect that we all know roads with 30 mph limits where it is easy to drift above that speed, and of roads where a sizeable proportion of drivers do so, so is it not absurd that the law prevents local authorities from putting up timely reminders to those using such roads? The legal restriction is truly a part of Britain's motoring history, but it is a piece of the past that I would very happily see disappear. It was originally set out in the Road Traffic Act 1934. The rule has always been that in a road with street lamps in a built-up area, the limit is always 30 mph unless it says otherwise. Such roads are designated as restricted roads. That rule has survived for 67 years and is currently wrapped up in section 82 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 1994. If the House gives me leave today, the Bill that I will lay before it will amend the 1984 Act to permit the use of signage on restricted roads.

My Bill has been welcomed by all those with whom I have discussed it. The Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety says that such a measure would make an important contribution to improved safety. In a recent report, PACTS confirmed the seriousness of the problem. It stated:

> "There is a strong link between the likelihood of an accident occurring and the speed at which drivers or riders travel. In urban areas 36 per cent. of the people killed or seriously injured are pedestrians, and children make up 41 per cent. of the pedestrian casualties in urban areas. 31 per cent. of pedal cyclist casualties are children."

In that report, PACTS made the clearest possible recommendation:

> "Compliance with the speed limit should be made as easy as possible to achieve. Information to the driver or rider regarding both the speed limit and the speed at which they are travelling must be made absolutely clear."

When I spoke to the AA about the Bill, its comment was:

> "Oh, we would love that. It's right at the top of our agenda."

The AA is committed to breaking the linkage between speed limits and lamp posts, and says that its research with motorists shows that many of them simply do not understand that connection, and many admit that that is often a reason for their breaking the speed limit. Government work has found similar reasons cited by motorists for speeding in built-up areas.

I also spoke to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, which said much the same thing and gave its support to the principle of the Bill. ROSPA believes that local authorities should have the flexibility to decide the most effective way to highlight speed limits.

I found the views of those national bodies clearly reflected in the views of local councillors and council officers to whom I spoke. One conversation, with the highways department at Surrey county council, was particularly revealing. I was told that many local authorities are trying to find ways around the law so that they can highlight speed limits without contravening the current rules. The association representing London boroughs has produced a green fluorescent sign which can be put on lamp posts to highlight speed limits, but the consensus among the professionals is that repeater signs would be much more effective.

One of the senior councillors on my own most immediate local borough council, Epsom and Ewell, said that the Bill would be extremely welcome, and that the council would very much like to be able to put up clearer signage, which is currently forbidden by law.

I know that the Government have given consideration to the matter. In the documentation that they have published, there is a suggestion that they, too, are uncomfortable with the present situation. The Government's speed policy review published in March 2000 addressed the matter and indicated that a change in legislation might be required. The Government told me in a written answer that they would be reviewing road signage this year. I hope that the Bill will give them the opportunity to throw their weight behind the proposed changes.

In Britain, we are fortunate to have some of the safest roads in Europe. Twenty years of public education have much reduced the problems posed by drink-driving, for example. However, there is general consensus that speed remains a major problem, especially in 30 mph zones. Today the House has the opportunity to take a small step towards reducing that problem. The Bill would put another piece in the road safety jigsaw. It would make it much more difficult for motorists to forget that they were in a 30 mph speed limit zone. It would give local authorities the freedom to judge where such a reminder was necessary.

I have not found a single person or organisation who thinks that the Bill is a bad idea. On the contrary, most people to whom I have spoken are amazed that the current law does not permit repeater signs in 30 mph limits. We can change that. I hope that today hon. Members will start my Bill on the road to the statute book, and that in doing so, they will help me take another step in making our roads safer for pedestrians, for motorists and, above all, for our children.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Chris Grayling, Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, Andrew Bennett, Mr. Paul Goodman, Mr. Mark Francois, Mr. Mark Hoban, Mr. Adrian Flook, Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger and Mr. Andrew Selous.

ROAD SAFETY AND SPEED

Chris Grayling accordingly presented a Bill to make further provision for road safety measures in residential areas and for the indication of speed limits: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 10 May, and to be printed [Bill 85].

Opposition Day

[9TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Post Office

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I announce to the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

4.50 pm

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): I beg to move,

That this House notes that under this Government the Post Office has gone from a profitable organisation to a business that is making half-yearly operating losses of £100 million, has the worst strike record of any business in the country and is consistently failing to meet its delivery targets; deplores its reported intention to abandon its morning delivery guarantee; condemns the Government for retaining Consignia in full public ownership while at the same time refusing to take any responsibility for its failures; further notes that in the last financial year another 547 sub post offices closed; regrets the Government's determination to press ahead with the withdrawal of benefit payments across the counter despite its failure to put in place any alternative source of income, thus threatening the survival of thousands more; and further condemns the Government's total mismanagement, which has created the crisis that is facing the Post Office today.

It is less than two years since Parliament passed the Postal Services Act 2000, which established the Post Office—or Consignia, as it then chose to be called—as a plc in 100 per cent. Government ownership.

During the Third Reading debate on that legislation, the then Secretary of State said:

> "This Bill guarantees a publicly owned Post Office, but with the commercial freedoms that will be needed to meet the challenges of the 21st century . . . It will ensure a strong Post Office that is better able to serve all its customers in all parts of the country."—[*Official Report*, 18 April 2000; Vol. 348, c. 939-40.]

That was the prediction of the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers), and, like everything else that he has touched, it has since proved a disaster. In the short time since he made that statement, the Post Office has reported its first operating loss for 25 years, and nearly 63,000 days have been lost owing to industrial action in the last financial year alone. In that same period, another 547 sub-post offices have closed, and the company has moved even further away from meeting its delivery targets.

Last November, it was reported that Consignia was considering 15,000 redundancies. At that time, the company was quoted as saying that 20,000 was an extreme worst-case figure. A few weeks later, just before Christmas, the chief executive casually dropped into an answer to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry that the number of redundancies was likely to be 30,000. Since then, we have had the decision to scrap the second delivery, and reports that the early morning collection is to go. The latest report, received in the last few days, is that deliveries might not be made until the afternoon.

It is extraordinary that a national institution such as the Post Office could have been brought so low in such a short time. There is no reason for that to have happened. The Post Office is still a huge business, with a work force of 200,000 and a brand image that is generally respected

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and trusted throughout the country. In particular, the postmen and women who get up early to deliver the mail in all weathers do a great job and are the company's greatest asset, while the sub-postmasters who deliver services for the Post Office are at the heart of thousands of rural and urban communities.

Of course, post offices throughout the world are facing challenges. Fax machines, e-mail, electronic payments and direct debits have all provided competition that has gnawed away at some of the basic business of mail and parcel delivery. Other European and international postal services, however, have adapted far more quickly than the Post Office in the United Kingdom. In Germany and Holland, the Governments have recognised that lumbering state-owned corporations are unsuited to the new challenges and that, if they are to survive and prosper, they need the freedom and flexibility of private sector ownership.

Since it was partially privatised, the German Post Office has bought the majority share in DHL, and is now the biggest operator in the European courier express and parcel industry. The Dutch post office, which is fully privatised, has bought TNT and is the second biggest business in Europe. Both have left the UK Post Office far behind—its own acquisitions have been far less successful. Only last month, the Public Accounts Committee reported that the Post Office's acquisition of German Parcel is barely showing a positive return and that the Department of Trade and Industry has failed to operate proper oversight.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Is the hon. Gentleman pledging that, if elected, the Conservatives would privatise the Post Office completely or that they would subsidise through taxpayers' money the second delivery that he does not want to cut?

Mr. Whittingdale: I am delighted to welcome the hon. Gentleman's conversion to the cause of privatisation. Part of the problem, which I shall explain to him, is the Government's failure to give the Post Office full commercial freedom. That is the view not only of the Opposition but of the National Audit Office, which reported last week that the absence of private shareholders might limit pressure to improve its efficiency and that the DTI might be more concerned with protecting the Government's dividend than with introducing greater competition. The latest figures show that the Post Office has recorded operating losses of £100 million, but the Government still refuse to say whether they intend to take a dividend out of the Post Office this year. Perhaps the Secretary of State will answer that question at least.

The Post Office has also complained that its present status—half in the public sector and half out—is unsatisfactory and has contributed to its problems. I should point out to the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies) that, in evidence to the Trade and Industry Committee not so long ago, the chief executive of the Post Office said exactly that. The Post Office itself feels that, although it is still in Government ownership, it lacks the freedom that it needs. Ministers might be unwilling to take responsibility for its performance, but they have not hesitated to interfere in its operation at every turn.

Mr. Colin Challen (Morley and Rothwell): Perhaps the hon. Gentleman made it clear in the first 45 seconds of his speech, which I apologise for missing, that his party would privatise the Post Office 100 per cent. That seems to be his party's position. If he did not say that, will he clarify matters?

Mr. Whittingdale: I remind the hon. Gentleman that the previous Conservative Government introduced proposals, which I supported, to privatise the Post Office. I regret, however, that we were unable to implement them because of opposition from the Labour party. The Secretary of State has criticised the previous Conservative Government for not giving the Post Office full commercial freedom, yet his party consistently opposed Conservative proposals to give it the commercial freedom that it needs.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): Before my hon. Friend moves on from his point about Government interference in the Post Office, will he draw the House's attention to the fact that, although the Government interfere in a way that is largely deleterious, they have not interfered to help the Post Office take a lead in, for example, environmental matters? Rather, they have left it to become one of the worst-lagging businesses in this country in respect of matters such as clean air.

Mr. Whittingdale: Both sides of the House acknowledge that my right hon. Friend is an expert on the environment, and he is absolutely right. When it has suited them, Ministers have denied any responsibility for the Post Office's operation and pretended that it has nothing to do with them while interfering in its management and making life more difficult for those who are trying to run a business.

As evidence of how the Government have interfered in the Post Office's operation, I cite the fact that at Trade and Industry questions at the end of last year the Secretary of State chose to announce that she had sacked its chairman, Dr. Neville Bain. She did so without having warned either the Post Office or, I understand, Dr. Bain.

Dr. Bain's temporary replacement, whose appointment was announced last week, has said that the organisation is now in a "perilous state", and that the business model does not work. Yet it is hard to see how even someone of Allan Leighton's obvious talent will sort out that problem on the one day a week that he is contracted to work as chairman of the Post Office.

The management is entirely right: part of the answer must be Consignia's getting its costs down and its productivity up. Doing that, however, will mean making hard decisions, while also confronting long-established working practices. Many in the work force accept the need for change, but many do not.

Geraint Davies *rose—*

Mr. Whittingdale: Let us find out which camp the hon. Gentleman is in.

Geraint Davies: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way a second time.

The hon. Gentleman talks of interference. In a world in which the Post Office had been privatised, would he superimpose the requirement for RPI minus X in terms of price and the requirement for universality in terms of public service? Would he also allow cherry-picking by private sector competitors? Does he agree with the NAO report's conclusion that there is an inherent tension among those factors?

Mr. Whittingdale: If the hon. Gentleman looks at the NAO report, he will see that it expresses some concern about the appropriateness of RPI minus X. What is certainly clear is that even if the Post Office were in the private sector, it would still have a quasi-monopoly, at least for the foreseeable future. It would therefore need to be regulated in the same way as other privatised utilities, and I would expect the universal service obligation to remain. The NAO report, however, specifically identifies as part of the problem the fact that the Post Office is not in the private sector, and has been retained as a wholly state-owned corporation. There is no doubt that that has contributed to its problems.

One of the Post Office's greatest problems, though, is the appalling industrial relations performance that has afflicted it over the past few years. As I have said, last year nearly 63,000 days were lost through industrial action in the Post Office—more than were lost in the rest of the economy put together. That is undoubtedly one of the main reasons for its failure to meet its performance targets.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Is not one of the key reasons for the industrial relations problem the catastrophically low morale among those who work in the Post Office, such as postmen? They feel very let down by the Government, which is one reason that they are so depressed about things.

Mr. Whittingdale: I agree that morale in the Post Office has not been helped, especially given the announcement of 30,000 redundancies two weeks before Christmas. That inevitably cast gloom over many who work in the Post Office, as I saw when I visited my local delivery office. I am sure that my hon. Friend would see much the same if he paid a similar visit. The fact is that the performance of the Post Office has continued to deteriorate steadily over the past few years.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): Does the hon. Gentleman feel that his proposals for privatisation would improve morale in the work force?

Mr. Whittingdale: I certainly think they would improve the performance of the Post Office, as has happened in Germany and Holland and, indeed, in other privatised utilities. The important thing is to improve performance and increase efficiency. I cannot believe that the hon. Gentleman will defend the Post Office's failure to meet its delivery targets, and the fact that in each of the last three years it has fallen ever further below them.

The Post Office's current performance is unsatisfactory. In some areas, especially in London, one in five letters fails to arrive on time. Postwatch, which the Government set up as a consumer body to monitor the Post Office, estimates that up to 1 million letters go missing each week. However, instead of working with the management to improve performance, the Communication Workers Union is now balloting its members about an all-out strike in the Post Office in pursuit of a pay claim. I hope that the Secretary of State agrees that further industrial action is the last thing the organisation needs, and that she will take the opportunity that the debate provides to condemn unreservedly any possibility of a Post Office strike.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Does my hon. Friend realise that Labour Members are being asked to vote for an amendment that congratulates the Government on

"encouraging partnership between employers and unions"?

Does he believe that Government Members know about the strike ballot?

Mr. Whittingdale: If they do, the amendment is curiously worded. My hon. Friend is right. There are nine days before the CWU announces the result of the ballot. When I was interviewed on breakfast television this morning, I heard the deputy general secretary asking his members to give him the authority to call a national strike in pursuit of a pay claim.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): The hon. Gentleman appears to be moving in a dangerous direction. Is he saying that if he were in power, he would ban strikes when people wanted a decent pay settlement from a private sector industry?

Mr. Whittingdale: I understand that the hon. Gentleman is sponsored by the CWU, and I am therefore not surprised that he tries to defend it.

Mr. Connarty: That shows the extent to which the hon. Gentleman is out of touch. There are no longer any sponsorship deals. I am a member of the parliamentary panel of the CWU, and I declare an interest. When sponsorship existed, I also declared my interest on the Floor of the House. There is currently no sponsorship, but if the hon. Gentleman wants to ban strikes, that will apply not only to one union but to the whole of industrial Britain.

Mr. Whittingdale: I accept the hon. Gentleman's curious distinction. I am not entirely sure what it means, but I accept his assurance that there is no sponsorship agreement. I am not talking about banning the strike, but I hope the CWU recognises that a national strike is the last thing needed by a business in the terrible state that the Post Office is in. Such action would do enormous damage, especially to small businesses, in a short time. If the strike goes ahead, I hope that the Government will consider removing the Post Office's monopoly.

Even if the Government do not lift the monopoly, greater competition will be one of the drivers of the improved performance in the Post Office that everybody supports. I welcome the regulator's moves to introduce more competition, and we look forward to his proposals for achieving that. Limited progress in introducing competition has already been made, but Postcomm needs to do more to encourage new entrants and to ensure that contracts with the Post Office are attainable and fair.

Competition will help to ensure that service standards do not deteriorate further. The universal service obligation is enshrined in the Postal Services Act 2000, but there

[Mr. Whittingdale]

have been worrying reports that it may be chipped away at the edges. As I have said, we already know that morning collections and second deliveries will be scrapped. Yesterday it was reported that domestic deliveries may not be made until the afternoon, with only businesses receiving mail before 10 o'clock in the morning.

It therefore appears that the Post Office cannot guarantee to deliver a first-class letter the next day, and that in future a letter may not even arrive until the afternoon of the subsequent day. Not only domestic customers will suffer: as the Federation of Small Businesses pointed out, it is often almost impossible to identify home-based businesses from the address on the envelope, so it is inevitable that many small firms will lose out if the proposal goes ahead. One report in *Sunday Business* even said that there are secret plans in the Post Office to end household deliveries all together. As the Liberal Democrats were identified as the source of the story, we can probably take any such reports with a pinch of salt. None the less, whether or not the report is true, the performance of Royal Mail is not good enough and is getting worse. Yet, Ministers have attempted to claim that that is entirely a matter for the management of Consignia and that they bear no responsibility. They cannot get away with it.

Mr. Challen: Will the hon. Gentleman explain how the private sector could guarantee all the services that he fears losing, except by charging more for them? He may be aware of a report in yesterday morning's *Yorkshire Post* featuring a business man in Hawes, North Yorkshire, who says that he greatly fears the impact of all the changes. However, the hon. Gentleman must say what will replace them.

Mr. Whittingdale: I ask the hon. Gentleman merely to look at the record of what has happened in Germany and Holland. Indeed, he should consider the record of other privatised utility companies, each of whose performance has improved.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): Will the hon. Gentleman share the information that he obviously has about the liberalised markets in Europe? To what extent has liberalisation affected domestic rather than commercial deliveries? Will he give us the figures?

Mr. Whittingdale: I do not have the figures to hand. I have read the NAO report, which makes it clear that, where competition has been introduced, the main post office has largely continued to have the vast majority share of business. I see no reason why that should not happen in this country. The Post Office should be an extremely successful business. I have no doubt that if it were allowed to compete, it could do extremely well. I anticipate not that it would lose a large share of the business, but that the introduction of competition would, as has happened elsewhere, act as a general driver to improve performance and increase efficiency. It is the Government who have decided to keep ownership of the Post Office in the public sector and who retain responsibility for the management of Consignia and its strategic direction. It is, therefore, the Government who are ultimately responsible for the company's performance and for ensuring that the customers get the standard of service they are entitled to expect.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Does my hon. Friend agree that the more the Post Office fails to give a reasonable, everyday service, and as the likelihood of a general strike increases, the more people will find alternative methods of sending their communications, perhaps through e-mail or text messages? As more people use such means of communication, fewer will be sending letters, so the unit cost will rise and the downward spiral worsen.

Mr. Whittingdale: My hon. Friend is entirely right. That is another reason why strike action is the last thing that the Post Office needs at this time.

I turn now to a different aspect of the business of the Post Office, but one that is equally important and that matters to a huge number of hon. Members in all parts of the House—the future of the counters business. I suspect that hon. Members in all parts of the House acknowledge that the 18,000 post offices and sub-post offices throughout the country perform a vital service. In my constituency and those of many other hon. Members, sub-postmasters play a vital part in sustaining the life of their local communities, especially in rural areas, and also in deprived areas of our cities. All too often, when the sub-post office closes, the village dies.

Once again, it was the current Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who said two years ago:

> "There is no doubt in my mind that our programme for the Post Office network will guarantee a future for the network, recognising the very important role that it plays in our communities."—[*Official Report*, 15 February 2000; Vol. 344, c. 813.]

Yet, following that statement, another 382 sub-post offices closed that year. Last year, the figure increased to 547 closures in a single year. I have no doubt that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will say that the rate of closure has slowed. I must warn her not to take too much comfort from that. Many sub-post offices are hanging on only because it has been found that no one is willing to buy the business. The sword of Damocles is hanging over the sub-post office network, and the Government are responsible for that.

Mr. Bob Laxton (Derby, North): Will the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that the issue is not only the closure of sub-post offices and rural post offices? In the constituency of the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin), a small rural sub-post office has recently re-opened. That was at Ashford in the Water. In some areas, where there has been co-operation on the part of local authorities and Consignia, offices are opening. It is not a matter of closure everywhere.

Mr. Whittingdale: I agree with the hon. Gentleman, who I understand is another Member who is sponsored by the Communication Workers Union.

In my constituency, I was delighted to assist in the re-opening of a sub-post office in Great Totham. However, for every sub-post office that is opening, I can point to at least a dozen that are closing. I have quoted net closures. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will not try to pretend that the sub-post office network is not shrinking every year.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Derby, North (Mr. Laxton) for giving me the opportunity to intervene on my hon. Friend. I understand that the hon. Gentleman is a Parliamentary Private Secretary in the Department of Trade and Industry.

Although the opening of the Ashford in the Water post office is welcome, the closure of the post offices in Cubley, Longford, Rostan, Flagg, Lea Bridge, Kniveton, Fenny Bentley, Clifton and Taddington took place under this Government.

Mr. Whittingdale: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend. The real tragedy is that the experience that he has set out in Derbyshire will be repeated in every county. There is no question but that sub-post offices are closing in alarming numbers and are continuing to do so.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I have a sense of deja vu because many of the predictions that we on the Opposition Benches made two years ago are being seen to come true. Perhaps it is worth mentioning that sub-post offices are private businesses. They are businesses into which people have put their pension money and their lifetime savings. When they cannot sell them, they see their assets—often assets on which they were relying for retirement—diminishing.

Mr. Whittingdale: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is one of the great tragedies. People who have put all their savings into the asset of a sub-post office are finding that they are unable to sell the business. As a result, they will be left with far less to provide for themselves in retirement.

I have already quoted the former Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. When my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) was speaking for the Opposition on these matters, she warned precisely what would happen if the Government continued with their policy.

Mr. Gummer: Does my hon. Friend agree that often post offices are unable to open to replace those that have closed because of the exorbitant terms that the Post Office forces upon new sub-postmasters? Is it not odd that although we can have a machine that is tied directly into a terminal in connection with the lottery, we still do not have similar machines that would enable people to obtain their normal social security benefits in post offices?

Mr. Whittingdale My right hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. I hope that the Post Office will do everything it can to encourage the opening of new post offices. Indeed, I hope that that is already happening.

The sub-post office network is under threat because of the decision taken by the Government to scrap the proposed benefit card system and to move instead to compulsory electronic transfer of benefits into bank accounts from next year. That poses the greatest threat to the network's survival. It is well known that the biggest source of revenue for sub-post offices is the administration of benefit payments. That is worth some £400 million to the network, or about 35 per cent. of its income. The loss of that money will jeopardise the future of thousands of post offices.

In addition, there is likely to be another devastating effect on the businesses' retail side. Many pensioners and benefit recipients go to the post office to draw benefits in cash, and often spend some of the money on purchases in the same location. Stopping benefit payments in cash across the counter will cause sub-post offices to lose the income that the Benefits Agency pays them, and to risk losing a sizeable proportion of their sales income.

The Government have pledged repeatedly that anyone wishing to receive benefits in cash at the post office will still be able to do so. We are assured that post offices will be able to offer basic banking facilities to people with bank accounts and that those who do not have banking facilities will be able to set up a Post Office card account, yet just over a year away from the beginning of the switch to automated credit transfer, there is no sign of the universal bank being put in place.

Four months ago, it was reported that the Government were considering scrapping plans for the universal bank, as a result of rows between the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry over cost. Then it was announced that the Department of Trade and Industry was no longer to be responsible for the universal bank, and that the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions had taken it over. One report said that that was a

> "fresh effort to make the troubled project work."

Two weeks ago, the *Financial Times* said that contingency plans were having to be drawn up in case the universal bank did not start on time, and that there was a growing conviction in Whitehall that the deadline would be missed. I hope, therefore, that the Secretary of State will take the opportunity this afternoon to say whether she is confident that the universal bank will be up and running by next year's deadline.

Mr. Blizzard: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way a second time. Will he set out his solution to the problem that he has outlined? I recall that the previous Conservative Government came up with a smart card solution that was not very smart.

Mr. Whittingdale: The scheme proposed by the previous Government would have preserved people's ability to receive cash across the counter. In addition, it would almost certainly have boosted sub-post offices' income and thus assured their future. However, this Government scrapped that scheme and replaced it with another that shows no sign of being operational in time. The problem for the hon. Gentleman is that we do not have time to wait until the election of the next Conservative Government, as this Government intend to scrap the cash payment of benefit in just over a year. They are failing to put in place any alternative scheme.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): Is not my hon. Friend being too kind to the Government? Most of the necessary efficiency savings and anti-fraud measures would have been achieved under the Horizon project, which has been scrapped at a cost of £571 million—a sum that has to be written off by the Post Office. In place of the Horizon proposals, post masters and their customers

[Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory]

have been offered the vague hope of a universal bank that no one believes will be brought in on time. The result was last year's record number of closures, which have been a financial and social disaster.

Mr. Whittingdale: My right hon. Friend is entirely right. I accept his criticism; I shall do my best not to be so kind to the Government in future.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): Does not my hon. Friend agree that, even if the universal bank is introduced, the payment of benefits and tax credits through it will still depend on there being enough post offices in existence for people who wish or need to collect the cash to be able to do so?

Mr. Whittingdale: Of course my hon. Friend is right. Although the universal bank may, if it ever happens, allow the Government to meet their undertaking that cash payments will still be available over the counter, it will not fill the gap that will be left once the sub-post offices lose the revenue that they currently enjoy from the administration of benefit payments.

I should like to press the Secretary of State a little further on some of the details of the scheme. Reports have suggested that the Government are working on an estimate of 3 million customers who may wish to take out post office card accounts. The Secretary of State will know that the potential number of customers is far greater than that. The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness has said that there will be no cap on the number of accounts, so the right hon. Lady will understand that there is therefore some confusion about the number that the Government are working on.

I hope that the Secretary of State will make it clear whether all those who wish to take out a post office card account will be able to do so. In particular, can she guarantee that the choice available will be a genuine one, and that those who already have bank accounts but would prefer to use a post office card account will be able to do so? What agreement has been reached with the high street banks on their contribution to the cost of the universal bank? How much do the Government intend to invest in it?

If the Secretary of State is in a position to give those assurances, how does she explain the letter that has gone out from Paymaster, the body that pays the armed forces' pensions, which says that weekly payment of war pensions by order book will be withdrawn from April of this year? Instead, payment will be made electronically into bank or building society accounts or by voucher to home addresses. Can the Secretary of State explain how war pensioners will be able to continue to obtain benefits in cash at post offices, as the Prime Minister has promised, once the system changes in eight weeks' time? Or is she able to say that the universal bank will be up and running within that time?

As my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) rightly pointed out—*[Interruption.]* I am delighted to see the hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn) seeking assistance and look forward to hearing the answer. As my hon. Friend said, even if the universal bank is put in place in time for the switch to ACT, it will not make up for the huge loss of revenue that sub-post offices will suffer as a result. To fill that gap, the Government have promised to create new business opportunities for sub-post offices to attract new customers. The performance and innovation unit report, which is a very good document, specifically identified a number of ways in which sub-post offices could modernise and attract new business. However, 18 months after the publication of the PIU report, almost nothing has been done.

In the urban network, there is widespread acceptance of the need for streamlining and for investment and modernisation of the branches that remain. However, no indication has been given of how many branches are likely to close. One recent report suggested that anything up to 8,000 sub-post offices could close. That has subsequently been denied, but no indication has been given of how many will remain, nor of what compensation will be available to those who decide to give up their business.

Another key way that we were told would bring new custom into sub-post offices was through the training of sub-postmasters as government general practitioners. Last year, a pilot project in Leicestershire and Rutland involved the installation of "Your Guide" terminals in more than 250 locations. I understand that the report which has been delivered to the Secretary of State said that the pilot project has been very successful. Indeed, I have no doubt that "Your Guide" will help people to access Government services and could, at the same time, provide a boost to sub-post offices. Yet since the pilot was set up, almost nothing more has been heard. Indeed, the only additional "Your Guide" terminal to be installed is the one that has just been made available in the post office in Portcullis House. Although that is an extremely welcome additional service for Members, surely the priority should be to install terminals where they are most needed—in the rural network; and to begin training sub-postmasters as quickly as possible. We are told that the Government have money available to do that so why has it not happened?

There seems little doubt that whatever new business can be won for sub-post offices will not be in time to replace the business that will be lost next year. The Government said that they will provide a subsidy to support the rural network and that money for that has been set aside. However, once again no details have been given as to how that subsidy will be determined or of the method whereby it will be paid. All we have heard are vague assurances from Ministers that everything will be all right on the day.

Time is running out. Thousands of businesses are being blighted as a result of uncertainty and gloom as to what their future holds. Unless action is taken to implement those measures, there is a real danger that many businesses will not survive.

The Post Office provides a public service, but like every public service in this country it is failing to deliver—literally, in the case of the Post Office. It is not good enough for the Government to wash their hands of the problem. They created the crisis that is affecting the Post Office and it is now up to them to say what action they propose to take to deal with it.

5.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"condemns the running down of the Post Office under 18 years of Conservative government, which saw 3,500 post offices close, hundreds of thousands of days lost through industrial action, a lack of investment which allowed the Post Office to slip behind its competitors, a failure to give the Post Office the commercial freedom it needed to invest and compete; congratulates the current Government for giving the Post Office commercial freedom to make its own decisions, enshrining the universal service obligation in legislation, establishing a new regulatory framework, bringing in new managers, modernising and supporting the post office network and encouraging partnership between employers and unions; and furthermore notes that Consignia invested £296 million in the last financial year, is addressing its cost base, strengthening its management and striving to achieve a world class service in Britain.".

Last week, the Conservatives attacked the health service and our health service staff. This week, they are attacking the Post Office, but at least this time the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) had the good grace to praise our postmen and women.

Let me start by paying my own tribute to the men and women who work for the Post Office. They do indeed work all hours—antisocial hours—in all weather, getting the mail through. The work is always hard. It is often inconvenient and uncomfortable, and sometimes—as we all recall from the murder of a postman in Belfast before Christmas—it is carried out at grave personal danger.

Behind those postmen and women are the sorting office staff. They make the deliveries possible by handling 81 million items every 24 hours. Then there are the sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses who provide their communities with everything from benefit payments to travellers cheques; and from fishing licences to information on winter fuel payments. I agree with the hon. Gentleman on one point: they provide an invaluable service that strengthens the social fabric.

I agree wholeheartedly with the remarks of the acting chairman of Consignia, Allan Leighton. He said recently that postal workers are

"heroes of their local community . . . they . . . do a cracking job, a fantastic job, in very difficult circumstances".

All of us—at least on the Labour Benches—agree with that.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Secretary of State mentioned the acting chairman of the Post Office. She will have seen an article in *The Sunday Times* last week that noted that a report prepared by senior Consignia directors, with the help of the investment bank UBS Warburg, concluded that radical surgery was needed. *The Sunday Times* stated that a copy of the report was held by the DTI. Have the Secretary of State or any of her Ministers seen it? What does it say?

Ms Hewitt: Opposition Members need to stop relying on speculation in the Sunday press.

Our goals, as a Government, are clear. We want a universal service—[Hon. Members: "Answer the question."] I shall answer by spelling out our policy goals and what we are doing to achieve them—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members do not like my answer, and they will like—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State was asked a question. She is trying to answer it and I should like to hear her answer.

Ms Hewitt: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Opposition did not like my answer—they will like it even less when I come on to their record in government.

Our goals as a Government are clear. We want a universal service that everyone can rely on. We want faster and more reliable mail deliveries. We want a strong network of modern post offices, an effective partnership between management and unions, and a better Post Office for people to work in.

Mr. Gummer: As all those issues were taken into account in the UBS Warburg report, will the Secretary of State now tell the House whether she has received and read it?

Ms Hewitt: The right hon. Gentleman seems to refer, once again, to *The Sunday Times* report. I have not seen *The Sunday Times* report, and I am not interested in press speculation. Beyond that, I do not know to which report he refers.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): The Secretary of State says that she has not seen *The Sunday Times* report, but is she not aware of the parliamentary answer that she gave my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) today, in which she says:

"Any Consignia Strategic Plan would be commercially confidential and therefore under Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information could not be placed in the Libraries of the House."?

Is she not saying that that UBS report, not that in *The Sunday Times*, is commercially confidential and that she has seen it, but is not prepared to reveal it to the House?

Ms Hewitt: I have not received the strategic plan for the company. I am waiting for it, and the position is precisely as I set out in my written answer today.

Mr. Connarty: On the more positive aspects of the comments on the Post Office and its employees, although none of us wants the management and unions to be involved in industrial action because they cannot resolve their differences, will my right hon. Friend give a firm indication that the Government recognise and respect the rights of any work force who cannot reach a settlement through the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, or with the management, to take industrial action if they think it necessary, especially if they are not being paid a wage claim that should have been paid last October?

Ms Hewitt: I shall come to industrial relations later, but let me make it clear, as I have done previously in the House, that I expect management and the unions to sit down, work with ACAS and reach a settlement.

[Ms Hewitt]

I have set out clearly the goals of our policy. Because we are committed to those goals, we are delivering the reform and investment that Consignia desperately needs. The Conservative party refused to provide that investment and reform for 18 years. The real shadow hanging over this afternoon's debate is the Conservative party's failure to reform the Post Office.

Mr. Bellingham: I am slightly confused about the report. The Secretary of State has not told us whether she has read it. I know that she used to work for a company that was in the habit of shredding documents, but will she shed more information on the UBS Warburg report?

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman should choose his words more carefully. As he ought to know, I did not work for Arthur Andersen, and he should take care not to make in the House remarks that would be libellous if made outside the House.

The legacy of Tory neglect, underinvestment and failure to reform the Post Office hangs over the Post Office's situation today. Frankly, this debate should have been called "The Conservative Government's mismanagement of the Post Office". Let me remind the House of the record because the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford seems to be suffering from false-memory syndrome.

In 18 years, the Conservative Government did not care at all about a secure future for the dedicated Post Office workers whom they are now so keen to praise. They did not care about improving delivery for consumers and businesses. They blew hot and cold on commercial freedom for the Post Office. They blew hot and cold on privatisation. Under the Conservative Government, the Post Office was treated as a cash cow—90 per cent. of its profits in its most profitable years went straight back to the Government. Between 1981 and 1997, the Conservative Government took a total of £1.7 billion from the Post Office. Let us understand why. In the 1980s and early 1990s, the Post Office was a successful publicly owned company. That is what the Conservative party could not stand.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): My right hon. Friend must be well aware that £70 million is still being taken out of the Post Office every year. Will she assure the House that, as there are problems in the Post Office and further investment is needed, that £70 million will not be taken out until it is in a better position?

Ms Hewitt: I remind my hon. Friend that we have cut the dividend that we would expect from the company from 90 per cent. to 40 per cent. I shall not make any decision on the dividend—[Hon. Members: "Oh!"] Wait for it. I shall not make any decision on the dividend that we should expect next year, or in future years, until I have seen the company's strategic plan.

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): The right hon. Lady said two things. First, she said that, until 1997 or thereabouts, the Post Office was a successful publicly owned company. We would all agree with that. She also said that, in that period, radical reform took place. Will she explain what the problem was?

Ms Hewitt: If the hon. Gentleman would let me make some progress, I shall explain exactly what the problem was, and what happened under the Conservatives. They were not interested in a successful publicly owned company. It did not fit their view of the world, which was, "Private sector good, public sector bad." As we have heard this afternoon, all they did was cream off the profits and leave the Post Office to stagnate.

The hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford had the nerve to tell us that, in that period, other Governments across the rest of Europe had seen the way in which postal services were changing and were taking radical steps to respond. He talked about privatisation and private involvement, but ownership was not the issue. Some postal services in Europe stayed in the public sector—in France and in the Scandinavian countries—while others, such as the Dutch and German postal services, obtained investment from the private sector. Different routes were pursued to achieve the same goal: reform and investment. All those postal services were given the chance to do better than our Post Office, which was denied the commercial freedom that it wanted within the public sector and the investment that it so desperately needed.

At the time when, as the hon. Gentleman had the nerve to say, change was happening in the rest of Europe, nothing whatever was happening in the United Kingdom under the Conservative Government. For example, in July 1992, the Conservative Government said that they would sell off Parcelforce and review the status of the rest of the business. Five years and £1.5 million of consultancy fees later, the Conservative party manifesto said in 1997 that, if re-elected, they would sell off Parcelforce and review the status of the rest of the business—five years to end up back where they started.

Our Post Office was falling behind. While other countries were changing, investing in and modernising their services, our Post Office's productivity was slipping. Between 1992 and 1996, Deutsche Post's productivity, for example, increased by 35 per cent. and overtook that of the British Post Office, which increased by only 13 per cent. in the same period.

The hon. Gentleman talked about industrial relations, which were disastrous under the Conservative Government. In 1996-97 alone—the last year of the Conservative Government—more than 800,000 days were lost to strike action. Let us consider the record under the Conservatives. Just like the many other public services that were run down under the Conservatives, our postal service went from being a leader in the 1980s to a laggard in the 1990s.

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South): On the record of the Conservative Government, will my right hon. Friend clear up the matter of the Horizon project? To listen to the Opposition, one would think that they were going to find a solution, although, in fact, the project was a consultant's gravy train. Let us nail their lie.

Ms Hewitt: I shall come back to Horizon, which was another botched procurement by the Conservatives. The position that we inherited in 1997 was as follows: more than a decade of underinvestment, 3,500 post offices closed, ministerial micro-management because of a refusal to give commercial freedom, hundreds of thousands of days lost to industrial action, and the Royal Mail left behind in an increasingly competitive world. So we acted. We immediately gave the Post Office greater freedom to borrow and invest. As I said, we cut the dividend from 90 per cent. under the Conservatives to 40 per cent. In the Postal Services Act 2000, we put the universal service obligation into law for the first time. We put in place a new regulator with a duty to safeguard universal service. We created a strong new voice for postal consumers and we gave the Post Office the commercial freedom for which management and unions had been asking for years.

Reform and investment go hand in hand. We have reformed the legal framework. We have also invested £450 million to computerise the post office network and earmarked another £270 million for it. We have been strengthening the management of the company, which many of my hon. Friends welcome. There are new non-executive directors for the board, including Allan Leighton, and new executive appointments, including a new finance director. We are continuing to strengthen the company's management through the open recruitment of a new chairman and a new chief executive for the post office network business.

Let us be clear about the enormous challenges ahead. The company is losing money. Its costs are continuing to rise, just as they did in the 1980s and 1990s, while the growth in mail on which it used to depend continues to slow, not least because of e-mail. Some 6,000 other firms now operate in the distribution business outside the regulated letter market. Greater competition will become a feature of the regulated part of the sector as the Postal Services Commission begins to exercise its powers and new European legislation comes into force.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): Will my right hon. Friend assure me that any licensed operator will pay the full relative cost to the regulator that Consignia has to pay? That is a key element in ensuring a level playing field when there is competition.

Ms Hewitt: The regulator is taking that into account in deciding on the new framework for competition.

There are enormous changes. Consignia is talking to its customers and work force. It has made no firm proposals to change the way in which the post is delivered. It is a great pity that the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford and other hon. Members keep quoting utterly ill-founded press reports. Any changes that the company wants to make will need the approval of the Postal Services Commission, the regulator, and Postwatch, the consumer body.

However, we know, and the hon. Gentleman said, that the company is not delivering consistently for its customers, who are our constituents. People in the company are working hard and in many parts of the country they are meeting—indeed, exceeding—their targets, but in far too many places customers cannot count on reliable mail delivery. That is because of long-standing industrial relations problems that should have been sorted out when the company was financially strong and the Conservative party should have given it the support and the chance to change.

If hon. Members look at the report produced last year by my noble Friend Lord Sawyer, commissioned, with our support, by the company and the union, they will find it easy to understand how fundamental industrial relations are to the company's future. There are many areas, such as my city of Leicester, where management and unions work effectively in partnership, and the customers get a good service as a result. However, in other mail centres, such as those in many parts of London and in Liverpool, the management culture is Victorian. Lord Sawyer's report mentions staff in the sorting offices having to put up their hands before they are allowed to go to the toilet. Such a management culture should not be tolerated in the 21st century. As Lord Sawyer put it, there are mail centres where

> "There is a clear divide between managers and staff which is exacerbated by the lack of trust and respect for each other."

That cannot go on.

I have described the tough challenges that the company faces from the changing market and increasing competition. Management and staff cannot afford to make things worse for the customer and for themselves by failing to find a way to work together. It is clear that the best way to improve pay and conditions for postal workers is to create a real partnership and to make the company more efficient and more effective.

For years, management and the unions begged the Conservative Government for commercial freedom. Now, with a Labour Government, they have it. It is time for them to listen to each other and to find a way to provide more reliable services to their customers. They cannot take for granted the loyalty of those customers, and they certainly cannot expect taxpayers to keep bailing out a loss-making company.

Mr. George Osborne: Will the Secretary of State make it clear that if there is a postal strike, she and her Government will absolutely condemn it?

Ms Hewitt: Management and the unions are in talks and are working with ACAS. I have made it crystal clear that I hope very much that they will resolve the matter so that there will be no industrial action.

Mr. Connarty: On a related point, and in contrast to the inflammatory approach of the Opposition, may I ask my right hon. Friend to confirm that a study of industrial relations in the Post Office delivery section and other sections since last August—in fact, since Lord Sawyer did his good work—shows that there has been little industrial action and lost time, and every effort is being made to secure a settlement with ACAS?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend is right: the immediate impact of the Sawyer report was indeed to improve matters. I very much hope, as indeed does my hon. Friend, that the improvement will continue.

Geraint Davies: My right hon. Friend may not know of the proposal to close the post office in East Croydon or that, as the area has a massive public transport interchange and many people pass the post office when it is closed in the mornings and evenings, the unions say that they are willing to work flexibly outside the normal hours and, indeed, consider staff reductions. Does she

[Geraint Davies]

agree that such a partnership approach, taken in the knowledge of commercial reality, is what we need if we are to have a vibrant Post Office?

Ms Hewitt: I certainly do not know the details of the situation in the East Croydon office, but I entirely agree with my hon. Friend's general point.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): Before the right hon. Lady leaves the subject of post, will she say a word about the report published last week by the National Audit Office? Will she comment on the tensions underlined by the report between the desire of us all to increase competition with the help of Postcomm, the equally strong desire to maintain the universal service obligation and the inevitable fact that companies wanting to compete with Consignia will want to cherry-pick from the profitable business sector, leaving Consignia to fulfil the universal service obligation, particularly in rural areas?

Ms Hewitt: It is precisely because of the importance that we place on the universal service obligation that we made its maintenance the No. 1 duty of the new postal services regulator. As the NAO report also says, rightly, competition will not only benefit customers but encourage Consignia itself to improve its services and offer its customers greater choice and reliability.

I turn now to the post office network. We inherited a post office network that, just like the mail business and the parcels business, had been weakened and undermined in the Conservative years. Again, unlike the Conservatives, we are doing something about it. This afternoon, the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford was, once again, talking down the post office network. Just last week, Colin Baker, the general secretary of the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters, dismissed as "rubbish" recent newspaper reports of widespread post office closures. Those are precisely the reports on which the hon. Gentleman relied. Colin Baker said:

> "Talk of mass closures is scaremongering and wide of the mark."

He went on to say:

> "It is wrong to criticise the industry for being out-of-date and in decline and then create panic when we are doing something about it."

He must have had an advance copy of the hon. Gentleman's speech.

Angus Robertson (Moray): On the concerns of sub-postmasters, may I raise a point made to me by my local sub-postmaster in Fochabers, Mr. Paul McBain? He estimates that the introduction of the automated credit transfer scheme will cut his business by between 50 and 80 per cent. Will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to announce what she will do to reassure my constituent and many others that their post offices will not become unprofitable and go out of business?

Ms Hewitt: I was just about to explain exactly what we are doing to ensure that post offices such as that run by the hon. Gentleman's constituent do indeed have a thriving future.

Mr. Gray: I am looking forward to hearing what the right hon. Lady is going to do. Does she remember that, two years ago, the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) made similar optimistic noises about sub-post offices? Does she realise that since then, 18 sub-post offices in my constituency have closed or are under threat? This week, we hear that the post office in the main town of Malmesbury will close. Does she think that the right hon. Gentleman's optimism was misplaced?

Ms Hewitt: We are taking action, which I am about to describe, to ensure that the post office network has a stronger future. That does not mean that we can prevent every closure, but we are doing a great deal to improve the situation, and I think that my right hon. Friend was right to be optimistic about the future of the network.

We started by commissioning the report by the Cabinet Office performance and innovation unit to which the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford referred. That excellent report was published in June 2000. We accepted all its recommendations and earmarked some £270 million to implement them. I shall explain exactly what is happening because clearly the hon. Gentleman is not aware of it. We started by placing a formal requirement on the company to maintain the rural network and prevent avoidable closures. That duty applies until 2006 in the first instance, and it is backed up, for the first time, by a fund to support community initiatives to sustain or reopen those vital post offices in rural communities.

We are developing universal banking services that will help to tackle financial exclusion while providing new income streams for the post office network. That is crucial in light of the decision to change benefit payments to the ACT system and to remove the old-fashioned giro system, which is not only extremely expensive to administer but costs taxpayers a substantial amount in fraud. I should have hoped that hon. Members from all Opposition parties would support strong action to deal with that problem.

The hon. Gentleman will recall that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave a commitment that both before and after the change to ACT, benefit and pension recipients who want to continue to collect their payments in cash, in full, across a post office counter will be able to do so, and those services will be free to customers. We are making progress on universal banking services, and we have made it clear in our discussions with sub-postmasters that those services will strengthen the post office network not only by allowing benefit claimants to receive their money in cash over the counter if they want to, but by enabling other customers, who use other banking chains, to get more services at the post office.

Matthew Green (Ludlow): The Secretary of State spoke of strengthening the post office network. Will she explain to my constituents why Chelmarsh, Wall under Heywood and Monkhopton post offices have all closed in the past six months?

Ms Hewitt: If the hon. Gentleman looks at Postcomm's recent report on the subject, he will see that a large proportion of those post offices that closed last year were very small, generally operated part-time and were not attached to any wider retail outlet. More than half of them had fewer than 70 customers a week. There are genuine difficulties in attracting investment and new sub-postmasters to post offices when the existing sub-postmaster wants to retire, which is why we are determined to modernise and strengthen the post office network by investing in computerisation and ensuring that new services such as banking services, particularly universal banking services, are available.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): Before the Secretary of State moves on from universal banking services, can she say whether they will be available before automated credit transfer is implemented next year?

Ms Hewitt: That has always been the plan; we continue to make good progress on it.

The government general practitioner service was raised.

Mr. O'Neill: Has my right hon. Friend considered how we should handle the problem of small rural post offices with penny numbers—fewer than 100 customers or 100 benefit recipients—where, often, the postmaster or postmistress is old? Is she suggesting that to keep them open we should make it compulsory for those people to remain in their offices and stay at their desks, especially when nobody else wants to buy an unattractive retail proposition? After all, there is a movement in the House for people to carry on working after 65 and, indeed, 70. Has my right hon. Friend thought about that, as it seems to be the only answer?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend makes his point extremely effectively. The way to strengthen the rural post office network and ensure that people who depend on it for cash payments can continue to do so is to increase the retail and business opportunities available to the network. When that is not possible, we should ensure that subsidies are available to support community-backed rural post offices; that is precisely what we are doing.

As has been said, we have created a pilot scheme—the "Your Guide" scheme—in Leicestershire and Rutland. As a Leicester Member, I have had the opportunity to visit several post offices where that project is operating, and have seen how customers welcome the innovative service and benefit from it.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Is the right hon. Lady saying that the subsidy scheme that is about to be introduced will secure income for smaller post offices to the same value as their present income?

Ms Hewitt: The precise position of any particular sub-post office will depend on the details of its circumstances and the nature of its application. However, we have established a fund to support community-backed rural post offices to ensure that when they are not going to be commercially viable, they can none the less continue to serve their community. We are, perfectly sensibly, evaluating the "Your Guide" pilot to see whether it would make sense to roll it out nationwide. The test is not only whether it will benefit the public, but whether it will benefit post offices by bringing in more retail trade, which they badly need.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Secretary of State is being highly disingenuous. The reason why sub-post offices are closing, or are not being taken over when the incumbent retires, is that they face the certainty that at least 40 per cent. of their income will disappear from next year. Against that, they have only the hope and the Secretary of State's word that some of that income may be replaced by the universal bank, which has not yet appeared. Can she give an assurance that the sum that sub-post offices will definitely lose as a result of the removal of the cash payment of benefits and pensions will at least be made up by the income stream that she anticipates and calculates will come from universal banking services?

Ms Hewitt: The right hon. Gentleman is doing exactly what the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford did earlier—scaremongering about the future of the post office network; I refer him too to what Colin Baker of the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters said. The right hon. Gentleman ignores independent research that shows that many benefit claimants have already moved to ACT or will do so in future, and will continue to get their benefits from their post office when banking services are available there. When they do so, they will buy things as well. Along with the automation of post offices that we have put in place, universal banking services will make it possible for sub-postmasters to offer a wider range of services to their customers and thus increase their income.

Mr. McLoughlin: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Ms Hewitt: One final time; I have been generous in accepting interventions.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Secretary of State has been exceedingly generous in giving way. She accused Opposition Members of scaremongering, but what does she think about the chief executive of Consignia, who appeared before the Select Committee on Trade and Industry and dropped the information that there were likely to be 30,000 redundancies?

Ms Hewitt: The chief executive speaks for himself; he was simply pointing out the implications of a particular calculation and the need to deal with excessive rising costs in the Post Office. It is not I who accuses Opposition Members of scaremongering; I quoted the general secretary of the NFSP, who is fed up with press reports, constantly quoted by Opposition Members, about the inevitable mass closure of post offices. We are acting to stop closures; the Conservative Government, for 18 years, did not.

The hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford spoke about the need for reform, greater choice, more competition and better management. However, the Government whom he supported did nothing whatsoever to enable the Post Office to thrive. Years of Tory inertia left the Post Office in a desperate state and in dire need of reform and investment. In opposition, we called for reform and investment; in power, we have delivered them. Under the Conservatives, we had cutbacks and cowardice. They ran the Post Office down with their policies, and are now doing so with their speeches. Under Labour, the Post Office has seen reform and investment—just what it needs to secure a better future for its customers, workers and sub-postmasters. I urge the House to support the amendment.

6.7 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I should like to speak to the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) and others.

The subject of our debate is well chosen, and I agree with most of the language of the Conservative amendment. None the less, the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) demonstrated amnesia about the past, especially when explaining how the Post Office has reached its current financial position. It has lost money for the past three financial years, including this year.

Mr. Gray: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) said that he intended to speak to the amendment tabled by his right hon. Friend the leader of the Liberal Democrat party. I believe that you said that you had selected the amendment tabled by the Prime Minister. Am I right that the hon. Gentleman is out of order to speak in favour of the Liberal Democrat amendment?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has anticipated what I was about to say; my mind is perhaps working a little more slowly. The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) must speak to the Question that has been proposed from the Chair—*[Interruption.]* Order. We are not debating an amendment that has not been selected.

Dr. Cable: I will happily conform with your order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and, in the process, use the excellent arguments in that amendment.

The Post Office has lost money for the past two or three financial years, but in the current period of economic expansion it should not be doing so. It is now beset by competition from fax and e-mail, and it has suffered from chronic underinvestment. Over the past 20 years, about £2.5 billion was taken out of it in dividends. It was effectively looted by the Treasury under the old dividend policy; that is part of the record.

The Secretary of State rightly said that the Government have changed the dividend policy to something more helpful, but for a variety of reasons that change has yet to manifest itself. Before this debate, I read Consignia's recent annual accounts, which are revealing and somewhat worrying. In 1999-2000, Consignia made a loss, mainly owing to extraordinary elements, of about £264 million. The Treasury none the less extracted a dividend of £151 million, plus £96 million in tax. Last financial year, when the new dividend regime had been implemented, Consignia made a very minor profit of about £66 million—it was targeted to make a profit of about three times as much—but still the Treasury took £93 million in dividend, plus £15 million in tax.

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has made a great issue of principle from the fact that Railtrack paid dividends while it was in a state of financial crisis and should have been investing, yet the Treasury is behaving exactly the same. I am struck by the irony in that.

The key question has already been put to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry: will she agree to waive the dividend for the current year? I am sure that she will answer that in due course, but there is a related question. Much of the Post Office's revenue still comes from bond income on the financial securities that it held in the old days. I believe that there is an understanding that that will be transferred from the Post Office. Will the Secretary of State say when that transfer will occur, because it will significantly affect the way in which the Post Office handles its financial difficulties over the next couple of years?

The second issue concerning Consignia management is the company's freedom to make decisions. There is an underlying tension between the company's wish to run its own affairs on a commercial basis, which the Government have increasingly respected by standing back from the company, and the fact that the Government are the major shareholder and therefore have a responsibility for what is going on. I want to focus on one specific decision for which the Government have ambiguous responsibility: the appointment of the chairman.

I do not want to go over why the previous chairman went, but will the Secretary of State explain the process by which the new chairman is being appointed? My understanding is—I may be wrong—that the Department of Trade and Industry did absolutely nothing to initiate the process of choosing a new chairman until the very last day of the previous chairman's contract and the day he left the office. Given the four-month period for public appointments, that effectively guaranteed that Consignia would be left without any leadership for the best part of that period. That seems at first sight to be simple incompetence. Perhaps the Secretary of State will explain the matter.

The third issue raised by the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) when moving the motion related to competition. I am sure that nobody would object in principle to competition in this context. However, the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), who has now left the Chamber, made a very helpful intervention to point out the comments of Sir John Bourn, the head of the National Audit Office, who explained that in the present context introducing more competition would simply make it unlikely that Consignia could honour its universal service obligations.

There is experience of post office networks in other European countries going further down the route of privatisation and competition than the British Post Office, and of what exactly that has meant. In Germany, as I understand it, only 50 per cent. of homes now have mail delivery. In Sweden, the stamp charge had to be doubled to cover the cost of the universal service obligation. The Secretary of State must explain what will happen if, as Sir John Bourn warns, Consignia can no longer continue to observe its universal service obligations. What will be the sequence of events? How will the Government ensure that such obligations are met?

Mr. Drew: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Cable: Perhaps I might anticipate the hon. Gentlemen's intervention by referring to his helpful suggestion that one way of ensuring that such obligations were met would be for the commercial competitors allowed into the business under the deregulation arrangements to pay a charge, thus making their contribution. I hope that the Minister will take that suggestion seriously.

Mr. Drew: I concur with the hon. Gentleman, but does he agree that such liberalisation in Europe is not a very good example because of the gross unfairness under such systems? All that seems to be happening as a result of the mad rush towards so-called competition and liberalisation is that we are losing the universal service—and at great cost.

Dr. Cable: The hon. Gentleman is right because in Europe, as in the UK, the sorting, distribution and collection system is a network monopoly—it is like the railways. Once cherry-picking of the system is allowed, profits are stripped out and the business is made progressively unviable—as indeed has happened in Europe and would happen here if the Conservative proposal were accepted in its present form.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): As the hon. Gentleman is on the subject of a so-called level playing field, what view does he take of the issue raised in the NAO report of Consignia alone being exempt from VAT?

Dr. Cable: It is clear that in the long term all players in the industry should operate on the same basis, whether publicly or privately owned. The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point in that respect.

Geraint Davies: For the record, Sir John Bourn, the Comptroller and Auditor General, did not say what the hon. Gentleman has just claimed. Sir John Bourn said that there is a tension between universal delivery provision and more and more competition. That is clearly true. The hon. Gentleman said that universality could not continue within increased competition.

Dr. Cable: I shall quote the relevant sentence and then there will be no need to debate what was said and not said. Sir John Bourn said:

> "If it were to lose significant custom to its competitors, Consignia might find it hard to finance the provision of a universal service at current prices or service levels."

That is as unambiguous a warning as a public servant could give.

I share the alarm of many Members on both sides of the House over the prospect of the industry being further destroyed by industrial action. It is fair to say that it is proposing to take action under the ballot legislation introduced by the previous Government; none the less, if the proposed strike and others occur, enormous and perhaps permanent damage will be done.

Members of the Government have been floating the idea in the past few days, especially in relation to the railways, that we should be moving to a system of compulsory and binding arbitration for such utilities. Will the Minister give some idea of current Government thinking? Will they allow industrial action only within the framework set by the previous Government, or do they envisage some new initiatives to make such action progressively less likely?

The Post Office Counters network concerns many colleagues, especially those representing rural areas. The point has been clearly made that we are staring in the face the prospect of the network losing income of £430 million a year or thereabouts, and of a significant haemorrhage of Post Office branches. We are not scaremongering: the original parliamentary answer giving the figure of 40 per cent. was in response to a question tabled by the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell)—a Labour Member. That is the basis of the arithmetic from which many of us have since worked. However, in the PIU report the Government proposed a variety of initiatives, and it is useful to go through them one by one and to ask exactly how far they have got.

On the post office card account, there is a rough target of 3 million and no cap. Will the Government confirm specifically that if numbers rise significantly above that, the scheme will be fully funded? The other option for people who wish to use the Post Office under the universal bank is the basic bank account, but there is a problem with that of which I am sure Ministers are becoming aware and alarmed about. Commercial banks are now charging £25 a day for failed direct debits. Many low-income people are faced with penal charges as a result. I hope, therefore, that the Minister will say how far he has got with negotiations with the banks to ensure that, when the basic bank account is introduced, the scale of penalties and charges will be appropriate to the customers whom they will have to serve. It has already been pointed out that those provisions are unlikely to work unless there is a banking network in place. If the branches close, people clearly will not be able to draw on their account in rural areas.

Perhaps I can take the Minister through the key segments of the counters network and ask about progress in each. About 18 months ago, the Government initiated a programme in rural areas that sounded attractive. It was a £2 million interim scheme to help owners of rural post offices to maintain their business. Answers to parliamentary questions from my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) and others suggest that, 18 months later, only five claims have so far been processed under the scheme, amounting in total to £27,000, which is a ridiculously small sum.

Apparently, 300 inquiries were made, 18 applications were made, and only five have been processed. I hope that the Minister will explain why there is such a dismal take-up, why so many postmasters and postmistresses have found it so difficult to apply, and what will happen to the remainder of the applications in the pipeline. If such a small £2 million scheme does not work, what hope is there of a much more ambitious scheme working? Perhaps the Government can take us through the process by which that will gradually operate.

I understand that the Government commissioned a report on how to proceed with the modernisation and improvement of post offices in urban deprived areas; perhaps the Minister will give us some idea of the time scale involved.

The third segment, which is rapidly emerging as the most worrying part of the Post Office Counters network because no one in Government seems to support it, consists of the remaining urban areas, such as mine, which are fairly prosperous in national terms, but where the counters network is used by relatively low-income members of the population.

Post Office Counters seemed to envisage a substantial contraction of this sector, and consolidation. It has described the process whereby Post Office Counters will

[Dr. Cable]

assess local need, prepare the ground for mergers, and compensate sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses. There is a good deal of anxiety about how that will happen. Our experience of the management of Post Office Counters, even in areas such as mine, is extremely unhappy. Perhaps the Minister will explain when the process is to be finalised.

With reference to Post Office Counters' alternative income, I shall ask the Minister about the so-called GP service. A few weeks ago, in a debate in Westminster Hall introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), we heard about the positive feedback to the pilot scheme in Leicestershire. What were the conclusions of that study? Are the Government committed to rolling out the scheme nationally, and will they fund it?

There are many unanswered questions relating to the counters network problem. We all know that there is a potential crisis. The Government have produced some answers, but let us have much more clarity and precision about the post office card account, the basic bank account and the roll-out of the GP system. We need to know what all those mean and how they will apply in practice.

In general, the Government are facing disaster with Consignia. It is a potential Railtrack. Unless we get clear answers about its future funding and organisation, the Government will face far more embarrassment than they have experienced this evening.

6.23 pm

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): I am happy to follow the thoughtful speech of the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable). I have a good deal of sympathy with his remarks, although I take issue with the Railtrack scenario that he sketched out in his final comments. That was ill-considered, in an otherwise thoughtful and intelligent analysis of many of the problems.

I support the Government amendment. We are dealing with a relatively new organisation in the public sector—an organisation that was promoted by my Conservative, Labour and Scottish Nationalist party colleagues in the last Parliament, and by Conservative and Labour in the Parliament before that. From 1994 or 1995, the Select Committee on Trade and Industry was unanimous in the view that the Post Office ought to be reconstructed on a financial basis as a plc within the public sector, with a degree of independence.

Since April last year, such a body has existed. In anticipation of the European postal directives, the postal monopoly is in the process of being ended. It might have been more helpful if we had known what the thinking was about the ending of the monopoly, rather than the suppositions on which the National Audit Office report was based. We are rather impatient about the length of time that it has taken the regulator to publish his recommendations. It is quite reasonable for Consignia to delay its financial plans until it finds out the detail of the regulatory framework in which it is to operate. We know the difficulties, but we do not know precisely the next phase of the regulator's thinking.

The increasingly difficult state of Consignia's finances must be set in context and given proper weight, as well as sympathy. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State repeatedly stated in her speech, Consignia and its predecessor, the Post Office, have been starved of the means to carry out the investment that a modern postal service requires. If the investment had been made available, the poor industrial relations that have scarred the postal service for so long would have been dealt with. I am not sure, however, that the £200 million lost in a full year by the parcels operation could be saved. I shall return to that later.

Apart from lack of investment, Consignia attributes its financial difficulties to poor industrial relations, the parcels operation, higher transport costs, the need to invest in technology, the pay increases and redundancies that it has had to finance in the past year, and pay increases and redundancies that have not yet borne fruit in the form of real improvements, apart from a slight increase in the delivery performance, which I shall deal with in a moment. Alongside those problems, there is the prospect of the end of the monopoly. In short, the business needs money to invest to achieve greater efficiency, to pay off some of its staff, to meet performance standards and to fulfil its universal service obligations.

Mr. Waterson: The hon. Gentleman speaks of the need for more investment in and by Consignia. As it is making losses, does the hon. Gentleman have a view about whether the Government should announce a decision not to claim a dividend in the current financial year?

Mr. O'Neill: The Government should give due weight to that, but they should wait until Consignia's own financial plan becomes available. We should have had that earlier. The regulator has been laggardly in producing the final version of the regulatory framework. I would not discount the Government's having to do as the hon. Gentleman suggests. I would favour that for the next 12 months, but an adult business working as a plc should not be getting subsidies from the state in the form of changing the financial premise on which it was, so to speak, set afloat by the Government. I am prepared for that to be done for a year, but not in perpetuity. Before we make a decision, it would be better to await the other two bricks that must go into the wall before we can address the situation properly.

There has been talk today of the ending of the two-delivery system. It is surprising that there was much talk about that by Opposition Members, but little in the way of figures. I am surprised that the hon. Member for Twickenham did not speak about the matter. The second delivery accounts for 30 per cent. of the delivery wage bill but only 6 per cent. of the mail. It cannot make economic sense in any business to have a drag on costs of that character. If we are to have two separate deliveries a day, I would prefer the first to be for business, and to be carried out by 9.30 or 10 o'clock in the morning at the latest. I would favour a second delivery later in the day, perhaps in the afternoon, for most households.

Mr. McLoughlin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. O'Neill: I will finish this point, then I will be happy to give way to the hon. Gentleman.

I do not understand people who spend their day waiting behind their letter box for their letters to arrive. In our household, and probably those of all hon. Members, most people have gone out to work by 8 o'clock in the morning and rarely see their post deliverer. Their letters are waiting for them when they return in the evening. *[Interruption.]* Some people may have a more leisurely lifestyle than the rest of us who have to work for a living; some of us are not necessarily as rich as some people on the other side of the divide.

Mr. Bellingham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. O'Neill: No, I am sorry. I am not going to respond to comments from a sedentary position. I shall take an intervention from the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) in a moment.

As a private citizen, I do not consider the idea that a morning delivery is essential to be too important. I would like a guarantee that my mail will be waiting behind the door for me when I come home in the evening, as it usually is at the moment. If I thought that some of the financial difficulties that Royal Mail and Consignia have to confront could be assisted by the formalisation of such a plan, I would be happy for that to happen.

I have heard what has been said by the Federation of Small Businesses. It is up to small businesses to ensure that they are clearly identified, and it is not beyond the wit and intelligence of the small business community or of Royal Mail to make arrangements to achieve that, even if it involves adding another letter to certain postcodes at an appropriate time.

Mr. McLoughlin: The hon. Gentleman dismisses too lightly the serious concerns of small businesses, particularly those in rural areas. There has been an explosion of such businesses and, under the hon. Gentleman's proposal, it would be very disadvantageous to them if there were not some way of ensuring that they got their post earlier in the morning.

Mr. O'Neill: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. The rural hinterland presents difficulties, but—let us face it—it does not necessarily get its deliveries very early in the morning at present. It might in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, I suppose, but I have constituents who are for ever telling me that they have difficulties in that regard. I must also make the point that the increase in the number of small businesses in rural and semi-rural areas is a direct consequence of the growth of the lifestyle business, in which people may sometimes not be working under quite the same pressures.

The hon. Gentleman 's point must be considered, but I do not think that it is as big a problem as some people would have us believe, especially when we consider that an increasing proportion of the business being conducted by the kind of enterprises that we are discussing is carried out by e-mail and on the internet.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): Does the hon. Gentleman also recognise that there is an increasing amount of home working being done by people in clerical, administrative and managerial jobs? In some cases, a steady supply of mail is important for those people, too.

Mr. O'Neill: I think we are getting bogged down here. It is not beyond the wit and intelligence even of Royal Mail—whose managers may not necessarily be the sharpest in the box—to establish a system to accommodate that type of mail business. Much of the work done from home is facilitated by the internet, however, and it is more important in that context to get broadband—which covers a different part of the communications network—in place. I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but we should not exclude the consideration of a change in the postal delivery system. We, as residents and workers, have changed our lifestyles and patterns in ways to which the Post Office has not fully adapted.

My proposal would make better use of the labour that the Post Office employs. The question of labour at the Post Office can be described as an asset and a liability at the same time: the labour is an asset but its cost is a liability. We must use the labour force to optimum effect. Whatever the figure would be for savings through staff reduction, a sizeable proportion of it would be achieved by natural wastage. Any organisation that has a staff turnover of about 200 per cent. in certain parts of the country will certainly be able to offload a number of people at relatively low cost, because, surprisingly, there is not only a high turnover but a relatively short period of service. We are not, in the main, talking about sizeable sums in terms of redundancy costs.

It is fair to say that that high turnover is a consequence of the inadequate system of industrial relations that exists in the Post Office. It was no secret, in the period before the 1997 election, that the Select Committee on Trade and Industry would have the workers in in the morning and the managers in the afternoon. We asked them the same questions, and we were equally rude to all of them, on the grounds that we felt that there was virtually a complete inability to talk sensibly about industrial relations. One of the actors in those scenes is now a member of the Government—indeed, he is a Minister at the Department of Trade and Industry. In his day, he would say to me that he was somewhat embarrassed by the questions that we were asking. Nevertheless, some of those questions remain unanswered.

It is no accident that industrial relations began to improve following last summer's publication of Tom Sawyer's report, in which he identified a number of issues and problems from which nobody could hide. The unions and the management—to a large extent—were embarrassed into addressing those challenges. The difficulty was that the fragility of the peace, the truce, the improvement—call it what you will—was evidenced by the reaction to the bombshell that was dropped when the figure of 30,000 staff slipped from the chief executive's mouth.

I am never sure whether to believe the cock-up theory of history or the conspiracy theory. I happen to like the chief executive, and I would attribute that occurrence more to cock-up than to conspiracy. Either way, it had a devastating effect on union opinion in Royal Mail, and set matters back considerably. Assurances that have been given since then are not of the kind that enthuse the postal workers' union in terms of the level of wages that its members are getting.

Hon. Members have been talking today about the number of people working in the postal services, and about industrial relations, but they have not talked about the issue behind the industrial dispute. I understand that, over two years, there will be an increase in the basic level of wages for postal workers outside London that will take

[Mr. O'Neill]

them up to the princely sum of £300 for a 36 or 37-hour week. In the year 2004, £15,000 will not be much of a carrot to dangle in front of workers in an industry with a high staff turnover, when jobs elsewhere seem equally attractive.

The bombshell was dropped at the busiest time of the year—just before Christmas, when we want industrial relations to be at their best—so it is no wonder the union is to ballot under the law. That ballot will give the union's general secretary and executive the right to call a strike at a date of their choosing, although it does not necessarily follow that there will be a strike. Indeed, Labour Members highlighted the fact that the industrial relations legislation was deficient because it put an additional weapon at the elbow of the general secretary and the executive as they went into negotiations. They were able to say, "If you don't give us what we want, our men and women will walk out under the law." We are, I hope, still a long way from a serious industrial dispute, but if one took place it would set us back some way.

The conditions that have created the bad industrial relations are due as much as anything to management timidity, which is apparent across other Royal Mail activities. Let us face it: the main activity is delivering mail, so surely we could have a pricing system with more flexibility than first-class mail at 27p and second-class at 19p. People who want a speedy special delivery must pay £3.50, but developing a pricing system to deliver letters by guarantee in an emergency for less than £3.50 is not rocket science.

Those of us who drive and walk about London know to their cost that couriers on bicycles and motor bikes deliver parcels and packages of a relatively small weight across the city. We may curse the drivers of Post Office vans from time to time, but we can completely exonerate staff from any responsibility for courier services of that sort. The postal services do not run them, not because the unions have refused to take part—in fact, they have repeatedly requested that the postal services change tactics radically and consider running urban courier services—but because the postal services do not want to get involved. They have no interest. I find that timidity frustrating in what ought to be a vibrant private sector-minded and now liberated operation.

There is a long way to go before the business attitudes of the postal services change. In large measure, the culture is that of the civil service rather than that of a competitive business.

Mr. Drew: When I visit my sorting offices, I never cease to be amazed by how little discretion the management have. They have to refer virtually every decision up the line, which causes frustration in the work force, who feel that they are never listened to.

Mr. O'Neill: I accept that. A number of able people at the lower levels cannot break through because they want to live locally and the structures are such that, in many respects, they inhibit best use of the talented management in the postal services.

All that the new broom has produced so far is a new cheaper headquarters outside London, perhaps fewer management layers and the contracting out of services such as fleet maintenance. Those required neither courage nor imagination, nor, for that matter, much innovative management thinking, but we must be careful not to go down the subcontracting road at will. If one aspect is responsible for creating the problems in Railtrack, the Atomic Energy Authority and British Nuclear Fuels, it is the extent to which subcontracting, either as a precursor or an alternative to privatisation, led to lack of management control.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) alluded to control that is too centralised, but often nobody knows what is going on. That problem was created in Railtrack. My worry is not that there could be a financial disaster, but that management may not be able to appraise or understand what is going on in the business for which they are responsible.

I have criticised the management and the mail service, but there have been improvements: 91 per cent. of first-class mail is delivered the next day, which is up on 86.5 per cent. in the first quarter of last year—and second-class deliveries have also improved—while the figures for first-class mail in France, Ireland and Spain are only 81, 87 and 70 per cent. I accept that the figures for Germany and the Netherlands are 95 and 92 per cent., but, as the hon. Member for Twickenham said, mail is not delivered to every household or six days a week in those countries.

On costs, a first-class delivery weighing under 60 g is 27p in Britain and just under 30p in France, while a 60 g delivery is 45p. In the Federal Republic of Germany, the cost is 37p first class and 74p up to 60 g. In Italy, a first-class letter costs 50p while in the Netherlands a delivery weighing over 20 g costs about 54p. Let us not talk down or, as some would like, condemn UK postal services, which are doing a first-class job of work in a number of respects.

I am not arguing that postal charges should necessarily go up. In the first instance, we may have to consider removing the dividend obligation in the next financial year, as the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) suggested from the Opposition Front Bench. Let us first consider the new pricing system and what the regulatory system offers, but let us also remember that, as the National Audit Office report suggests, if there is liberalisation there will be cherry picking, not in the domestic delivery market but in commercial sectors.

Significantly, when I asked the shadow spokesman, the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale), about the split between commercial and domestic deliveries, he was unable to give me an answer. I do not have the answer, but I do not suggest that liberalisation will at present be anything other than very difficult for Royal Mail, given the constraints. I wish Royal Mail well, but we need a vast improvement in the quality of management, and continuing but non-interventionist Government sympathy. The Government are no longer allowed to intervene under the law, so they must look benignly on the postal services. We must also dramatically improve industrial relations so that strike threats are not used to get poorly paid workers a decent wage.

If all that happens, establishing the Post Office as a plc with the Government as the single shareholder will succeed. This is a novel, bold and innovative attempt to sustain the public service and the universal service obligation, so let us hope that it does indeed succeed. I look forward to the Minister's reply.

6.49 pm

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): One of the advantages of having been here for a number of years is that I have observed the same scenery coming round more than once, and the same problems appearing again and again.

I can tell the hon. Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill) that I plead guilty: I was the Back Bencher who tabled the amendment whose effect was to release on to the streets of London all the motor cycle couriers who frighten the heck out of people. At the time I could not work out why Ministers allowed me to do so, but when I saw the motor cyclists whipping through traffic I realised that I was the fall guy. Anyone who complained would be told, "It wasn't me, guv; it was that chap Richard Page."

I think I can fairly claim a long interest in this sector, stretching back not only to the amendment I just mentioned but to the early 1990s when the then Government were moved to introduce some commercialisation. We now observe the collective amnesia of the Labour party—led by that of the Secretary of State, who seems to have forgotten that the Labour Government opposed any move towards commercialisation. It must be said that they were joined by 12 to 15 of our own misguided Back Benchers.

That attitude was aided and abetted by an excellent campaign on the part of the union. Let me add, for the benefit of those collecting trivia, that the union was involved in a television documentary. I suggest that those who want to know how to run a campaign in the future watch that documentary, from which we can all learn many lessons.

The point is that because our majority was not as great as that of this Government, we could not proceed. The Government should know that they prevented us from going ahead with commercialisation some 10 years ago.

Mr. Challen: By "commercialisation", does the hon. Gentleman mean privatisation? That is what the debate was about in the early 1990s.

Mr. Page: I am afraid the Labour party erected a rigid wall between it and any change in the ownership or operation of the Post Office. No Labour Member told us, "We will resist this, but we will go along with that, that or that." One reason for our present troubles is the refusal of the then Opposition to recognise that competition was stirring in other European countries.

Conservative Members saw then that Royal Mail's monopoly could not be guaranteed for ever. We saw that it would run into trouble, and we greatly regretted that we could not go further. That is why some of us began to express concern to this Government as soon as they were elected, only to be given what I can only describe as a series of brush-off answers. In fact, my most recent contribution was made in DTI questions just before Christmas, when I listed a host of shortcomings and worries relating to Consignia. I was given what I considered a rather waspish reply by the Secretary of State, who said that she would take no lectures from me. A few days later, she demonstrated her fingertip control of Consignia by presiding over the announcement of 30,000 job losses.

The hon. Member for Ochil is a nice chap—I like him very much—but, as an old hand, he must know that no chief executive of any company suddenly lets slip from the side of his mouth that there could be 30,000 redundancies. In a state-owned industry, a chief executive is not allowed to breathe unless given permission by the Secretary of State. Whatever this Secretary of State may say, that is the truth: I know, having been there and done that. Her reply to me can only be described as misleading.

On top of all that came rumours of the possible closure of 1,000 or more sub-post offices. The Secretary of State's response that any such rumours were completely false was, in each case, less than convincing. I wish she had been more forthcoming and had said, "I know nothing of this, I have received no such reports, and I would wish to resist such moves, because they would be devastating to, in particular, our countryside."

In view of the pressures on her, I forgive the Secretary of State for her waspish reply. I am like that—I have a kind and generous nature. We can imagine the scene in the DTI just before Christmas, when the Consignia executives march in and say, "I am sorry, Secretary of State, but we have bad news. Consignia has made a thumping trading loss." I can imagine the thoughts flashing through the Secretary of State's mind: "Oh no, gosh. We've had the problems of the Dome, and the problems of Wembley stadium and the athletics track. We have not yet sorted out the tube, the national health service is in a mess, Railtrack is costing us a fortune, and now we have this. What to do?" The executives will have turned round and said, "It's quite simple. You must put up the price of a stamp, or you must face redundancies."

We all know that the regulator must have a hand in any increase in the price of a stamp, and that the Chancellor must be consulted. I think that the Chancellor's involvement with prudence would forbid such a move, so what must happen? Sadly, redundancies.

A number of Members have pointed out that Consignia has to pay the Government a dividend. It happens under extreme pressure, and there are good arguments against it. Indeed, it may be a further reason why no moves can be made in any direction which do not address fundamental structures—and fundamental efficiencies—in the Post Office.

Moreover, during past months a realisation has built up that the universal bank plan does not look healthy and cannot replace the income of sub-post offices following the introduction of ACT. I have no doubt that Post Office Counters executives have mentioned that to the Secretary of State and have said, "Do not look to us for a living, from one side or the other, because we are losing money: we have no money at all." As I have said, given all the problems that are falling on the poor Secretary of State, I forgive her for her waspish reply. I knew that the problems were building up and I knew they were serious, but I did not realise that they were as bad as they are, according to the way they have been presented to us.

The person I feel most sorry for, however, is the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Nigel Griffiths). He has just been dropped in it. I envisage his life stretching ahead interminably, with Adjournment debate after Adjournment debate in which Members ask why this or that sub-post office is closing. He should look on the bright side, however: he can make the

[Mr. Page]

same speech to each of them, as long as he remembers to change the name of the sub-post office. That will cut down his work load.

Where does Consignia go from here? Let us consider Post Office Counters. The Secretary of State tried to give us some reassurance, but if we look at answers given by Ministers over the past few years we can only call them—let us be kind—misleading. Let me pull from the hat an answer given to the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) on 14 May 1998. The hon. Gentleman had asked:

> "Does the Minister share my concern that increasing commercialisation could lead to the Post Office's beginning to centralise some of its services so that it can concentrate more on the commercial aspects that may bring in increasing profits? Could not that lead to a further run-down in rural post offices?"

The right hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), as he now is, replied:

> "The hon. Gentleman's fears are unfounded. The principle of the review is to maintain and develop the network of 19,200 post offices."—[*Official Report*, 14 May 1998; Vol. 312, c. 501.]

And so it goes on.

I made a small contribution a moment later, expressing concerns about the issue of setting the Post Office free. They were dismissed by the Minister with a comment about my own shortcomings—which, of course, was completely and utterly justified. However, that again gave the impression that the Labour Government were rebuilding the Post Office from the wreck that the previous Government had left. If we compare the current organisation with the Post Office of some five or six years ago, I know which is the healthier—and it is not the former.

The scene now shifts to Standing Committee B on the Postal Services Bill; I had the privilege of leading for the Opposition. The then Minister with responsibility for the Post Office, the hon. Member for Hull, West and Hessle (Alan Johnson), responded to anxiety about the number of sub-post office closures by saying he could reassure the Committee that the decline had ceased and the rate was again normal. He said:

> "The decrease in figures was a blip. The headline in one of the newspapers that cited the figure of 500 was exaggerated . . . The Post Office is now convinced that the trend . . . is . . . slower".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 2 March 2000; c. 88.]

He was right. That year, 382 sub-post offices closed. However, in the subsequent year, the figure broke the 500 barrier with 547 closures.

It is worrying that, despite all assurances, 441 closures occurred in rural areas. My hon. Friends have reeled off dozens of sub-post offices that are closing in their constituencies. The closure of a rural post office means the death of a rural community. We are therefore exceedingly worried. Although it is not appreciated, there is a subsidy within Post Office Counters, whereby a great deal of money passes from urban to rural post offices to keep them going. They have different rates of funding transactions, but all that could be put at risk.

I shall leave aside the fact that some aspects of proposed Government funding may require EU approval. To some extent, I shall follow in the footsteps of the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable). I agreed with much of his speech, in which he gave a thoughtful summary of the problems that many Post Office activities face.

The Government have earmarked some funds for rural post offices. The Department of Trade and Industry has a start-up capital subsidy scheme of some £2 million, limited to £20,000 per application for rural sub-post offices. Will that be enough to influence someone to take the risk of putting a lot of money into a scheme? If I were in that position, I should have grave doubts.

The Government are working on the details of the universal bank service—combining the basic bank account and the new post office card accounts—that is due to begin in April next year. That is barely 15 months away. When will the Government share their plans for the migrating 16 million people who get their benefits from sub-post offices? The Government make statements about the cost to individuals of using the new accounts. What research have they undertaken into the numbers that might migrate from existing banking systems to the new one? If the costs of running the new account are cheaper and people can operate at a much lower cost, will not that put a strain on the universal bank service that will make it even more unviable?

The Government are working on the assumption of 3 million post office card accounts, but the figure is uncontrolled. Some hon. Members have already asked what will happen if the limit is exceeded. What will happen if more than 3 million people want POCAs? Who will pay? I shall not travel further along that path, but the sooner the Government make a definitive statement about their vision for sub-post offices, the better. It would reassure and give confidence to those who run sub-post offices. The Government appear to have forgotten that we are considering private individuals, who have put their savings into their sub-post office. Every closure represents a loss to the individuals involved.

I want briefly to consider the Royal Mail. In 1992, we had probably one of the most efficient services in the world. Even now, despite the effect of competition from e-mails, other distributors and mobile phones, our Royal Mail continues to measure up well. The hon. Member for Ochil did a good job in outlining the advantages. As he said, our first-class stamp is cheaper than the equivalent in the countries of our major European competitors. Our speed of delivery is better and door to door. However, Royal Mail has not moved on at the same speed as our competitors. I do not understand how it can compete if it is shackled by state ownership, which is not the quickest way to achieve success.

Mr. O'Neill: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that a change has occurred since he previously had some ministerial interest in the matter? There has been a major breakthrough in sorting technology, but the Royal Mail has not been able to take full advantage of it, partly because of industrial relations but mainly through lack of money. The Conservative Government had to filch money in excessive dividends from the Post Office over the years to staunch the flow of the public finances. That, and failure to invest in the kit, meant that the achievements of the Royal Mail are even greater because it does not have the advantage of the same sorting equipment that its European counterparts enjoy.

Mr. Page: We shall consider the relative generosity of respective Chancellors when the current Chancellor takes action on the dividend. He will have a strong point if he waives it. However, when the Conservative Government were in control, the Royal Mail made a profit and did not lose money. The worries are caused by its losing money. Investment in letter-reading equipment has improved immensely in the past few years. The modern readers have greater speed; hand sorting was almost as quick as the work of those of 10 or 15 years ago.

The hon. Member for Ochil should not have tempted me to follow that route, but I should like to see a postcode box on every envelope. Postcodes can thus be read automatically by machines. That happens in France and other countries; why not here? Perhaps that will provide the substance for a ten-minute Bill entitled the "Envelope Marking Bill". Whoever promotes it will get the Royal Mail's seal of approval.

Mr. McLoughlin: Even more regulation.

Mr. Page: As my hon. Friend says, it will lead to more regulation, but in the cause of speed and efficiency.

As we know, competition is emerging and the new regulator has issued specific licences to competitors such as TNT. Doing nothing is therefore not an option. However, we must ensure that we give Consignia the opportunity to operate on a level playing field. That is a terrible phrase, but we all know what it means. We must ensure that Consignia has the same access to European markets as its European counterparts have here so that our companies are not frozen out of competing on the continent. I appreciate that TNT, through its relationship with the Dutch post office, already has an opportunity in this country. I have to say to the Minister that Consignia faces a bit of a hybrid situation and there are worries about whether it will be resolved before complete liberalisation. I wonder whether the Government have caused more problems than they envisaged by taking a dual approach to the introduction of competition between Europe and ourselves.

There are a lot of worried people out there in the Post Office services, whether they work in Royal Mail or serve in local sub-post offices. It behoves the Government to come forward and make some clear statements on their policies. They should tell us what they are going to do, what levels of support they will provide and how it will all work. At the moment, there is a dispirited and very worried group of workers out there—and they deserve better.

7.10 pm

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): This debate continues to roll on and it needs resolving. There are a lot of questions that we all need to ask about the future of the Post Office. First, I congratulate postal workers on delivering a quality service. Chorley does very well and benefits from an excellent service. The mail arrives at people's homes very early in the morning. In rain or snow, whatever the weather, the mail is always delivered. We should remember that the issue is the quality of service that is given to us. We should all congratulate those who are responsible, as it is easy to forget that, day after day, they are loyal people who provide a quality service.

I want now to deal with some of the issues. As a member of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, I was present when it heard about the possible loss of 30,000 jobs. That information came as a shock to members of the Committee and to everyone else, and the newspapers have been reminding us of it ever since. We should get people around the table. We must ensure that high-level discussions are held about the future of the Post Office, because whatever we do, we must remember that it is a universal, quality service. It does not matter whether people live in urban or rural areas or whether they use the Post Office on business or privately—the service must always be provided. We must be aware of that.

It is easy for competition to result in cherry-picking. We cannot allow the cherry-picking of services at the expense of remote areas and services that nobody wants to deliver. It is the quality of the universal service that we must protect. The service that is provided in remote rural areas is subsidised by that in urban areas. That cross-subsidy is easily forgotten but should not be. A remote rural service cannot be provided without finding the money, which the urban service provides. To keep the service in remote areas, the service as a whole must be combined and work together. It is important that we get that right.

Everyone has rightly mentioned rural post offices, but I want to mention urban post offices as well. We have two sorts of post office whose future remains uncertain, and it is that uncertainty that puts pressure on the postmasters, rural and urban, who operate the service. They wonder what the future holds for them. We must help and support them. If we relaxed the £70 million dividend that is taken by the Treasury, we could begin to ease those problems. We could help with computerisation in rural post offices. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State today announced financial support for these post offices, but we need an earlier commitment on that finance. The sooner that that commitment is made, the better it will be for the rural and urban post offices over which a cloud hangs. There are difficulties when such post offices are put on the market. Who wants to take over a post office in such circumstances? We need to provide help, support and clarity to ensure that post offices, whether urban or rural, know where the future lies. I want to see that commitment. I am sure that it can be made and hope that the Minister will make it in his reply and say where the Government support will come from.

We talk about the uniform tariff, but if we want to be realistic and ensure that the universal postal service continues, we need to allow the price of postage to rise. We cannot expect a service to continue throughout the country and between rural and urban areas at the price that we currently pay. I do not want the price to rise out of all proportion, but I believe that it is necessary to consider allowing an increase in the price of stamps. If people want the service, they will, unfortunately, have to pay a little more for it, especially on first-class, next-day delivery.

It is easy to forget just what happens when we open things up to liberalisation but we can see what has happened in other countries. It is the cherry-picking that worries me. Hon. Members have rightly mentioned Sweden. Since 1993, there has been a 52 per cent. reduction in the number of post offices in Sweden, where the price of a letter has risen by 60 per cent. in real terms. The Swedish post office organisation is in financial crisis and lost 1 million kronor in the first quarter of 2001, so it is not all good news. New Zealand liberalised in 1998. People in smaller towns now wait an extra one or two full days to receive their mail. Spain went for full

[Mr. Lindsay Hoyle]

liberalisation in 1960, but less than 70 per cent. of letters were delivered on target there in 2000. The mail service in Spain is beginning to collapse and is an absolute disaster.

That is not the liberalisation that many people talk about. We can pick out particular countries as good examples, but I can pick bad examples as well. The issue is about balance and asking what we really want. Do we want to look after the few or everyone? I believe that we need to look after everyone in the country. Without doubt, it is people who live in remote areas who should especially be considered. I look across at Opposition Members who represent rural areas. Do they believe that their constituents expect, and should expect, a quality service? I believe that my constituents should have a good-quality service with next-day deliveries, but we will not achieve that by allowing cherry-picking of the services that are provided.

A quality service can be provided only if it is a universal service with the cross-subsidies that I mentioned. That is the only way to proceed. We should be proud of the postal service in this country. We should all recognise that the problems of the Post Office are those of the Treasury. We all know about the previous Conservative Government, 18 years of draining finances from post offices and the lack of investment. The problem is that we cannot keep looking back. We should begin to look forward by saying, "Stop draining that money, put the investment in, make sure that the Post Office can be re-equipped, fully support the people who work there, get the management managing correctly and get away from those old practices that still exist."

We must make this a postal service that we can be proud of and support the people who turn out in all weathers to ensure that our mail drops through the letter box day after day. It is those people who ensure that our constituents receive the mail on time and we must continue to support them. The danger is that we will lose that service. Liberalisation means competition, but competition does not mean that things get better. It means that something drops off the edge—in this case, it is the people who live in remote, rural areas. They will not get the service that we get, but they should be able to expect the quality of service that is achieved in London. I am here five days a week and it is very nice that the mailbag comes through without a problem. At home in Chorley, we do very well and the mail is delivered, but I know that remote parts of my constituency will not receive the same quality of service.

I plead with the Minister to take on board those views and to ensure that we get the message across to the chief executive and the new acting chairman. We must get it across to the management that they must remember the people who deliver and remember that our constituents, the people who use that service, expect a quality service. We should be able to deliver such a service and it should be something of which we can all be proud.

We should be proud of the Royal Mail. It was easy to change the name and pretend that it no longer belonged to us, but we are still the only shareholder in the Post Office. We must ensure that the message is heard. Trade unions and management must discuss the future of a service that is provided for us all, and not only for the few.

I look forward to the Minister's reply. I know that he will take my points on board. The Government listen and recognise the need—

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East): My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is a listening Minister.

Mr. Hoyle: That is right.

Without doubt, the Government will deliver on behalf of the postal workers and the postal service. We recognise the need for future investment and understand that the quality service that is provided should not be destroyed.

7.21 pm

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle). He made a passionate plea that the Government should not take money from the Post Office, or demand a dividend from it, at a time when the Post Office is making a loss. He attacked the Conservative Government for taking a dividend when the Post Office was making a profit. Should the Post Office be paying a dividend to the Government when it is losing money? When it is losing money, it is interesting to know whose money it is losing. There is a difference between that approach and saying that the Post Office should make a contribution to the Exchequer when it is making money.

Clive Efford (Eltham): I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman. How does he explain his party's position on the money that it thinks should have been given to Railtrack?

Mr. McLoughlin: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman raised that issue. I am about to deal with that matter.

I am minded of what was said by the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. On Second Reading of the Postal Services Bill, he said:

> "I am confident that the Bill will transform the Post Office into a more commercial organisation. It will enable the Post Office to realise its ambition to become a world-class distribution company. In the global economy, we need a modern and competitive Post Office that can win new business, expand into new markets and create jobs and wealth in Britain . . . The Bill provides for a Post Office with a modern commercial structure while keeping it within public ownership. It provides for strong consumer protection, wherever possible through competition, and ensures that the benefits of competitive, modern postal services are available to all."

The right hon. Gentleman concluded:

> "The Bill is forward looking. It creates a postal service that is fit for the 21st century, and I commend it to the House."—[*Official Report*, 15 February 2000; Vol. 344, c. 815.]

I am worried that those words were used by the man who is now the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. He made a hash of dealing with the Post Office and its future, and he is now doing the same with Railtrack. We have seen the implementation of his words. As a result, the Post Office is in more serious trouble now than when he embarked on his policy.

I was disappointed when I read the report of a debate that took place during July 1994. At the end of her speech, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Estelle Morris), who is now the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, said:

> "Post Office workers have worked in an atmosphere of uncertainty for the past two years, and that is long enough. I invite the Government to give firm assurances on the specific questions that I have raised about the future of the Post Office pension schemes."—[*Official Report*, 12 July 1994; Vol. 246, c. 892.]

How does that fit in, now that she is in a position of some responsibility in the Cabinet, with how Post Office workers must have felt when they heard the remarks of the chief executive shortly before Christmas? He said, off the top of his head, that there could be about 30,000 redundancies.

The Secretary of State accused Conservative Members of scaremongering. We have heard scaremongering from many people. The chief executive certainly indulged in it in his evidence to the Select Committee shortly before Christmas.

Mr. Challen: The hon. Gentleman quoted an Opposition day debate that took place in 1994 on the then Government's plan to privatise 51 per cent. of the Post Office. Given that none of his colleagues has been able to say whether the Opposition support privatisation, will he have the courage to say that he supports 100 per cent. privatisation of the Post Office?

Mr. McLoughlin: The hon. Gentleman is slightly wrong. I was quoting from the report of a debate to which I replied on behalf of the then Government. That being so, I know what it was about. It was about a Green Paper that had been published that gave three options for the future of postal services.

I thought that we were in a new mindset from the one in which the hon. Gentleman finds himself. According to the Prime Minister, we should not denigrate the public sector or the private sector. I understand that we should work together to follow the third way. The hon. Gentleman must get the mood music right. If he does not, he will remain on the Back Benches for a long time.

The hon. Gentleman seems to be asking what the Conservative party's policy will be at the next general election. That is a question to which I shall gladly respond. When we come to the next general election, we shall publish a manifesto, upon which we shall fight the general election. We shall set out the policies that we shall put before the public in that manifesto. We shall not say what those policies are until we are ready to do so.

We are not discussing what the Opposition's plans will be in three and a half years' time. We are here to hold the Government to account on their policy for the Post Office and for the people who work in it. We want to know what will happen to the organisation over the next three and a half years. Instead of trying to score silly little party political points, perhaps the hon. Gentleman should question the Government about the future of those who work in and rely on the Post Office.

Dr. Kumar: My hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Rothwell (Mr. Challen) was not making a party political point, but trying to get some factual information from the Opposition.

Mr. McLoughlin: The hon. Member for Morley and Rothwell (Mr. Challen) has just been given it. The factual information is that we shall tell him and others in due course. At present, as I have said, we are holding the Government to account for their policies and for what they are doing. It is the Government who make appointments to Post Office boards.

We are accused of scaremongering. I was disappointed when the Secretary of State would not tell us whether she had read the report that was alluded to in *The Sunday Times*. She told us that we should not believe everything that we read in the newspapers, but that is the only way that we manage to get information these days. The Government are reluctant to make statements in the House, so we sometimes have to rely on what we read in the newspapers.

Those of us who rely greatly on the rural post network in our constituencies are extremely worried, and I am in that category. The report referred not only to rural post offices but to urban ones.

The Government amendment refers to the closure of about 3,500 post offices under a Conservative Government during 18 years. I am not prepared to say that there should never be any post office closures. Of course there are such closures. On average there were about 180 a year under the Conservative Government. Sometimes people who have run a post office in their homes, sometimes in rural communities, want to retire. They want to move out of the district, and they cease running the post office unless somebody else can be found to take over. Sometimes it is difficult to find other people to take on the business, and if they cannot be found the post office closes.

No Conservative Member is saying that we shall never see a post office closure, and that we must keep 19,000 sub-post offices always in operation. However, although 3,500 sub-post offices closed over 18 years at an average of 180 a year, 1,564 have closed since 1998. I omit reference to 1997 because of the change of Government half way through that year.

The Government's amendment implies that there were an average of 180 closures a year under the previous Conservative Government. The Government stand condemned by that amendment, as an average of around 350 sub-post offices a year have closed under this Government.

It is no good the Secretary of State saying that Conservative Members are scaremongering. A briefing paper from the NFSP stated:

> "We remain very concerned about the rate of closures of sub post offices. Some 547 closed last year. Whilst we welcome the Government's commitment to support the rural network, there is a very real problem with continuing closures averaging two a day which requires urgent attention."

I urge the NFSP to be careful about assurances from this Government. As I have shown, the assurance that they would not close post offices meant only that they would close twice as many as the previous Government, than whom this Government always like to show that they are better.

I hope that the Minister will give the House some reassurance on the matter. It is one of the reasons why we were right to call for today's debate.

I hope that the Minister will also give his attention to the range of services that sub-post offices can offer. At the moment, sub-post offices can offer no services that are in competition with those offered by the Post Office.

[Mr. McLoughlin]

I think that they should be able to offer such services, especially in respect of the delivery network. For instance, if the Business Post group wanted to operate through the sub-post office network, it should be allowed to. Similarly, some of the delivery companies should be allowed to deliver material to post offices, possibly for onward distribution. In rural areas, that could be a useful service, especially given the growth of buying over the internet.

I have received many letters from the villages of Curber, Carver and Froggatt in my constituency. People are very worried about the future of post office services in that area. One constituent wrote:

> "Like so many other people I have been concerned with the Government's proposals for the payment of benefit. The latest news that the Government may put a cap on the number of Post Office Card Account facilities has doubly increased my worry.
>
> My village will be at a disadvantage if this was to occur, and many elderly and disabled and young mothers will experience great hardship. The collection of benefits in cash is the only easy way of obtaining money locally. The nearest bank is in Bakewell which is five miles away. This journey is not easy for anyone without his or her own transport and it also incurs a cost. Benefits in general have not risen sufficiently to take into account any new cost involved in their collection.
>
> I would therefore ask you to impress upon . . . the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, who is now dealing with the matter of benefits, that it is vital that POCAs are available at every Post Office and not just a select few."

Many people, especially those in rural areas, want to be reassured that the POCA service will not be available only at a few post offices. It is very important that it is much more widely available.

The sub-post office network can be a vital lifeline, especially in rural areas. Sub-post offices are often located in integrated village shops, and in rural communities they provide essential services for people who, for whatever reason, are confined to villages. The sub-post office is also a critical element in the village shopowner's financial plans.

Although I welcome some of the schemes introduced by the Government, the overall picture is very worrying. There is still great unease about the transfer to ACT and the effects that that might have. The Government have said that extra money has been made available for the network of sub-post offices, but that money will come on stream only in 2003. We would believe the Government's commitment more readily if the money were made available now. Moreover, the money being made available is a lot less than the amount that is being devoted to establishing ACT.

I hope that I am not accused of scaremongering. The hon. Member for Derby, North (Mr. Laxton) told me earlier about the circumstances in Ashford in the Water, of which I am well aware. I thought it amazing that a Parliamentary Private Secretary associated with this Department should tell me to celebrate the fact that a sub-post office had not closed, and not to dwell on the many sub-post offices in my constituency that have closed.

I accept that some sub-post offices have closed because it was difficult to find someone to take over the business. In such circumstances, closure is inevitable. However, whether the Government like it or not, it has become more difficult to find people to run village sub-post offices in part because there is great doubt about their future viability. What we have heard so far from the Secretary of State has done nothing to reassure people that they can rest easy about the future of village post offices.

If I am scaremongering unnecessarily, I will apologise in three and a half years' time, when no more post offices in my constituency have closed. I doubt that I am going to have to apologise.

7.36 pm

Clive Efford (Eltham): Earlier, I challenged the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) about the Conservative party's position on Railtrack and its demand that the Government should devote taxpayers' money to paying dividends to Railtrack shareholders. I wanted to know how its approach to that issue compared with its position on Consignia. The hon. Gentleman failed to answer that question.

I think that we can dismiss the Conservative motion. I doubt that anyone will believe that the Opposition would do anything other than privatise the postal service. That demonstrates that they have learned nothing from the past five years, and that they will be consigned to the Opposition Benches for many years to come. People can be pleased that, at least in the near future, they will be saved from another term of Conservative misrule.

I wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to postal workers in my area. They have been through a difficult time, and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary must understand that parts of the work force are very demoralised. We have a lot to do to assure those people that their futures are secure. There has been a great deal of scaremongering, and that will inevitably cause much anxiety.

In recent times, the postal service in my area has been very short of staff, as a result, it seems, of management failure, but, even so, local workers displayed an enormous amount of good will. For instance, they used their own cars to take extra bags of post out to make sure that people got their post on time. In addition, they turned up early for work so that they could sort the post and get out on time. In that way, they made sure that they met the delivery deadlines for the first post.

Unfortunately, a new manager was appointed who did not respect the good will and dedication to providing a quality service exhibited by the work force. He started to play about with some of the restrictions governing the use of private cars, with the result that the good will was lost and the postal service in Eltham deteriorated enormously. For many people locally, that caused problems that went on for a long time. It has taken a lot of effort to put matters right.

There was a long delay in implementing a review of the local postal service. It was clear to anyone who knew anything about the matter that extra staff were needed. I intend to return to the question of the universal service and the fact that it is so labour intensive.

With a few exceptions, the service in my constituency has got much better, because extra staff were taken on. Some of the attempts made by the postal service over a number of years to automate the service and the sorting, which were doomed to failure, underline the fact that this is a labour-intensive service. The prospect of large cuts in the work force raises anxiety about the quality of the service in the future and the ability to deliver a universal service.

The delivery of letters to every household every day of the week requires a high level of service and is dependent on a vast army of postal workers. Figures in the Consignia budget show a huge overspend in the universal service. The Postcomm website puts the cost of providing a universal service at around £80 million. That is cross-subsidised from more profitable and lucrative areas of the postal service.

The future funding of a universal service gives rise to great concern. From what is said on the Postcomm website, it is clear that it is determined to have more competition in the postal network. That in itself is not a bad thing; I do not object to competition per se. However, when such competition is bound to undermine the postal service's ability to deliver a universal service to every household in the country, we have to question whether that is the direction in which we want to go.

Postcomm states that competitors coming into the market need not necessarily provide a universal service. I feel that I should point out to my hon. Friend the Minister that the costings for Postcomm were carried out by Andersens. He may wish to revisit those calculations in the light of recent events.

Postcomm is offering a recipe for cherry-picking the more lucrative areas of the postal service. That, in turn, will cause a great deal of concern not just to the work force but to those who rely heavily on the universal service.

A great many of my constituents who run their business or work from home rely on the postal service. I know that because when we recently had problems with our local postal service, they expressed their concern to me about the poor quality of service. We must ensure that their needs are considered when we look at the future and at the standards that we set for a universal service.

I was concerned when I heard a Consignia spokesperson suggest on the "Today" programme that a universal postal service might mean that a letter was delivered some time within the working day. For people who rely on having the post delivered within a reasonable period of time, that could have a devastating effect. When challenged, he said that perhaps Consignia could come to an arrangement for people who rely on it. If such an arrangement results in extra costs for those people, particularly if they work independently and have not budgeted for it, I am sure that it will not be welcome. I ask my hon. Friend to take that on board when considering the future of a universal service. Many small businesses rely on it heavily, and any changes to the delivery of the service could have a devastating effect on them.

Staff are concerned about the effects of many of the decisions made in the postal service. An enormous amount of money was invested in the Horizon scheme, for instance—I am advised that the figure exceeded £500 million. When they see Consignia return a loss in this financial year, they are worried that their jobs could be threatened by decisions over which they have no influence and which do not have a direct bearing on their performance.

Money has also been invested in the integrated mail preparation scheme, which cost more than £120 million, and is still not in operation. The work force feel a great deal of frustration and concern that they may be faced with redundancies as a result of poor management decisions. The scheme was purchased to automate the sorting of mail and, according to my friends in the Eltham post office, it is still not in operation.

Postal workers in my constituency feel threatened because of those decisions. We need to impress on Consignia that a great deal more needs to be done if industrial relations are to be improved and we are to avoid a strike.

Let me refer in passing to South West Trains. The trade union is prepared to go to arbitration and has acted within the law. If it had not, South West Trains would have gone straight to court to deal with the union and stop the industrial action. Managers are being used to undermine the strike, and the long-term effects on industrial relations in the industry could be felt for many years to come. We could rue the day that South West Trains took action to undermine the strike. I caution against any such action being taken in the postal industry, which already has poor industrial relations in many areas because of the decisions and threats that have been made.

People in my constituency and elsewhere want a reliable, efficient and economic public mail service. I accept that most people would not be concerned if part of the service were provided by the private sector. They are concerned about the quality of the service. However, it is not possible to maintain a universal postal industry where the core function is to provide a universal service without the cost being underwritten by the Government or by cross-subsidies from other lucrative areas of the postal industry. I caution against further privatisation without taking those issues into consideration.

7.48 pm

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): The debate is about the Government's mismanagement of the Post Office. If we had been in year 1, year 2 or even year 3 of the Government's term of office, the debate might seem a little unfair, but this is year 5. The current Post Office regime is covered by the Postal Services Act 2000, which, as we have repeatedly heard in the debate, was passed in the face of many Government assurances about what it would mean for the Post Office and the services that it was meant to deliver. So this is a perfectly fair debate to have and, as we have heard, the Post Office, or Consignia, has major problems.

When we talk of the Post Office we mean both the monopoly state business and thousands of small private businesses. I am not sure whether I agree with some of the comments that it is terrible to privatise the Post Office, because, of course, much of it is privately run. The general efficiency of the system over the years has been underpinned by the fact that it has been a successful marriage between small private businesses and a universal Post Office. However, there is no doubt that change is necessary because the volume of letters sent is not rising as much as it used to. There is a vast number of alternatives, ranging from electronic mail and mobile phones to the fax machine. They all mean that the Post Office—Consignia—will have greater difficulties in maintaining its market dominance in future.

The Government's solution has been to set up a state-owned but independent business. As we have heard, that business is suffering—it has moved from profit into

[Mr. Robert Syms]

loss. There are reports in the newspapers almost weekly about suggested changes to the service—the suspension of second deliveries and so forth. It is a business whose chief executive just happened to mention before a Select Committee that as many as 30,000 workers may lose their jobs. The business is not in a happy state. It does not seem to be well managed at present and it needs to change.

Some of my colleagues have suggested that private capital might be needed in the industry. The reason is not that we believe that privatisation is necessarily always the best solution for every case, but that sometimes, in industries such as the Post Office, we have to change the culture. Part of the problem—as we have heard repeatedly during the debate—is that the management and the trade unions, both of whom have had problems over the years, have not worked well together. We have a changed name and a changed set-up but the same old culture, which does not deliver the first-rate service that we need for this century. That is why we sometimes need to consider the ownership of businesses and how they are run.

My hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) set out clearly what happened 10 years ago when the Government under John Major had to back down, due to the size of the parliamentary majority against the options that they were proposing. To some extent, we are returning to the debate that was held 10 years ago. The Labour Government are having to change the way in which the Post Office is managed—perhaps far more than they would have admitted 10 years ago—because of tremendous pressures from various sources.

Under the Postal Services Act, the Government proposed Ofcom. We all know that Ofcom, due to pressure from the European Community among other things, will be making proposals for increased competition in the postal market. We are all concerned about whether that will kill the universal service or spur the company into making the service more successful in future.

None of us knows what will happen, but we know that there are tremendous challenges. The Post Office has high fixed costs, but we know that the whole regime will have to change during the next few years. The company will have to face those challenges under the Labour Government. It is thus right and proper for my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) to say that our view will be set out in our manifesto, as we do not know what state the business will be in when the next Conservative Government take office. That is fair, because things are changing fast—indeed, in some cases, they are deteriorating much more than one would have thought possible a few years ago.

The business has stodgy management and the trade unions have not learned that they will have to improve their working methods. A total of 62,000 days has been lost through unofficial strikes, which have caused their own problems. We can all offer examples of industrial action in various sorting offices that has caused tremendous disruption to businesses, especially to small businesses.

Earlier in the debate, we heard how unusual it is for people to wait behind their front door for the mail to arrive. We were told that people have better things to do. However, the reality is that many small businesses in my constituency depend on the arrival of the mail because it brings the cheques that they need to pay wages and bills in order to trade. A regular cashflow can mean the difference between life or death for some businesses. That is why the postal service is important. Regular and decent deliveries are essential. There must be change.

There is no doubt that the sub-post office network faces major challenges. We have already heard that 547 sub-post offices closed during the past year. We know that the ACT changes—payments through banks—will deprive many of between a third and a half of their income. Many of those small businesses are marginal—they barely make a living—and if their income falls by that amount they will face problems staying in business as part of their community. There will be an avalanche of closures over the next few years.

None of the questions posed during the debate has been answered. It is true that the payment of benefits through post offices is an implicit subsidy of about £430 million for the post office system. It might be respectable to say that post offices should not have that role, but if the income of those small businesses is to be sustained the money will have to come from somewhere else. Although several schemes have been suggested, none of them would produce anything like £430 million.

The Government's proposals for a universal bank to offset that loss of income may not be implemented on time. We are not sure that the bank could cater for the required number of people. There are also concerns about whether a cap will be imposed.

When the Government took office, about 30 per cent. of benefits were paid through banks. The amount has risen to 40 per cent. but it will have to rise to almost 100 per cent. Will the universal bank have the capacity to deal with the rush? Will it be able to ensure that benefits are paid after the changes?

There are great concerns. Many sub-postmasters have invested years in their small business. They are part of the community, and dealing with that change is presenting them with a huge challenge. They are concerned. We have received general assurances, but nothing to make up for that substantial loss of income. That will have a major effect not only on the rural economy but in many urban areas.

I have an urban seat so I have not experienced the scale of the problems described by some Members today who have spoken about post office closures in villages. However, many urban branches will close. Many pensioners and others in my constituency consider their local sub-post office as an extra arm of the social services. They go there for advice and for help in filling out forms, to check information and sometimes to have official letters interpreted. The sub-post office is an important part of their life. When those businesses close, people will no longer have that facility. They may write to their MP or visit the citizens advice bureau, but all of us will find that the quality of life for many of our constituents will have deteriorated as a result of those changes.

We want a clear view of where the Government are going. We want an explanation of how the business will change in the broadest sense. How will Consignia perform in the future? We want reassurances about how the competition regime will change things. We want further assurances about the impact of the Government's policy on the large number of sub-post offices. Will the Government be able to deliver their universal bank? What is their commitment to subsidy? What and how much will it mean for the sub-post office network?

Although many questions have been posed in the debate, we have received few answers. There have certainly been few answers that will reassure those whose future depends on those answers—whether small post office businesses or the people who value and rely on their services. This is only one debate, but if we do not receive answers today we shall return to it. This will be a key political issue for the next two or three years. I can see only bad news ahead. If the Government do not listen, it will be bad news for them.

7.59 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden): I am grateful to the House for the opportunity to make a brief contribution to this debate, because I believe that the Post Office is one of the most important institutions in Britain. It provides a great public service, but it is in need of modernisation and reform, and great challenges lie ahead.

Having said that, I am worried that this debate is another in a series of debates in which the Opposition attempt to make the public believe that they have had a damascene conversion to public service, when what they are really about is doing down the public services and weakening public confidence in them. The Conservative party had 18 years' worth of chances to give the Post Office the commercial freedom in the public sector that the management and the Communication Workers Union desired, but they failed to do so. If they had taken action when they had the chance, our constituents would be receiving an even better service than they receive today, instead of which we are still running to catch up with Holland, Germany and the Scandinavian countries. We are still trying to give our nation the first-class postal service that we need to function and thrive in the modern world.

The review carried out by Tom Sawyer after Labour came to government in 1997 showed that there was much to be done to reverse the decline of the Conservative years, when there was no investment in the postal service and 80 per cent. of the profits were squirrelled away into the Treasury. It is revealing that we have heard precious little from Conservative Members about the starvation of the Post Office, the mistakes that they made and the consequences of those mistakes—for example, 3,500 post offices closed across the country when they were in power.

I believe that Labour is committed to maintaining a viable network of post offices across the country, unlike the Conservative party, which oversaw the closure of so many vitally needed post offices. We have shown that commitment by placing a formal requirement on Consignia to maintain the network of rural post offices, which do so much to support rural communities with the range of services that they offer and which provide a focal point for many out-of-the-way communities. It is important to many of my constituents in suburban south-west London—they are not rural residents but they care about the countryside as well as our public services—that that requirement and that commitment to the post office network is underlined, as we demonstrate again that the public sector Post Office is safe under Labour.

Of course, we must not forget the value of post offices in towns, too. For example, in Collier's Wood in my constituency, I recently had the great opportunity to reopen a post office that was closed by the Conservatives 15 years ago. That post office in suburban south-west London provides an excellent services to pensioners, to people with young children and to those who do not want to travel too far to gain access to services. I believe that Labour understands the value of post offices in towns, cities and the countryside, and we have introduced appropriate safeguards to protect them for the people of this country.

As well as investing almost £500 million in modernising the postal network and developing universal banking services to allow benefits to be paid straight into post office accounts while ensuring that people who choose to have them paid in cash over the counter can still do so, Labour has given the Post Office the commercial freedom to enter into alliances, to raise more capital and to focus on better management practices. That is a welcome step, and the establishment of Postcomm to ensure that the principle of universal service provision is protected and to set and enforce standards of service is another welcome step towards ensuring that the public postal system, which has served this country well for the past 150 years, is built up and developed in the context of the public sector, not splintered and floated off into the private sector, as the short-termist Conservative party did so ineptly with Railtrack.

Of course, whether Consignia has used its new freedoms wisely is debatable, and to my mind that should be the true subject for today's debate. There are aspects of the company, particularly in its dealing with union representation, that are questionable.

Mr. Syms: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Siobhain McDonagh: No. I only want to make a short contribution, so I will not take interventions.

It is no longer for the Government to micromanage and intervene in every dispute that comes along, although I believe that we retain the responsibility to do so in extreme cases. Labour has quite enough on its plate with the reform and modernisation of all the public services to equip them for delivery—public services that the Conservative party either cheerfully sold off, or left to rot. I also believe we have a duty to the people of this country to encourage Consignia to work honestly and transparently with the CWU in resolving differences between the company and the work force.

Thankfully for my constituents as customers of the postal system, those differences have not been manifested in strikes. As a result of the agreement reached and facilitated following Lord Sawyer's report, there has been little or no industrial action since August last year. However, Consignia still insists that the work force are behaving militantly. Such claims can no longer be justified given the strenuous efforts which the union—led, I am proud to say, by my constituent Billy Hayes—has made towards dialogue with the company.

The union is at present conducting an industrial action ballot in pursuance of an outstanding pay claim that was due in early October last year. It is in discussions involving ACAS, and it has a desire to reach a negotiated settlement. The obstacle to such a settlement is Consignia.

[Siobhain McDonagh]

which time and again has shown itself reluctant to take constructive and progressive action towards resolving the claim.

On job security, the CWU has made good progress with Consignia and was hopeful of reaching a negotiated settlement based on voluntary, not compulsory, redundancy, despite the fact that Consignia apparently briefed the press after giving an undertaking not to do so.

To conclude, I believe that, since 1997, following the long, lean years during which the Conservative Government failed the Post Office and the people of this country, Labour has reshaped the service, providing a necessary period of stabilisation for further consultation and creating a public sector, public service organisation that operates in the commercial arena. The CWU is fully committed to making progress as outlined in the Sawyer report, having reached a good agreement with the employers on partnership. The CWU is waiting for that agreement to be introduced when the outstanding pay dispute is resolved. The key to that resolution is Consignia.

8.6 pm

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): A number of Labour Members, including the hon. Members for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh), for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) and for Eltham (Clive Efford) have praised the Post Office's hard-working staff, and I join them in that praise. The hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden attacked the last Conservative Government, but the Labour party has been in power now for nearly five years, and I seem to remember that, when I was last a Member, the Post Office was making a lot of money, had excellent labour relations and was going from strength to strength. What we now see is in complete contrast to that.

I represent a large, rural constituency and, like my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin), I represent a significant number of small, rural sub-post offices. I also represent a number of people who work in a large Post Office sorting office at Baxter's Plain, King's Lynn. I visited that sorting office before Christmas and met a large number of its staff, and I was appalled at the very low morale that I discovered among those hard-working, dedicated postmen and women, who were sorting out their rounds, as well as among its long-serving management. It was a story of low morale, confusion as to where the industry was going and depression about the future. I found that very sad indeed.

I kept asking myself, "Why change the name of the operation to Consignia?" What the hell does Consignia mean? It is another example of new Labour political correctness. Why change an excellent brand—the Post Office, the Royal Mail—to something meaningless such as Consignia? That makes absolutely no sense whatever; it is a total distraction.

Mr. George Osborne: Is my hon. Friend aware that according to the National Audit Office report, the Royal Mail was the second most recognised brand in Britain after Coca-Cola?

Mr. Bellingham: Yes, I am aware of that, and I wonder how much was spent on management consultants, public relations people and advertising experts to re-brand the Post Office. That was completely daft and an utter waste of money.

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): The answer to my hon. Friend's question is about £2 million. Is not the fact that people still refer to "the Post Office tower" 25 years after BT was hived off from the Post Office an indication of the incredible strength of the brand that the Government have started to throw away?

Mr. Bellingham: It was an extraordinary brand, and people worldwide would have paid a huge amount of money for it, but it has been chucked away under the aegis of this Government. The name change is nothing more than a ridiculous gimmick.

Geraint Davies: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bellingham: No, I will not give way; I want to try to make some progress.

The name change has certainly helped to foster the poor morale that I mentioned. The problem of poor morale results partly from the lack of direction in the business. Many people who work in the organisation are confused about where it is going. Many Conservative Members, including my hon. Friends the Members for Poole (Mr. Syms) and for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin), have made that crystal clear. The chief executive of the Post Office appeared before the Select Committee and talked in dire terms of redundancies totalling 30,000. No wonder there has been an adverse effect on morale. Morale is plummeting: it is on a downward escalator. Things might be improving slightly, then another announcement is made and morale takes a further tumble. That is the story I have heard from all the people who work for the Post Office in my constituency.

In a constituency such as North-West Norfolk, rural sub-post offices play a vital role. It was a treat to hear the Opposition Deputy Chief Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire, speak in the Chamber, because he does not often do so. He made an excellent speech. Like me, he represents a constituency with a large number of sub-post offices and he was right to point out that they are often the lifeblood of villages. As my hon. Friend the Member for Poole pointed out, people go into post offices to obtain and share information and to engage in social discourse. Those post offices form part of the rural tradition.

In many villages in my constituency, pubs and others shops have closed. Village crafts, such as the those practised by the blacksmith, have disappeared. The problems go on. All too often, the village is left with just a shop and a post office. Now those sub-post offices, which are the very lifeblood of our villages, are being closed in huge numbers, and many others are hanging on by their fingernails.

Last year, as my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale), the shadow Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pointed out, 547 small sub-post offices closed. A number have closed in my constituency, but many more are hanging on by the skin of their teeth. I am afraid that many will close in the future unless action is taken.

For many sub-post offices, lottery terminals are a lifeline. However, those terminals will not be enough if Labour continues to go along the mad route towards automated credit transfer. The Conservative Government considered the ACT of benefits payments carefully and we decided that the price of introducing it would be too great to pay. As my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford rightly pointed out, £400 million-worth of business goes into the sub-post offices as a result of benefit payments. People go to the post office to draw their benefit—unemployment benefit, their pension or whatever it might be—and they spend the money in the village shop. That helps to generate sales for the sub-postmaster or sub-postmistress, and that extra spending power is crucial to the viability of village shops.

Time and again, sub-postmasters and postmistresses have told me that the introduction of ACT will lose them the benefits that they derive from paying people in cash. They believe that its introduction will be an absolute disaster for their businesses. I do not understand why, in the face of all the evidence, the Government are determined to push this proposal through.

Not only are the Government determined to push the proposal through: they have said on several occasions that the universal bank will provide the answer to a number of the problems that post offices face. However, we have not seen any progress on the development of the universal bank and there has not been a proper response to the report of the performance and innovation unit. We have not had any further information since the Government statement of about six months ago that suggested that subsidies would be available to small rural post offices.

Rural constituencies face a huge crisis in agriculture and a chronic loss of jobs in the rural economy. In the two years before the outbreak of foot and mouth disease, 42,000 farmers went out of businesses. Employment is being lost in more and more businesses in the agriculture sector, and many rural constituencies face a serious crisis. Those with a strong livestock sector face devastation, and even in constituencies such as mine and that of my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), where there are predominantly arable-based businesses, the story is one of depression in the farming community. The loss of jobs in other industries is also having a big impact, but the rural post office often keeps the fabric of such communities together. None the less, hundreds of post offices in East Anglia face closure.

I listened with great interest to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to try to find a glimmer of hope for the future and some consolation to which the hard-pressed sub-post offices in my constituency could cling. However, it was a lame speech full of attacks on the previous Conservative Government. Sub-post offices need direction and leadership. They are facing a critical period in their history and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Poole pointed out, the people running them are not appointed or employed by the Post Office. Many of them are small entrepreneurs and small business people who have put a lot of their savings into the businesses. They are at a crossroads, and they are looking for strong leadership, direction and a common-sense approach to their problems.

If the Government do not listen to what many Members representing rural and indeed urban constituencies are saying, to what the National Federation of the Self-Employed and Small Businesses is saying, to what the sub-post offices trade association is saying or to the views expressed in our motion, the future will be very bleak indeed.

8.16 pm

Mr. Colin Challen (Morley and Rothwell): I am pleased to take part in this debate because the first Adjournment debate of the year was the one that I introduced on the subject of competition in postal services.

I wish to set the debate in an objective context, and I shall not engage in the hypocritical bluster that the Conservative motion represents. The last two to three years have brought mixed fortunes to postal services around the world, and not just in the United Kingdom. In the United States, the postal service, which remains in the public sector, has in 2001 posted a loss of $1,680 million whereas only two years previously it had reported a profit of $363 million. In New Zealand, where the post office is in the private sector, the earnings per share plummeted from 62.7 cents in 1996 to just 17.5 cents in 2001. In Sweden, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) referred, the postal service is now heavily in debt.

In Holland, the privatised post office appears to be doing well, although we have heard something about the cost in terms of service delivery. In Germany, the post office also appears to be doing well but, even there, more than 50 per cent. of it remains in public ownership. In Japan, the Government are considering privatisation under their new, right-wing Prime Minister. However, a local newspaper said that, before they do that, the state should make the postal service profitable, so that it would have a strong equity base for the private sector to take over. There is an irony, indeed. They should make it profitable and keep it public.

Clearly our recent unfortunate experience is not unique, but there is no room for complacency. Nor is there any room for simplistic solutions, such as ideologically driven privatisations. If we study the Conservative motion carefully, we see that Conservatives are rather coy about privatisation. In fact, the contributions of Conservative Members show that they are extremely coy about it. They would presumably like to see the Post Office wholly privatised, but they do not have the guts to confront the British public over that again after their disastrous and destabilising attempts at privatisation failed back in 1994.

Perhaps we should ask the Conservatives again: "Yes or no? Will they privatise the Post Office?" I do not take silence as assent, but, if they had such a policy and they thought it was successful, perhaps they should launch it now because that might give them a slight chance of winning over public opinion in time for the next general election. The fact that they do not perhaps shows that they have no confidence in their policy, which they are keeping under wraps.

The reasons why the Post Office should not be privatised were set out clearly in an Opposition day debate on 12 July 1994 when my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) moved the Labour motion. It recognised that the best way of maintaining services, not least in rural areas, which most Conservative Members represent, was by keeping the Post Office as a cohesive whole, capable of delivering an equal service to all residents and businesses in the United Kingdom. That motion was, of course, defeated.

[Mr. Colin Challen]

At least one or two Conservative Members were honest enough to admit that what they wanted was the 100 per cent. privatisation of the Post Office. The hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), who was then the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury, was clearly fed up with the possibility that the then Government's privatisation proposals would not move fast enough. With views like that, I am not surprised that he has been promoted to the Opposition Front Bench. Also contributing to that debate was the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) who said that the second delivery was

> "a bit of a luxury".—[*Official Report*, 12 July 1994; Vol. 246, c. 902.]

I shall return to that shortly.

Clearly the subtext of today's debate is that the Conservative party still wants the complete privatisation of the Post Office, yet it just cannot find the words to say it. It is wrong now, just as it was wrong eight years ago. There are sound reasons why the Post Office should remain a publicly owned business. My right hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Peter Hain) set out some of those reasons in 1994, and his arguments still stand. They show that the impact of privatisation in the Post Office will inevitably lead to profitable work being creamed off, leaving all the costs to be picked up by what is left of the privatised Post Office.

The effect of that will be fairly obvious to all hon. Members. I shall start with sub-post offices. Despite closures over the past decade or two, we still have one of the highest ratios of sub-post offices to population anywhere in the world, but now, because of the much-hyped pressures of competition, a banker is advising the board of Consignia that up to half of those sub-post offices will have to go. I am sure that it is easy for the big cheeses at bankers UBS Warburg to recommend that; I doubt whether any of them use sub-post offices.

Perhaps the bankers will respond by saying that in Sweden, where the system is being radically changed, vast improvements under privatisation are materialising. Sweden has something like 1,200 sub-post offices compared to our 18,000 or 19,000. In Sweden, many of the functions performed by sub-post offices are also to be delivered at 3,000 new outlets, in petrol stations and the like. In Sweden, that may be deemed appropriate; in this country, it would be entirely wrong. Such an approach would rapidly lead to the attainment of UBS Warburg's prescription, which is to close half the sub-post offices in this country. That is what privatisation means and it is what Conservative Members support, but they cannot bring themselves to say it.

Another alleged benefit of privatisation in Sweden is that its post office now delivers mail to up to 25 per cent. more remote locations than it did when it was in public ownership. We should remember, however, that in this country the Post Office delivers to 100 per cent. of remote locations, although once again recent press reports suggest that Consignia is trying to wriggle out of that obligation for such places as the outer Shetland Isles. We know why: it is the benefit of getting ready for liberalised, privatised markets.

I mentioned what the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton said about the second post being a bit of a luxury. Under the pressures of liberalisation, we shall not have to worry about that any more. Recent press reports claim that the 9.30 am target for deliveries has already slipped to 10 am, and worse is to come. A spokesman for Consignia has been quoted as saying:

> "Most people are out of the house nowadays by 8am and so it does not really matter to them whether their post arrives at 9am or 3pm."

The second delivery would indeed become a luxury. If it came at all, it would arrive presumably to be read with the evening cocoa and the bedtime story. The later delivery of mail will come about, but only because of market pressures. That is the price that we will have to pay if we allow the market to determine the standards in what should be a public service.

Mr. Bacon: I have two points to make. The first is to say that the hon. Gentleman has been trying to describe Conservative policy when no Conservative Member has promoted the idea of privatisation in this Parliament yet. The second is to ask whether he does not recognise that the deterioration that he is describing is happening now. We are interested in what the solutions are for the deterioration that is happening now under a publicly owned company.

Mr. Challen: The hon. Gentleman will hear one or two of my suggestions as I conclude my speech. On his first point, I am describing the effects of privatisation in other countries.

Let me deal with price. That is what the Conservatives want. They are fixated with pounds, shillings and pence, or perhaps I should say euros and cents. We might ask why it is that we have some of the cheapest postal rates in Europe. A National Audit Office report makes that clear. In the UK, it costs just 19p to post a 60 g item; in Germany, it costs £1.08p. Full privatisation would bring the joys of many price hikes. It has been suggested that privatisation would lead to many services that we accept as standard—such as early morning delivery—becoming premium rate services. We would have to pay more for them.

How long would it take for a case to arrive at the European Court of Justice brought by the competitors of a privatised Post Office asserting that the value added tax exemption was illegal? A row is already taking place in Germany over whether the partially privatised Deutsche Post should have certain tax exemptions. It would not take the Post Office's competitors any time at all to realise that the VAT their customers had to pay was placing them at a disadvantage. So there would be another price rise for everyone to pay, but without any extra benefit.

Where is all the competition coming from? It is possible to believe from some reports that tomorrow morning, or perhaps tomorrow afternoon, people will wake up and find that some of their mail is to be delivered by a Dutchman. Perhaps a German will then come cycling down the street with direct mail, followed by a Swede with a stocking filler from Stockholm. Indeed, it is generally agreed that in recent years it is direct mail, or junk mail as some people cruelly call it, that is the driving force in maintaining postal volumes. I can believe that, having just torn up the 20th credit card offer that I have received since Christmas. The message of the market is: "You owe it to direct mail that you have a service at all, so do as we say, or the Post Office gets it."

I do not buy into that, and I suspect the vast majority of the British people still do not buy into that. We want a Post Office that delivers for all, equally. That is why it is natural for it to be a monopoly and, as such, the public interest is best protected by its being in public ownership.

Half of the reasons that are driving market change in postal services, which are summarised on page 23 of the NAO report, are specious. They are assertions that can and should be challenged; for example, that legislation must lead to liberalisation. Much of the time legislators are accused of lagging behind, but the underlying assumption, whichever way round the equation works, is that liberalisation can bring only benefits. We should be grown up enough to say that sometimes it does and sometimes it does not. This is a case in which, as I have made clear, it does not.

We have to address what action the European Union is taking to ensure that citizens' interests are protected. I am afraid that it is not the direct mail industry, for all its undoubted benefits, including credit card offers, that will be the ultimate protector of people's interests; it is the Government. That is why we should be challenging the EU's objective of complete liberalisation of postal services by 2009. To achieve that objective, each country's postal service will have to relinquish more and more of its restricted area to competition. The EU is effectively telling us that our Post Office should be just like any other business, be it Joe Bloggs express deliveries or a transnational corporation, which can decide, from some remote headquarters, how our national interest in this essential service is to be upheld.

Finally, I have no doubt that the management of the Post Office can be improved, just as the management of any organisation, including the Conservative party, can be improved. Thankfully, we are not considering the latter today. The Government are clearly not responsible, nor should they be, for the day-to-day operational management of Consignia, but I urge them, as shareholders, to ask Consignia what are its plans to broaden the business.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): My hon. Friend is right to say that the Government are not responsible for Consignia's day-to-day decisions. Nevertheless, should not our colleague on the Front Bench have a word with Consignia's management about its approach to industrial relations, following the casual announcement in a television interview of the probability of 30,000 redundancies? Is that the way to motivate the work force on whom Consignia's reputation depends?

Mr. Challen: I agree with my hon. Friend that that is not the way to operate. Having said that, a reading of the 1994 debate to which I have referred reveals that even then, eight years ago, it was claimed that 27,000 job losses could be the cost of liberalising postal services.

It is clear that, privatised or not, other countries' post offices are moving into other areas, such as logistics, which add to their profitability. In preparation for this speech, I did a survey of the websites of other national post offices, privatised or not. They offer a greater range of services than the British Post Office is willing to offer. I would like our Post Office to work with the British printing industry, for example, to send a message abroad: "The British are coming. Our product is excellent." We will win business on that basis, not by decimating our Post Office.

8.32 pm

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): It goes without saying that Post Office deliveries are vital in Scotland and Wales, but that is especially true in more rural areas such as the highlands and islands, which get deliveries because of the universal service obligation. We in the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru believe that that should be protected at all costs, and we do not believe that it will survive under privatisation. On that basis, we cannot support the Opposition motion, as we believe that they are seeking full privatisation. That does not mean that we are completely happy with the Post Office, or Consignia, as it is at present—far from it. I agree with much of what Conservative Members have said about the rural sub-post office network. However, the universal service obligation is important to rural Scotland.

We have heard much in the debate about e-business and the threat from text messages and e-commerce, but although we can order goods over the internet and even pay for them electronically, until we get our hands on Star Trek's transporters, someone physically has to move goods from one place to another. In most of rural Scotland, that service is provided by the Post Office. The universal service obligation ensures that those in remote areas of Scotland and Wales can get packages delivered at the same cost as those who live in more central or urban areas. Under privatisation, or even part-privatisation, that service will be chipped away.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I note that the hon. Gentleman praises the universal postal service, and I join him in that, but does he accept that as Scotland has a higher percentage of rural areas than England and Wales, an inevitable consequence of independence would be higher postal charges for people living in Scotland?

Mr. Weir: After independence Scotland will have a much more efficient postal service.

At the moment, however, no one else will provide that universal service in Scotland. It is interesting that many other carriers already refuse to deliver to the highlands and islands or will do so only at a much greater cost than that charged by the Post Office. Indeed, that includes the carriers praised by the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale) that are owned by continental post offices. If the universal service provision is withdrawn by Consignia, or amended in any way, that will inevitably lead to greater costs for people living in remote areas and contribute to the cycle of rural decline.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that in areas such as mid-Wales, the fear that those services may be withdrawn is having a practical effect on people's outlook and quality of life?

Mr. Weir: Indeed, it is the same in rural Scotland, where there are great fears about the future of the rural economy.

[Mr. Weir]

The hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle), who is not here at the moment, made a good point about the cross-subsidy of postal services and the danger of cherry-picking under privatisation. To some extent, cherry-picking is already with us. Many businesses have entered into agreements on mail deliveries outside the postal system to ensure that they get next-day delivery and so on; Hays DX and the Legal Post are two examples.

Consignia has already said that it is thinking of moving away from the universal service obligation. I was encouraged to some extent by what the Secretary of State said about the Government's reaction. Inevitably, however, if there is privatisation or part-privatisation, the obligation will not survive because of the implied need to cut costs. Consignia has already signalled that an increasing number of homes, mostly in rural areas, do not receive a service direct to their door. It is claimed that that is coming to light only because of better record keeping, but there are obvious concerns that the universal service obligation is already being diminished.

Only the other day, it was reported that Consignia was proposing to dispense with morning deliveries to domestic addresses to concentrate on business mail. Again, the justification is to achieve savings; in an otherwise excellent speech, the hon. Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill) failed to pin that down. There are serious difficulties with the proposal, especially in rural areas in Scotland and Wales. How is a business address to be identified? In many areas, business and residential premises are mixed. What about those who rely on postal deliveries? The Federation of Small Businesses has warned that the proposal would be a disaster for more than 1 million businesses based at residential addresses. It is vital for them to get cheques, contracts and other documents first thing in the morning. If they do not get them until late afternoon, they will effectively have lost a day because they cannot bank cheques until the following morning, which will affect their cash flow and could be disastrous.

Whatever happened to the concept of working from home—telecommuting—which has been pushed in the past few years? As I have said, it is not possible to do everything over the telephone. The move to restrict delivery services would seriously damage any chance of extending home working and have a disproportionate impact on rural and remote areas, where many of those businesses have set up. In a rural village, how is one supposed to differentiate between business and domestic addresses, or are all the addresses in the area to suffer a downgraded service? It must be remembered that in many of those areas, there is effectively only one delivery at present.

Consignia's defence of that policy was breathtakingly arrogant. It reported:

> "The delivery service offered in the UK is still far better than in most other European countries. In the UK it costs 27p or 19p to send a 60 g letter. In Germany it costs £1.08"

That translates as, "It doesn't matter if our service deteriorates and increases in price; it is still better than some." That is hardly a ringing endorsement of Consignia's business acumen.

Above all, in many rural areas in Scotland and Wales, including my own, the fate of sub-post offices is causing huge concern. In June 2000, the Prime Minister's performance and innovation unit published "Counter Revolution: Modernising the Post Office Network" on the future of the network. Over a year later, sub-post offices are still closing at a reported rate of two a day, depriving whole communities, especially already deprived rural areas, of a broad range of services.

That will only be exacerbated by the Government's determination to press on with the payment of benefits by automated credit transfer, which could spell the end for many sub-post offices in Scotland. If no alternative sources of income are found—frankly, it is difficult to see how many sub-post offices will find such sources—it is calculated that some 80 per cent. of surviving rural post offices could go. Post offices rely on benefit payments for 40 per cent. of their revenue. If that is lost, it has been calculated that, over the next five years, Scotland could lose around one quarter of its post offices. Again, that is a real worry for rural areas.

According to a report in the *Financial Times*, some 5,000 to 8,000 post offices throughout the UK could become non-viable by 2003 when ACT for benefits is introduced. I am sure that in his reply the Minister will point to the universal bank as an alternative. I asked the Secretary of State earlier whether she would assure us that the universal bank will be in place by the time the ACT regulations are introduced. She did not give me that assurance. Unless the universal bank and the regulations are introduced at the same time—if the Government insist on going ahead with ACT—there will inevitably be a massive reduction in business in rural post offices. If a service is not immediately available, people will make alternative arrangements. They must do so to secure a regular flow of income.

The PIU recommended:

> "the post office should see the universal bank as a major new business opportunity. It should urgently develop the concept of partnership with the High Street banks and others".

What exactly has happened? I appreciate that the Minister may not any longer be the Minister in charge of the universal bank, since responsibility for it was reported to have been transferred to the Department for Work and Pensions, but a year after the so-called big four banks signed undertakings to provide the cash support required, I must ask what progress has been made on its introduction. Banking sources suggest that there has been no appreciable progress.

I also understand that it will probably take a minimum of a year to implement systems that will allow the smooth transfer of those without bank accounts to an electronic system. If that is so and the universal bank is not ready to be put into operation now, it will not be in place by the time that ACT is introduced. That will lead to chaos, both for those looking for their benefits and the sub-post offices that rely on providing them. That will lead to a further round of rural sub-post office closures.

We on the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru Bench find ourselves in a difficult position. We are not afraid to put our position squarely on the record: we oppose the privatisation of the Post Office. For that reason, we cannot support the Tory motion. It is clear from what Conservative Members have said in this debate that that is the way that they wish to go. At the same time, we find it difficult to support the Government unless the Minister can give some answers to the various questions about the universal bank, ACT and rural sub-post offices and the universal service obligation.

8.43 pm

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): We have had an interesting debate, which the Tories opened with a ragbag of political opportunism, conveniently forgetting that 80 per cent. of the profit in their time was syphoned to the Treasury and that they closed 3,500 post offices. They did not pledge any additional funding for the extra deliveries that they want and were unclear about their commitment to privatisation, although as we drew out Tory Front Benchers it became obvious that in their hearts that is what they want. The former right hon. Member for Henley, Mr. Heseltine, came unstuck over his popularity for that policy, not least among his Back Benchers, who in their hearts wanted privatisation but realised in electoral terms that it would be political suicide.

Mr. Waterson: The hon. Gentleman says that we want funding for extra deliveries: nothing could be further from the truth. All we are doing is pointing to the fact that parts of the existing service on which people have relied for years are being stopped—the morning collection, the second delivery and the morning delivery to private addresses. We are looking to maintain the status quo, rather than bringing in anything new.

Geraint Davies: Implicit in the comments that were made was the idea that if current services were reduced, the timing and frequency of deliveries would be reinstated by the Conservatives—otherwise their argument would be hollow. I heard no commitment to provide extra funding from Government subsidy to Consignia to make that possible. If the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) wants to illuminate his position, I shall be happy to give way. Apparently, he does not. That is a big surprise.

The Conservatives' position is clear. They want privatisation, a system of regulation that is RPI minus X, and cherry-picking in respect of competitive access. As the NAO report makes clear, that will threaten the concept of universal provision of services to rural and urban communities throughout the country. The Conservatives know that the situation would have been much worse under privatisation. The key prospect for the Government to break out of the traditional nationalised industry and stay clear of privatisation is to manage a mixed economy that balances service delivery, public interest and some degree of commercial enterprise.

I was interested to hear the Liberal position, which is a rather stark exaggeration of the prospects envisaged in the NAO report. I shall return to that report later. I was pleased to hear the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) set out the position of the Scottish and Welsh nationalists. They would devolve control of the Post Office to Scotland, where average unit costs are obviously much higher because the community is much more rural. They would stick a massive tax on the people of Scotland and Wales, or increase prices, which is the logical consequence of devolution. What the Welsh and Scottish people do not want—of course, I am ethnically Welsh—is more costs heaped on them by people who do not understand the economics of more and more devolution.

Mr. Weir: The hon. Gentleman misrepresents the policy. Do not the people of Scotland and Wales have much more interest in the rural communities there—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. Before the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) leaves the Chamber, may I say that the House takes a very strong view on mobile phones going off in the Chamber?

Mr. Weir: The part-privatisation or full privatisation proposed by Members on both sides of the House will damage the service to rural communities.

Geraint Davies: I understand the argument that privatisation and cherry-picking would undermine the viability of rural communities. My point is that if the responsibility for and financial management of the Post Office were devolved, the average unit cost would, other things being equal, go up.

In my brief contribution, I shall deal with two aspects—first, the general analysis of the pressures that face the Post Office and, secondly, East Croydon post office, which is threatened with imminent closure. I shall do so not merely because I have a constituency interest, but because some of the factors and opportunities there illustrate the commercial opportunities for the Post Office elsewhere in Britain, which I hope the management will take up, rather than be fixated with making cuts to balance budgets. The other way to achieve that is to generate revenue, as anyone who has been in business, as I have, would know.

No one has spoken about the marketplace in general. Hon. Members may know that 20 billion letters are sent in Britain every year. The Post Office is not in chronic decline, partly because of the increasing amount of business post: 86 per cent. of letters sent are from businesses, and 67 per cent. of received letters are for domestic addresses. There has been an enormous increase in what some call business mail, and others regard as junk mail. Issues about relative pricing are also involved in that context.

There has certainly been a growth in the number of letters, but, set against that, many people who used to write letters use telephones more, and many people who use telephones communicate increasingly by e-mail. That change in the marketplace obviously needs to be embraced by a modern Post Office. A key area for growth is parcel delivery; a lot of that business is generated by e-mail and does not even involve the Post Office. The Post Office does not have a good history in parcel delivery, and quite a lot of profit is being made by new companies entering that marketplace.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill) has already mentioned relative prices in the European context. It costs 26p to send a 20 g letter in Britain, compared with 39.3p in Germany and 24p in the United States. Our stamp costs are far below those of France, Italy and the Netherlands. Our charge for a 60 g package is 26p, compared with 50.6p in Germany; in this case, America is more expensive than us, as are France, Italy and the Netherlands.

In relative terms, the prices charged to the British public and businesses are low. To a certain extent, that explains the fact that there was rapid revenue growth between 1995 and 2001, with the Post Office's turnover increasing from £6 billion to £8 billion, while profit margins went into decline; it is now making a loss. The National Audit Office has asked whether the regime of RPI minus X is sensible in terms of our wish to have decent service delivery at a time and price that consumers

[Geraint Davies]

think fair. Consumers do not want a regulator to come along and hammer down the price, leaving the Consignia management no option but to cut services. I would like the Government to consider those issues.

The economics of cherry-picking dictate that if the marginal revenue is greater than the marginal cost, the private sector will move in. Obviously, the private sector is not interested in operating in the kind of market that is depicted on the front of the National Audit Office report. It shows a man in a strange sort of truck going across a field to deliver one or two letters. Such activity is not exactly profit-making, but it is part of the universal service that we ensure. The problem that we face is that the universal service obligation is challenged by the niche entry into the market of those people who pick off certain types of business, particularly urban business and business-to-business transactions. The NAO report states:

> "RPI-X price control is not wholly appropriate in this instance."

It is worth noting that 73 per cent. of the public say that the postal service is very good or good value for money, and that only 40 per cent. know the cost of a stamp. At a time when nine out of 10 people are satisfied with post boxes, post offices and postal services generally, it is worth considering whether, if the public will is to pay a higher price and have a better service, that should be accommodated in the regulatory regime.

Instead, we are beginning to see a downward pressure on prices, the level of some services is beginning to decline in terms of multiple delivery and delivery times, and, in theory, the universality of the service is being challenged. We have seen the beginning of market entry being allowed by Postcomm, with licences being issued, but the problem for Consignia is that about 40 per cent. of its costs are fixed. As it competes at a marginal level, the situation will be more painful.

As a result of the European proposals for liberalisation more of the Post Office's core services will be open to competition. In particular, from 2003, the delivery of any item above 100 g will be open to competition; by 2006, that will extend to any item over 50 g. The Government need to consider the business's profile as we move forward.

Like other Members, I am concerned about the reliability of the first-class post. The Post Office has been condemned for not meeting its target of delivering 92.5 per cent. of first-class post by the following day. In fact, it achieves a low of 89 per cent., which is only marginally less. If a manager is told, "You're priority is to improve from 89 per cent. to 92.5 per cent. or above," one response might be to cut one of the two deliveries to ensure that at least one gets through later in the day. If the objectives and incentives do not embrace service frequency and timing—we are talking about value judgments—the machinery of devolved management will produce results that might be undesirable from some points of view.

I understand that only 7 per cent. of letters arrive by second post, but they absorb about 40 per cent. of the cost. From a business management perspective, one can see the point of changes such as those that have been discussed on the "Today" programme and elsewhere. However, my feeling is that the regulatory framework should enable us to understand and embrace outputs, which are, in fact, predictable.

There are clearly tensions to balance between the public service and the profit motive and commercial viability. There are also tensions between universal service provision and a cherry-picking competition. It is important to factor in not only the obvious commercial saving arising from post office closures, but the wider social cost—two different sums. We must establish not only the potential commercial and operational saving of reductions in service frequency, but the wider externality in terms of economic value.

Perhaps such balances have already been struck, and one can argue that they have, but questions of fine tuning need to be addressed if we are to pursue a mixed-economy approach. Neither reverting to a traditional, state-run monopoly, nor exploring the vagaries of privatisation are in the consumer and public interest. It is difficult to strike a fine balance, and I respect the fact that the Government are doing well in that regard. The fact remains, however, that a guaranteed first-class delivery rate of 92.5 per cent., RPI minus X, universality and market entry can result in operational decisions that some people do not want.

We need to review the parameters, constraints and opportunities. My colleagues on the Public Accounts Committee and I look forward to quizzing representatives of Postcomm about the way in which its regime is influencing management behaviour and public service.

The Government need to strike the right balance—not a state monopoly or a privatised monopoly—and encourage a regime that tries not simply to drive down costs, but innovatively to generate commercial revenue. With that in mind, I want to discuss briefly the case of East Croydon Crown post office. It is on East Croydon station, which, as many hon. Members may know, is the fourth busiest public transport interchange in the country. The trains and the new tram system—as leader of the council, I was involved in its introduction—transport some 18 million passengers along the tracks. In addition, there is the bus centre.

Given the enormous number of people milling around the station, why is the post office not breaking even? One reason is that it is not open when people are travelling to and from work, which is extraordinary. Moreover, the profile of the business is aimed at a declining market—the unemployed and pensioners—rather than commuters. I suggested that the post office change the range of available products, and perhaps provide a sign to show that the post office is there, given that it is 10 yds from the main terminus. I have been negotiating with the unions, whose representatives say—contradicting the picture painted of them—that their members are willing to stay open outside normal working hours to serve those going to and from work who may want, for instance, to collect internet-ordered products that cannot be delivered to their houses because they will not be in.

Mr. Hoyle: Has my hon. Friend suggested to the Minister that there should be signs showing the location of all post offices throughout the country, not just Crown post offices? If so, I support him.

Geraint Davies: I agree. It is remarkable that most of the millions of people who go to East Croydon station do not even know that there is a post office there.

Our local council, a very good council, has offered to man one of the counters at the post office, offering services and marketing them by means of colour literature for every household, on a regular basis. As a result, more people will go to the post office, pick up products and provide more revenue.

The development of the site behind East Croydon station will have enormous implications for retail and other sectors. The simple point I am making is that there are opportunities for new products and new consumers. Such opportunities, which will certainly be realised at railway stations, should be taken up elsewhere in the network to preserve the existing service.

In the case of East Croydon station, many people will have to walk an extra mile to visit a post office. I hope to present a petition to Parliament tomorrow signed by 4,000 people who do not want that to happen. I hope that the council and, indeed, the larger retailers who have joined forces to help the post office will succeed. I understand that they plan to work with Connex in the first instance to set up more innovative outlets providing services involving tickets, travel in general, retail and finance—a sort of network reinvention scheme. Sadly, however, the signals I am receiving suggest that closure is imminent and unstoppable. I fear that that is because management mentality is focused entirely on cutting costs rather than on generating revenue innovatively.

As I have said, I think that the opportunities offered in East Croydon can provide national lessons relating to relationships with unions, links with the private sector and links with councils and train companies. The Post Office should consider those lessons.

We live in a mixed economy, in which the wider public interest must be balanced with commercial viability. We do not want to end up with the free market that the Tories wanted. Indeed, their legacy of 3,500 closures would be dwarfed by the carnage that would result from the implementation of their economic and social policies. We need to get the balance right between service levels, prices, universality and fair competition if we are to obtain the right output in the public interest. We need the right regulatory system, promoting service, innovation and efficiency to ensure that a new commercial freedom can make the Post Office secure in the Government's hands.

9.3 pm

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater): I shall try to be brief, given the time.

I was interested to read the executive summary of "postal services", which refers to the exercise of

> "functions in a manner first calculated to ensure the provision of a uniform postal service at an affordable and geographically uniform price. This is their primary statutory duty".

I was also interested to see the figures relating to post office closures in the United Kingdom since 1997. The total number is 1,568, but there are also figures relating to rural and urban closures: in 1999, 167 rural post offices closed, but only 18 urban post offices shut. In 2000, the figures were 271 and 92 respectively.

My constituency is nearly 50 miles long. If the definition of a main post office is one that serves a population of 10,000 or more, only one in my constituency fulfils that criterion. If we bear in mind the fact that sub-post offices are to close, we have some idea of the problems that the constituency faces. It puts things into perspective when we remember that Consignia spent £2 million on a name change. As was said earlier, when we take into account changes to stationery and so on, the figure is much greater. We are witnessing a great waste of money by a company that should spend more wisely, especially to try to maintain services for people who can least afford to lose them. That is disgraceful.

The harmonisation of the Horizon system is another problem that I have encountered in rural areas. Many of the postmasters and postmistresses in my constituency are elderly. They are not technically aware and they find it difficult to understand the way in which the Horizon system works, or its purpose. Training for any changes is never carried out locally; it always happens a long way away. Once, it happened in Bristol. It takes much more than an hour and a half to travel from Minehead to Bristol. How on earth is a fairly elderly person expected to do that?

Many rural post offices are located in houses. Some have had to be rewired, costing up to £30,000 a go, for the Horizon system. Rural postmistresses cannot afford that. In one case in my constituency, a post office could not obtain a link to Horizon. A satellite had to be placed in the garden and no one was allowed within five metres of the transmission box. The postmistress had young children and when Consignia refused to move the transmission box she had to close the post office. That is unacceptable. My predecessor, now Lord King, and I fought the closure, but Consignia was not sympathetic, and the lady and the post office have gone.

As my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) said, the police, local tourist boards, social services and many other organisations use rural post offices to get their message across to villages that have no pub and no other shop. We have managed to open a post office, but Labour Members should not get too excited because the building was donated by a wealthy landowner and is staffed by volunteers who work from hand to mouth to keep it open. It not only stocks local produce but provides a place for the organisations that I mentioned to present their ideas and views.

There is an enormous explosion of e-commerce in this country. It is all-encompassing, and even Sir Elton John has said how marvellous it is. Why cannot Consignia use that as a way forward and boost people's ability to utilise it in rural areas? Many people in my constituency shop by e-mail because they have no choice. What will happen in 2003? What is the future of the rural post office? I have asked many people about that. I have also worked in two post offices, and it is incredibly hard work.

I asked the elderly ladies what they would do if they had to use bank accounts, swipe cards and so on. Most looked horrified. They are of a generation who are not used to that; they are not accustomed to going to banks that are not in their local villages. How will they use the service? I ask the Government to bear in mind people who are ill equipped to deal with modern technology and the vagaries of modern life. Labour Members may shake their heads, but I assure them that one group, whose capabilities they know, is running a campaign on the matter: the National Federation of Women's Institutes. It has only just begun; Labour Members should therefore be careful. If it keeps going, they should start to quake.

Rural post offices matter in rural areas. If they are allowed to go, that is it. There is nothing else to which many villages can turn.

9.9 pm

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I apologise to the House for missing some of the earlier speeches, as I had to attend a Standing Committee sitting. However, I was able to hear the opening speeches, so I have an idea of the gist of the Conservative party's attack on the Government and heard the contribution of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this debate, especially because, like many hon. Members, I have been very concerned about postal services since I was elected last year. I have received a fair amount of correspondence from people who are anxious about the postal service and have also had much contact with people with such concerns in my constituency office and surgery. Concerns have also been expressed about the sub-post offices in the area. In the Stockbridge area of my constituency, both sub-post offices were closed down during the latter part of last year, causing particular difficulties for a community with many thousands of elderly residents. It is not only rural areas that suffer from post office closures; sometimes urban areas can be affected just as seriously. The closures have caused great difficulty for many of my constituents.

I have raised those issues in the House, with Ministers and with Consignia, and I make no apology for doing so. Labour Members who are keen to see high-quality services also recognise that it does the public service no favours not to point out failings, as it is only by pointing out failings that we can improve the services. At the same time, I am also happy to pay tribute to them when they are successful. In the two cases to which I referred, there have been a number of improvements during the past few weeks. I would not be so arrogant as to claim the entire credit for such improvements, although for the purposes of a constituency newsletter, I may claim some of it. I know that the letter delivery service has improved markedly in a number of areas in my constituency. Indeed, a number of the businesses that complained to me about the quality of service last year have written back to say that it has improved. Hon. Members throughout the House will agree that it is not too often that people come back and make contact to say that a service has improved after having made complaints.

On the sub-post office closures in the Stockbridge area, I am pleased at the way in which Post Office Counters has been trying to provide alternative premises to replace those that have closed. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the former postmistress at the Stockbridge sub-post office, 83-year-old Pat Burford, who delayed her retirement for some weeks to allow the service to continue. I pay tribute to her public-spiritedness, which I know is typical of many of the people who run sub-post offices throughout the country.

I mention those improvements in the service and the provision of sub-post offices in my constituency because I think that it is important for those of us who make complaints about public services also to recognise improvements from time to time and to make it clear that a positive response has been made to complaints when we manage to achieve one. Such positive stories about the Post Office are also a reminder of the fact that, although criticisms can rightly be made about its services, there is still a lot that is good about the postal services in this country. My hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) pointed out that some of the European examples have not been too successful for the consumers, postal workers or Treasuries of the countries concerned. Most consumers in most European countries can only dream of a service that allows them to post a letter at 5 pm in one part of the country and have it delivered 400 miles away, more often than not the next day if it is first class. That is a standard of service of which people in most countries can only dream.

Although a lot can be said for the postal services in this country, it cannot be disputed that the previously high standards of UK postal services have begun to slip. It is perhaps precisely because we have a history of a high-quality postal service in this country that our constituents expect the services to meet such high standards.

I regret that the Opposition motion does not contribute substantially to the debate about how we improve postal services. I am a new Member, but I understand the reality that Opposition day debates are usually knockabout affairs where every crime that can be dredged up is thrown at the Government. That is something to which one becomes accustomed in this place. Even by those standards, the negativity of Conservative Members' contributions has been staggering.

Perhaps that is not surprising, because the Conservative party, when in government, was responsible for many of the problems in today's postal service. There was the failure of the then Government to grant the Post Office the commercial freedom that had been sought for years by unions and management. That lies at the heart of many of the problems affecting postal services.

No doubt that explains the evident contradictions in what Conservatives say they want to do with the Post Office if they ever have the chance to get their hands on it. There is a coy refusal to tell us whether they favour privatisation. Some Conservative Members tell us that they do not know what their party's policy will be. Others say that they are not in favour of privatisation. Hon. Members who read *Hansard* tomorrow will be able to check for themselves and see that there was a clear indication from the Opposition spokesperson that privatisation was something that he wished had happened earlier and something that he would no doubt try to introduce were he to get his hands on the service in future.

Combined with a wish to see a hands-off approach, as Conservative Members would describe it, there are calls from Conservative Members for day-to-day interference in the management of postal services of the type that would more commonly be associated with the command economy of Stalin's Russia. The Conservative party cannot for ever sit on the fence and claim that it is in favour of privatisation and commercial freedom on the one hand but wants to see day-to-day interference in the way in which the Post Office is run on the other.

Like many Members who have contributed to the debate, I pay tribute to the thousands of postal workers throughout the country who have kept the service going through rain, wind and snow. I have not been uncritical of some of the actions taken by trade unions in the Post Office, but I recognise the frequent pressures on staff in the Post Office and the provocations that they face. The record of local management in many areas has not been good. It has certainly been responsible in many instances for bringing about a negative reaction from the work force.

Whatever else we see in the future of the Post Office, there must be a new relationship between trade unions and management. There must be a relationship that leads to a constructive approach for the benefit of the community. That is essential if the challenges of the many market threats that face the Post Office are to be successfully met in the years to come.

9.19 pm

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): I have enjoyed listening to the debate.

First, there is the nature of the market that we are facing. It has been said that the Post Office is facing competitive threats from new technologies, industrial relations and heaven knows what else. Although that is the case, it is important not to forget that there is a growing market. Growth was not as large last year as was predicted, but as the sub-postmaster at Mulbarton in my constituency said this morning, 15 years ago there would be six or seven sacks in the morning, and now there are 30 to 40. So there is a growing market with an exciting future.

The Post Office has 28 million footfalls through the doors of its premises every week. Most retailers would kill for that. In the over 350 g market, more than 4,000 companies are competing. We have seen the improvement in service that has resulted from that. We do not necessarily have anything to fear from greater competition so long as it is handled in the right way.

Secondly, there are some serious questions to ask about the management of Consignia. The hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies), who is no longer in his place, said that the income of the Post Office has risen considerably, from £6 billion to £8 billion. He could have added that Consignia's management has let the costs of the business run out of control. Costs are up by £1.2 billion, and that is the main reason why Consignia is in a hole. The problem arises not because there is no market or because Consignia is not getting increased revenues, but because the management is completely unable to control costs.

Reference has been made to poor industrial relations. I am not surprised that they are poor, given that 30,000 people were told just two weeks before Christmas that they would be sacked. My experience is that companies with good managements tend to have good industrial relations, and that companies with poor managements tend to have poor industrial relations.

My third point is that there is only one shareholder—the Government. The NAO report referred to several times in the debate states:

> "The relationship between the Department and Consignia may affect the company's commitment to improving efficiency"

Later on, the report continues:

> "It is highly unusual for a shareholder to direct a company's management to pay a guaranteed minimum dividend."

In most businesses, the management decides whether to pay a dividend, and the amount involved. I accept that, during the 1980s, the Treasury sucked a lot of money out of the Post Office, but the Post Office was at least making a profit at the time. I should prefer the people working in the Post Office to have more control over the amount of money to be paid in dividend.

The hon. Member for Croydon, Central referred also to the fact that maintaining a universal service would cause conflict in a profit-maximising organisation. No one in his or her right mind would suggest that a universal service delivering light letters at a uniform price was a profit-maximising activity. It has been argued that having a universal service obligation could provide a market attraction to some players, but no one would suggest that such a service was, in itself, a profit-maximising activity.

I was interested in the speech of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz). It was interesting that he did not refer to his own private Member's Bill on employee share ownership. I speak for no one but myself, and I certainly would not want to commit my Front-Bench colleagues on the matter, but my contention is that the best way to transform the business, which has potentially exciting prospects, is to hand it over to the 200,000 people who work in it. If they became the majority shareholders of the business, they could help it find its feet—and the markets that would ensure prosperity.

9.22 pm

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): I, too, shall be brief, so that others may speak. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale), the shadow Secretary of State, for persuading the powers that be to hold this timely debate on the Post Office.

I recently received a letter from the Post Office, which stated:

> "Dear Mr. Osborne,
>
> Re. Ollerton Post Office . . . The above post office closed in April 2000."

I knew that. It went on:

> "The purpose of this letter is to ask if you . . . may help us identify a prospective candidate"

to

> "restore a service to our customers . . . If you are aware of any such person please contact myself within one month from the date of this letter . . . If we receive no new information, we will regard this as a permanent closure."

It seems a rather odd approach if the Post Office is asking Members of Parliament to find sub-postmasters in their constituencies.

Mr. Lazarowicz: Instead of dismissing such approaches from the Post Office, should not the hon. Gentleman recognise them as well-intended efforts to obtain the sort of information that Members of Parliament often have? Certainly, I was happy to assist the Post Office when I received a similar approach.

Mr. Osborne: If the hon. Gentleman ever passes through Cheshire, he will know that I advertised the post in the *Knutsford Guardian*, and that I have spoken to Ollerton parish council, among other things.

The Government amendment rests on the fiction that the Government have given the Post Office commercial freedom. Consignia is not free, and it does not operate in a commercial environment. It is not free, as the Government are the only shareholder: they appoint the directors, and the watchdog that supervises the Post Office. Moreover, Consignia does not operate in a commercial environment, as it has a monopoly on all letters below a certain weight or at a certain price.

[Mr. Osborne]

It is clear to me, having listened to Labour and Liberal Democrat Members, that they need a lesson in market economics. One had thought that new Labour had taken root, but the debate has revealed that those roots are thankfully pretty shallow. Time and again, Labour Members have said that we need to keep postal services as a nationalised industry and keep the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in control. Have they learned nothing from the privatisations of British Telecom and British Gas, which have driven down costs for consumers and have increased service provision and the products available to consumers? Those privatisations are generally a very good thing and have been copied around the world. Indeed, the National Audit Office report, which has been bandied around this afternoon, makes it absolutely clear:

> "The incentive on Consignia's management to secure efficiencies is relatively weak in the absence of pressure from private sector shareholders and the stock market and is further weakened by the knowledge that efficiency gains would give Postcomm room to introduce more competition and to set tougher price controls."

That is the truth of the arrangement that the Government have set up through the Postal Services Act 2000. We are living with the consequences as services are cut, jobs are lost and unions hold strike ballots.

We live in a world in which ways to communicate, whether by e-mail, telephone, the internet or text messaging, have proliferated. All sorts of methods of communicating are provided by private operators and they operate in a highly competitive market environment. Surely it makes sense to bring the private sector into the provision of snail mail, as people who use e-mail call the Post Office service. Surely it makes sense to bring private sector discipline into Post Office management.

9.26 pm

Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): It is regrettable that after such a long time and so many debates we are still discussing concerns about sub-post offices and the Post Office. It is also regrettable that the Conservative party seems to have amnesia. The core issue, which has been alluded to by a number of right hon. and hon. Members, is that the Conservatives had the opportunity in the early to mid-1990s to tackle this issue and make investment which would have saved us from the problems that we face today. It takes a certain amount of cheek for them to criticise the Government. I am not against criticising the Government, of course, and frequently do so. However, the Conservatives talk about dividends and funding, yet in 1995 they took away £1 billion from the Post Office services.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): It was profitable.

Brian Cotter: For the next two and a half years, they took away another £1 billion.

Mr. Key: It was very profitable.

Brian Cotter: Profitable, indeed, but what was required at the time was investment, and yet the Conservatives criticise the Government.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) said, the Government are failing to give Consignia the necessary freedom to operate as an independent publicly owned corporation. Consignia makes that point frequently. Mr. John Roberts, the chief executive of Consignia, told the Select Committee that he had serious doubts about whether the existing model was working.

Another executive from the company told the *Financial Times* on 13 December:

> "The public sector monopoly model is no longer fit for the environment in which we operate . . . We don't have the degree of flexibility that our rivals have, particularly in bringing down our cost base."

Many points have been made in this debate. It is regrettable that the Government brought in the hare of ACT two years ago without thinking it through clearly. It has caused concern about the sub-post office system not being viable. Because of that, we are still looking for a firm commitment from the Government that the lost revenue will be replaced. From 40 per cent. to 50, 60 and 70 per cent. of revenue comes from that source.

We have had so many assurances from the Government, yet many of us wonder whether there is real meat in them. My hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham referred to a scheme that the Government have put forward as part of their programme to save the sub-post offices. They allocated £2 million to the scheme, yet after a considerable period there have been only five call-offs: £13,200, £1,600, £208, £10,200 and £3,860. Why? It is either because people do not feel that the scheme is really what they want, or because it is difficult for them to access it.

I am conscious of the fact that little time remains for the debate, but we need an answer from the Minister. What real opportunities will people be given to obtain funding support? How will the "Your Guide" scheme work? Will it be funded by the Government? It would offer sub-post offices another framework for progress, based on the Government's proposals.

9.30 pm

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): This has been a timely debate. We have heard much about the problems that beset our postal services, but another theme that has come through loud and clear is the considerable affection in which ordinary postmen and women are held by the British public. Despite the problems, the Post Office is a strong brand. It is thus all the more puzzling that it was thought clever to spend £2 million on changing its name to Consignia—a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham).

Geraint Davies: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Waterson: Let me make a little progress, before we hear about East Croydon post office for the fifth time.

The Post Office is yet another example of a great British public service in trouble. In some ways, it has a greater impact on the public than the national health service because almost everyone in the land uses the Post Office for one reason or another every day—even if they only receive a delivery of mail. It matters very much to all of us if our Post Office is failing.

Geraint Davies: Does the hon. Gentleman realise that the reason for the branding change was to open up

European markets? Research showed that people in Europe would understand the word "Consignia", but "The Post Office" is an English brand name.

Mr. Waterson: So the fact that the word ends with a vowel will produce more business in Europe. Well, I have heard everything now.

The Post Office's failure is also the Government's failure. As the chief executive of Postcomm, Mr. Martin Stanley, said in his recent report:

> "the company takes less care of its customers, is less innovative, is less efficient and therefore provides a generally worse and more expensive service than might otherwise be the case".

He referred to

> "a management and workforce who have a well developed ability to resist change, including a good deal of political clout".

We have seen some of that this evening.

Mr. Stanley concludes that many voters regard the company

> "as a public service for which they will hold Ministers accountable".

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): Has my hon. Friend read page 40 of the NAO report which refers to postal services in the south and south-west? In those areas, some customers receive no delivery for four days in a row, including people in the town of Bognor Regis which I represent. I know only too well from constituents of the appalling postal delivery service experienced by some people in Bognor. Is that what is meant by the universal service?

Mr. Waterson: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to Bognor—one of the country's black holes as regards postal deliveries.

As we have heard from several hon. Members, a record number of 547 sub-post offices closed last year. Those closures continue week in, week out, up and down the land. The National Federation of Sub-Postmasters says that sub-post offices are still closing at the rate of two a day.

Then there is the growing mystery of the UBS Warburg report on the strategy for Consignia. In Standing Committee, the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Miss Johnson), said that there was no such report. This afternoon, the Secretary of State said that she had not seen it. In an answer only today to my request that the report be placed in the Library, the right hon. Lady replied that it was subject to commercial confidentiality rules. We still want to know whether the report exists. If the Secretary of State has not seen it, who at the DTI has seen it?

The chief executive of Consignia has admitted in evidence to the Select Committee that up to half the network could be uneconomic. The only certainty in life for the sub-postmaster or sub-postmistress is that, from April next year, the payment of benefits through post offices will cease, removing more than £400 million of their business.

I hope that, in responding to the debate, the Minister will not forget the specific question that was asked about Paymaster's recent letter to war pensioners that referred to payments by payable order books being withdrawn from April this year, not April next year. We would like to hear a clear answer to that, please.

All Members know from our constituency experience the very real worries that arise when local post offices are threatened with closure. They are often the heart of the community, and their closure impacts most on the vulnerable, the poor and the elderly—points made by my hon. Friends the Members for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin), for Poole (Mr. Syms) and for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger).

I had the benefit yesterday of visiting the demonstration of the "Your Guide" pilot scheme in Portcullis House. I recommend it to all hon. Members; it is very impressive and has been very well received. Only today, I received a copy of the interim evaluation report on the "Your Guide" pilot scheme in Leicestershire, which, I understand, has already been sent to Ministers. The conclusions in the interim report are clear:

> "The concept has high consumer appeal, users are satisfied and perceive real benefits".

The report also states that, in a practical sense,

> "the service can be delivered."

That is a very ringing endorsement of that pilot scheme, but I put it to Ministers that a prompt decision is now needed on a national roll-out; otherwise, for many local post offices it will come too late. Much the same goes for the universal bank.

In its briefing for this debate, the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters states that it fully supports the idea of the universal bank and believes that

> "the post office card account should be available to every pensioner and beneficiary in the land without any form of cap."

Perhaps the Minister can confirm in his speech that that will be the case. The NFSP goes on to say:

> "We share the concern of many parliamentarians that the Universal Bank may not be in place by April 2003, as scheduled"

so this is not some concern got up by the Opposition for our debate today.

The NFSP concludes:

> "it would be disastrous for sub postmasters if there was any delay in the operation of the Universal Bank."

The Secretary of State was a bit weak in her endorsement of the April 2003 date for the bank's being ready to roll, so I hope that the Minister will be much more positive in his winding-up speech.

It is ironic that the Office for National Statistics has only just proposed to stop collating statistics on strikes, when we are witnessing a resurgence in militant union activity. The commuters who use South West Trains need no reminding of that. The Post Office is already responsible for half of all the days lost in Britain through industrial action, and the union is currently balloting for a national postal strike. We know the sort of power that the union wields over such matters.

For example, the former Secretary of State's proposed phasing out the Post Office's monopoly over letters costing less than £1 in December 1998. A statutory instrument was laid before the House, followed closely by another to revoke the first because the Government had to back off from their proposal to reduce the monopoly to 50p to avoid defeat on a CWU-backed motion at the 1999 Labour party conference in Bournemouth. That is the sort of political clout to which the regulator referred in the quote that I gave earlier.

[Mr. Waterson]

We have tonight seen some more examples of the CWU's reach. We heard some rather ill-advised interventions from CWU-sponsored Members, including the hon. Member for Derby, North (Mr. Laxton), who happens to be a Parliamentary Private Secretary at the very Department involved in the debate. Labour Members should be very careful because I read in the *Evening Standard* today that the RMT is now threatening to withdraw sponsorship from Labour Members, including no less a figure than the Deputy Prime Minister, who have been less than helpful in relation to the recent industrial action. Nor should the British people expect any help from the Government.

There was a time when a large part of new Labour's electoral appeal was its willingness to stand up to the so-called forces of conservatism in the public sector. That is no longer the case. In his speech on the national health service a few days ago, the Prime Minister signalled that Labour was returning to its uncritical support for the producers and public sector unions. That does not bode well for users of postal services.

The plain truth is that, when it comes to the Post Office, this Government are not part of the solution, but part of the problem. Consignia may have only one shareholder, but it is the shareholder from hell. It is not a little old lady checking the value of her investments over tea and biscuits, and perhaps attending the annual general meeting. The Secretary of State, who is not in her place, is, I guess, a sort of ultimate Postman Pat.

Ministers glibly say that they have given the Post Office commercial freedom. They have done nothing of the sort. They interfere in the running of the Post Office at all levels almost daily. As my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) said, they will simply not allow management to manage. As in every other field, they are an interfering, nannying, finger-wagging, hectoring, lecturing bunch of know-alls who have never run a commercial organisation in their lives. [HON. MEMBERS: "Here she is."] Here she is; the Secretary of State has arrived.

That culture of interference reached its nadir when the Secretary of State informed the House in Trade and Industry questions a few weeks ago that she was, in effect, sacking the then chairman of Consignia—what power for one shareholder to wield. The headhunters have now embarked on the search for a new chairman. In the meantime, Mr. Allan Leighton is kindly standing in as interim chairman for one day a week. The union commented:

> "We would like to think that the chairman of the Post Office would show more commitment than turning up one day a week."

I stumbled on the advertisement for the new chairman recently. It refers to 50 million customers—those customers do not have much choice—and says:

> "The challenges facing Consignia are well publicised."

We are certainly doing our bit to publicise them.

What are those challenges? They include a consistent failure to meet basic delivery targets; the scrapping of the first collection and the second delivery; plans to deliver first-class mail to private addresses in the afternoon; mounting financial losses; appalling industrial relations and a looming national strike; a million items of mail lost each week; the continuing cull of local post offices; losses on its overseas acquisitions; and pressure from the regulator and from Europe for greater competition.

However, the new chairman—whoever he or she is—will not be short of advice from Ministers. In answer to a recent written question, I was informed by the Secretary of State that, in a six-month period, she and the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness had had five meetings with executives of Consignia, that 12 items of correspondence had been sent and that there had been a number of telephone conversations—I wonder how many.

In typically guarded language, the recent National Audit Office report is damning about the relationship between Consignia and its sole shareholder. That point was made by hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon). The report says:

> "There is a risk that the Department of Trade and Industry, as the principal shareholder, may not apply sufficient pressure on Consignia to improve its performance and respond constructively to competition."

It also says:

> "The absence of private shareholders may limit the pressure on Consignia to improve its efficiency".

To add insult to injury, in the "Alice through the Looking Glass" world of the modern Post Office, Ministers are still considering whether they can extract a dividend this year from a company that is losing money hand over fist. As my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) said, the Secretary of State has the effrontery to suggest that this situation is somehow the fault of the official Opposition, conveniently forgetting that the Post Office made profits in every year that the Conservative party was in government. It is preposterous for the Secretary of State to claim that it is the fault of the last Conservative Government for not privatising the Post Office. I do not remember her manning the barricades for greater commercialisation and lambasting the Conservatives because we were not privatising. If that was her view, she kept it remarkably quiet.

I am indebted to Mr. Tim Row for providing evidence of the Secretary of State's real views. He is with an organisation called Action for Solidarity and is the Leicestershire CWU political officer. He says:

> "Our branch donated £400 to Patricia Hewitt's campaign"—

we are obviously not in Enron territory—

> "on the basis of a letter she had sent me two months before the election pledging her opposition to Post Office privatisation. Now that she is Blair's DTI minister . . . we are in a better position to run a serious campaign against privatisation".

The plain fact is that the Post Office is not working, and it is not working because it is trapped in a limbo between public and private sectors which was designed by the Government. Ministers must do the right thing by the Post Office and all the people who work in it and who depend on it. That means granting the Post Office the commercial freedom it so clearly needs if that great public service, founded in the early 19th century, is to survive and prosper in the 21st century. I urge all hon. Members to support our motion.

9.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): The debate has demonstrated the strength of support for the post office network in the House and the wider country, but I am sorry that support has not been unanimous among hon. Members. The motion is about mismanaging the Post Office. The Conservatives are experts on that.

Mr. McLoughlin: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you instruct the Serjeant at Arms to investigate whether the monitors are working? I am sure that Labour Back Benchers would like to come and support their Minister.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a serious point of order.

Nigel Griffiths: The Conservative party gave Britain record post office closures in the 1980s and 1990s and starved the network of investment. It is the party that saw industrial relations in the Post Office plunge to an all-time low. It is the party that today seeks to divide the House against the Post Office instead of rallying to its defence. The National Audit Office this week said that the Post Office gives high levels of satisfaction, good value for money and a lower cost than postal providers in other countries. We are not complacent, however, because we saw what complacency and inaction did before 1997. We do not claim that Consignia is perfect or that our radical reform package has achieved all that we want it to, but we have seen unprecedented investment go into our postal services at a pace of which the previous Administration could only dream.

The Conservatives have a new dream, though, as explained on the "Today" programme this morning. On their new policy, the shadow Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale), was asked whether he supported customers paying extra to get a better delivery service. Jim Naughtie asked him whether his message for the future was:

> "if you had the cash to pay, you could buy a better delivery?"

The answer was "yes."

The Conservatives know how to peddle the private health service and more private education; now they advocate a premium postal payment that would threaten the universal service. Our key priority is to secure investment for the universal service that meets the expanding needs of customers by providing a wide choice of services to give our citizens a postal service that is fit for a new era.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Will the Minister stop ranting about the Opposition and answer a question about the Government's responsibilities? On what date last year did the Post Office first contact his Department to ask whether it was the intention of Ministers to reappoint Neville Bain as its chairman? Will he confirm that several months elapsed before Ministers made an announcement on 29 November and that on that date, the Department had put no measures in place for someone to succeed Neville Bain as chairman to ensure continuity of leadership and management in the Post Office

Nigel Griffiths: Neville Bain agreed to an extension of his contract, and the hon. Gentleman and the House know the subsequent results.

The shadow Secretary of State opened with four assertions: that deliveries are falling short of targets; that many days are lost through strikes; that there are many post office closures, and that Consignia is operating at a loss. It will be pleasure to deal with all of them. Let us consider what the National Audit Office says about deliveries falling short of targets. I can confirm that the NAO found that 89 per cent. of first-class mail arrives the next day—the target is 92.5 per cent—which is 3 per cent. up on the figure under the last Conservative Government. I can confirm also that 98.4 per cent. of second-class mail arrives within three days, which is just below the 98.5 per cent. target and 2 per cent. up on the 1997 figure.

I turn now to the number of days lost through strikes, which is another subject on which the Opposition are experts. In the past five years, 195,000 days were lost through industrial action. During the previous five years, the figure was 933,000—nearly five times higher. The shadow Secretary of State spoke with great historical accuracy when he briefed Ceefax today and said that industrial relations were a shambles. Of course we are concerned about industrial relations problems, which at the moment are running at a fifth of their level in the last year of the Conservative Government. Management and the unions have been in talks with ACAS, and I urge both parties to take full advantage of arbitration and conciliation to obtain an equitable solution and avoid disrupting the service.

Poor management has been mentioned. Yes, there has been poor management, but it lay at the heart of that Conservative Government, when Secretaries of State failed to meet their 1992 promises to invest and to give the Post Office commercial freedom. Conservative Governments took £1.7 billion from the Post Office to pay for unemployment and other prices of failure. We, however, have strengthened the management with a new financial director and a new acting chairman, Allan Leighton. We have given the Post Office commercial freedom and invested £750 million.

I turn now to the concerns of all colleagues about post office closures. The House knows that between 1979 and 1997, 3,500 post offices closed; 16 were lost every month—almost three every week—for 18 years. Opera fans familiar with the Don Giovanni catalogue aria will have been interested to hear Conservative Members giving a list of post offices that have closed, but they were noticeably silent on the matter before 1997, when the post office network most needed their help. We are spending £270 million on modernising and sustaining the network, with more to follow. We welcome the reopening of 169 post offices between April 2000 and March 2001, which my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) outlined.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): The Minister will know that benefit availability lies at the heart of the issue of whether post offices will stay open. Has he seen the letter from the Paymaster General to war pension recipients? Is it the case that payment through order books will be withdrawn from April this year? If so, how does that square with the Prime Minister's pledge on the continued availability of payments through post offices?

Nigel Griffiths: I understand that that is not a state benefit but an occupational benefit. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising it because that gives me the opportunity to explain the time scale for deploying that procedure, about which several hon. Members asked. That will start in 2003, and be phased in over the next couple of years; that has always been the policy, and I am pleased to reiterate it to the House.

The hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford spoke about Consignia's operating loss. He said that it was astonishing that such a great institution could be brought so low in such a short time. However, the Post Office was not brought low in a short time; it took the Conservatives 20 years to bring it to its present parlous state, and it has taken us five years to start reversing the decline. We have not heard one word of apology from the Opposition for years of neglect and underinvestment in our postal service. There is a history of low investment.

Mr. Challen: Does my hon. Friend agree that the long run of profitability in the Post Office began in the middle of the Wilson/Callaghan years? We started it; the Conservatives milked it.

Nigel Griffiths: My hon. Friend provokes me to say that profitability in the Tory years was gained at the risk of investment; the drive was for profits, not for letting investment go ahead. The history of low investment could not be seen more clearly than in automation and computerisation. In 1997, not one branch of the Post Office was computerised; two years later, a Labour Government had invested £450 million and connected all sub-post offices—*[Interruption.]* Yes, I am addressing the very issue raised by the hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger).

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome) *rose—*

Nigel Griffiths: I shall give way one last time.

Mr. Heath: One initiative that is supposed to be taking place at the moment is the introduction of automated telling machines in sub-post offices. Is the Minister aware that when an ATM is put in a sub-post office, not only do customers pay a premium on every withdrawal, but the sub-post master as to put his own money into the machines to provide the service? Does the Minister think that that is right?

Nigel Griffiths: The programme has been warmly welcomed by the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters, and we are grateful for all its support. We are also grateful for the extension that the NFSP has proposed to the computerisation; the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) referred to that, having seen it in Portcullis House. The extension will involve 260 post offices in pilot areas participating in a programme in which Government information is immediately accessible to people via the computerised network.

David Taylor *rose—*

Nigel Griffiths: I am afraid that my hon. Friend came to this debate rather late; I am sure that he will find in *Hansard* that his point was covered.

We welcome the support that we have had from the NFSP and its positive proposals. We are wary of the criticisms made by Opposition Members, which have been condemned by the NFSP. We now aim to ensure that the unforgivable attack by the Opposition on another valuable service does not ring true with the general public, especially as that attack came from people who starved the Post Office of investment, presided over record closures and unprecedented bad relations with staff. Today, the Conservatives advocate special charges for people who want their mail on time. Why should we be surprised, when their record was one of chronic underinvestment every step of the way in schools, hospitals and now in our postal services?

We have heard today how the Conservatives dithered over the request from Post Office managers and trade unions for greater commercial freedom. They spent £1.5 million on consultants and, five years later, they did precisely nothing.

David Maclean (Penrith and The Border) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House proceeded to a Division.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I ask the Serjeant at Arms to investigate the delay in the Aye Lobby.

The House having divided: Ayes 185, Noes 324.

Division No. 147] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
(Rushcliffe)
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James

Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Dr. Julian Lewis.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Annabelle
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark

Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Tami, Mark
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tony McNulty and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 312, Noes 191.

Division No. 148] **[10.16 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles
(Norwich S)
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack
(Copeland)
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
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Davidson, Ian
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Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
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Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
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Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
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Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
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Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
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Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
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Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
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Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
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Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*

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Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
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Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
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Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
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Hinchliffe, David
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Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
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Hoyle, Lindsay
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Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
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Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
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Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Tami, Mark
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tony McNulty and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
(Rushcliffe)
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy

Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Dr. Julian Lewis.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House condemns the running down of the Post Office under 18 years of Conservative government, which saw 3,500 post offices close, hundreds of thousands of days lost through industrial action, a lack of investment which allowed the Post Office to slip behind its competitors, a failure to give the Post Office the commercial freedom it needed to invest and compete; congratulates the current Government for giving the Post Office commercial freedom to make its own decisions, enshrining the universal service obligation in legislation, establishing a new regulatory framework, bringing in new managers, modernising and supporting the post office network and encouraging partnership between employers and unions; and furthermore notes that Consignia invested £296 million in the last financial year, is addressing its cost base, strengthening its management and striving to achieve a world class service in Britain.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

That the draft Local Authorities (Mayoral Elections) (England and Wales) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 19th December 2001, be approved.—*[Dan Norris.]*

Question agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

Ordered,

That this House, at its rising on Thursday 14th February, do adjourn till Monday 25th February 2002.—*[Dan Norris.]*

Elderly Care (Isle of Wight)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dan Norris.]*

10.29 pm

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): On 6 December 1999, Councillor Buster Bartlett, who was alerted by the proprietors of Fernleigh residential home in Ventnor to the fact that the Care Standards Act 2000 would cause its closure, wrote to the Prime Minister. In his letter, he asked:

> "If the occupants have no complaints, why allow this upheaval to be imposed to the worry and distress of the occupants? . . . It seems that this new legislation, if carried out to the letter, will see the demise of care homes on the Island, with the loss to the applicants of what they treasure most—a place they call their home."

On 3 November 2000, Graham Nichols, portfolio holder for social services on the all-party executive of the council, alerted my predecessor to

> "A very difficult and escalating problem with regard to provision of nursing and residential home care . . . particularly acute in the nursing home sector, where another home is . . . threatened with closure."

He went on to say:

> "The home is currently being kept going for a limited period with subsidy from the Social Services Department. Quite simply this is because we have no beds elsewhere on the island to put displaced patients."

He added:

> "There is a political dimension to this in that we do not have the option of buying care from homes located across a shared local authority boundary, since we have none . . . The problem is primarily one of money . . . From the base date of 1st April 1993 . . . the fees paid by the Council . . . have been uplifted in line with the cost of living index. As you know, wage inflation has significantly exceeded this . . . Fees no longer equate to costs; profit for many homes . . . is non-existent."

Those two predictions have come true. Forty-eight homes have closed in the past five years. The purpose of this debate is to ask Her Majesty's Government to take urgent action to provide a breathing space for residential and nursing homes and to give their proprietors confidence to invest for the future. If they do not do so, some of the Government's other cherished plans, such as those for the health service, will be put at risk.

I ask the Minister to consider clarifying the enforcement responsibilities of the National Care Standards Commission, permitting a pause on implementation of the standards to allow Isle of Wight council and providers to sort out investment problems and assisting the council to meet providers' reasonable costs by paying realistic fees.

The Isle of Wight is unique. It is a beautiful constituency, a unitary authority and one of the poorest areas in the prosperous south-east. Its gross domestic product is less than 75 per cent. of the national average. One in four of its population are elderly. Of course, it is also an island, so we cannot export our old people to be looked after elsewhere. It had been apparent for a long time that a bed crisis in our care homes was imminent. According to Isle of Wight council figures, between 1998 and 2001 bed numbers fell in residential homes from 1,948 to 1,791 and in nursing homes from 445 to 356.

The position has not been helped by a significant social services overspend in 2000–01 and a rather curious budget-making process last year. The whole process, including select committees, led to the executive agreeing a budget well above the standard spending assessment for social services. That was followed the same morning by a full council meeting, at which the budget was reduced back to the SSA level with seven of the 12 executive members voting in favour.

That left Charles Waddicor, our director of social services, with an almost impossible task. By April 2001, a serious bed crisis was looming. Another overspend was forecast. Quick action reduced the forecast overspend to about £500,000, but it did so at the expense of more rigorous assessments for home care, excluding many needy pensioners, an almost total stop to placements in residential care and a bed-blocking crisis at St. Mary's hospital.

After a visit by the social services inspectorate, the Government provided £326,000 in discharge money. Both I and the council are very pleased to have that money, which we welcome. It helped to rescue the island from an impending disaster. Of the 30 beds that were blocked by mid-December, 21 have now been freed. We are also grateful for the £690,000 subsequently announced for 2002-04. It means that the Isle of Wight council can afford to buy places, but the problem has now shifted, because there are insufficient places to meet demand. Nursing home beds are down 33 per cent. in the past three years and 10 homes now provide 294 beds. Our most recent loss was that of the St. Lawrence nursing home, which closed despite every bed being filled. It was run by Medina housing association. It was not run for profit and was losing £40,000 to £50,000 a year.

The result, according to the chief executive of St. Mary's, is that since Christmas another 30 medical outliers are occupying beds in surgical wards, at a cost to the national health service of £1,200 a week, compared with the cost of a bed in a nursing home of £380 a week. The knock-on effect is delayed admission for others. I visited someone last weekend who had had two hip operations cancelled.

That is where the crisis is impacting on the Government's cherished waiting-list, waiting-time targets. Beds cannot be unblocked where there is nowhere to put people.

Last month, the island's joint registration and inspection unit published a report that had been requested by the nursing and residential homes on the impact of national minimum care standards. Some of the examples of the unit's findings were that 60 per cent. of homes had no passenger lift and 36 per cent. did not expect to be able to meet the door-width standards by the target date of April this year.

Since the completion of the survey, there has been closure or notice of closure of other homes, leading to the loss of 114 beds, and the target date is only 60 days away. These are part of a total of 14 per cent. of all homes that said that they would close within two years, with the loss of 450 beds. It was described by the new social services portfolio holder as

> "beyond crisis into melt down",

and he was right to do so.

There are four main reasons for the closures and the lack of capacity, the first of which is a skills shortage. The hospital is already recruiting nurses from the Philippines. Secondly, cost pressures are driving people out of business. Thirdly, there is uncertainty over funding and care standards.

[Mr. Andrew Turner]

Qualified staff are difficult to recruit. Those who are employed are leaving for less stressful jobs in supermarkets, in retailing or in tourism. Tesco offers £1 an hour more than registered care homes to care assistants. There are cost pressures, such as wage inflation, which this year is 5 per cent. There is the working time directive and four weeks' paid holiday. The cost of the latter to the Fernleigh residential home would be the equivalent of an additional member of staff for a year.

There is also the cost of the new standards. The physical care standards are one-off costs for nursing homes of £3,000 per resident, or £84,000 for the average home. The position of residential homes is similar. The one-off cost to residential homes is estimated at £1.2 million. Peter Davies, the director of Kynance care home in East Cowes, tells me that the cost to him of the capital works will be £79,000. The annual recurrent costs of applying the new staff standards in nursing homes are £950 per resident, or £26,000 per home.

Those standards can be afforded only if a profit is being made and there is a reasonable certainty of continuing in business long enough to ensure that the money is paid back. For many island residential and care homes, that is not the case. There is inadequate funding to offer a fair return on investment.

I refer the Minister to some figures that I provided her with for 40-bed and 28-bed nursing homes. Forty-bed homes are the largest on the island and 28-bed homes are the average. The figures show that the average-size home makes a loss even before the proprietor and his wife have taken a wage. The largest 40-bed homes provide nothing like an adequate return on investment, even with a proprietor and wife's combined salary of as little as £32,000 a year.

Even if the council increases the fees by 18 per cent.—it is proposing 15 per cent. for nursing homes—the average homes will make a loss. The largest would make a return that could be described only as adequate, and that is before the capital cost of implementing the care standards is taken into account.

Although there is a current surplus of places—the social services department and the care sector have imaginative proposals for providing more domiciliary care and very sheltered housing—even the council accepts that there could be precipitate closures instead of planned contraction.

The uncertainty about the future scope of care standards is making things worse. I plead with the Minister to put an end to the uncertainty referred to eloquently, almost desperately, by Richard Jones, the chairman of the Isle of Wight registered care homes association. He said:

> "It is now nine weeks until 1st April when, in common with all homes, I will be hit with the Care Standards Acts . . . With such a short time before implementation . . . it is unbelievable what we still don't know. The following come to mind immediately
>
> the full extent of the legislation involved (the NCSC has made no contact whatsoever with homes, nor has the DoH)
>
> the required staffing numbers
>
> fees to be paid by IW social services from 1/4/02
>
> number of residents requiring care for the coming years, although the Director of Social Services has stated his overall aim of reducing numbers.
>
> And we are expected to run professional care homes while in this state of uncertainty!"

Mr. Jones continued:

> "In summary, I have no knowledge of the interpretation of legislative requirements from 1st April, nor is there anybody to ask until 1st April! I have no idea what fees will be paid by the local authority from 1st April. I have no idea how many residents I should plan to care for from 1st April."

Much as care home proprietors welcome the majority of new care standards, they are being implemented too quickly, without adequate resources, and without clarity.

Councillor Roger Mazillius, chairman of the Isle of Wight social services committee, was told in a letter from one of the Minister's officials that

> "Ministers are confident that . . . any improvement in the quality of care homes necessary will be achieved smoothly, and that stability in the care home sector and sufficient capacity is maintained while the changes are made."

On the island, that is wholly implausible. The Minister's official continued:

> "It will be open to care home owners to agree that they satisfy the requirements"—

presumably of registration—

> "by means other than those set out in the standards . . . It will be for the regulator to decide in the particular circumstances of each individual home whether the home conforms to the standards necessary to meet the assessed needs of residents."

That is not a masterpiece of clarity. I think that I understand what it means, but I will not end up committing a criminal offence if I am too cavalier. Neither will I end up going bankrupt—or closing, and displacing many old people—if I am too cautious. I beg the Minister to take some steps to ensure clarity and a climate of investment for the island's care home proprietors. Otherwise, homes will close, beds will be blocked, the Government's health targets will be missed, and patients will suffer.

In Richard Jones' words:

> "Some residents will die earlier than expected because of the trauma involved."

10.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I should like to congratulate the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on securing a debate on a subject about which both he and I care a great deal. He has done an excellent job this evening of bringing to my attention the concerns of his constituents.

Long-term care is a very important subject in all areas of the country, including the constituency of the hon. Member for Isle of Wight. The care system plays a very important role in ensuring that vulnerable people of all ages receive the care that they need. It is important for the Government that we try to create a partnership between commissioners, providers, and local authority social services, to ensure that the needs of local people are met.

We appreciate that the independent care home sector is facing a number of challenges at present. The Government have no intention of denying that there are difficulties in the sector, but we must get the matter in perspective. We must be sure that we are dealing with the facts about care homes. Many figures are bandied about with regard to the numbers of beds that have closed in recent times, but the study conducted by Laing and Buisson found that the net loss of residential and nursing home beds has totalled about 19,000 since 1997.

Capacity problems do not appear everywhere in the country. The national occupancy rate is something like 91 per cent., which indicates spare capacity in some parts of the country. Conditions vary in different parts of the country, and the position in the Isle of Wight is mixed. The island has always had plenty of residential care home beds. A good number of homes were established in the 1970s and 1980s, often using old hotels and guest houses already on the island. In terms of residential care, it is fair to say that there is sufficient capacity, perhaps even overcapacity, in the Isle of Wight. However, we recognise that there is not sufficient residential care for older people with mental health problems who need specialised provision. The number of nursing homes may not be sufficient to meet demand in the Isle of Wight.

It is the Government's policy to promote independence for older people wherever we can and enable them to remain in their own home wherever possible. It is what the people concerned and their families tell us they want. I am encouraged by the figures showing that in the year 2000—the most recent figures we have—228 families received intensive care home packages on the Isle of Wight. That is an increase of about 10 per cent. on the previous year. The number of people receiving intensive domiciliary care in their own home is increasing, and we want to encourage that trend where it meets people's needs. Clearly, some people, too frail and vulnerable even to be supported by an intensive domiciliary care package, will need residential accommodation.

The care home sector can be assured that its services will be required in future and that there is a real need for the authorities to do some long-term, sustainable planning. I accept that short-termism is difficult for providers in the sector. It is important that the commissioners and the local authority have a plan for years to come about how to provide for local people.

About two weeks ago, in a debate on a Liberal Democrat motion about the long-term care system, my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) said that we should not be judged simply by the number of people in residential care. We must remind ourselves that the policy of care in the community was to ensure that if people could live in their own home with intensive support, we should aim to provide that, balancing it with good, effective, high-quality residential care where necessary. It is a matter of getting the balance right for communities.

The commissioners and providers are equal partners—each needs the other. About three-quarters of residential care provision is provided in the independent sector, so it is vital to get the relationships right. That is why we set up the high-level strategic commissioning group, chaired first by the Minister of State, Department of Health, my right hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), and now by the Minister of State, Department of Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith). It aims to give greater direction to the way in which we commission these services.

We recently issued an agreement between all the parties in a document entitled "Building Capacity and Partnership in Care". I hope that that document will underpin the relationship for the foreseeable future. It sets out in some detail the responsibilities and expectations for central Government, local government, commissioners, providers and the national health services. It stresses the need for long-term contracts to ensure that there is planning in the system and that we do not end up with what the hon. Member for Isle of Wight referred to as precipitate closures which can have a damaging effect on the individuals involved.

The document also seeks to press the parties involved to be a little more imaginative and think of new ways of providing residential care that can help people to maximise their independence, rather than simply purchasing new places in the existing provision. I am delighted that in the Isle of Wight, social services and the NHS have developed a successful model. They have two independent resource centres for the rehabilitation of older people in the community. Those units have 14 places. During the first six months of their operation, up to March last year, 39 older people passed through the unit when they were discharged from hospital. Only one person was admitted from the unit back to hospital or into a nursing home. The remaining 38 people were rehabilitated back home and remained there for a substantial period. That eased demand for both hospital and nursing home places.

I understand that plans for next year include the expansion of the rehabilitation service. I am delighted, because that is a concrete example of people working hard to come up with an imaginative way of maximising people's independence. It simply is not good enough for people to be discharged from hospital and sent home without the support and care to ensure that they can cope in that setting.

The hon. Gentleman rightly welcomed the additional funding that has been allocated to ease the problem of delayed discharges. Indeed, the Isle of Wight council is one of the 55 councils targeted for extra help over and above the general run of local authorities. It has received extra funding—£326,000 this year. The amount will be almost £700,000 next year. Although about £260,000 of that money will be used to purchase additional residential care places, much of it will be used in imaginative schemes such as the rehabilitation project and also for the funding of intermediate care beds. Hopefully, that will avoid hospital admissions and help people in their convalescence.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Although we welcome the money, the director of social services has pointed out that the problem is that there will not be enough beds to purchase.

Ms Blears: That is why all the partners need to get around the table to discuss whether they need to invest in new build and to create some additional capacity. If the rehabilitation schemes avoid the need for people to be admitted to nursing homes—or at least delay it—and let them have a few more years of healthy independent living, we all welcome them.

As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, we need to stabilise the care home sector. That is also true nationally. We have brought in a range of flexible possibilities through the Health and Social Care Act 2001 so that there can be joint and pooled budgets between the NHS and social services. There will thus be a larger pot to provide some of the longer-term solutions that we might need.

The hon. Gentleman's local authority might want to explore the possibility of setting up a care trust jointly with the NHS to ensure that there is maximum buy-in

[Ms Blears]

from all the organisations in the area. They will then feel that there is a real partnership working to achieve some longer-term solutions.

I am pleased to tell the hon. Gentleman that the Government have commissioned research into the supply of residential and nursing care accommodation throughout England. The study will examine future requirements, profitability and closures. We expect the final report to be produced within the next month and I shall ensure that a copy of it is placed in the Library. Such research, undertaking proper exploration of the issues that will undoubtedly face us in the future, will help to inform some of our long-term policy making. The sector has been subject to many rather short-term decisions and that has caused difficulty.

The Government are addressing previous underfunding of social services. We are trying to ensure that local authorities have the resources that they need to purchase care services in the community for people who require them. We have increased social services funding by more than 20 per cent. in real terms since 1997. This year, there has been an average real-terms increase of 3.2 per cent.

The Isle of Wight council has received above-average increases in its personal social services standard spending assessment allocation in each of the past two years. It will also receive an above-average increase next year of 5.8 per cent. The Government are certainly putting in the money to ensure that we provide for people.

The hon. Gentleman expressed the concern of his constituents about care home standards and the National Care Standards Commission. The former regulatory system for care homes was riddled with gaps and anomalies. Different bodies inspected different parts of the system and it was extremely difficult both for commissioners and for providers to find a way through. I understand that some homes were not regulated at all. As the hon. Gentleman said, most responsible care home providers welcome the introduction of national standards. They want to provide a high-quality and excellent service for the people they look after.

The introduction of national minimum standards will also mean that providers are clear about the standards that they have to meet. It will aid long-term planning if there is certainty about standards and about the investment needed to meet them. Users and carers will know what standards they are entitled to expect. There will be a benchmark for the quality of the services on offer.

The National Care Standards Commission will regulate care services in accordance with those standards and will apply them consistently to all providers—to try to ensure that there is a level playing field. Most responsible providers want that level playing field. The hon. Gentleman made the point that he wants the standards to be applied sensitively so that they do not cause undue concern. The phrase "precipitate closures" will stay with me, and I am very conscious indeed of that issue.

I understand that the Minister of State, Department of Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch, will make an announcement very shortly on the precise way in which the National Care Standards Commission will operate. The commission will try to ensure that it works with responsible organisations to provide high-quality services to achieve compliance with the standards, rather than simply imposing them from on high and acting in a dictatorial manner. Again, that reflects the partnership principle set out in our long-term agreement, and it involves working with the sector in the interests of the people who are cared for.

I hope that I have reassured the hon. Gentleman that the National Care Standards Commission will work very closely with providers and have a dialogue with them. He is concerned that, to date, that kind of detailed discussion with the commission has not taken place. Providers need to take part in those discussions so that they can find out what the variations are, what extra work they need to do, what the time scales are and how much leeway they will have in meeting those standards.

I hope that during the next few weeks the hon. Gentleman and his constituents will receive that reassurance and get into that very important dialogue with the commission, but that does not detract from the fact that it is absolutely crucial to set national minimum standards. People in need of residential and nursing home care and their families are entitled to know that they will receive the very best care wherever they are cared for.

Our reforms are intended to be evolutionary, not revolutionary. The commission will focus on working with people to help them meet the standards. If standards are not being met in a few respects, the commission will note that fact in its inspection report, write to the home owner and give reasonable time in which to make the necessary changes. I hope that that will greatly assist people in the sector.

Another important issue is that it has been difficult to recruit residential and nursing home staff. We want to ensure that, in this sector—as in the national health service as a whole and, indeed, in social services—we provide a climate in which people want to work and in which they feel that they receive a decent reward but also a climate in which they receive training so that they feel that their skills are being developed and that working in residential care is a worthwhile experience. That is why we have included in the partnership agreement and in the national minimum standards a core provision for training, with support and funding, to ensure that we make the sector an attractive place for people to work. I am acutely conscious of the fact that we need to draw in the best people to look after some of the most frail and vulnerable people in our communities, so we have to ensure not only that they are attracted, but that they can be retained for a decent period so that we can build up their skills and qualifications. I hope that that will happen in future.

I understand that the hon. Gentleman has specific concerns. Because of the Isle of Wight's geography, it is more difficult to form partnerships with neighbouring local authorities, so there is a need to produce some home-grown solutions. I hope that the extra money that we are providing for social services, together with the money for delayed discharges, will help to reduce the pressure on the NHS. Delayed discharges in the Isle of Wight are now down to about 14—about 4 per cent. of acute capacity—which is extremely good news. I hope that things will continue to get better and that the hon. Gentleman will find that his constituents receive the best possible provision in the future.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 30 January 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Tibet

1. **Norman Baker** (Lewes): What steps she is taking to assist the people of Tibet. [29124]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Hilary Benn): In Tibet, we are supporting two projects run by Save the Children UK. These are providing basic services to poor Tibetan communities to improve their access to education, clean water and sanitation. We also contribute to the EU's programme in Tibet.

Norman Baker: I welcome that news. Will the Minister ensure that any projects supported by his Department enhance the political, cultural and economic rights of the indigenous people of Tibet? That is especially important given that China, the occupying power, is very keen to use its western economic development strategy to "crush splittism", as it puts it.

Hilary Benn: I am aware that the hon. Gentleman takes a particular and keen interest in human rights in Tibet. The House must remember that the poor have human rights too. That is why it is right that we should be involved in the projects that we support. In the longer term, the economic development of China and Tibet provides opportunities to improve the dialogue between us on human rights, for the simple reason that, in the end, a more open society is one in which it is more difficult to abuse human rights.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I am sure that the Minister will agree that our thoughts are with the people of Tibet as they face the serious illness of the Dalai Lama. However, are the Government doing anything to help the displaced people from Tibet, especially those in India?

Hilary Benn: I am sure that the House will echo the sentiments expressed by the hon. Gentleman. The Government have been funding a higher education project for Tibetan refugees in Dharamsala in India.

Natural Disasters (Africa)

2. **Dr. Nick Palmer** (Broxtowe): What steps she is taking to support preparations for a rapid reaction capability in Africa for flooding and other natural disasters. [29125]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): My Department is working to strengthen international disaster response across the world by strengthening the capacity of the United Nations system. However, following any disaster, most lives are saved in the first few hours by the immediate local effort. We therefore support work across the world, particularly through the Red Cross, to build up local and national capacity for immediate response.

Following the floods in Mozambique two years ago, we have been working through the UN to increase the capacity of the Government of Mozambique to respond to disasters. We are making a similar effort in India, following the lessons of the Gujerat earthquake.

Dr. Palmer: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. She may remember that I and many other MPs raised this matter after the Mozambique floods. We were concerned that support infrastructure—helicopters, emergency supplies, and so on—was not available on the continent of Africa, and had to be brought in from Britain and elsewhere. Is there a role for additional continental reaction capability, going beyond the individual countries involved, to enable us to respond to disasters anywhere in Africa?

Clare Short: We are trying to work through the UN to make sure that stocks are deployed across the world that can be drawn on in any disaster. My hon. Friend might recall that, despite all the arguments that took place about helicopters from the UK, the cheapest and most readily available helicopters came from South Africa. They were deployed very quickly, although we had to provide the fuel. My hon. Friend will remember the little girl who was born in a tree. She and her mother were lifted out of that tree by a South African helicopter using UK-supplied fuel.

People think of sending material directly from their home countries, but that is usually very slow. My Department has lots of stocks that can be deployed when they are needed, but we are trying to achieve a regional and national response to disasters, as people often lose their lives when resources have to be brought in from a long distance.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): A rapid reaction facility such as the Secretary of State has described may well have been of help to the Democrat Republic of the Congo after the recent volcano eruption. However, is it not important that such initiatives do not distract us from the need to ensure sufficient sustainable development? In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, two-thirds of people face malnourishment, and the UN consolidated appeal for the Congo is only 40 per cent. funded. There is sometimes a danger that we focus on the headlines created by initiatives such those described by the right hon. Lady, without sufficient attention being paid to the underlying need for sustainable development in countries such as the Congo, and others elsewhere in Africa.

Clare Short: Clearly, the Goma disaster was very bad. Everyone saw the graphic pictures. But the international response was quite effective. I talked to President Kagame yesterday. People are in need because they have lost possessions, but the situation is under control. The response was pretty good.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that there is a disastrous situation in the poor benighted Democratic Republic of the Congo. From colonial times to the present day, people there have never had decent governance. Obviously, we must respond to the humanitarian disaster, but the real disaster is that the conflict is not properly resolved. The country is divided into three parts. We need full implementation of the Lusaka peace accords so that we can establish a full-blooded development programme. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is a heavily indebted poor country, and if we could resolve that problem, the country would get debt relief and we could start to reconstruct what is really another failed state.

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): I have just returned from Goma in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the site of that catastrophic volcano eruption. Will the Department for International Development look at improving co-ordination of relief efforts, as a refugee camp that I visited at Gisenye was sadly lacking in that regard? Having said that, I congratulate DFID on the work that it has done.

Does the Secretary of State agree that behind this humanitarian catastrophe lies a man-made catastrophe that has claimed 2.5 million lives in the past three years? Will she and the Government push very hard to move forward the Lusaka peace process, as she has said?

Clare Short: I will indeed look into the matter that my hon. Friend raises concerning the situation in Goma and see what more we can do. I agree with her second point. The cameras arrive quickly at a natural disaster, but the long-sustained tragedy of poor governance and endless war, death and loss in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, like the long-standing civil war in Sudan, is of no interest to the media, even though both countries are massive—as big as western Europe. We have an opportunity, if we are sufficiently determined, to bring peace. That will transform the prospects of the people of those two countries and of Africa, and we should make a bigger effort.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): After a spate of disasters in Africa, both man-made and natural, will the Secretary of State, like me, send her condolences to the people of Lagos after their recent tragedy? We hear a lot, and rightly, about the reconstruction of Afghanistan, but the spotlight of the world, as the right hon. Lady has said, moves quickly from one disaster to another.

What plans, if any, are there for the reconstruction of dwellings in Goma? We have discussed water and sanitation before, but what plans are there for the reconstruction of accommodation for the people of Goma following the recent volcanic eruptions?

Clare Short: I am sure that the House will want to send condolences to the families of the many people who lost their lives in Lagos after the explosion of ammunition that made people think that a war or a coup was starting; there was terrible loss of life, through panic rather than through injuries suffered as a direct result of the explosions. I will write to the hon. Lady about the reconstruction of dwellings in Goma. We will stay engaged.

I agree that it is the tragedies that do not hit the headlines that are killing more people and destroying more lives. That is where we must concentrate our efforts so that the people of Goma have a better life within a Democratic Republic of the Congo that is properly governed and can start real economic development.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): As well as concentrating on immediate natural disasters, surely it is important to take a long view for Africa. Will my right hon. Friend encourage the Prime Minister to visit Africa and to co-ordinate a Marshall aid-style Africa initiative to ensure that Africa is not locked out of globalisation for the future, and that it does not suffer a reverse, with people dying of starvation on an even greater scale for lack of initiatives being taken now?

Clare Short: My hon. Friend is right. A third of the poor of the world live in Africa but the poverty is deeper and progress is slower than anywhere else in the world. Across the continent, on current levels of economic growth, there will be growing poverty. We need a massive effort in Africa, which, as my hon. Friend will know, the Prime Minister is to visit shortly. We must resolve some of the long-standing conflicts, and with enough international attention, I am sure that major progress is possible. Then we will need more investment, faster economic growth and more trade access. That is what the New Partnership for African Development, led by President Mbeki, is all about. The Prime Minister is determined to be a partner of that and to mobilise the G7 and the rest of the international community to make an effort to improve development in Africa, which we urgently support.

Afghanistan

3. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What recent discussions she has had with her European counterparts on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. [29126]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): Last week I attended the Tokyo conference on the reconstruction of Afghanistan, where I met my counterparts from a number of European countries, the European Commission and representatives of other Governments and international institutions.

We discussed the need for continuing humanitarian assistance and strengthening of the Afghan interim administration's capacity to deliver to its people. We also agreed that there was an urgent need to improve security and begin the process of demobilisation of armed factions and the building of an Afghan army and police force.

Miss McIntosh: Does the Secretary of State share my sadness at the death of the lion in captivity in Kabul, which became a symbol of the struggle in Afghanistan? Will she tell the House what discussions she has held with her European counterparts about the particular problem that arises from the fact that most of the assistance to Afghanistan is announced only one year in advance? Will she push for longer-term commitments to Afghanistan?

Clare Short: We are all sorry to see a lion die—although I think it was an old lion. I hope that he had led a happier life than many of the people of Afghanistan. I read that in some countries the appeal for funds for the zoo in Afghanistan secured more funding than appeals for the people of Afghanistan. Something is out of proportion if that was the case, although we should care for animals and people.

I agree with the hon. Lady's underlying point. We must stay committed to Afghanistan for the long term. The country cannot be rehabilitated in a year. That is why we made a five-year commitment. We are working strongly with Commissioner Patten for a long-term commitment from the EC, and although he could not do that formally, he was trying to achieve a commitment to mobilise 1 billion euro rather than merely making a one-year commitment. Some countries took a long-term view; others did not. We must do all that we can to keep a sustained engagement so as to give Afghanistan a chance.

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): The Secretary of State may be aware that there are many Afghan refugees in my constituency. A significant number of them, many of whom have extremely good skills, would like to return to Afghanistan to help in the reconstruction. However, it is not always easy, especially if they have been out of contact for a long time, to find a point of reference there—someone to whom they can notify their skills and whom they can ask that they be used appropriately. Has there been any thought about that and are any contacts emerging in the new Afghan Government to whom I could refer a growing number of people?

Clare Short: I, too, have 100 or so Afghan asylum seekers in my constituency, many of whom are highly skilled and educated. I am sure that that is true all over the world. Many skilled and educated Afghans left the country and we must do all that we can to try to assist them so that they can help in the rebuilding of their country. The International Organisation for Migration—a UN body—has set up a register and is asking all Afghans in the diaspora who are interested in helping to register their skills. The organisation is keeping a tally of the skills needed in Afghanistan. We will thus be able to match people up and help them to go home permanently or temporarily to help in the reconstruction.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): May I ask the Secretary of State again whether she is concerned that the UK contribution to humanitarian aid and the reconstruction of Afghanistan is being met entirely by the Department for International Development? That is despite the fact that £100 million has been made available to the Ministry of Defence from Treasury reserves for operations there. The right hon. Lady will remember that during the Kosovo crisis the Treasury reserves contributed £68 million to the efforts of DFID. Will she assure the House that the cupboard will not be bare in the event of another natural disaster? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is far too much noise in the Chamber.

Clare Short: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I welcome increases in my budget from anywhere in the Government system. If the hon. Lady can persuade the Treasury to contribute more to my budget, I shall welcome it. On the other hand, we have to deploy our resources flexibly—especially resources for disasters, because we never know where disasters will occur. As I explained, we have a contingency reserve within my budget and when that is exhausted we go to the Treasury. I cannot remember whether we received £10 million or £20 million from the Treasury towards Afghanistan, but the rest of the commitment comes from my budget. That means that if there was a series of disasters across the world I should be in difficulty, although, of course, we are approaching the end of a financial year. We cope and we deploy our budget well, but we spend every farthing. More would be welcome and if the hon. Lady could help me with the Treasury I should be enormously grateful.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): Does my right hon. Friend agree that in Afghanistan, as elsewhere, Britain's contribution is both bilateral and multilateral; that her Department has given an excellent lead; and that if, following the events of 11 September, which themselves followed devastation in Afghanistan, we can give the Afghans the same recognition that we gave to the Kurds, that would be a noble objective?

Clare Short: My right hon. Friend is right. The contributions that the UK is making to the reconstruction of Afghanistan and to development across the world include not only our direct British programme but the contributions that my budget makes to the World Bank and the Asian development bank. Moreover, 20 per cent. of the EC contribution will draw down on my budget. However, it is right that we should have a strong multilateral system that can work everywhere, including countries where we have a particular partnership. We are deploying all those resources and I am really hopeful that if the international community sustains its engagement, we can guarantee the people of Afghanistan a better future and bring good out of bad. We must all work for that.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): On Monday, in her statement about the rebuilding of Afghanistan, the Secretary of State said that Britain would assist the new interim administration with what she called a scoping study on security. What does that mean and how long will it take? What is the likely commitment of British resources to that study?

Clare Short: The scoping study is the initial study that assesses the size of the country, makes the best possible estimate of the number of forces under arms and starts to think through the process of demobilisation and work out where to train the armed forces. Obviously, the armed forces need to serve the whole country, so they should be representative ethnically, but then exclusive ethnic groups in parts of the country—there are minorities—would not be properly protected. In other words, it is the initial study, getting the numbers, beginning to think of the process that would take things forward, then sharing the information with the international community, to reach agreement with the interim administration on a process of putting it into action. We have conducted similar studies, in Sierra Leone before we started that work, and in other countries such as Indonesia, where the security sector needs reform. We hope to get that study moving fast, share the information internationally and then, hopefully, start the process of demobilisation and the building of new security forces.

Electricity Supply (Africa)

4. **Mr. Gareth R. Thomas** (Harrow, West): What further action she is taking to improve the access to electricity of isolated communities in Africa. [29127]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): In many sub-Saharan African countries less than 10 per cent. of the population have access to electricity. That means that most rely on wood for fuel, which uses up forest resources and causes much ill health through pollution caused by cooking indoors. Africa needs massive new investment in infrastructure—in electricity, water, sanitation, transport and telecommunications. To achieve that requires a reduction of conflict, and stronger partnerships between the public and private sectors.

We have therefore been working with other agencies to create a new facility, which is known as the public-private infrastructure advisory facility, to advise Governments on how to create conditions to attract private investment in infrastructure. I am this evening launching an investment fund designed to leverage more private investment into infrastructure in Africa.

Mr. Thomas: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Does she agree that renewable energy options such as small-scale windpower plant and solar power offer an environmentally friendly, affordable and reliable means of generating power for the schools, health clinics, irrigation systems and other vital services on which those communities rely? What further action will her Department take to promote the roll-out and easy accessibility of such power options?

Clare Short: I do not particularly agree with my hon. Friend. I am in favour of the deployment of modern technology and as many renewables as possible, but Africa needs basic electricity supplies, telecommunications, water systems and sanitation. Sometimes people bring their greenest agenda to the poorest countries. Yes, let us use the best possible technology, but Africa needs the basics, and we should do all in our power to bring investment in modern infrastructure to countries across the board, not just some nice renewables in odd projects.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): This is a first. For the first time, I totally agree with the right hon. Lady. She is absolutely right because the cost of photovoltaic cells and windmills would be prohibitive, particularly in the developing world. Does she agree that the work of many of the British privatised companies, now providing not only networks for electricity but self-contained electrical generating units in portakabins, is possibly the short-term answer for those countries that so desperately need electricity in their rural areas?

Clare Short: I should like to enjoy agreeing with the hon. Gentleman—I see that he is wearing his red tie today, so perhaps that explains it. Let us be clear that we should all favour the development of renewables, but we should drive forward that technology in countries such as our own, rather than trying to get the poorest countries to pay for the experiments and the development of the new technology. Self-contained generators are used in many poor countries because the basic national systems are so poor and tend to be more expensive, and firms have to use that kind of technology when their national systems do not work. But we really need proper privatisation under good regulation so that we can get private sector investment and better energy provision, and therefore access to telecommunications and the internet, which most Africans lack at the moment.

Mr. Piara S. Khabra (Ealing, Southall): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the completion of the European Union reform programme will make a difference to the EU development programme for the poor countries?

Clare Short: I agree with my hon. Friend that an important start has been made in reforming the European Commission's very poor quality development programme, but we have a long way to go until that reform agenda is implemented. New figures are available if we do the calculations. EC funding to poor countries has gone from 70 per cent. down to 50 per cent., and it will be 38 per cent. this year. That is disgraceful, and more EC resources need to be allocated according to need and poverty. I am afraid that we still have a long way to go.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): In considering access to electricity in isolated communities in Africa, I am sure that the Secretary of State will agree that among the most isolated communities at the moment are those in Zimbabwe that are at the mercy of Mugabe's thugs. What is her view of the way in which electricity is currently being supplied from South Africa? Does she feel that she and her Department have any role to play in exerting effective pressure to stop Mugabe and his thugs grabbing land from those who are the legitimate owners?

Clare Short: I do not agree that Zimbabwe's isolation is the problem, but it has virtually every other problem, and the situation is disastrous economically and politically. We all have to work as hard as we can for free and fair elections. That looks difficult and we cannot be optimistic, but we have to sustain our efforts. There is no magic answer; we can call for all the tools of international pressure—indeed, as the hon. Gentleman will know, they are being deployed as we speak—but the situation continues to deteriorate. I do not know whether it gives any comfort to the hon. Gentleman to know that President Mugabe finds our Government very much more objectionable than the Government whom the hon.

Gentleman supported. President Mugabe objects to me in particular because I took the view that land reform should be transparent and benefit the people, rather than be used to give land to cronies.

European Community Aid

5. **Hugh Bayley** (City of York): What steps she is taking in the Council of Ministers to ensure that more EU aid is spent on helping poor people in the poorest countries. [29128]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Hilary Benn): Poor countries should be given priority in the allocation of European Community development funds. In November 2000, my right hon. Friend helped to secure the first ever commitment by the EC to poverty reduction as the central objective of its programmes. However, that commitment has yet to be put into practice. As my right hon. Friend has just told the House, the percentage of EC aid being spent in poor countries remains low. We also continue to press for a far more effective EC aid programme.

Hugh Bayley: Does my hon. Friend agree that the most effective aid is that spent on helping poor people in poor countries whose Governments are committed to pro-poor development? Does he recognise that the proportion of EU aid going to low-income countries is not only low but declining, having decreased from 70 per cent. in 1989 to 51 per cent. in 1999? Will he reassure the House that our Government are voicing the strongest possible arguments in the Council of Ministers and in bilateral relationships with other EU member states to increase the proportion spent for poor people?

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend is entirely right about the declining proportion of the EU's aid budget that goes to poor countries, which is precisely why all of us have a responsibility to ensure that that changes. As he will be aware from his visit, along with other members of the Select Committee, to Brussels last week, that has been going on for a very long time, and it is to my right hon. Friend's credit that we have told the EC that that needs to begin to change, but it will be a long haul if we are to make progress, and we need to work together.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): I applaud the efforts to ensure that the poorest people in the poorest countries get all the aid that can be made available to them, but does the Minister agree that in Zimbabwe, which should be one of the wealthiest countries in Africa, there are extremely poor people? Does he also accept that a new poor is being created, consisting of those who have been forced to flee from the brutality of the Mugabe regime? Could not our Government give further consideration to assisting those British citizens who have been displaced and forced to return to the United Kingdom?

Hilary Benn: I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the very difficult situation in Zimbabwe and the effect that it has had on the people whom he mentioned. We are giving humanitarian support, including food aid, which is a measure of how bad the situation currently is.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [29154] **Laura Moffatt** (Crawley): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 30 January.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Laura Moffatt: The Prime Minister will be aware that a review of health services in and around Crawley has been taking place. Will he join me in thanking all the people who have taken part in the review, particularly Councillor Brenda Smith, our independent chair, Peter Bagnall and the health campaigner, Christine Earnell? Is that not a fine example of the new ways of working in the national health service that have been so well illustrated in the modernisation board report?

The Prime Minister: I congratulate all those who have been involved in the review of health services in my hon. Friend's constituency. I understand that they will consider a final report from the review team tomorrow.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right to stress that the modernisation board report of a couple of weeks ago said that, although there were still major challenges in the national health service, there were real signs of improvement as a result of the investment going in and the reform. That is why we believe it is so important that the continued, sustained investment in the national health service continues, and that it is matched by reform to deliver the national health service that the people of this country want.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Does the Prime Minister agree that accident and emergency services are in crisis across the country?

The Prime Minister: No, I do not. The most recent analysis of accident and emergency services appeared in the modernisation board report. It showed that, although there was still a long way to go, as a result of the extra investment, by March this year 75 per cent. of people requiring such services should have to wait four hours or less, and that, by 2004, that should be the case for everyone. That does not mean that there are not real pressures on casualty departments in many parts of the country, but the only answer is the one that I have given before, which is to put in the additional investment that gives us the consultants, the nurses and beds that we need.

Mr. Duncan Smith: In March 1997, the then Leader of the Opposition said at Prime Minister's questions that accident and emergency departments across the country

> "are in acute and chronic crisis and . . . many simply cannot make do."—[*Official Report*, 4 March 1997; Vol. 291, c. 707.]

Well, at that point, three quarters of patients were seen by a doctor in casualty within the hour. After five years of a Labour Government, only half are seen in that time and a quarter are not even admitted within four hours. Will the Prime Minister now accept that accident and emergency services are in acute and chronic crisis across the country?

The Prime Minister: No, I will not. Let me inform the right hon. Gentleman of the change that has been made by this Government. Whereas his Government used to measure the time that people spent in accident and emergency from when they were first seen, we measure it from when they enter the accident and emergency department. I am afraid that he has got his facts wrong.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Yet again, the Prime Minister talks a lot of nonsense. In opposition, he was busy crying foul; now in government, it is, "Everything will get better—trust me."

Last week, the Prime Minister said that he stands by health professionals, so perhaps he would like to listen to the words of the consultant at Kent and Canterbury hospital, who said that

> "the state of A&E is dreadful. People sit there for three or four days in an open corridor. The standards of care are unacceptable. The nurses go round in tears".

Will the Prime Minister perhaps accept, as he was so keen to do in opposition, that accident and emergency services are now in crisis?

The Prime Minister: I do not accept that. What I certainly do accept, however, is that there are accident and emergency departments across the country that are under real pressure. What is important is that just as we should not pretend that the national health service is perfect, the right hon. Gentleman should not pretend that the service is rubbish. We know exactly why he is doing that. The answer to the pressure in accident and emergency is extra consultants. There have been 60 extra since we came to power. By 2004 that will have increased by two thirds over the 1997 figures. There are also 600 additional accident and emergency nurses. In addition, as a result of the £120 million package announced last October, improvements are happening across the country, including in Kent and Canterbury. The only answer is to keep that investment going in. Can we now have an answer from the right hon. Gentleman, as we have given our answers: is he in favour of that investment or not?

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister is very keen to ask us about that, but figures available in the past few days show that public investment in public services has fallen below that of the previous Government. Before he gets too sanctimonious, we must first of all ask him the same question: is he prepared to accept, on his own measure and own figures, that he has made a mistake and got it wrong? One minute he says that the public servants leave scars on his back; the next moment he is running to hide behind them when there is a problem. He then turns the entire weight of his Government and their machine on a 94-year-old lady—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Duncan Smith: He turns the machine on people who complain because they have nowhere else to go. When will he grasp the fact that the problems in the NHS are not the fault of the doctors, the nurses or the patients, but his fault, and that the buck stops with him?

The Prime Minister: We are putting substantial sums of additional investment into the national health service. The right hon. Gentleman may recall that when we did so, the Conservative party called that extra spending reckless, irresponsible and dangerous. I gather that he is now saying that we never spent enough on the national health service—a slightly curious position for the Conservative party to be in.

We have made it clear throughout that the national health service faces huge challenges: it is bound to—there are 5.5 million operations a year and 12.5 million or 13 million out-patient appointments, and 270 million people see their GPs. We know there are challenges, but as the independent review by the modernisation board found, there are also real improvements. My point is that we will sustain those improvements only if we keep the money going in and match it with reform. So far, we have failed to get any indication at all from the Conservative party that it supports that investment. We have our strategy on the health service, and the Conservatives have theirs. Our strategy is to rebuild the national health service; their strategy is to run it down so that they can dismantle it.

Q2. [29155] **Valerie Davey** (Bristol, West): Communities in Bristol that are experiencing crime and violence that is directly linked to class A drugs are working closely with the police. Their efforts and co-operation are leading to an increased number of arrests, yet the availability of those drugs remains high. What more can the Government do to ensure that those drugs are prevented from entering the country?

The Prime Minister: I know, as my hon. Friend rightly says, that there are serious problems in her constituency and elsewhere as a result of that particular drugs trade. She will know, however, that Avon and Somerset police are working closely with Customs and Excise and that they recently met the authorities from Jamaica and are constructing a programme to deal with that issue. I very much hope, as a result of the measures that we are taking with the Jamaican authorities, that we can stop a lot of those drugs coming to this country. They cause nothing but misery and mayhem for people on our streets and we have to do everything we can, nationally and internationally, to stop the trade.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): Why is it that, since the right hon. Gentleman's party came to power, the number of cancelled national health service operations has gone up by 50 per cent?

The Prime Minister: It is true that the number of cancelled operations is unacceptably high, but it is also true that 19 out of 20 operations happen on time in the way that they are supposed to.

Mr. Kennedy: The Government's own figures, given only on 23 January this year, show that last year 77,000 people had to put up with the trauma of a cancelled operation. All of us know from our constituencies that bed blocking is a national scandal and that there are elderly people in hospital wards who should be in residential care, yet the Government have not yet adequately tackled the problem. Do patients not deserve better than that?

The Prime Minister: They do deserve better, which is why it is important that we reduce waiting lists and waiting times. Seventy per cent. of people in this country now get their operation within three months, and as a result of the extra nurses and consultants now coming into the health service, we are making progress on every single aspect of waiting lists.

However, the point that the right hon. Gentleman makes about bed blocking is right, which is why, before Christmas, we put some £300 million extra, over and above the original budget, into bed blocking; as a result, delayed discharges in the past few months have fallen by about 12 per cent.

Denzil Davies (Llanelli): Has my right hon. Friend seen reports that the European Commission has censured the Government of Germany for straying too close to the 3 per cent. ceiling on borrowing, as set out in the Maastricht treaty? Given that Germany is struggling to get out of a recession, does my right hon. Friend not agree that the Commission's action shows that there is a fundamental flaw in both the 3 per cent. limitation and the absurdly named growth and stability pact?

The Prime Minister: I know that my right hon. Friend has strong views on those issues, but I must tell him that I am not responsible for the German Government. I am thankful that as a result of the brilliant management of the economy by our Chancellor debt and public finances in this country are in an extremely healthy state.

Q3. [29156] **Mr. Jonathan Djanogly** (Huntingdon): If the Government are prepared to spend at least £100 million, or £5 for every taxpayer in the country, on the Saville inquiry into an event that happened at least 30 years ago, how can the Prime Minister justify, on either cost or delay grounds, not holding a full public inquiry into the foot and mouth disaster—an event that happened only 30 days ago?

The Prime Minister: The answer is that in the events of Bloody Sunday many people lost their lives. With foot and mouth, it is important to learn the lessons properly and direct agriculture forward for the future. That was the purpose of the Anderson inquiry report published yesterday. However, the situation regarding Bloody Sunday is quite different. I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's implication that we should not have set up that inquiry. Sometimes it is important to get to the truth of what happened, even though it was a long time ago, because what happened a long time ago affects the present day as well.

Q4. [29157] **Julie Morgan** (Cardiff, North): Is the Prime Minister aware that nearly £300 million has now been committed to objective 1 areas in Wales? Will he make certain that the interests of Wales are represented in the decision on the follow-up programme that will take place after 2006, in the same way that he made certain that Wales, the valleys and west Wales benefited from a programme in 1998?

The Prime Minister: We shall certainly make sure that people are properly consulted on the next phase. It is as well to emphasise one point. As my hon. Friend rightly said, some £300 million is going to west Wales and the valleys, which is boosted by match funding of £400 million or thereabouts. As a result, there will be substantial additional investment in west Wales and the valleys. As a result of the work that has been done and the state of the economy, the hon. Lady will know that, although unemployment remains a severe and real problem in those areas, the fall in unemployment there has been the largest of any constituent part of the UK.

Q5. [29158] **John Barrett** (Edinburgh, West): The Prime Minister will be aware of the widespread concern that exists about deep vein thrombosis and its connection with long-distance flights. Does he share my concern that the World Health Organisation study into DVT has not only failed to begin, but will take two and a half years to complete? What measures will the Government take in the interim to ensure the safety of the one in 10 people who develop blood clots on international flights, which can develop into life-threatening conditions?

The Prime Minister: We issued guidance on the subject in November, as I understand it. The World Health Organisation report will take some time, but it is as well to wait for what will be a detailed piece of research. That should provide us with the basis for further guidance. In the meantime, people will be well advised to follow the guidance that has already been issued.

Q6. [29159] **Phil Sawford** (Kettering): I recently visited the new cardiac ward at Kettering general hospital where I saw the new building to house our MRI scanner, which will shortly be in service, and in a few days I shall attend the official opening of the hospital's new creche facility. *[Interruption.]* Is my right hon. Friend aware of the stark contrast between the situation now and with the public appeals, bingo sessions and car boot sales that we used to rely on to fund health services in Kettering when the Conservative party was in power?

The Prime Minister: The Conservatives were howling at my hon. Friend because they do not like to hear any good news about the health service. He is right. The MRI scanners that are going not just to his constituency but to other constituencies, and the fact that more than 90 per cent. of people with suspected cancer are seen within two weeks, are important signs of progress, but of course there remains far more to do.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Will the Prime Minister tell us how much the RMT has given to the Labour party over the past financial year?

The Prime Minister: I do not know the precise sum, and there is no particular reason why I should. However, the right hon. Gentleman will know that we have made our position totally clear on the strikes that are happening: they are not justifiable, which is why we condemn them.

Mr. Duncan Smith: According to the Electoral Commission, the answer is in excess of £84,000. Of course, the union also gives extra perks to certain members of the Cabinet, whom we already know. Yet that is a union—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let the Leader of the Opposition speak.

Mr. Duncan Smith: That union is causing misery for millions of rail passengers throughout the country. While passengers trying to get to work are losing money, the Prime Minister's party is still making money from the union. It is not enough for him to say that he condemns the strikes. Will he take a lead, take action and sever his links with that striking union?

The Prime Minister: I have made it clear that we regard the strikes as unjustified and unjustifiable. In relation to how we deal with them, the important thing is to state that clearly on behalf of the Government, and to make sure that the measures that we take enable the investment and the change in the railways to go through. The worst thing that we could do would be to adopt the suggestion that the right hon. Gentleman made yesterday and ban the right to strike. I do not think that that is the right way forward. Instead, we should state clearly that it is not right for the strikes to take place, and in the meantime to make sure that we put into the railways the investment that is needed.

Q7. [29160] **Mr. David Crausby** (Bolton, North-East): With a majority both inside and outside the House in favour of a ban on hunting with hounds, will my right hon. Friend put us out of our misery by telling us that he will introduce such a measure urgently and ensure that there is enough time for it to proceed successfully through both Houses?

The Prime Minister: I am afraid that I am not going to put my hon. Friend out of his misery yet. As we have made clear before, and as I said in the House a couple of weeks ago, the House will have an opportunity to vote on the issue. We will announce the date of the vote at the appropriate time.

Q8. [29161] **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): Does the Prime Minister agree with York district hospital, York city council, which is run by the Labour party, and the Selby and York primary care trust that their problem is lack not of money but of care home places? The Government have presided over a historic loss of 50,000 care home places in the past five years. In the city of York alone, we are looking for 50 care places. The Prime Minister has increased the costs of private care homes; what does he propose to do about it today?

The Prime Minister: I do not agree with the hon. Lady's figures, and I do not know her trust's specific position. However, I would be surprised if it claims that the problem has nothing to do with money. Many care homes face serious problems because of the level of fees and because they have been under huge and increasing pressure through, for example, bed blocking and other issues that we discussed a moment or two ago. The only method of sorting out better social care for people is through investing in it and reconfiguring our organisation of it, as primary care trusts throughout the country are doing.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): Is the Prime Minister aware that participation in community sport continues to fall in this country? My appearances for Burstall rugby club's first team have nothing to do with late recognition of my skills; we simply no longer have a second or third team. Will my right hon. Friend join me and others who have signed early-day motion 702 and ensure that the Chancellor introduces tax exemptions for such clubs in his Budget, which he suggested he would like to do, rather than following the charitable route? That would make an enormous difference to 150,000 sports clubs throughout the country and to the 1.5 million volunteers who give their time for sport.

The Prime Minister: I suspect that that will be the first of many Budget representations. I understand that the Treasury has issued a consultation document on the matter; we are considering it.

Q9. [29162] **Annabelle Ewing** (Perth): Following the revelations of the past few days, will the Prime Minister accept that the Arthur Andersen private finance initiative report on which the Government relied is fundamentally tainted and that his flagship PFI policy has been holed below the waterline?

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the PricewaterhouseCoopers report on the PFI, which found that it was excellent value for money. She should also talk to people throughout the country who have seen new hospital buildings, GP premises and school buildings, not least in Scotland, built through a partnership between the public and private sectors. It is important to continue to use the private sector to help to lever in greater investment when that will work. Overwhelming evidence, not only from the PricewaterhouseCoopers report but from the National Audit Commission, shows that the partnership provides good value for money. People such as the hon. Lady who oppose that must explain where they would get the money.

Ministerial Visit (North Ayrshire)

Q10. [29163] **Mr. Brian H. Donohoe** (Cunninghame, South): When he next expects to visit north Ayrshire.

The Prime Minister: I have no immediate plans to do so.

Mr. Donohoe: I am extremely sorry to hear that. My right hon. Friend would have been taken to meet some industrialists, especially those in the electronics industry, with which there are genuine problems. Much investment is going to Ireland because of the difference between corporation tax in the United Kingdom and in Ireland, where it is 10 per cent. Although the Chancellor has given start-up much encouragement in this country, corporation tax remains at 30 per cent. for the rest of industry. Will my right hon. Friend do something about that?

The Prime Minister: Again, I am sure that the Chancellor has heard that representation. However, we have made changes in corporation tax since coming to power; we have cut the rate from 33 per cent. to 30 per cent. Although that is high when compared with Ireland, I hope that my hon. Friend realises that there has recently been substantial inward investment in his part of Scotland. We have much more to do to attract more inward investment there, but I hope that he agrees that it is not all doom and gloom. Many good contracts, including a recent contract for £4 million in his constituency, give us hope for the future.

Engagements

Q11. [29165] **Mr. Michael Foster** (Worcester): Conservative-controlled Worcester city council appears reluctant to use antisocial behaviour orders in the fight against yob culture. Does my right hon. Friend believe that that lack of political willingness is part of the reason why such tools are not used in the fight against crime and antisocial behaviour in cities such as Worcester?

The Prime Minister: There has been some reluctance to use them, but we must also consider their use critically and whether we can streamline their application. For example, I know that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is examining interim orders and methods of cutting the bureaucracy involved in obtaining such orders. Many people's problems are not the heavy crimes that hit the headlines every day, but continuing antisocial behaviour. Antisocial behaviour orders constitute one mechamism, but not the only one, for defeating it. I agree with my hon. Friend that we must do more, and that is precisely why we are reviewing the matter and will take further action.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): Will the Prime Minister now accept that the Saville inquiry has served only to reopen deep wounds that should have been allowed to heal? Is he aware that, while the IRA's adjutant in Londonderry 30 years ago today struts around this place and raises a foreign flag in this House, the former soldiers of the Parachute Regiment stand accused by a stream of pro-IRA propaganda films on television that have served to pollute the atmosphere in which the Saville inquiry is being held? Surely the £66 million—not £52 million, as he told my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) last week—that the Government have spent on lining the lawyers' pockets would have been better spent helping the families of those who were bombed at Omagh.

The Prime Minister: First, I do not agree that the wounds had healed; one of the reasons for having the inquiry was that they had not done so. I believe, for the reasons that I gave at the time, that it was right to have that inquiry. As for the more general position on Northern Ireland, I am sorry that the Conservatives are now effectively taking the view that they do not support the process that we have painfully tried to construct there. Whatever the difficulties involved in that process, it is a lot better than what we had before; real progress is being made in Northern Ireland. This is a classic situation in which, if people opt for circumstances in which everything is perfect, we will simply go back to the days when nothing was working, or perfect, at all. With the greatest respect to the hon. Gentleman, I believe that the peace process is right, and that the decision that we took on the inquiry is right; I stick by both of them.

Q13. [29167] **Mr. Bill O'Brien** (Normanton): My right hon. Friend is known to care for, and provide assistance to, the mining communities, and that is welcome in those communities, is he aware of our concerns about under-achievement in education and the need for greater social care for those who are chronically sick with emphysema and bronchitis? Will he make further inquiries so that we can have the care in the mining communities that we wish to obtain from the Government?

The Prime Minister: First, I thank my hon. Friend for his acknowledgment that we have put a substantial amount of investment into the mining communities. I have seen for myself that that has given many of those communities a new lease of life and sense of hope. He is right to make the point about payments of compensation to people with emphysema, and so on. We are doing everything that we possibly can to speed those payments up. The problem that we have had throughout is that each case has to be individually assessed. We are, however, looking at further ways of speeding up the process, and hundreds of millions of pounds have now been paid out.

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): Is the Prime Minister aware that, later this year, the whole world will hear the evidence against Slobodan Milosevic in an open court, but that the United States proposes to try the terrorists associated with Osama bin Laden behind closed doors in a military court? Will the right hon. Gentleman seek to persuade President Bush that justice for the victims of 11 September should be seen to be done?

The Prime Minister: A decision has not yet been taken about how these people should be tried. Over the past few weeks, we have seen some very unfair reporting in relation to exactly what has happened to the detainees, and in relation to the American position more generally. I ask the hon. Gentleman to remember that this situation arose out of thousands of people being killed in cold blood on the streets of America. The exact status of the detainees has not yet been decided, but it is not the case that they are being mistreated. Representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross are now based at the camp and are visiting the detainees; they will make a full report to the United States Government. I ask that—in respect of this issue, as of others—people wait until a decision has been taken before they attack it.

Q14. [29168] **Mrs. Betty Williams** (Conwy): Will my right hon. Friend join me and other hon. Members in supporting No Smoking day, and set an example to the whole nation by joining the campaign to ban smoking in all rooms in the House where we meet?

The Prime Minister: Fortunately, I am not responsible for what happens in the various Rooms of the House—

that is a matter for the House itself, I am pleased to say. In respect of the campaign against smoking, the one thing that we should be clear about is that the dangers and health risks of smoking are now absolutely clear. So the point that my hon. Friend makes in general is right, but I am afraid that her particular point is a matter for the House.

Q15. [29169] **Mr. Bill Wiggin** (Leominster): Is the Prime Minister aware that 16 doctors wrote to me from Herefordshire's local medical committee and Leominster primary care trust to say that they cannot get their patients admitted to hospital because there are not enough beds? Is he aware that this will get worse when the new hospital opens, as there will be even fewer beds?

The Prime Minister: I do not doubt that there are real problems with the number of doctors, nurses and beds, but we shall not take lessons from a Conservative party who savaged the number of beds in the health service when it was in power. I hope that the hon. Gentleman gives his constituents this reply: the only way to get those extra doctors, nurses and beds is to invest in the national health service—not privatise it, which is the Tory plan.

6

Point of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This matter arises out of the operation of the Data Protection Act 1998, which I believe can fundamentally affect the work of Members of Parliament in representing their constituents.

On Monday of this week, I received a telephone call from a Government Department indicating that before it could reply to a letter that I had sent to it on behalf of a constituent, it required a consent form from my constituent. My constituent had written on behalf of her profoundly deaf daughter, for whom she is the carer and whose interests I have sought to represent over 18 years.

That is just one of a significant number of incidents when Government Departments, agencies and other organisations—I am thinking particularly of Consignia—have sought to deny Members information, sheltering behind the Data Protection Act. On behalf of Back-Bench Members, whose interests you, Mr. Speaker, have continuously sought to protect, would you please seek an urgent meeting with the Information Commissioner, Elizabeth France, to clarify fully and finally the manner in which Members of Parliament may be, could be and should be properly allowed to represent their constituents' interests?

Mr. Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his point of order. I can understand his frustration, but it is not for me to say whether an Act of Parliament passed by the House has been correctly interpreted and applied. I suggest that he pursue his point with the Information Commissioner and the responsible Minister.

SCOTTISH GRAND COMMITTEE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 100(1) (Scottish Grand Committee (sittings)),

That the Scottish Grand Committee shall meet at Westminster—

(a) on Wednesday 13th February at half-past Ten o'clock to consider a substantive Motion for the adjournment of the Committee; and

(b) on Tuesday 5th March at half-past Ten o'clock to consider a substantive Motion for the adjournment of the Committee—*[Dan Norris.]*

Question agreed to.

Police

3.33 pm

The Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs (Mr. John Denham): I beg to move,

That the Police Grant Report (England and Wales) 2002–03 (HC 533), which was laid before this House on 28th January, be approved.

In the White Paper on policing the 21st century, published before Christmas, the Government set out a radical programme for police reform with the aim of reducing crime and the fear of crime. The public want criminals caught and convicted. They want to see crime tackled, the fear of crime reduced, and antisocial behaviour and disorder tackled effectively. The White Paper sets out the ways in which we shall raise the performance of the police service across England and Wales and bring all forces up to the standard of the best.

The funding settlement that I am announcing today will help to underpin the process of police reform. Resources have been targeted to support the modernisation process. More officers will be provided through investment in the crime fighting fund, and the police service will benefit from more effective support from science, technology and information technology through Airwave and the national strategy for police information systems. We are also providing investment to enable police officers to make better use of their time and skills, through the DNA expansion programme, and there is an increased provision for capital investment in works, vehicles, information technology and other equipment.

Police resources will be maximised to put more officers on the beat, and to make better use of them when they are there. That will be achieved by better deployment of the increasing number of police officers, tackling unnecessary bureaucracy, and enhancing the capacity of support staff.

Central to that vision is an increase in the number of police officers. Our target is to achieve 130,000 officers by the end of the coming financial year. In the past two years, the Government have provided for an additional 6,000 recruits, and a further 3,000 will be financed in the coming year—all outside the general funding for police authorities covered by the police grant that we are discussing today. The crime fighting fund alone is equivalent to an additional £221 million on the provision for policing.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Is there specific provision in the figures that the right hon. Gentleman is announcing for the additional security required following the events on 11 September? Undoubtedly, there must be police officers at our ports of entry and our airports. In Avon and Somerset, 10 police officers who could be patrolling our rural areas are permanently lost to provide cover at Bristol airport. How can we recover that funding and make up for the depleted number of officers who police our rural areas?

Mr. Denham: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. As in any year, the costs of policing terrorist activities and incidents are in part included in the police grant, but the issue of increased costs is under consideration and consultation is taking place with the Association of Chief Police Officers and others. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we have already made

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specific provision of some £30 million over and above the police grant in the current financial year. I am not yet in a position to announce the funding for the coming year.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Denham: I would not mind making a little progress, but I shall take one more intervention.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I want to give the Minister a word of thanks. His Department has reimbursed North Yorkshire police for the extra cost of policing Menwith Hill and Fylingdales in my constituency, and we are grateful for that. The bad news is that North Yorkshire police have still not been reimbursed the £1 million cost of policing the Selby rail crash. This is now an urgent matter, and unless some reassurance can be given before the police committee meeting next Monday, the precept in North Yorkshire, which is already going up by a third, will increase by even more in order to meet that cost.

Mr. Denham: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman as swiftly as I can on the specific issue of Selby. There may be cause to discuss that problem later in the debate. Police authorities are routinely expected to absorb an element of unprecedented and unexpected costs. It has never been the case that every single penny of unexpected costs is reimbursed from the centre. I shall endeavour to get back to the hon. Gentleman regarding the specific matter of Selby.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): My right hon. Friend talks of unexpected costs. He will recall the disturbances in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley last year, which caused serious problems for the police budgets in West Yorkshire, Greater Manchester and Lancashire. Is he able to give a positive indication that those additional costs will be met?

Mr. Denham: If I may make a little progress, I shall come to that matter in a moment.

As a result of the Government's efforts, we have turned the tide on police numbers. Increases in police funding have brought about a rise in the number of police officers to 127,200, and we shall continue to build on that success this year. We expect to have record numbers of police officers—more than 128,300—in the spring, and 14 forces already have record numbers. After we have reached those record numbers, we shall need another 1,700 officers to reach next year's spring target of 130,000. Financing 3,000 recruits through the crime fighting fund next year should deliver that target.

The number of civilian support staff now stands at 56,644, which is an increase of 2,788 in the year to September 2001. Those extra support officers mean that police can spend more of their time on visible operational policing.

Police authorities and forces have pressed for funds for additional officers for many years. We have provided those funds. Indeed, had we included them in the general allocation of grant this year and next, the increase in resources going directly to forces would have been not 2.9 per cent. but about 3.9 per cent.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge) *rose—*

Mr. Denham: I will take one more intervention, but I hope that Members will then let me make a little progress. I suspect that many of the issues that they want to raise will be covered later in my speech.

Mrs. Campbell: My constituents are grateful for the 40 extra officers that the Cambridgeshire police have had since September 2000. The police authority, however, maintains that unless the police rate goes up by 10 per cent., Cambridgeshire stands to lose up to 100 officers. Does my right hon. Friend regard that as scaremongering?

Mr. Denham: As my hon. Friend will know, the Cambridgeshire force is one of those that have already achieved record numbers. The determination of the exact precept is a matter for the police authority, but the settlement commits substantial resources to the police in England and Wales as a whole.

The grant allocation does not include the large amount in the crime fighting fund that will pay not just the costs of recruits in the coming year, but the salaries of those recruited in the previous two years of the fund. When that money has not been taken fully into account in the presentation of figures, the true resources available to police authorities are inevitably understated.

The police funding settlement for the coming year builds on last year's record level. Overall provision for policing will increase by 6.1 per cent., to £9,010 million. That is an increase of over 16 per cent. on the provision for 2001. By 2003–04, police funds will have risen to £9.3 billion. That is an increase of more than 20 per cent., or 12 per cent. in real terms, on provision in 2000–01. Most will be paid to police authorities as grant, either for general purposes or to support specific initiatives.

The police grant report deals with Home Office support for revenue expenditure, but revenue spending is not the whole story. I am pleased to say that we have been able to increase the provision of capital grant and supplementary credit approvals from £157.43 million in 2001–02 to £209.43 million in 2002–03. That is a substantial increase—33 per cent. Most forces will receive more capital grant and credit approval for general capital expenditure than they did this year, and none will receive less. With part of the £209 million, we will establish a £20 million grant fund to improve the police estate. The Audit Commission has remarked on the condition of police properties. The increased provision, and the opportunities for forces to bid for more from the capital fund, will lead to modernised working conditions and improved services for members of the public who go to the police.

Let me now deal with general funding. For 2002–03, the total amount of police authority general expenditure to which the Government will contribute police or rate support grant will be £7,831 million. That is an increase of £217 million on this year's provision, adjusted for the move of the National Crime Squad and National Criminal Intelligence Service to central funding. The increase amounts to 2.9 per cent., but Members should bear in mind the fact that when provision for specific initiatives and capital is included, it becomes 5 per cent.

I have taken account of a number of factors in the grant settlement. On 1 April 2000, the boundaries of the Metropolitan police district were brought into line with those of the 32 London boroughs. That meant that Essex, Hertfordshire and Surrey took over responsibility for the policing of areas that were formerly in the Metropolitan police district.

We have taken account of transitional costs incurred in the last three years. We had intended to discontinue the additional payments for 2002–03, but I have recognised that transitional costs will continue to be incurred, and have extended the payments for one further year. We will therefore be making special payments of grant in 2002–03 totalling £1.1 million in recognition of the additional costs resulting from the boundary changes. Hertfordshire will receive an additional £0.3 million and Surrey an additional £0.8 million.

We accept that the police funding formula is not sufficiently sophisticated or flexible to respond to the distinct characteristics and responsibilities of the Metropolitan police in carrying out capital city and national functions. For that reason, each year the Greater London Authority receives a special payment of grant on behalf of the Metropolitan police authority in addition to that provided through the funding formula.

In recognition of the Metropolitan police service's specific needs, the Metropolitan police special grant will be increased from £191 million this year to £197 million for 2002-03. That is paid as 100 per cent. Home Office grant and is not charged to London council tax payers.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): The Minister has taken account of the special national role of the police force in the capital. He will be aware that this year Manchester is hosting the Commonwealth games, an important national sporting occasion. Will he undertake not just to provide the £3 million that has already been promised, but to meet the whole of the £7.5 million cost of policing the games? If he does not, he must understand that there will be an unacceptable cost for council tax payers in Greater Manchester, or unacceptable cuts to policing in Greater Manchester.

Mr. Denham: For the record, nothing has been promised yet under this heading. The hon. Gentleman may be anticipating things that I will come to a little later, or Ceefax for the north-west, but I will deal with the Commonwealth games in due course, although the Government have already pledged some £30 million towards the cost of the Commonwealth games.

I turn to specific initiatives for revenue or operational spending, for which provision is made on top of the general allocation of funds to police authorities. The main programmes address particular pressing needs identified by police authorities. They also reflect our concern to develop particular elements of the service as part of the modernisation agenda.

I have already referred to the crime fighting fund, of which the coming financial year will be the third year. A total of £167 million is provided for the costs of continuing to employ the first 6,000 recruits, and £54 million is provided for next year's recruits. That investment is critical to the delivery of 130,000 officers by spring next year. Police authorities and forces have delivered admirably against the first two years' targets for the programme.

Both revenue and capital provision is made for those forces scheduled to take Airwave, the new radio communication system, during the coming year. Capital set-up provision of £76 million is made available for the equipment and facilities that will be required locally for forces scheduled to take the service. We will also provide up to £65 million of revenue support for forces to invest in initial preparation costs and for locally determined menu services. The core service charge payable to the contractor, and likely to cost around £50 million next year, will be met centrally.

Airwave is an important building block in police modernisation. It will replace a variety of existing radio systems with a common system based on modern digital technology. Greater Manchester police was the second force to receive Airwave, in part in recognition of the need to have a modern communication system in place in time for the Commonwealth games. That spending is part of our undertaking to provide up to £500 million over three years to enable forces to adopt the system in the certainty that the main burden of the cost will be covered.

In 2000-01, the Government provided £15 million through a new rural policing fund to meet the particular problems encountered in rural or sparsely populated areas. The fund was expanded to £30 million this year and I propose to continue payment next year. The fund is targeted at rural policing issues. The 31 forces that benefit are encouraged to develop ideas and initiatives that benefit rural communities.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): Can my right hon. Friend assure me that that will be part of the negotiation that he will enter into with the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions? Whatever new funding mechanism is arrived at, the problem of policing in rural areas must be recognised.

Mr. Denham: I shall say something in a moment about the funding formula, the way in which it may be re-examined and our approach to that. We will want to ensure that we look at the range of criticisms of the current funding formula.

We are particularly aware of the impact that the higher cost of living in London and the south-east can have on recruitment and retention in the area, which is why we have provided additional funding to help forces recruit and retain officers. In the coming year, £33 million will be provided for a 75 per cent. share of the cost of the London pay lead—the payment to Metropolitan and City police force officers who were recruited on, or after, 24 September 1994, and who do not receive housing allowances. Arrangements are also in place to provide an allowance to qualifying officers in other forces in the south-east. In Essex, Hertfordshire, Kent, Surrey and Thames Valley, the allowance is an extra £2,000 a year; in Bedfordshire, Hampshire and Sussex, it is an additional

[Mr. Denham]

£1,000. Provision is also made for funding free rail travel up to 70 miles from London for officers in the Metropolitan and City forces.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Denham: I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter).

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): Is my right hon. Friend the Minister aware that many of us have lobbied long and hard for the regional cost of living allowance for forces adjoining London? House prices in my Reading constituency, and in many others in the south-east, actually exceed those in many parts of London. Does he not recognise that it is potentially damaging to pay police officers in the Metropolitan police area an additional £6,000—my goodness, they have earned it—while paying only £2,000 to officers in other high-cost housing areas? Will the Minister undertake to review that system, which simply is not working? At the moment, the additional money is not much more than a sticking plaster.

Mr. Denham: I understand my hon. Friend's point, but the allowances, which are a relatively recent development, were properly agreed with the police negotiating body through the negotiating structure—the forum in which those issues should properly be addressed. As a Hampshire MP, I, too, am aware that such issues exist in the south-east, but we must ensure that we take a proper and well-informed approach to them, rather than suggesting that we can make a difference simply by pulling a figure out of a hat. I shall now give way to my county colleague.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): As the right hon. Gentleman has implied, he is not unfamiliar with the problems in Hampshire. The resources that he announced at the beginning of the debate are very welcome, but unless the issue of allowances is addressed, it will be impossible to spend those resources because of the retention and recruitment problem, to which reference has just been made. Will he use such influence as he has to review as soon as possible the £1,000 allowance, which is a real barrier to getting the quality police force that we all want to see?

Mr. Denham: I want to ensure that we identify the problems precisely and tackle them effectively. It is notable that some of the police forces surrounding London appear to have much greater problems with recruitment and retention than others, even though the apparent underlying conditions are very similar. For example, Surrey, which is as geographically close to London as one can get, has very high house prices, but the Surrey force has not suffered the same recruitment difficulty as the Hampshire and Hertfordshire forces. I am anxious to work with forces in the region to identify the precise nature of the recruitment and retention problems, and such work is already in train. I want to ensure that any action taken addresses real, rather than assumed, problems, which is the approach that I tend to take. I acknowledge the concerns that have been expressed, but I think that the approach that I have identified is the right and proper way for the Government to proceed.

I want to touch briefly on centrally provided services, which also form part of the police funding arrangements for the coming year and account for about £170 million. Some £23 million is provided for training costs arising from the crime fighting fund, which will cover initial training for additional recruits at national police training centres. Some £61 million has been allocated to the DNA database expansion programme, and £27 million has been included for the national strategy for police information systems—NSPIS.

The planned case and custody applications will provide a number of benefits to the police. Case preparation will reduce paperwork through the creation and use of electronic files. The custody application will provide police custody officers with online guidance on all the procedures to be followed in the booking-in of suspects, and their subsequent progress through the system. The systems will be linked to each other. The accurate details that they provide will eliminate the need for police officers to fill out several different forms, and will be capable of transmission to other criminal justice systems.

All that is part of our effort to prevent the time-wasting duplication of work, and to free officers to concentrate on a job that there is no doubt requires their full professional skills.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): What the Minister has said will come as a great relief to the many who have wondered when the Government would be able to introduce a computerised custody system. However, we discussed the matter only a month or so ago when the Home Secretary introduced his White Paper. At that time, the Minister was evasive about when the system would be introduced. He appears today to be saying that that introduction is imminent. Will he give us a deadline by which he expects to introduce a computerised custody system that will reduce the ridiculous bureaucracy in police stations?

Mr. Denham: The provision that I have announced this afternoon reflects our confidence that we will make significant progress this coming year. A full system will not be in place in every part of the country this year, and it will be some time before we can roll it out across the police service as a whole. However, we recognise the need to make progress on this area of IT development. There is no doubt that poor police IT is one of the factors that limits the most effective use of police officers' time. As we identified in last autumn's study entitled "Diary of a Police Officer", the lack of appropriate IT ties police officers to the police station as they cope with unnecessary bureaucratic duties. We are determined to make progress, and the provision announced this afternoon demonstrates our desire to do so.

The National Crime Squad and the National Criminal Intelligence Service form a vital part of a modernised police service in tackling serious and organised crime. Both agencies have an important role to play, internationally and nationally, and the valuable work that they do in turn benefits police authorities at local level.

Provision for the NCS and NCIS was increased in 2001-02, using funds from levies on police authorities. From the coming year, both bodies will be funded directly by the Home Office. That will add to the transparency of their funding, which will no longer be a hidden deduction from the general policing provision.

Because of the central importance of the NCS and NCIS in the battle against serious crime, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has decided to increase provision for the NCS and NCIS from £165 million to £202 million in 2002-03. I believe that that investment in tackling serious crime will be broadly and widely welcomed.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Hon. Members from all parties in Cheshire recently met the chief constable of the local force, and heard the disturbing news that our police authority grant is to increase by only 1.9 per cent. in real terms. The reason, as the Minister has made clear, is that the amount being deducted from the grant to meet the allocations for the NCS and NCIS is more than the local police force was spending. As a result of the mechanism that the Minister described, the force has lost out. Will he look specifically at the Cheshire case, as it concerns both Labour and Conservative MPs in the county?

Mr. Denham: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman understands the question any more than I will understand the answer that I am about to give. However, I assure him that, having been alerted to the concerns in Cheshire by hon. Members of all parties, I am satisfied that we are right to say that the county has received an increase of 2.5 per cent. The adjustments in baselines to reflect the change in the way that the NCS and NCIS are funded do not undermine that argument, and are perfectly consistent with the ways in which adjustments to baseline budgets are always implemented by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

I shall be happy to write to the hon. Gentleman to set out the case. However, I took the opportunity to check the matter earlier, and I believe that the funding increase has been appropriately represented by the Government.

A consultation exercise on the funding settlement was held in the normal way. I received 38 representations from 27 police authority areas, as well as from hon. Members, the Association of Chief Police Officers, chief constables and police authorities.

There is always concern about the size of any settlement and how the cake is cut, but, of the overall increase of 6.1 per cent., 5 per cent. will go to police authorities for the CFF, as capital, and for other specific initiatives, as well as the grant. It builds on the 10 per cent. increase in policing provision in 2001–02.

Concerns were raised about the method of adjustment to the 2001–02 baseline, on which I have touched. However, as a result of wider changes to the baseline calculations from services not affecting my Department, but in a more equitable way, we have agreed to fund an additional £5 million to that which was proposed in the autumn to make sure that, on a like for like basis, year on year, every police authority will receive a grant increase of at least 2.3 per cent. In total, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has been able to identify some £11 million on top of the original policing settlement to make sure that we achieve an equitable increase for all police authorities.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): The Minister will be aware that for a variety of reasons, pension costs as a proportion of the total police budget are increasing. Indeed, it is predicted that such costs will increase dramatically in the next few years. To what extent has he taken that into account and will he take it into account when considering the funding of the police authorities in the months and years ahead?

Mr. Denham: In the short term, the cost of pensions has been taken into account in the settlement in the normal way. However, we said in the police reform White Paper that we are looking at more significant changes to the police pension system, and we are currently working on that. There are a number of issues to address, such as having a modern benefits structure. We said in the White Paper that we would like to find a way of more satisfactorily insulating police authorities from the predictable costs of normal retirement within the pension scheme. Work on that will be continuing. For the coming year, provision has been made in the usual way and is reflected in these calculations.

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): Following on from that point, what advice will the Minister give police authorities about their budgeting this year? If they are anticipating a pension time bomb in several years, it might be prudent to put extra money on one side now, but if there is to be a change in a few years, there would be no possibility of putting more police on the beat. What advice will he give the authorities on coping with the future, given the uncertainty of the change ahead?

Mr. Denham: The police authorities should probably approach the coming year as they have approached previous years. If the Home Office felt that there was a need for central guidance which varied from that advice, we would send it out. However, I have said to my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Llew Smith) that we recognise that pensions are an issue for police authorities' budgets, and we want to deal with that as we look at the future of police pension provision. I would not like to trigger any dramatic change today in the way in which police authorities approach their budgeting for this issue for next year.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): Will the Minister acknowledge that the contributions made by police into their pension funds are almost double what many other public sector workers, such as local government officers, pay?

Mr. Denham: I accept that the contribution rate is quite high. Equally, full pension rights can be achieved after 30 years of service, which is not the case in other schemes. Indeed, an issue that arises when considering the future of pension schemes is how to achieve a system that is seen by all sides to be equitable in terms of the cost to the employer and to the police officer, and which continues to reflect the rather special nature of a police career and the duties and responsibilities of police officers. That is one reason why we have the sort of pension scheme that is in place at the moment. These are not easy matters to keep in balance, and we will need to do that as we develop our ideas on the future of the pension scheme.

David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): The costs that the Minister has been talking about, and others,

[David Davis]

put particular pressure on some police forces so that the settlement that the formula has delivered is not enough to cover their costs. Some police forces, such as mine in Humberside and South Yorkshire—of particular interest to the Home Secretary—are badly hit by the formula and have been for some years. In my case, it has meant doubling the council tax precept to cover the costs. Earlier the right hon. Gentleman mentioned changes to the formula. Can he give us any guidance and hope that the formula will be changed in such a way as to help the likes of the Humberside and South Yorkshire forces in future? They are good police forces doing a good job, but they are dying the death of a thousand cuts.

Mr. Denham: I do not accept that either of those forces is dying the death of a thousand cuts. The increases in resources during the past two years were unheard of under the right hon. Gentleman's party, so let us not have loose talk of that sort because it is damaging.

Let us talk about the formula. All that I want to do—extremely tentatively—is to set out the principles. A part of the pension costs arises from predictable costs that occur when people retire from the police service in the usual way. The police service as a whole and individual police forces have no control over that, but the costs can vary unpredictably if, 30 years previously, there was a cohort with an especially substantial intake. When that group leaves the service there can be a disproportionate impact on pension costs and the budget for that year, and that fact will not be reflected 100 per cent. in the damping mechanisms that are currently in the system. My aim—although I am not sure whether I can achieve it—is to have a system that better protects forces from those costs.

Another cost built into pension schemes reflects to a large extent the success or otherwise of police services in effectively managing health and medical retirement issues. We all acknowledge that some forces have dealt with those much more effectively than others. I am not convinced that those costs are central and that we should pick them up, or that it would serve the good management of the police service to say that whatever the rate of medical retirement the cost to the pension scheme would be picked up centrally. The honest answer is that we shall have to get that right, so that we send the correct signals through the system. We must try to protect police authorities against costs over which they cannot possibly have control but which can affect their budget. However, we do not want to send a signal that poor management will be subsidised by the central police settlement. That will be my approach.

I have already referred to our actions in finding additional resources from outside the planned settlement to ensure that each police authority receives a grant increase during 2001-02 on a like-for-like basis of at least 2.3 per cent. The mechanism is part of a system of floors and ceilings that have applied to the local government grant settlement. Although the mechanism has generally been welcomed, some authorities would have preferred a higher floor, while others were concerned that those above the floor were paying for those below it. We have damped that effect with the additional resources found by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. The introduction of the floors and ceilings system has been useful this year.

I want to make a couple of points about the special grant. As my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) pointed out, I have received requests for special grant to support several police authorities who suffered during the disturbances last summer. I am pleased to tell the House that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has agreed to meet more than half the extra policing costs that were incurred and to give grant as follows: £2.22 million to West Yorkshire; £1.44 million to Greater Manchester; £0.82 million to Lancashire; and £0.56 million to Staffordshire.

Mr. Paul Truswell (Pudsey): The announcement that my right hon. Friend has made about West Yorkshire will be most welcome and will go some way towards mitigating the £3.4 million that the service spent on policing the Bradford disturbances. Will he bear in mind, however, that the authority, like many others, also faces claims for riot damage? In the case of West Yorkshire, the amount is £7.5 million. Will he monitor the situation with a view to being equally generous when the final picture and its impact on the service and on police funding becomes clearer?

Mr. Denham: The amount that I announced is an improvement on the normal special grant criteria. Those criteria would have allowed for only a small payment for policing costs—only about £300,000 for West Yorkshire. I hope that the move to meet almost 64 per cent. of the extra policing costs will be seen as significant.

I can say nothing specific this afternoon about possible claims under the Riot (Damages) Act 1886. We shall have to wait and see what the position is. We are aware that the Lancashire police authority, for example, is determined to resist claims under the Act. I cannot speak for the authority, but it sees no reason why taxpayers' money should be spent on refunding insurance companies. I believe that that is some way in the distance, but I hope that the additional resources will be welcomed by the forces that receive them.

We have also considered the position of Greater Manchester police, which, as I have just announced, will receive £1.44 million to help to meet the costs of the disturbances. The Secretary of State and I have agreed that a grant of £3 million will be paid to Greater Manchester police as a contribution to the policing costs of the Commonwealth games in a few months' time. Until two or three months ago, Greater Manchester police was telling us that the costs would be £4.8 million, so £3 million is a fairly substantial amount. There was a £3 million hike in that cost, of which we were informed in November.

There cannot be a blank cheque for underwriting whatever costs Greater Manchester police says that it will incur. My officials are still in discussions with the police authority to ascertain whether further costs are justified, but comments of the sort that I heard the chairman of the police authority make today, suggesting that people would be put at risk, show a great deal less confidence in Greater Manchester police than I have.

Mr. Brady: The Minister has said that the estimate of the cost of policing has increased since the original estimate was given, but will he give an undertaking that if he is persuaded that the new estimate is accurate and the costs will be £7.5 million, the whole cost will be funded by the Home Office, not dumped on the council tax payers of Greater Manchester?

Mr. Denham: I have said what I have said. Until November we were told that the costs would be £4.8 million, and then someone said that they would be another £3 million. We are in discussions about the nature of those costs and we shall have to see what happens. Clearly, that would be additional substantial Government funding, in addition to the funding that has already been made available to the Commonwealth games. Of course we all want the games to be a success and a safe success, but equally there cannot be a blank cheque.

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): My right hon. Friend has been generous in recognising the difficulties faced by many forces, but will he also recognise that when particular areas decide to bid for large events such as the Commonwealth games, it is done on the basis that local people, local business interests and others believe that there will be a financial gain as a result of attracting these events? Should not they also contribute something towards the policing costs?

Mr. Denham: My hon. Friend is right in the sense that we all hope that Manchester, and the north-west region, will benefit substantially from a successful Commonwealth games. I am quite prepared—I believe that this is the Government's attitude—to approach the issue in partnership, which is why there has been significant Government funding and why I was pleased to make the announcement that I made this afternoon. But I am aware of the reality that may have prompted my hon. Friend's question—that money that I find for the Commonwealth games in Manchester is money that cannot be made available to the police service in any of the areas represented by any of the other hon. Members in the Chamber. We must get the right balance between the needs that arise from specific events and the needs that exist in every area of the country, and I hope that we are doing so. That is why we do not like blank cheques, and why we consider issues very seriously and carefully, on the merits of each case.

For the coming year, we continue to set store by stability in the grant system, to help police authorities to plan ahead. As with this year, we have not proposed any changes to the method of police grant distribution for 2002-03. There will be no substantive changes to the operation of the police funding formula for next year, although of course data have been updated as usual. For 2002-03, the average increase in grant-supported expenditure for police authorities will be 2.9 per cent.

The formula has many strengths. It is generally acceptable to much of the policing community; it also has well recognised limitations. It is largely based on the way in which police forces allocated officers to services in the early 1990s, so we are working to update the formula in line with the policing needs of the next five years. We have a working group with the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Association of Police Authorities, the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the National Assembly for Wales, the Local Government Association, the Greater London Authority and the Metropolitan police. That group is considering a range of options to update the funding formula, particularly with regard to the police activity data that underlies it. The group is also considering how best to deal with the additional costs that may arise from policing especially sparsely or densely populated areas—an issue raised earlier in the debate.

During the consultation on the grant this year a variety of issues have been raised about the formula. Those who raise such issues always assume any change will be to their benefit, even though no change will ever produce only winners. However, my right hon. Friend and I have concluded that this is the time to undertake a serious and wide-ranging review of the formula. As part of that review, we shall want to examine all the issues raised in the consultation and seek to ensure that the grant formula properly supports the police service of England and Wales on its key role of tackling criminality, reducing crime and tackling the fear of crime.

Where possible, I should like changes to the funding formula to be introduced, after consultation, in time for the provisional police funding settlement for 2003–04, but the ability to do that will depend on making good progress in the months ahead.

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East): I have listened carefully to what my right hon. Friend has said about the annual settlement. I have a briefing from the Cleveland police authority in which I am told:

> "The overall effect of the police settlement is that local taxation will have to increase significantly above general inflation to provide essential additional funding for the police service."

Is my right hon. Friend aware of that? The chairman of the police authority has said that the police precept will have to increase by at least 50p a week—about £26 on a band D council tax bill. That is a serious consequence of the settlement.

Mr. Denham: I shall write to my hon. Friend about the position in his authority, but I have set out pretty clearly that this is a good settlement, taking into account not just the grant settlement, but the additional funding, through the crime fighting fund, to recruit additional police officers—plus the 30 per cent. increase on average in capital funding, together with the additional resources from which many forces benefit. Of course, it is for police authorities to set their precepts, and we expect them to do so in a reasonable and prudent manner, but those who are trying to represent the settlement as a particularly poor one are really not reflecting the contribution of the different sources of funds that I have set out this afternoon.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): I was pleased to hear that the Minister has consulted the National Assembly for Wales on the future of the formula. The settlement has had a mixed reception in Wales, but there is a growing feeling that police functions and police funding should be devolved to the National Assembly for Wales. Has his Department had any discussions with the Secretary of State for Wales or the First Minister, with a view to making progress?

Mr. Denham: I think that I can be absolutely confident in saying that no such discussions have taken place in the six or seven months that I have been in this job, and I am not aware that any took place previously, but we enjoy

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in the devolution settlement an extremely good working relationship with National Assembly for Wales at official and political level. The Assembly shares absolutely our commitment to tackling criminality, reducing crime and tackling the fear of crime. I have made a number of visits to Wales, as I have to the regions of England. We have a good, effective working relationship, and I hope that we can build on it in the years to come. We are determined to reduce crime and to lessen the fear of crime. The investment that I have announced will help the police to play their key part in tackling crime and disorder.

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): My right hon. Friend talks of reducing crime, and I am sure that he is conscious of the fact that police numbers are rising and crime is falling in Nottinghamshire, but on any statistical comparison with like authorities, he will find that the Nottinghamshire police appear to be under-resourced. Will he give a commitment that, in the new formula in 2003–04, he will look very carefully at the position in Nottinghamshire? I accept what he says: all cannot be winners; there will be losers, too.

Mr. Denham: I have visited Nottinghamshire, and I am aware that the view in the city of Nottingham in particular is that the Nottinghamshire force faces the typical crime patterns of a major city under what is seen as a shire county funding formula. I cannot tell my hon. Friend what the outcome of the formula review will be, but I hope—this may be fatal optimism—that we will be able to approach the matter in such a way that he and other Nottinghamshire Members will be able to see that their concerns have been considered and addressed. That is an ambitious aim for any review—it will not leave everybody satisfied—but I hope that I can at least say that I listened to people when I made such visits. After many years of such issues not being considered, we are now prepared to consider them afresh.

I have taken considerably longer than I had hoped, but I hope that I have given way to all hon. Members who wished to intervene and that I have been able to respond to many of their points.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. I remind all hon. Members that Mr. Speaker has imposed a time limit of 12 minutes on all Back Benchers' speeches. Given the fact that a number of hon. Members have risen, they may wish to make their contributions even shorter.

4.21 pm

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): I shall do my best to enable as many hon. Members as possible, from all parties, to contribute to the debate.

I recognise the courteous way in which the Minister introduced the debate. He has given way, as has been a tradition in this debate over many years, to every hon. Member who wished to put the case for their police force. He and I are the only two hon. Members who have been prevented from doing that, but I assure him that I shall do my best to do so when I come to the appropriate moment in my speech.

I welcome the Minister's announcement, towards the end of his remarks, about extra resources for those forces who had to deal with riots, unrest and disturbances in some parts of the country last year. It is right that such extraordinary costs should be recognised, as should the extra costs—I will not enter into the dispute about how much they will be—that Manchester will incur because of the Commonwealth games. I would refer to Cambridgeshire inasmuch as, last year, the then Home Secretary recognised the extra costs faced by the police force in policing the Huntingdon Life Sciences protests, which are a permanent thorn in the side of Cambridgeshire constabulary. I hope that the Minister will look favourably on that issue again.

The debate takes place against a dismal background of acute demoralisation in the police force. Before I consider the settlement, it is right to examine that background. Since the Home Secretary took on his new role just eight months ago, he has used every opportunity to criticise and undermine the police force. He has criticised their sickness rates, wastage rates and clear-up rates, and has generally presented the police force as a bunch of lazy, ill layabouts.

Even before that, however, the police were faced with ever-increasing bureaucracy and paperwork. As the Minister rightly said, that was manifested in the diary of a police officer, which showed how little time the police spend doing what most people regard as the most important part of policing—being out there visibly carrying out their duties.

As I said in my intervention, I welcome the fact that the Minister believes that the computerised custody system will come on stream in the course of next year. I am sorry that he was not able to provide a more definitive date as to when it will be extended to the whole country, as it will not be fully beneficial until then. However, the study entitled "Diary of a Police Officer" showed that it takes about three and a half hours on average to process each arrest. Therefore, any savings that can be made through the use of a computerised system would release a considerable amount of officer time.

Mr. Drew: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that is precisely the sort of role with which civilians could help, especially retired police officers who know how to process arrests? That would be a good use of their time and would help the police overall.

Mr. Paice: The hon. Gentleman is on to a good point, but he misses the crucial issue, which is the vast amount of paperwork that needs to be done before we address the problem of who does it. I welcome the fact that the Police Negotiating Board has tentatively found a way to encourage police officers who have done their 30 years to stay on in the force and use their experience to deal with custody cases or some other policing activity. That is a considerable step forward, but other things have caused the police to wonder why they bother.

The courts continue to release on bail people who the police know full well will reoffend. Chief police officers have expressed their concern to me about that. The Government introduced the early release scheme, which allowed 200 people who had attacked police officers out of prison early. In addition, the Home Secretary's proposals to make a dramatic change to pay and terms of employment were pushed through the Police Negotiating Board just before Christmas, under the heads of agreement. The rank and file are due to vote next week. The expectation in all levels of the police force is that it will be a no vote and that the concessions on overtime which the Home Secretary made on Monday will be insufficient to alter the result. As one police officer said to me yesterday, they have been knocked about. They feel bruised and battered and just when they needed encouragement, they are kicked again. Anyone with experience of managing people knows that it is necessary to bolster the morale of staff and the work force before setting about asking them to face change.

Let me be clear on this: we wholly support the need for change and increased flexibility in the police force. That is necessary, but the Government's bully-boy tactics are not conducive to making the police force adapt and face up to that change constructively, which is what we need if we are to achieve the necessary results.

The Minister referred to figures. Only two years ago, the Prime Minister said:

"every single promise that we made—on getting waiting lists down, getting class sizes down and increasing police numbers—will be met by the next general election, as we said they would be."—[*Official Report*, 16 February 2000; Vol. 344, c. 948.]

We know that that did not happen and the promise was broken. It appears that the Government have at last got police numbers back to the level that they inherited, but instead of showing remorse or apologising for four wasted years, the Minister wants credit for getting us back to square one.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Paice: In a moment.

The Minister used the phrase "We have turned the tide." The question has to be asked: who set the tide in that direction in the first place? It was the present Government.

Mr. Denham: The direction of the tide was set by the previous Government who began cutting police numbers in 1993 and they continued to fall steadily. Not only did crime double, but the country was left in such a bad economic state that we had to sort out the public finances, which were in such a mess in 1997, and introduce economic stability to provide the platform for the increase in police numbers. The hon. Gentleman's Government set the tide in that direction when they allowed crime to double.

Mr. Paice: The Minister is absolutely wrong. According to the Government's figures—it is staggering how often they belie what the Government say—between March 1996 and March 1997, the last year of the Conservative Government, the number of police officers rose by 250 in a single year. I do not know where he gets the idea that we set the tide in that direction because the numbers rose to 127,158. I remind the House that by 31 March 2000 the number of police officers had dropped from 127,158 to 124,170—a drop of almost 3,000 in the first three years of a Labour Government.

Norman Baker (Lewes): The hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to the drop in police numbers when the Labour Government came to power. Is not the problem the fact that the Government followed Tory spending plans?

Mr. Paice: That is a typical Liberal intervention. The hon. Gentleman knows full well that the Government say that they have followed Conservative plans when it suits them to do so, as an excuse for a lack of effective and efficient economic management. However, when they want to boast about extra expenditure, of course that has nothing to do with the previous Government's spending plans; they claim the credit for themselves.

Fiona Mactaggart: We have got into a debate, since I sought to intervene, about where this all started. In Slough, it started with the abolition of the police housing allowance by the Conservative Government, which has meant that police officers in Slough, who are only four miles away from the boundary of the Met area, are paid £6,000 less than Met officers. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, in power, his party was wrong to abolish the police housing allowance?

Mr. Paice: No, I certainly do not agree that we were wrong to abolish it per se—*[Interruption.]* Well, the hon. Lady specifically referred to Slough. I do not pretend to have a detailed working knowledge of the police force in Slough; that is her responsibility, and I do not have that knowledge. If it proves that the policy was not right for circumstances in Slough, she may have a point; I cannot answer that. However, overall, it was not wrong to abolish the allowance in the wider context of London and the Metropolitan police. The £6,000 pay lead to which the Minister referred was a more sensible way of dealing with the problem, coupled with the introduction of the transport allowance. My own county, however, is suffering from the introduction of that allowance; in counties from which it is possible to commute to London, we now find that many police officers are using the free travel to join the Met. It is swings and roundabouts; some police forces may have lost out a little, but overall there has been a significant gain for policing in this country.

The final background issue which I wish to mention is crime. In the five years before Labour came to power, crime fell year on year by a total of 17 per cent, which was the first time in decades that the rise had begun to be reversed. Crime then started to rise; the Home Office, as is traditional in the circumstances, tried to change the figures so that it was difficult to make comparisons. However, after those changes, recorded crime began to rise again, by 3.8 per cent in the following year, only thankfully to fall back by 2.5 per cent. the year after.

Mr. McCabe: Does the hon. Gentleman reject the British crime survey finding that overall crime has fallen by 22 per cent. since Labour came to power in 1997?

Mr. Paice: I find it hard to accept that. The fact is—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind hon. Members that we are discussing the size and distribution of the police grant as contained in the report.

Mr. Paice: I appreciate that very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. However, may I respond briefly to the

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intervention? The simple fact is that much crime, particularly violent crime, has risen dramatically in the past few years. In some London boroughs, robbery has increased by more than 100 per cent. in the past 12 months. For the Minister to chide us that crime doubled over 18 years sits ill with the fact that under Labour, violent crime and robbery in some London boroughs has doubled in 12 months.

Having set the background to the debate, I shall look directly at funding and the police grant. The Minister paraded a great many figures to demonstrate huge generosity. He spoke about 6.1 per cent. and 5 per cent., and at one stage he got to a 16 per cent. planned increase. For the vast majority of police authorities, however, the reality is much less. For 19 authorities, it is the floor figure of 2.3 per cent. The introduction of floors and ceilings is a commendable way of ironing out some of the unfairnesses that arise from the formula, but it seems odd to choose figures which mean that almost half—19 of the police authorities—are at the floor level.

The total standard spending increase of 2.8 per cent. means an increase of £209 million, but according to the Association of Police Authorities, authorities will have to increase their revenue expenditure by £371 million just to stand still. That is because of inflation, last year's pay settlement of 3.5 per cent., and pensions rising by a projected 8 per cent. this year.

We see another turn of the screw on the council tax payer. Already under the Government there has been a marked shift towards funding the police through the council tax payer. That is nowhere more marked than in the Metropolitan police area, where there has been a 141 per cent. increase in the council tax precept per head. In Humberside, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) said, it has doubled. In Staffordshire, too, it has doubled. In my county, Cambridgeshire, it has gone up by 64 per cent. In the county of my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), it has gone up by some 60 per cent. The county with the lowest increase is Durham, where the figure is just 23 per cent. I can only conjecture as to why that might be.

We also know that for the coming year, as a result of the grant settlement announced by the Minister this afternoon, police authorities are considering the need for further huge increases. In the case of Cambridgeshire, despite what the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) said earlier—she was wrong—the county police authority is consulting on a 20 per cent. increase, just to have a stand-still budget, with no extra for national schemes or local pressures. Despite what the Minister said, Cambridgeshire remains the second lowest in terms of officers per head of population and in terms of average spending per head.

In Cumbria, the chief constable said that the settlement means that there will be some hard decisions ahead. In discussions with other authorities this morning and earlier this week, we found that Hampshire, the Minister's own authority, requires 5.2 per cent. just to stand still, but is expecting an increase of 14.5 per cent. In Lancashire, the projected figure is 8.7 per cent., in Cheshire, 14 per cent., and in Bedfordshire, 12 per cent. A survey conducted by the Police Authorities Treasurers Society showed that a significant number of forces were considering an increase in the precept of 20 to 30 per cent., and others were trying to deal with the shortfall by cutting back on certain elements.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): In the case of the West Mercia police authority, a further massive real-terms increase of 19.9 per cent. in council tax is predicted. That comes on top of the 7.9 per cent. increase that the county council must levy to meet the Government's spending ambitions—a huge increase for those who can least afford to pay it.

Mr. Paice: Were all counties represented in the Chamber and were I to give way, I am sure that many other hon. Members would tell similar stories to that of my hon. Friend. Every county that we have telephoned has given similar stories. We just chose a few at random.

Will the Minister tell the House what rise he realistically expects in the average council tax precept by police authorities, just for a stand-still budget? It is important to know that because, as the chief constable of Cumbria said with reference to the crime fighting fund,

> "the rules which govern the appointment of these officers require that they are in addition to normal recruitment—which in the light of the overall position cannot be guaranteed."

As the Minister reminded us, the Government are committed to having 130,000 officers by the end of the approaching financial year, yet some authorities clearly doubt whether they can afford to maintain the normal recruitment pattern. That would mean losing access to the crime fighting fund. The Minister makes great play of the target for a record number of officers, and we shall be pleased if he achieves it. However, the cup may be dashed from his lips because authorities cannot afford the extra officers without further substantial increases in council tax. In the first four years, council tax payers have had to pay considerably more for, in the main, the same number of police officers.

The Minister mentioned pensions in his concluding remarks. I appreciate the difficulty of wrestling with that issue, but I hope that he realises the urgency of reaching a conclusion on the problem. It is a running sore for police authorities and a huge and increasing drain on their resources.

The Minister referred to the distribution formula, and I was interested to hear that he and the Home Secretary believe that the time is right to undertake "a serious and wide-ranging review of the formula". That would be good news if the Government had not embarked on a similar review three years ago in 1999. We have received no results from it. Year after year, the Minister and his predecessors have promised to change the distribution formula; we continue to await results.

Top-sliced funding is also important. This year, the Government have increased the amount of money that they top slice from the police budget by some 51 per cent. for special initiatives. I admit that each initiative is a worthy item of expenditure; £120 million extra has been taken for them, another £203 million for the National Criminal Intelligence Service and £167 million for centrally provided services. The figures for last year are not directly comparable because they are shrouded in Home Office mystique, but there appeared to be an increase of 143 per cent. in the amount of money that was top sliced and retained by the centre. That is a worrying trend.

The Home Secretary reportedly said that he wanted an initiative a day, but a clear picture is emerging: he does not trust chief constables or police authorities with the initiatives. The trend towards central control of funds, coupled with the swingeing extra powers that he proposes to take in the Police Reform Bill, are the signs of someone who trusts nobody. His stance appears to be, "We can have as many initiatives as we like as long as they are all mine." That is the opposite of local control, to which the Government pay lip service.

It is worth recalling the words of the White Paper, which was published before Christmas. On page 137, it states:

> "The importance of police authorities in the governance of the police service is recognised and their role in providing local oversight of police forces is key . . . This new role creates a much higher set of expectations of police authorities".

Yet their power to act is increasingly curtailed.

We can divine two clear messages from the settlement and those that preceded it. First, there is a huge shift in the cost of policing, which is borne increasingly by council tax payers, presumably in the hope that they will not notice, that they will blame the police authority or, even better, the local authority that levies the tax. Secondly, we can forget about local control or initiatives. Policing will be exactly what the Home Secretary determines. His instincts about the need to improve policing are right, but his methods are wrong.

Increasingly centralised control of our police by funding or authority may seem attractive to a Home Secretary who wants change fast, but it is dangerous to put so much power in the hands of one person, and he should think again.

4.44 pm

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): I welcome the announcement, particularly from the point of view of the west midlands. I spoke earlier today to some of the officers, including the chief constable, of West Midlands police. They were certainly happy with their settlement, which is the average 2.8 per cent. That is worth £368 million in revenue for the west midlands, and I welcome that. It is clear that the police need more officers, more resources and more support. It strikes me, however, that they are not immune to reform. Like any other public service, they must be prepared to respond to changing needs and to changing public demands.

Despite the tale of woe and denial from the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), it is a fact that the latest British crime survey records that overall crime figures have fallen by 22 per cent. since Labour came to power in 1997. That is a mark of the strength of the Government's policing strategies and funding strategies, and we should celebrate that. In particular, we should celebrate the initiatives that have reduced house burglary and vehicle crime.

We should also be prepared, however, to criticise when we come across the statistics that suggest that 24 per cent. of all recorded crime goes undetected, and only 9 per cent. ends in a conviction. That suggests that we should try to do more. A key to that is obviously to have more officers, and the additional funding that has been announced, plus the crime fighting fund, will achieve that aim. In the west midlands, the number of officers rose from 7,113 in March 1997 to 7,432 by September last year, so there can be no doubt that there has been an increase.

That increase could well have been greater if we were not suffering from problems of transfers and retention in the west midlands. The current proposals on police pay will give the average officer about an extra £1,000 a year, which is welcome in terms of helping with retention. If regional allowances are having a positive impact in some parts of the home counties, it should be worth considering whether a similar arrangement could be made for a big force such as the West Midlands police, which is suffering from a seepage of trained officers to surrounding forces.

I also welcome the proposals to reduce red tape. I was astounded by a case that I encountered recently in Birmingham, in which the chief constable delegated powers for the making of an antisocial behaviour order to the superintendent of the operational command unit. He omitted, however, to delegate the powers to consult with the relevant associated agencies, and the magistrates court refused to make the order, even though it was based on a well-founded application. That is the ultimate absurdity in red tape, and I hope that efforts will be made to sweep that kind of nonsense away at the earliest opportunity.

I want to comment on two topical issues confronting the police, which relate to how we spend resources. First, I want to explore the possibility of making greater use of people such as community support officers, and the proposals for the accreditation of other agencies. This is not necessarily a bad thing, and in some areas such provisions could complement police work. It must, however, be made clear that community support officers will play a supporting role that will not be regarded as second-hand, or cheaper, policing, and that their use will not be used to disguise police numbers.

Many hon. Members will have seen the letter in *The Times* today from the former Deputy Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan police. He made the telling point that a community support officer may deal with certain activities but does not have the capacity to deal with more serious incidents. If one of our—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have already reminded hon. Members that we are discussing the police grant report.

Mr. McCabe: I am extremely grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The point that I was trying to make is that we must use the funding appropriately, and that we do not want to create two-tier policing. Although it is important to get the maximum benefit from the resources available to us, if a uniformed element appears as a quasi police force without appropriate powers, we risk undermining public confidence rather than reinforcing it.

Will the Minister assure us that any moves towards accreditation or community support officers will be fully discussed and negotiated, and that they will not be imposed on police forces throughout the country?

I should like to touch on a point raised by the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire about the tendency to centralise. He was talking specifically about the top-slicing of certain resources for central elements. This Government have established a new approach to policing under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, based on pooling resources and energies within local

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partnerships with a view to tackling crime together. It would be a mistake to go about top-slicing budgets and creating too many centralised targets and initiatives that distract from the work in a local area.

Some of the Home Office targets—those on house burglaries and vehicle crime spring to mind—have been immensely successful. However, it would be a dreadful mistake if we were to attempt to micromanage the police from Queen Anne's Gate. It would fly in the face of the recommendations in the Audit Commission report, which argued strongly for devolving resources—operational power and, more importantly, budgets and finance—to basic command units.

Will the Minister ensure that we do not undermine the work that has been done in establishing basic command units and local partnerships, because they are the key to tackling the crimes that most members of the public are afraid of. They are also the key to tackling antisocial behaviour, and they are unlikely to be aided by central targets or central management. They will certainly not be aided by centralising budgets. I hope that the Minister will pay due attention to that issue.

I am conscious that several other Members want to speak in this debate and I do not want to take up more of the House's time. Let me stress, however, that although there are concerns about the level of funding in the west midlands, I have yet to encounter a police officer who has told me that the police are unhappy with the settlement announced today. In a hard-hitting article in the force's own newspaper, the chairman of the west midlands branch of the Police Federation was critical of certain Government proposals but concluded that the other two parties had absolutely no ideas on crime or policing. When we are paid that sort of compliment, we must assume that we are on the right track.

4.54 pm

Norman Baker (Lewes): This is a dry topic on the amount of grant and other allocations given to police authorities, but the impact of that grant is important in terms of the number of police officers in our areas and on our streets. That is how the public will measure the success of the Government's proposals this afternoon and subsequently.

The hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) talked about police numbers and, from my understanding, the figures that he gave are correct. It is a great pity that we have only just got back to the position in 1997, when the Government were elected on a pledge to increase police numbers. The reason is clear. My view, which is shared by the chairman of the Labour party, is that the Government were wrong to stick to the Conservative Government's spending plans for the first two years of the last Parliament. If they had not done so, we would be further forward now.

I welcome the Minister's statement about extra costs for Greater Manchester police for their policing of the riots and for the Commonwealth games. I hope that he will be equally clear about money for the Metropolitan police to cover the costs that they are incurring to deal with the threat of terrorism, ahead of the precept which will be announced without much further delay.

The headline figure that the Government have been keen to trumpet in the paper that they have published is 6.1 per cent. That follows the headline figure of 10.1 per cent. last year, so the Government will be keen to say how much more is going into local policing. It is worth noting that the figure has fallen, and according to the comprehensive spending review will fall again next year to only 3.1 per cent., which is close to the inflation rate.

Mrs. Brooke: Does my hon. Friend agree that residents of Dorset, who currently pay the third highest precept, will not be terribly impressed with that headline figure, given that they are not seeing more police on the streets, which is what they want, despite paying those high levels and facing large increases in the precept?

Norman Baker: That is right. The hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire touched on the issue of the precept, as will I. The Government are presenting us with a pool in which the water looks crystal clear but when one sticks a piece of wood in it and stirs it around all sorts of muck comes up from the bottom, and it is less clear when the detritus has risen to the surface. There are a number of hidden problems with the 6.1 per cent. increase.

By the Government's own admission, the amount being paid directly to local police authorities averages only 2.8 per cent. That allows for an anticipated precept from the police standard spending assessment, which will come through. Therefore, of the 6.1 per cent. increase, more than half—3.3 per cent.—will be allocated for central funding proposals. Even on the Government's figures, only five of the 38 police authorities will get 3 per cent. or more. That is hardly a huge increase. Some increases are as low as 2.3 per cent., which is the Government's baseline inflation figure.

The pay award in 2001-02 was 3.5 per cent. Therefore, the base figure of 2.3 per cent. fails even to keep up with the pay award. The pay award for next year is anticipated to be along the same lines. Authorities such as North Yorkshire anticipate a shortfall of £1.1 million this year as a consequence of the Government's formula. Last year, it received £2.014 million in the rural funding element, which provided 60 new officers. That is very good: we are all in favour of 60 new officers in rural areas. As a rural Member, I know that they are badly needed.

This year's rural funding formula produces £2.018 million, which is an increase of only £4,000, but the authority has to pay the increase in the salaries of the 60 officers whom it took on last year in good faith. Therefore, the authority will immediately face budget problems. It estimates a shortfall that will have to be met by savings of 5 per cent. on non-operational budgets and big precept rises, which is the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) made. The Association of Police Authorities has said that 2.8 per cent. is insufficient, and that 5 per cent. is needed just to stand still.

I draw the Minister's attention to a recent press release from Cleveland police, which stated:

> "A potential cash crisis is putting police services in Cleveland under threat.
>
> Despite the Government's much trumpeted 6.1 per cent. increase in funding nationwide the reality is . . . earmarked by the Home Office for the Cleveland Force is 2.85 per cent.—which fails to even cover pay award rises.

> As a result the Force is facing a £6 million deficit—the equivalent to losing 240 police officers—and a host of plans to improve services for local people and make life more difficult for criminal may go on ice."

The picture, then, may not be quite as rosy as the Minister would have us believe.

Let us consider the direct grant—never mind the standard spending assessment and the capital figure. According to the House of Commons Library, the direct grant for every police authority in England is now less than it was last year, if we allow for an increase in inflation. In other words, every police authority will have experienced a real-terms decrease in the grant provided by the Government—which is, after all, what we are discussing. Last year, every authority experienced a real-terms increase, except Surrey, which is a special case because of the London arrangements.

That has a number of implications. For one thing, there will be a greater reliance on the precept, as the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire pointed out. That means big increases in Sussex and in other police authorities up and down the country, which in turn means that people will pay more council tax without necessarily seeing more police officers as a consequence.

Dr. Kumar: The hon. Gentleman is criticising the Government for what I consider to be an excellent settlement. What allocation would he make? I have not heard him mention a figure.

Norman Baker: I am surprised by what the hon. Gentleman says, because I took his earlier intervention to be critical of the settlement. In any case, we are here to discuss the Government's settlement: it is they who are presenting the proposals. We made it clear at the last election that we would increase police resources significantly, and that remains our position.

What we would also do is ensure that police money was allocated in a way that was supported by police authorities and, as far as possible, by the police themselves. Can the Minister say whether chief constables are happy with the settlement, and, perhaps more importantly, with the division of it? It is not just a case of budget uncertainty; there is more and more money to bid for. There are more and more central funds, which makes it difficult for police authorities to set precepts. They are not sure of the parameters, or of how much will be provided. It is the same problem that local authorities have had for years. It is getting worse for them, and now it will get worse for police authorities.

Another problem is creeping centralisation. The Government's own figures, also provided by the Library, suggest that while the increase for police authorities directly will be 2.8 per cent., the increase for centrally provided services will be 83.1 per cent. The increase for specific initiatives will be 51.4 per cent., and the increase in central capital funds will be 33.6 per cent. The increase for the National Criminal Intelligence Service, which is now centrally controlled, will be 23.8 per cent. We are seeing huge percentage increases in all the pockets of money that are centrally controlled—huge increases in areas in which Ministers themselves give discretion. Police authorities, however, which are locally accountable, will receive an overall rise of 2.8 per cent. I do not believe that chief constables will support that.

Mr. Denham: I assume that the hon. Gentleman would include in his definition of centralising projects the development of a national DNA database, or the development of the Airwave communications system. Do the Liberal Democrats believe that there should be no national DNA database? Do they think that the money should simply be devolved to police authorities so that they can decide whether they want to make better use of DNA in detection?

An element of reality in the hon. Gentleman's comments would be helpful. If he does think that the examples I have given should be central priorities, he is not making a great deal of sense.

Norman Baker: A lot of money that is spent centrally could be devolved. It is not clear why the crime fighting fund, for instance, has not been devolved. That is a huge amount of money. Nor is it clear why the rural policing fund is to be held centrally. These are the big figures; the DNA database, in terms of—

Mr. Denham: I do not think the hon. Gentleman understands. The rural policing fund constitutes a recognition by central Government that the existing police formula did not adequately represent the needs of sparsely populated areas. Extra money could be provided for such areas only if central Government created a fund allocated to police authorities, but what the money is spent on is determined by the police authorities.

Norman Baker: That money is still outside the normal police authority funding settlement. A special fund has been set up that does not need to be administered centrally. As the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe) said when he was in the Chamber, that fund could be wrapped up in the formula that is applied directly to local police authorities. It is not at the moment.

Mr. Luff: It is not my style to help the hon. Gentleman but in this case I would like to. The formal response from West Mercia police authority to the Home Office consultation states:

> "The additional resources allocated via a number of specific ringfenced initiatives are welcome but the Police Authority views the growth of ringfenced initiatives per se as regrettable. It leads to uncertainties in medium term financial plans, disrupted spending patterns and undermines the local democratic process."

Norman Baker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for intervening. He makes the case very well. The Minister will have to address that point. Ring-fencing of funds centrally is not popular as a long-term strategy, but there is an increasing tendency towards that. *[Interruption.]* The Minister may laugh but people in my police authority—police officers in Sussex, local councillors and others—do not like the creeping centralisation that the Government have embarked on. It is dangerous.

As the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire said, there are proposals from the Home Secretary to take for himself sweeping powers to sack chief constables. In Sussex, we have been at the rough end of that already—one local chief constable has already been sacked via a press release by the Home Secretary. It seems that he wants to go further.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will now confine his remarks to the grant.

Norman Baker: I am happy to do so. I was making the point—I am sorry if I did not make myself entirely

[Norman Baker]

clear—that the way the grant is allocated determines the level of local accountability within the police service. Centralisation of grant money and funds by the Home Office gives it extra leverage over the independence of local police authorities and forces, which is mirrored by the proposal to allow the Home Secretary to sack chief constables.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): Centralisation is an arbitrary process. Does my hon. Friend agree that it does not give certainty in relation to future planning, especially for police forces in rural areas where the sparsity factor is not properly included in the calculations?

Norman Baker: I agree. The history of such centralisation has not been a happy one in local government. We need to start moving away from it rather than increasing the tendency towards it.

As for the effect that the grant will have on the number of police officers, the Government are moving in the right direction and I pay tribute to their efforts in the past couple of years to increase the number of police officers. I accept that they are succeeding in increasing the recruitment of officers, but they are not ensuring that they are retained, which is a different matter. I am sure that the Minister will try to address that.

The Minister will know, for example, that in the past year resignations in the Metropolitan police increased by 29 per cent. over the previous year. The number of officers who transferred to other forces increased by 63 per cent. Resignations in the west midlands force increased by 32 per cent. over the previous year. The figure for Greater Manchester is 29 per cent. The Government are doing good work on recruitment but they need to find a way to ensure that officers are retained because it is obvious that that is not happening. If that pattern of loss were to continue at length, we would have a preponderance of new officers without sufficient training, because it is the experienced officers who are leaving. That is bad for the balance within the police force.

What assumptions have been made in the budget proposals set out today about community support officers. How many does the Minister assume will be in place in 12 months? He must have made that calculation in order to work out the grant. When he made that assumption, he will have had an assumption about what those persons will do—clearly, the functions that they are given will determine how many are required. If they are to carry out non-controversial functions, such as dealing with untaxed vehicles, which I think all hon. Members would support, that represents a different order of things. Among the more controversial suggestions from the Government, however, are those relating to powers of detention and so on.

I welcome the overall 6.1 per cent. increase, but I am concerned at the way in which it is being divided. It is unfortunate that there is more centralisation and ring fencing, and I hope that the Government will try to reverse that trend in years to come.

5.10 pm

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): I welcome the opportunity to address the thorny issue of police funding, and I also welcome the Minister's announcement of an increase in resources of 6.1 per cent., coupled with the important agenda of reform. Listening to the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), I was a little confused as to whether the Conservative party embraces the reform agenda or is merely cherry-picking bits of that difficult procedure for its own party political advantage.

Time is short, so I shall address three specific areas: problems relating to retention and recruitment, particularly in the south-east; policing and the consequences for police resourcing in Reading; and the fundamental fault line that runs through the heart of the police funding formula. Governments of all persuasions have recognised the need to review that formula, and such a review cannot come quickly enough.

In talking about policing or any other public service, one should set out one's credentials. As a child of the 1960s, I did not always enjoy an enthusiastic relationship with the police. In fact, I first encountered my current area commander when he was a special patrol group officer on the Grunwick picket line. I am not sure whether he is personally responsible for a rather large scar on my right shin, but we have moved on and we now laugh about that encounter over a beer. I am honoured and privileged to be about to graduate from the police service parliamentary scheme, which I commend to other hon. Members. It gives fascinating and invaluable insight into the work of our police officers.

Ministers are well aware of the huge problems, to which reference has already been made, faced by all public service providers in high-cost housing areas in the south-east. However, under the crime fighting fund, which I welcomed with open arms, the Thames Valley police force received funding for only 200 additional officers for the period 1999-2001. Despite record recruitment levels in the force and nationally, and despite the additional £2,000 regional cost of living allowance for which many of us lobbied, in real terms the Thames Valley force has not one extra police officer. In fact, we are losing officers to other forces as fast as we can recruit them.

What does the absurd notion of splitting operational independence from budgetary independence mean? It means that, in effect, our council tax payers—including those represented by Opposition Members, and by my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart), with whom I have worked closely on this issue—are funding a recruitment agency for other, better policed forces. I hope that the Minister and other hon. Members will address that point.

As a result of the shortages that we face, Thames Valley officers are squeezed from both ends. Overtime levels are at a record high and, in the short term, officers like that situation, but it leads to increased stress in the long term. Having to work overtime just to put a roof over their heads is stressful. The problem is doubly bad in urban areas such as Slough and Reading, which attract many thousands of people from other areas, and that requires extra policing.

The Thames valley—I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Slough will forgive me if, in discussing policing in Reading and the Thames valley, I mention her constituency from time to time—is a growth area with an expanding population. Its police force has to protect the royal family and many other dignitaries. Some of them deserve such protection, but in the case of others the matter is open to debate. The area has extensive defence industries and major motorways. In short, it has a huge policing requirement, yet according to a Home Office table, in terms of the number of officers per 100,000 population, Thames Valley police force has been the third worst in the country since 31 March 2001. The best is Merseyside, with 351 officers per 100,000 people. Not unsurprisingly, that is followed by the Metropolitan police, which has 209 officers per 100,000. The Thames Valley force comes 41st out of 43, with 175 officers per 100,000 people, and the West Mercia force has 171. The hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) represents an area covered by the West Mercia force. As he is an Opposition Whip, he is banned from speaking, so I shall speak for him. At 43rd in the list is the Suffolk constabulary, with something over 160 officers per 100,000 people in its area.

Interestingly, my research leads me to believe that the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire was churlish not to thank my hon. Friend the Minister for the increase of 84 police officers that has taken place in his force over the past 12 months. I am sure that, on behalf of the people of Cambridgeshire, my hon. Friend will be pleased that that information has been read into the record.

Fiona Mactaggart: Does my hon. Friend share my anger at the low number of police per 100,000 people in Slough? The force covers a large area, but it is not just a rural force, as it also has to cover the urban area of Slough. The basic crime unit family includes other bits of police forces, all of which are in the Metropolitan police area in inner London.

Mr. Salter: My hon. Friend is right. Slough has all London's policing problems, yet it does not get the resources it needs. That is having a knock-on effect on neighbouring authorities. There are fundamental flaws in the way the crime unit families are constructed, in the notion of operational independence versus budgetary independence, and in resource allocation.

I turn now to the standstill—or modest increase—in police numbers over the past 10 years. Figures provided by the chief constable of the Thames Valley force—not by the Home Office, or Millbank—do not make good reading for Conservative Members. They show that on 31 March 1997, the force had a total of 3,695 officers, an all-time low. That was under a Conservative Government. Under the Labour Government, the force reached an all-time high of 3,765, although that is nothing to boast about. As a result of the crime fighting fund, the force now has 0.5 of an officer less than in 1999. The fund therefore has achieved no growth in police numbers at all.

The allocation of these meagre resources to the Thames Valley force has had an effect in the area. Admittedly, the boundaries involved have changed slightly in the period to which I want to refer, but the scale of the problem remains the same for Slough. In 1990, it had 585 officers, whereas now it has 237. Reading had 526 officers in 1990, and that number has fallen to 342.

The total resource allocation formula used to arrive at the figures ripped off Reading and Slough in a quite disgraceful way. That decision was taken under the devolved powers given to the local police authority. I repeat: there is a world of difference between budgetary independence and operational independence.

There are many challenges involved in policing a regional centre. Reading has expanded out of all recognition. I have dug out the figures for crimes committed in the town centre. I assure my right hon. Friend the Minister that many of his constituents shop at the Oracle centre in Reading. We regularly bump into people from Cardiff, Bristol, Banbury and all over the place. We welcome them to our town, but their presence creates policing problems.

Between April 1999 and March 2001, shoplifting in Reading town centre rose by 16 per cent. In the same period, the number of robberies in the town centre rose by 61 per cent., and crimes of violence against the person rose by 60 per cent. There have been massive increases in incidents involving riot, violent disorder and affray in Reading, with the figure rising from 1,400 in 1998–99 to 3,800 in the last full year.

How does the police funding formula address those issues? The answer is that it fails spectacularly to do so. I accept that no funding formula is perfect, but it would be difficult to devise a system that was less advantageous to towns such as Reading and Slough, which provide a huge range of services for tens of thousands of people who live in, and pay taxes in, communities many miles away.

I took the trouble to dig out the Library notes on the police funding formula. The factors used in the formula are worth quoting, as they include daytime population, resident population, unemployment, household renting, area cost adjustment and built-up road lengths. People asleep in bed or busy at work are not a major factor in the creation of crime, nor are lengths of built-up roads. These funding formula factors do not take into account the fact that in a town such as Reading 20,000 public entertainment licences are granted. Similar figures apply in Slough, Oxford and elsewhere. The night-time economy creates a tremendous strain on the police force.

I am delighted that the working group is meeting to consider the funding formula. I hope that a new formula can be devised and introduced by 2003–04 and that it will take into account the need for the policing requirements of a night-time population to be addressed.

I conclude with a parallel. It is a supreme irony that, prior to becoming Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) was Secretary of State for Education and Employment. In education, the funding formula is very straightforward—the funding follows the pupil. In my town of Reading this year, as a result of boundary changes and other anomalies, we are expecting some 1,400 year 6 pupils to seek secondary education across the boundaries in west Berkshire or Wokingham. There is no problem with that because the funding follows the pupil—how could it be any other way?—yet does the funding follow the policing requirements of the night-time population of Slough or Reading? Does it heck!

I hope that the Minister has found this analysis useful. I look forward to meeting him to discuss the very real policing problems that we have in Reading and Slough and to addressing some of these important issues. It cannot be acceptable for the Government to put money in

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and for my constituents not to see the benefit of the additional resources to which they have contributed in their taxes.

5.21 pm

Tony Baldry (Banbury): I hope that the Minister pays particular attention to the speech of the hon. Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter). I agree with much of what he said, not least his concern about the haemorrhaging of police officers from the Thames valley area.

Like the hon. Gentleman, I welcome the Home Secretary's police grant allocation to the Thames Valley force, which polices my constituency in north Oxfordshire and Oxfordshire as a whole. The Home Secretary is a generous man. The Thames Valley police will now receive the fifth highest allowance from the Government, an appropriate amount that seemingly reflects the Home Secretary's funding formula of more money to those who need it most. Good stuff. However, it begs the question, what will the Thames Valley police do with the new grant? That is where we encounter a very real problem. The grant looks good on paper and in isolation, but it looks bad when one considers the detail of the Thames Valley's grant in comparison with other forces in England and Wales.

The Thames Valley's resources look meagre. Moreover, given the chronic problems of recruitment and, in particular, retention of police officers in the force. Home Office figures show that police strength within the Thames valley area has fallen year on year since 1997, and I hope that sooner or later the Home Office will wake up to that fact. The Thames Valley simply does not have the police officers to match the aspirations that come with such a grant.

Let us start with the basics of the funding formula for police grants. I alluded earlier to what the police grant report somewhat grandly refers to as the Home Secretary's principal formula. Also like the hon. Member for Reading, West, I have examined the principles behind the formula and have noted two interesting facts. First, paragraph 5.2 rightly says that the main determinants in the principal formula are the resident population and the day-time population. It says that cost adjustments are built into this formula for the socio-economic circumstances and the cost of provision between areas.

I do not dispute that Government principle. There is no doubt that the allocation of police grants should be made on the basis of the area's population demand on police officers and the cost of providing police officers. That principle means that the Thames Valley is allocated one of the country's highest grants.

The second Government principle, which I find interesting, is in paragraph 4.4, which states:

> "The Home Secretary has decided that the greater London Authority on behalf of the Metropolitan Police Authority should receive additional funding in recognition of the Metropolitan Police's distinct national and capital city functions."

That justification is acceptable when the principle relates to population: there is no doubt that London officers have more people to police. However, the principle is less convincing if applied to the area costs for police officers in London against other forces in the south-east. Unfortunately, that is exactly what happens. Why do the Government suddenly apply such a principle to police pay only if the officers work in London? It is clear from future funding allocations that the Government are still failing to tackle the core cause of crime in the Thames valley: the failure to recruit and—more important and of greater concern at present—the failure to retain police officers through a serious lack of resources for police pay. It is no good for the Government to trumpet what is after all only a marginal increase in money from the comprehensive spending review when they persistently refuse to recognise the need for additional resources for the south-eastern region.

Thames Valley police officers are in the worst of all possible worlds. Their cost of living, including housing, is high, yet they do not benefit from the additional allowances paid to London police officers. I suspect that almost every force in the country must look more attractive to police officers than the Thames Valley force.

Police officers in the Metropolitan force receive an annual London weighting of £1,773, with an additional London allowance of £1,001 and, on top of that, a further London allowance of as much as £3,327 each year. That means that a police officer in London could earn about £6,000 a year more than a police officer in the Thames valley for doing exactly the same job.

Furthermore, police officers in London also have free transport, so it is not uncommon—I am told by senior police officers in the Thames valley—for Thames Valley officers to see fellow police officers on railway stations on their way to work in London, where they will be paid significantly more, and being given free travel to do it. That is plainly unfair and unjustified.

Police officers in the south-east have to cope with a cost of living that the Government's principle does not seem to take into account when it comes to paying them. Last year, a survey by the Halifax found a massive 17 per cent. increase in house prices in the south-east, but only a 7 per cent. increase in the rest of England and Wales, yet the Government do not pay officers so as to reflect that difference. The Government recognise the "cost of provision" in police grants but completely ignore the same principle—the same costs—when paying police officers.

Moreover, we need to consider the difference in house prices in the south-east compared with London. The Land Registry's latest quarterly survey observes that house prices in London are rising more slowly than those outside the capital in the south-east region. Indeed, the Halifax survey also found that although house prices have risen by an average of £4,000 in London, they have risen by a staggering £26,000 in Oxfordshire over the same period. Why are the Government not funding police officers in north Oxfordshire as adequately as in north Acton? Why do the principles outlined in the report suddenly morph into thin air when it comes to police pay?

It is no wonder that police retention is at an all-time low in the Thames valley. A large number of officers resign for non-medical reasons. The consequence is often all too clear: there are too few officers to police towns such as Banbury and Bicester and the villages in my constituency. In the whole of north Oxfordshire, in towns such as Banbury and in the surrounding villages, there are often no more than four police officers on duty at any one time.

If the Government do not pay police officers in the Thames valley properly, the force will continue to haemorrhage experienced officers to other forces where they can either earn more or live for less. London and the east midlands, on the borders of the Thames valley, offer both prospects to police officers, so why should officers come to the Thames valley?

As the hon. Member for Reading, West pointed out, the Thames Valley police force merely acts as an expensive training area for officers who move on. Even more important, when the beat inspector in Banbury sends out a team to police north Oxfordshire, it often includes a large proportion of new recruits. We lack the experience of senior officers who have moved elsewhere.

It was particularly insulting of the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Beverley Hughes), in response to an oral question that I asked on the matter, to claim that Thames Valley officers must be paid less because the Government believe that it reflects

> "the different circumstances and pressures"—[*Official Report*, 19 November 2001; Vol. 375, c. 10.]

that they face, compared with the circumstances and pressures that they would face if they were doing the same job in other forces around the country. This is nonsense.

The Home Secretary's recent statement on police reform outlined that officers in all forces face the same problems in policing. Surely the fact that the Thames Valley is in the top five police grant receivers based on "resident population" and "socio- economic characteristics" would in itself indicate that police officers working in the area face at least the possibility of more pressure.

I have taken the liberty of leafing through the Home Office's own figures of recorded crime for 2001. They reveal that that possibility is very much a reality. Let us consider violent crime dealt with by each police force over the last year, which is a yardstick that, I hope most hon. Members would agree, presents officers with the "different circumstances and pressures" to which the Under-Secretary was presumably alluding. I found that police officers in the Thames valley had to deal with nearly 15,000 cases of violent crime—the 11th highest figure for the 41 forces. If it is the Government's principle to pay Metropolitan officers more because they deal with more cases of violent crime, why are police officers in north Wales paid the same as Thames Valley officers, when officers in north Wales have to deal with a third of the violent crimes that Thames Valley officers have to? Why is the apparent Government principle of paying less to officers doing a supposedly less important job ignored when it comes to Humberside police officers, who deal with 5,000 fewer violent crimes than those officers who work in the Thames valley?

The House might also like to note that the Halifax building society estimates that the cost of the average property in south Humberside is £46,700, whereas the same property in Oxfordshire would cost £162,450. It is little wonder that police officers are leaving.

It is pretty obvious why north Oxfordshire—and the Thames valley as a whole—continues to lose officers to other forces in England and Wales. Thames Valley police officers deserve sufficient pay to live on so that they can deliver to local people the peace of mind to which they are entitled. It is audacious of the Government to announce in their latest White Paper "Policing a New Century" that

> "a fairer and better system is needed for paying police officers. As a general principle"—

I should like the House to note that phrase—

> "the Government will be looking for ways of recognising and rewarding those who are at the frontline of public service, and in particular those shouldering the most difficult and demanding tasks".

For all those warm words, I do not find that "general principle" reflected in the pay awarded to uniformed police officers in the Thames Valley compared with uniformed officers in Humberside, North Wales or 30 or so other forces. The same lack of "general principle" is applied by the Government to officers, whether sergeants or inspectors, uniformed or detective.

I very much hope that the Government will take on board what Thames Valley police and Members of Parliament are saying this afternoon. I strongly suspect that the Minister will hear similar sentiments expressed by the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart).

I recently received a copy of a letter that a police sergeant from my constituency wrote to the Home Secretary. At one point the officer made the observation that

> "last week we had another murder in Oxford. The duty inspector phoned round off duty officers to find two to do a 12 hour duty on double pay to guard the scene—no takers! All already working".

It strikes me, therefore, that while the Thames Valley strives to achieve the Government's objectives, it will simply not have the resources to reach those targets without the almost superhuman efforts of existing officers.

The officer also asked the Home Secretary:

> "do you really think that you are going to attract talented, professional people to the service, with the kind of output, that is apparently designed to undermine Police Officers' case to maintain their standard of living, coming from the Government recently? . . . those of my staff who have children rely on their overtime to keep their heads above water, financially."

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

5.34 pm

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): I welcome the record level of funding that has been announced, and, in particular, the amount allocated to the West Midlands force. I am also pleased with the crime fighting fund, now in its third year; later I shall discuss how the West Midlands force has benefited from the fund.

The 12 per cent. real-terms increase in funding between 2000-01 and 2003-04 is welcome because it means that the police will be in a better position to fulfil the task that we, as a society, expect of them. In addition to the revenue grants covered by the report, there are capital amounts. I welcome the amount that will be used to establish the DNA database and a computerised custody system.

I want to address some of the centralisation issues and swingeing powers, as they were called by the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), and to try to show that there is nothing unusual in demanding accountability in the police as in other public services. It is axiomatic that the grant of money has a corollary—a responsibility to account for its use. Of course, there is the biblical parable of the three servants who were entrusted by their master with equal sums, and the one blessed was the one who used the money wisely in the master's absence. So there is nothing wrong with asking the police to account for the money granted. That accountability runs alongside the accountability that

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operates at local level through police authorities and local partnerships. The issue is how to measure accountability, and one way to do so is through police performance.

Hon. Members are concerned that performance varies around the country, as is shown, for example, in recorded crime detection rates. I am pleased that the operational command unit in Dudley, North has the highest number of crimes detected per officer in the West Midlands force. I pay tribute to the police officers in my area for the sterling work that they do. That is a comfort to me as the local Member of Parliament, but I cannot be happy that recorded crime detection rates vary dramatically throughout the country. For example, the figure is less than 8 per cent. for burglary in some areas, whereas it is more than 43 per cent. in others. In some cases, the figure for robbery is as low as 15 per cent.; in others it is 50 per cent. No doubt, that variation can be explained in some cases by social and economic factors.

I recently received a strong letter from a constable in my constituency who told me that there was a vast difference between policing in the intense urban conurbation of the west midlands and policing in some of the more relaxed rural shires. There is a certain truth in what he had to say, but performance can and must be improved, so I welcome proposals, which we are not debating this afternoon, such as the creation of the standards unit, which will work alongside the inspectorate to identify and ventilate best practice.

Let me return to the theme of responsibility for using the grant wisely, and then accounting for performance. I raise that issue because the view has been expressed in some quarters that the police are in a different position from other public services. The hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) referred to the proposed arrangements to exercise a power to remove chief officers on grounds of inefficiency. Some of the other proposals have attracted fire on the basis that, somehow, the police do not have to account for money granted in the same way as other public services. I do not accept that.

At one level, accountability involves compliance with standards—for example, the performance standards to which I have referred: detection rates. At another level, accountability flows from the extent to which the police can be called to account for their behaviour—for example, police complaints procedures. Again, although this is not the subject of this debate, the new independent police complaints commission should enhance satisfaction with the way in which complaints against the police are handled. Incidentally, I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will be able to respond at some point on the issue of the complaints procedures operating internally. I have written to him about the extent to which the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 should apply to the police.

A third level of accountability for the money granted is political accountability. One dimension is the extent to which we ask questions about how the police operate. For example, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe) mentioned the issue of retention rates in the West Midlands force. To some extent, that parallels the issues raised by the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) and my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter) because, like the Thames Valley force, the West Midlands force has suffered from an attrition of officers. Last year, 101 officers left to join other forces. It was the worst year since 1997, when the ratio of leavers to new recruits was also 4:1. One explanation is that other areas have benefited from the crime fighting fund and can now recruit as they could not in the past. Therefore, people who have been trained in the West Midlands force are now going back to their home areas.

Another point mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Minister in correspondence is that the attrition rate in the police force remains low compared with other public services. I also take that point into account. I hope that, in the coming year, he will address issues such as the discrepancy in allowances, to which hon. Members have referred this afternoon. Certainly, the Police Federation in the west midlands has raised with all hon. Members who have constituencies in the area the issue of a special housing allowance, and the fact that that was abolished in the 1990s.

Accountability in terms of asking questions about how the money is spent can be carried out in the House, and it can also be done locally. I shall see my chief constable in the near future and I shall raise with him the issue of allocation of officers in the West Midlands force. In terms of figures on crimes recorded as opposed to officers allocated, I shall make the point—it may have a detrimental effect on other constituencies—that Dudley, North should have more officers.

Another dimension to the issue of accountability for the money granted is the argument, which was echoed in the opening remarks of the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire, that the police are somehow unaccountable and independent. Some very old legal authorities say that police officers are independent officers of the law, and are not servants of anyone—they are only answerable to the law itself. That analysis is deeply flawed.

Norman Baker: Is not the prime method of accountability the local, elected and accountable police authority? Does not taking more power to the centre weaken that accountability?

Ross Cranston: I hope that the hon. Gentleman has followed the flow of my remarks. Accountability operates at a range of levels—there is local accountability and national accountability. Hon. Members must be able to raise questions in the House about what happens.

I reject the notion that the police are different and do not have to be accountable. It is certainly a constitutional imperative that there can be no interference in their individual case decisions. That would be monstrous. However, it is perfectly consistent with constitutional principle that the police grants that we are considering should be conditional on the police acting accountably in terms of their behaviour and their performance.

5.44 pm

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): I wish to address the problems faced by Norfolk police. Governments of both persuasions have historically provided a relatively low level of funding for our police. I would not claim that our problems are as intense as some of those faced in inner-city conurbations, but I hope that the Minister will take my points on board.

The Minister knows that expenditure on policing per head of population in Norfolk is the 10th lowest in England and Wales. It is the second largest county, but it has the fourth lowest ratio of police officers to population, and the police face increased demands for their services. Norfolk's population rose from 759,000 in 1991 to nearly 800,000 last year. More than 1 million tourists visit the county in the course of a year. Although we welcome them, they place an additional strain on policing. Like other areas, Norfolk has a royal residence, at Sandringham, and significant military bases. Those are vulnerable to terrorism and the Norfolk police force is involved in their protection.

The number of 999 calls to the force control room in 1996-97 was 63,000. It is anticipated that by the end of this year the number will have risen to 110,000, an increase of 72 per cent. Even with the use of civilian resources, that places an additional strain on the police service. There has also been an increase in certain types of crime. Crime has decreased in many parts of the country, but the Minister knows that there is a fear of crime in rural areas. In Norfolk, we had the high-profile case of Tony Martin, and there has been an increase in robbery and vandalism in many rural communities. We now have the prospect of the damage caused by raves, especially on farms. Like other hon. Members, we have a problem with travellers who, two Christmases ago, descended on Great Yarmouth, which put an enormous strain on policing.

Next year's Government grant for Norfolk represents a 3.6 per cent. increase, which is the second highest budget increase after Derbyshire. Other hon. Members may well ask what I have to complain about. The increase is warmly welcomed, but it does not begin to meet the requirements of the Norfolk police. The reality is that it brings the police authority to a standstill. It requires an increase of at least 4 per cent., and even at that level, according to the police authority, recruitment and current service levels could not be maintained.

The standstill budget will not enable the police force to reach its target on the recruitment of officers. As the Minister knows, Norfolk already has one of the lowest officer to population ratios.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Simpson: No, I am sorry, but I have limited time.

Indeed, the Norfolk police force has identified that it needs an additional 340 officers fully to meet all anticipated requirements in the medium term. The increase will not enable investment in necessary information technology infrastructure. To give but one example, Norfolk is one of only two forces still on Holmes 1—it sounds like something out of Arthur Conan Doyle—which is an obsolescent and largely discarded computer system for use in major incident inquiries. Nor can the increase provide dedicated air cover. Geographically Norfolk is one of the largest counties with a long coastline, but its police force is one of only four without dedicated police helicopter cover.

Those specific examples of serious weaknesses in police cover in Norfolk would be bad enough in the context of a standstill budget had the Government not already rejected specific bids by the county. In December last year, Norfolk police force learned that its bid for funding to help to pay for a £13.5 million upgrade in the county's police technology under the capital modernisation fund had been unsuccessful. The bid was essential for the development of the force's information and communication technology infrastructure to enable implementation of the national strategy for police information system applications that the Government require all forces to employ. The chief constable advised the Home Secretary that that left Norfolk police in the position of having either to fund those infrastructure requirements by taking money from current activity, or to slow down—or even to halt—some aspects of the implementation programme during the next four to five years.

The Home Office has also been unhelpful in Norfolk's bid for Government funding for a helicopter. Norfolk police asked the Home Office for £1 million to cover the full cost of buying a reconditioned second-hand helicopter. They explained that a helicopter could save hundreds of thousands of pounds every year, as well as facilitating the arrest of criminals. They gave the example of Dyfed-Powys police, who saved £22 million over three years by using a helicopter rather than police on the ground.

The Home Office, however, said that the money could be provided for a helicopter only on a 50:50 basis, with half coming from the Government and half from the police force. At a meeting in December, the police explained to the Home Office that half-funding a new helicopter would cost the Government £1 million—enough money to buy a second-hand helicopter outright—but the Home Office said that funding rules could not be changed and that Norfolk police would have to use their own budget. Reluctantly, Norfolk police withdrew their bid as they needed what money they had to recruit extra police personnel and upgrade force technology.

Norfolk police, like many other police, find themselves in the worst of all possible binds, from which it appears that there is no way out. They are bidding against other police forces. The biggest irony of everything that I have just identified—the lack of money to spend on new technology or provide a helicopter—is that next week Her Majesty the Queen opens a new purpose-built police headquarters south of Norwich, provided under the Government public-private partnership scheme. However, like many other Government PPP schemes, such as the recently opened Norfolk and Norwich hospital, it leaves much to be desired. The new centralised police headquarters which, if properly equipped and manned, would save money and deliver better policing, is likely to be a largely empty box. It will not have new information technology, the need for which the Home Office itself has identified, and it will not be able to communicate with police personnel on the ground. The chief constable has already admitted that he does not have enough police men and women on the ground. A further bind is that money is not available to provide a helicopter.

I hope that the Minister will recognise that Norfolk, despite receiving what appears to be a headline-worthy good grant, has a standstill budget. Will he look again, both at Norfolk's bid for funding for an upgrade of the police ICT infrastructure and the rules for funding the purchase of a second-hand helicopter? Otherwise, Norfolk police will be unable to provide a proper service to meet current requirements, let alone future ones. At the end of the day, the police men and women who have to deliver that service will decide, not that there is a better police force to go to, but that there are better jobs.

[Mr. Simpson]

Last Sunday, there was a new episode of "A Touch of Frost". The irony of that programme is that there is a contradiction between two types of policing—Inspector Frost is the old lag who cuts corners, bends the rules and is concerned with tackling crime on the streets, and Superintendent Mullett is the managerial policeman, who is primarily concerned with paperclip counting. Modern policing requires both characteristics in the same man or woman; I regret that, although the funding provided so far appears generous, we will not end up with the kind of men and women whom Norfolk requires.

5.54 pm

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): It is always a delight to follow the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson); his analogies about how television cops relate to real life gives us a spirit of realism. I shall try to keep my remarks brief so that other Members can contribute to this important debate. It is traditional that I take part, and I usually do so with the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears), but since she has been elevated to the Front Bench, it looks like I will be the one to keep going from year to year.

The Government's action sends out some good signals. I congratulate them on listening to people on three issues. Simply getting more police out on the beat is a measure of the effective role played by my right hon. Friend the Minister. That increase is being achieved in my area, despite a difficult position; we are experiencing retirements and are approaching a particularly difficult time in a few years as the big police increases under the last Labour Government have an impact on retirement, creating the need for further recruitment. The revenue that the police have received will result in capital spending, and I shall say more about that in a minute.

I congratulate the Government on keeping Gloucestershire constabulary; there was a movement to get rid of small police forces and amalgamation was held to be the way forward. I am pleased that we have been listened to locally; we have come up with a sensible compromise, involving better working arrangements with other emergency services, principally ambulance and fire services, which has resulted in the tri-service initiative that the Government helped to fund. Gloucestershire police will move to a new headquarters, which has changed attitudes radically, although not without problems, as my right hon. Friend the Minister will know. However, it is a good sign that there are improvements and that we are being listened to.

I do not wish to rehearse arguments that have already been made, but there are drawbacks to being a relatively small force. We have talked a lot about budgets. Ours is not one of the areas that is singing from the rooftops about what it has received, and it has misgivings about ring fencing, but genuine increases have been made and we will work within our budget. As a smaller force, the implied savings cut us to the quick. I had a meeting with the chief constable recently, and I hope that my right hon. Friend will pick up our plea for dispensation, not necessarily now, but when it comes to renegotiating budgets. Having efficiency savings year on year is an attractive notion, but they are difficult for smaller forces to achieve. Can some dispensation be allowed? Although we have to be efficient, that should not be at the cost of good, effective services. That issue has not yet been brought out in our debate.

I welcome what my right hon. Friend said about the sparsity factor which, I hope, will play a part in future negotiations and help us to achieve an even better budget settlement and a sensible replacement for the standard spending assessment. However, I am sure that that argument has been heard; our debate can only enhance it.

Every year, I discuss the impact of the pensions time bomb, but the problem is more acute this year than in previous years, and I urge my right hon. Friend to recognise it. It is not of our making; the deal was done under the Thatcher Government to keep the police on board, coincidentally or not at the time of the miners' strike. Police officers make a considerable contribution to their pension, but it is virtually impossible to improve the provision that they have. We are trying to negotiate with the Police Federation which, I understand, is listening; we shall have to come up with a sensible compromise, but that is not easy. I am sure that that is behind the vote which, I hope, is in favour of modernisation.

Whenever I talk to the police, they moan about the contribution that they have to make, but they also think about their future, as they retire on a good pension, probably the best in the public sector, if not any sector. It is difficult to improve that provision, but we must grasp the problems that it presents because, if it is affordable now, it will certainly not be in five or 10 years' time. I am a bit worried that there is already evidence of backtracking. Even if change is painful in the short term, the Government have to see through the transition to a more sensible system.

I am pleased with the capital arrangements which, although not generous, are helpful to Gloucestershire. They have helped the tri-service arrangements and the movement towards the Airwave system. In Gloucestershire we have some difficulties—I shall be careful how I phrase this, as an inquiry is going on—getting the planning applications through for the masts so that the system can be put in place. I always try to explain to people that, although the introduction of such systems must be measured and the precautionary principle upheld, in a couple of years we will lose the analogue system. If we do not have a digital system in place, there will be no police communications. The ambulance and fire services will no doubt also seek to digitalise and use Airwave equipment.

I ask my right hon. Friend the Minister to bear in mind that if we are a little slow getting there, that does not mean that we do not want help from the Government. We just need some time to convince people that the system is the right system, that we are very careful about the siting of masts, certainly away from schools, and that we try to make sure that all the equipment goes on the same masts. We want the system put in place and we want it funded, as the existing system is unacceptable. It causes enough difficulty, as I know from going out with the police. The only thing that would be more unacceptable is no communications system at all. We must push the new system through.

Other hon. Members have touched on the need to recognise the changing nature of policing. It is a bureaucratic nightmare, but that is the nature of the society in which we live. The police are expected to account for the decisions that they take, and arresting people is probably one of their more important tasks. I shall not rehearse my exchange with the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), but if we can help with the process and minimise the amount of paperwork, that would be useful. The process must be transparent, it must be funded appropriately, and people must have confidence in it.

David Taylor: With reference to reducing the paperwork burden on police officers, as a public institution and a public service, the police force, second only to this place, needs significantly higher levels of investment in information and communications technology to support its day-to-day work. If my hon. Friend speaks to police in his authority, particularly detective sergeants and police constables, they will tell him what proportion of their time they spend on such unproductive work.

Mr. Drew: My hon. Friend almost reads my mind, but not quite. I accept his point, but the problem is not an internal police matter. It involves the relationship with the Crown Prosecution Service, whether that relationship is conducted through computers or by human beings talking to one another. I have some misgivings. We have moved on from the impasse a few years ago involving who spoke to whom and how that was done. It is a resource issue and also a matter of cultures. Communication is improving, but it would help if there were computer systems that could talk to each other better. That will be expensive and take time, because technology does not seem to do what we want it to do at the appropriate moment.

I am assured that the situation is improving. It would be nice to think about local solutions, but it merely exacerbates the problem if police forces get their own systems and the CPS does not do all that we want it to do. There must be some centralisation, although I know that my chief constable and the Association of Chief Police Officers are a little worried about the apparent loss of independence. They are worried about the pressures on them to deliver policing in their area.

Effective centralisation is the only way forward. We must recognise that policing at the level of divisions, not even at the level of a county force, is where decisions have to be taken and priorities outlined, so that people have confidence in their police and policing is carried out in the most appropriate way.

I am happier this year. In the negotiations that are taking place nationally, the Government's position is clear. I wish that progress could be made more quickly, but I do not want any confrontation with the police. They are my friends, and I go out with them regularly in my constituency, so I see the problems that they have. We need to move on to make sure that the police are effective and deliver value for money, as we all want them to do.

6.5 pm

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

Several hon. Members have spoken about the proportion of the overall increase of 6.1 per cent. in the provision for policing that is being made available through total standard spending to enable police authorities to meet their responsibilities, and the proportion being allocated by the Home Office for its own purposes or governed by the Home Office for initiatives that must be delivered as priorities by police authorities. I shall begin with that, and then touch on particular issues relating to Cambridgeshire, to which other hon. Members have already referred.

Of the overall 6.1 per cent.—£550 million—only about 40 per cent. is being allocated to total standard spending. So much of it is being allocated by central Government that the ability of police authorities to meet their responsibilities is being undermined. The Home Office sets its priorities for police authorities. Happily, after years of neglecting such matters, it is beginning to talk about important issues such as visible policing.

For police services such as my own in Cambridgeshire, visibility of policing is intensely difficult to achieve, given the relatively low numbers of police. Cambridgeshire has the second lowest level of funding per head of population of any police authority in the country. It is all very well setting an overall level of provision for policing, but if, as a consequence of Home Office priorities and control over spending, local police authorities cannot meet their responsibilities, there will be a deterioration in the visibility of policing, the prevention of crime and the ability to detect crime and follow it up.

We are beginning to see that in Cambridgeshire. The number of incidents has gone up by 20 per cent. in the past few years and is projected to increase at a faster rate. The number of 999 calls is going up dramatically. The ability of the police to respond to and follow up crime and to act proactively in local communities is being diminished.

The Home Office may assume that it makes provision for its own priorities, but that is not the case. In Cambridgeshire, some of the demands have to be met from the police authority's budget, and go beyond what is provided centrally by the Home Office for its own priorities. For example, £1 million is required from the local budget for the Airwaves project, £734,000 in the coming year for the implementation of the action for justice programme, £308,000 for the DNA programme, and £234,000 for the new national crime recording system. The police authority must meet those needs from its budgets, and that diminishes the sum available for its own priorities.

The situation is even worse than that. The police authority has to meet pay and pension pressures far in excess of what has been provided by the Home Office. The Home Office has said that standard spending should rise by 2.6 per cent., but grant has risen by only 2.3 per cent. There is a national settlement of 3.5 per cent. for police officers, and pension costs for the authority are rising at about 6 per cent. After the pay, inflation and pension costs have been absorbed, there is no room for any response to other local pressures. All the Home Office priorities, in addition to those that I mentioned, are biting deeply into the authority's ability to provide policing.

What is the net result? We have a modest increase in police numbers after a decline and years of trying to attain the same number of police as in 1997. However, with a modest increase in the precept for the council tax precept, the prospect for next year is that we will not meet the gateway criteria for the crime fighting fund, and will

[Mr. Andrew Lansley]

therefore lose the additional 24 police who should be available through it. That is contrary to the views of the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), who is no longer here to hear the facts. If the police authority implemented a precept of 10 per cent., it would lose the gateway criteria and the 24 additional police. It would no longer be able to maintain its normal recruitment, and the net result would be a decline in the number of police in Cambridgeshire.

To fulfil the requirement for a 4 per cent. increase in the budget, the police authority would have to increase its precept by 20 per cent. to respond to the pressures and demands of policing in Cambridgeshire, and we are relatively underpoliced compared with the rest of the country and the police authority has to consult on a possible 30 per cent. increase in the precept in the council tax, Other increases are also being considered, including a possible 9.3 per cent. by the county council, and the district council has to consider an increase of 40 per cent. in its previously modest precept. That adds up to substantial pressures on individuals through the council tax.

The Home Office is chasing a headline figure of 6.1 per cent. and it has not accurately related it to the pressures that it places on police authorities. It is indifferent to the fact that some police authorities will have to increase the council tax dramatically, and it did not attempt to cut its coat according to local cloth. In future, it would be better for the Home Office to start by considering the policing that it wants to achieve locally and provide for greater devolution of budgets and discretion to enable local police authorities to fulfil their responsibilities.

The obvious candidate for such devolution is the crime fighting fund, and rural policing should also be taken into account in future formula allocations in order to provide properly for it. We should also take proper account of the cost of living. Other hon. Members have talked about inadequate consideration of the cost of living and the provision of a service in places outside London, such as the Thames valley.

If I have an opportunity later, I may speak about the area cost adjustment in more detail. However, people in the Thames valley should note that they will receive an 8 per cent. uplift in their allocation through the area cost adjustment, which is not available to Cambridgeshire. Yet housing costs and labour market pressures in Cambridge are at least as great as those in north Oxfordshire.

Earlier, I asked about the net result. An authority and a police service in Cambridgeshire, which have historically been poorly funded by Government, will receive an increase in grant of only 2.3 per cent. this year. Whatever other priorities may exist, the net result for my constituents will be a large increase in council tax simply to maintain existing levels of policing. They want more police to deal with the greater incidence of crime, the greater number of 999 calls and the recent increases in recorded crime.

6.13 pm

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East): I shall be brief. I congratulate the Government on the settlement for the police force in my area of Cleveland, which received an increase of 4.47 per cent. If we take into account the crime fighting fund, the rural fund and the capital increases, and compare the figures with those for last year, we have received an increase of 4.9 per cent.

The figures are much higher than those under the previous Government. They appear to be increasing under our Government because of the great success of the dynamic economy that they have created. We have thus been able to allocate more money to constituencies such as mine.

The rural part of my constituency—60 per cent. of it is rural—will benefit most, because the targeted money will help greatly. We have made good progress through the crime fighting fund: under it approximately 74 officers have been allocated for 2000–03. We recruited 20 officers under that fund last year; we hope that we will be allocated 36 new officers by the end of this year; and we hope to have a further allocation of 18 officers for 2002–03.

We have also made progress on recruitment. Police numbers have increased from 1,407 in March last year to 1,434. The Government's spirit in tackling crime and ensuring that there are enough police officers to deal with it is a credit to the Labour party.

My right hon. Friend made the allocation of 4.47 per cent., which I and other Members of Parliament who represent the area appreciate, but there is a discrepancy. I understand that the Government based their calculations on tax band D and reached a figure of 7p a week for the police precept. The police authority tells me that the precept that it expects means approximately 50p a week. Its method of calculating the required amount for fighting crime and that of the Government have led to two different figures. I should be interested to know what my right hon. Friend considers to be a sensible figure. Ultimately, we must have the support of the communities that we represent and ensure that they are willing to back the increases in the police precept.

I should also be interested to know whether my right hon. Friend believes that the local authority should consult the people of Cleveland before it sets the police precept. We are considering accountability and carrying the agreement of the people, so it is important to note that the four boroughs are not keen on the increases that the police authority has mentioned, and they therefore need a steer. They told me that the police authority can impose whatever figure it wishes. I do not know whether that is true and I await my right hon. Friend's response.

I am satisfied that the Government have made great strides in tackling crime and I look forward to hearing my right hon. Friend's views.

6.17 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I shall try to truncate my remarks because other hon. Members wish to speak.

On the earlier remarks of the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams), devolving policing responsibilities to the National Assembly for Wales is becoming a live issue. All the parties in the Assembly support that, and I hope that it will happen.

The Welsh total constitutes a 0.8 per cent. increase on last year, although it represents a decrease of 0.6 per cent. for North Wales police authority. It is interesting to note that although Wales has a higher police grant, the Welsh proportion of the overall budget decreased slightly. However, the figure is back up to 4.9 per cent. this year.

The proposed settlement provides for an increase of 2.8 per cent. in police authority funding to support local services next year. However, many areas are pegged to the floor at 2.3 per cent. We know about the pressures on budgets, which have already been mentioned, and which include pay awards for police and support staff at 3.5 per cent., the police pension, which is a big issue, and the local cost of implementing national priorities.

A letter from the chairperson of the Association of Police Authorities to the Home Secretary on 14 January 2002 states:

> "Our concerns are heightened by the approach adopted by the Welsh Assembly. Police authorities in Wales operate within the overall framework for policing set by the Home Secretary, including decisions on the allocation of police grant. However, local taxation is a matter for the Welsh Assembly, which has given a very clear indication of its expectations that police authorities in Wales should keep the increase in council tax to an overall maximum of 5 per cent. This stance is inconsistent with the overall policy intentions set by the Home Office, and with the practical implementation of issues such as the Crime Fighting Fund, where police authorities need to ensure sufficient funding to maintain baseline recruitment targets in order to access the Crime Fighting Fund."

The letter goes on in a similar vein. That important issue has already been mentioned, so I shall not dwell on it now.

North Wales police feel aggrieved at the settlement. The Treasury gave the Home Office an additional 6.1 per cent. to spend on the police, but the amount that the Home Office has given directly is only about 2.8 per cent. The rest has gone to central schemes that hon. Members have already mentioned, and to rural forces. It is, of course, welcome that £30 million has been made available under the rural policing fund, and £65 million under Airwave for 2002-03. That is all well and good, but police forces have to bid for those funds, and there is no guarantee that they will receive them.

This settlement does not guarantee the protection of the present spending commitments of the North Wales force. There is a real danger here, because 80 per cent. of the police budget goes on people, and if North Wales police are unsuccessful with their bids, there is a big possibility that they will be forced to downsize, leading to job losses. Overall—not just in the police strand—north Wales has received a 2.3 per cent. increase from the Home Office, of which 2 per cent. will go on pensions. The rest, apparently, will be expected to form the revenue budget for this year.

Of course, not all police funding for Wales comes from the Home Office; 22 per cent. comes from council tax receipts, and 32 per cent. from the National Assembly, from non-domestic rates receipts. The Assembly has given the police authority an increase of 4 per cent. this year, because that is what was expected from the Home Office. The Assembly has pledged to stick to that figure, even though the Home Office has made an increase of only 2.3 per cent. That will, therefore, leave a considerable shortfall. North Wales police need a 5.9 per cent. increase just to stand still. With the settlements from the Home Office and the Assembly, they will receive a 3.5 per cent. increase, so it will fall to local council tax payers to bear the burden of the shortfall. This is made worse because the National Assembly has said that it will cap any increase if it thinks it necessary to do so.

The university of Bangor recently conducted a survey of 500 people. Sixty-six per cent. said that there were too few officers in the area; 64 per cent. said that North Wales police were delivering value for money; and 75 per cent. agreed that they were prepared to pay more council tax to have more police. The local authorities in north Wales find themselves between a rock and a hard place. If they substantially raise the precept to ensure access to the crime fighting fund, they will be capped by the National Assembly, so they are in real difficulty at the moment.

South Wales police—and other police forces in Wales—are relatively happy with their settlement, but they echo what North Wales police have said about inflationary costs. Furthermore, much of the money that the Treasury has given to the Home Office will be held centrally. Although some of the central schemes are very good, they will have to be part of the bidding process. According to the crime and police figures, there were 6,592 officers in Wales in 1997. By 2000, there had been an increase of roughly 200. The manpower figures seem to be improving slowly but surely.

I am acutely aware that other hon. Members wish to speak, but I am the only Welsh Member in the debate. I shall come to a close fairly swiftly, to be fair to other colleagues. Welsh police forces are doing a splendid job; their detection rate of 41 per cent. is better than the English average of 24 per cent. In the Dyfed-Powys area, for example, the rate is 63 per cent., and in Gwent it is 57 per cent. Those areas are the best by a long shot.

On Tuesday this week, there was a debate in the National Assembly for Wales on devolving all these matters to the Assembly, so that it could be on a par with the Scottish Parliament. Such a move is overdue, and the funding problems—the perennial banging on doors and desks—would come to an end if the matter were dealt with centrally in Cardiff. I do not often quote the Labour First Minister of the Assembly with any degree of confidence, but he has said that that is the "next natural step."

Interestingly, several senior police officers in Wales openly support such a move. At this late stage, I must declare an interest. My brother is a serving police inspector in the North Wales police force—not that my speech is likely to affect his life very much! If, as the Government say, this settlement and the previous ones were so fantastic, I doubt that senior police officers would be showing support for devolution of this power.

6.25 pm

Patrick Mercer (Newark): I shall try not to iterate the points that have been so much better made by a number of other hon. Members, and I shall confine myself entirely to Nottinghamshire. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping) and to the Minister for teeing me up—being my warm-up act, if you like—on Nottinghamshire, whose constabulary, it has rightly been pointed out, has urban proportions of crime but shire funding and shire manning.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) referred to the now infamous Tony Martin case. That is a style of crime that my constituency—which covers Newark and Retford—mercifully sees only occasionally. The two boys in the case—one was killed, the other wounded—came from the Hawtonville estate in Newark. Crime that ends in a fatality is mercifully rare in

[Patrick Mercer]

my neck of the woods. Much more typical are the comments that I get two or three times a week from the likes of James Clark from Hawtonville, who told me that he is pestered all the time by mobs of youths, or from the residents of the parish of East Drayton whom I met last week, who told me that they do not see a police car for months on end. Also typical are the comments of the people of Retford, who told me that when there was a slight traffic accident in the town, the police switchboard was completely blocked.

I find myself acting as an apologist for the police, not because of their conduct—which I universally admire—but because of the funding issue, to which we must return each and every time. Stephen Green, the chief constable of Nottinghamshire police, has put out a press release today, in which he describes the challenges that he faces. I have known him for 25 years—we were at Sandhurst together—and he is very open in his comments to me. It is clear to him that his force has to cope with the same level of recorded crime as Merseyside, although it is funded and manned only at the level of a shire force.

To refer back to a point that the Minister made earlier, the chief constable can deal with crime in Nottingham—just. Perhaps, at a pinch, he can deal with crime in places such as Mansfield. But he cannot deal with conurbation crime while also dealing with the market towns of Newark and Retford, and with the many villages in between. He cannot do both tasks with the men and women at his disposal. He must identify the main effort, and he does so—rightly, in my opinion—where the serious crimes occur.

In Newark and Retford, we largely face petty crimes. With the A1 running through the constituency, we have a lot of speeding and motor-related crime. Yet, suddenly, Newark has had five armed robberies in as many weeks, and people are beginning to run scared in an area that should be a sleepy hollow, but which is rapidly turning into a bit of a hot spot.

I am grateful to the Government—I shall try not to be churlish, as there have been comments on that from Labour Members—for the police numbers that the chief constable deploys today. He says that he will have 177 extra officers on the beat in the next year. That is great. Eighty-nine of them, however, will have to be found from within his own resources. That means that he will be taking people out of desk jobs and putting them back on the beat, so far as he can. I understand how difficult that will be in such an institution.

There will be 52 new recruits—rookies—coming in, and it will take some time for them to become effective. In addition, 36 experienced hands may be taken from the Thames Valley force and lured away to Nottinghamshire. Who can blame them? One would hope that life would be much better in the quieter parts of rural Nottinghamshire, so long as there are enough people to keep a lid on the rapidly changing situation.

The funding, however, is a completely different issue. I have already asked the Prime Minister why £3.3 million is being added to Nottinghamshire's funds in the next financial year. That is a 2.5 per cent. increase in cash terms, but no increase whatever in real terms. Once the costs of police pensions, equipment, recruitment and the like have been added, Nottinghamshire police face a real-terms funding decrease.

The chief constable, Stephen Green, told me that he will make up for that decrease in funding and will fund the new officers—I repeat that I am grateful for them—by adding to the council tax precept in constituencies such as mine. Newark and Retford face an increase of over 20 per cent. in the council tax precept, yet given the increase in crime in Nottingham, I suspect that we shall see very few extra officers. We have been promised a new police station. We do not really want a new police station, because that neither deters nor detects; it is merely there to represent power. We need officers on the beat.

My final point to the Minister is this: 60 per cent. of my postbag revolves around law and order issues in my constituency. Police funding in Nottinghamshire has caused my constituents to begin to resent the police. The police find it almost impossible to recruit special constables—the no-cost option for local policing—and more and more people blame the police officers, rather than the funding and resourcing, for the way in which crime is being tackled.

As I said earlier, I try to redress that by explaining to my constituents that Nottinghamshire constabulary, particularly Newark and Retford police, do a fine job. However, if the Minister continues to underfund forces such as Nottinghamshire, which have extremely difficult decisions to make, he will continue to set the police against the population.

6.32 pm

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in the debate. I shall shorten my remarks and concentrate purely on the position in the Thames valley, as my constituency is in that police area.

Funding for the Thames Valley force is being increased by just 2.6 per cent. That is one of the lowest increases in the country, but I suppose we should be grateful that it is an increase at all. I want to set that figure against the particular situation that we face. We heard a powerful speech from the hon. Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter), who told us how he had been bashed over the head by a policeman when he was on the Grunwick picket line. It seems to have done little harm to his thinking, because he got the point absolutely right: a cold look at the figures shows that the Thames Valley is hard done by.

Figures on the Home Office website show that there are, on average, 183.9 constables per 100,000 of the population. The Thames Valley force has the third lowest number in the country—just 135 constables per 100,000 of the population. I should be grateful if the Minister would explain the reason for that when he winds up the debate. It is certainly not because of the crime rate in the Thames valley, where the number of offences per 100,000 of the population is 8,883. That is much higher than the national average and higher than the average for the south-east or the south-west.

The position seems to have worsened. The figures for police strength show that in the 12 months to September 2001, police numbers fell by 1.1 per cent. in the Thames valley, whereas they are increasing in other areas. The Minister said that he was turning the tide; in the Thames valley, the tide seems to be ebbing rather than flowing. The problem is not helped by the fact that last year Thames Valley police recruited an extra 50 special constables but lost 114 through wastage.

Part of the problem is revealed when we look at the situation on the ground, rather than at the figures in the blue book. Oxfordshire in the Thames valley has some of the highest house prices and the highest cost of living in the United Kingdom—perhaps that is why some of our officers find their way on the road to Nottingham. The Thames Valley police area abuts the Metropolitan police area. As the hon. Member for Reading, West and my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) said, Met officers receive a cost-of-living allowance totalling some £6,000 a year, whereas the maximum available to Thames Valley officers is just £2,000.

House prices in Oxfordshire are close to the average for Greater London and much higher than in many London boroughs. Figures from the Library show that in 2001 the average price of a house in Oxfordshire was £180,000, compared with £94,000 in Barking—to choose one London borough at random. Is it any wonder that officers are leaving to go to the Met for more money, or to go to the south-west or the north for lower living costs? The Government are going in the wrong direction by not addressing the problem of police numbers in the Thames Valley force.

On Friday night, I went on the beat with the police in Witney. It brought home to me the fact that, whatever money they get next year, we must ensure that it addresses the real problems that they face. An officer took me through a common assault case with which he had been dealing. The paperwork, which I have in my hand, consists of 18 sheets of paper on which the defendant's name had to be written over and again. Even at a cursory glance, many of the forms appear to be duplicated.

When we went out on the beat, the officer showed me the radios, which are truly local: if a problem arises in Oxford or Banbury, police officers cannot radio other officers in Witney or talk to their base because the radio waves are clocked. If somebody is arrested, there are not enough custody sergeants—I assume that some of them have gone to Nottingham—so the cells in Witney police station are often shut.

Thus the problem is a lack of officers—that problem is getting worse—and not enough specials to support those officers; poor local communications for making arrests; and far too much paperwork when an arrest is made. If an arrest is made, the suspect must be taken all the way to Banbury when the cells in Witney are shut.

It is a sorry tale and a poor way to treat public servants who do a magnificent job. They deserve more than they are getting at the moment.

6.37 pm

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): I am a Member of a Metropolitan police family, so not surprisingly I rise to speak in support of them and their need for increased manpower. I would suggest targets far in excess of the modest ones that the Government have set.

When Gilbert and Sullivan said that a policeman's lot is not a happy one, they were right and they are still right. At a time of increased pressure from the rise in certain types of crime, particularly drug-related violent crime, robberies and vandalism, the Metropolitan police are 600 men down on their 1997 figure.

The public perception is that criminals are getting away with it and that there is no point in reporting crime. Nobody knows the real crime levels because of that unreported element, but the public perception is universally that we need more policemen. In London, one is five times more likely to become a victim of crime than somebody who lives in New York.

Morale is pivotal to recruitment and retention. The recent recruitment through training centres is extremely welcome, but we must also retain experienced officers. The proposal to offer a £1,000 incentive to delay the retirement of experienced officers is welcome. It is also a very good deal for the police because that £1,000 will be repaid many times over by the unpaid pension payments. The high level of early retirement on health grounds is an indication of poor morale within the police force.

Mr. Denham: If the hon. Lady believes that that is an indication of poor morale in the police service, does she agree that police morale was much worse five years ago, when the level of ill health retirement was much higher?

Angela Watkinson: That is not my experience, and it is not what the people I have spoken to tell me.

Will the Minister clarify a response that I received to a written question about the Metropolitan police training schools? I understand that there is now an almost 100 per cent. pass rate. Indeed, that is necessary if the targets on police resources are to be met. Will he compare that with the 1960s, when there was an almost 50 per cent. pass rate? I hope that the improved figures are due to a higher standard of recruit and not a lowering of entry requirements.

The London borough of Havering is a low crime area by London standards. It has nine fewer officers than in 1997, and the overall crime rate has increased by 23.7 per cent. The council tax is rocketing, and the Mayor of London has levied a precept of an additional 35 per cent. He claims that the extra money is required to fund the 1,050 additional police constables needed in the metropolitan area, but only £17 million of the £166 million raised will be used for that purpose. The lion's share of the funding for those 1,050 will come from the crime fighting fund. We can only speculate on what Mayor Livingstone intends to use the rest of that money for

Haver[illegible], as an outer-London borough, often has to provide additional support for security in the capital, and it needs extra police for that, because it often leaves Havering's numbers depleted. In the borough, Romford has the highest concentration of night-time leisure and entertainment centres and nightclubs outside the west end of London, and 13,000 people converge on those nightclubs every night. That puts enormous strain on Havering police, who do a good job but are stretched to the limit. The other parts of the borough are often left virtually unpoliced because of the demands of the nightclubs in Romford.

I have lost count of the number of constituents who have said to me that they want visible policing. They want to see police on the beat. I know that that is not the modern method of policing, and it is considered to be ineffective and inefficient, but that is what the general public want. An enormous increase in manpower would be needed to enable Havering police to beat police the entire borough with three shifts. Modest increases are not enough. If we are to satisfy public demand for beat policing, we need huge increases in manpower. That is

[Angela Watkinson]

what the public want. What the police want is the backing of senior officers, the Government and the Crown Prosecution Service.

6.43 pm

Mr. Paice: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to make a few comments in response to the debate. I know that the Minister wants to respond more fully, and I do not intend to take long.

Few hon. Members, other than one or two Government lackeys, have been entirely satisfied with the totality of the police grant. In particular, many hon. Members—not just Conservative Members, but Liberal Democrat and Labour Members—have expressed concern about the trend towards centralisation, to which I referred in my speech. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe) took that view, followed by, among others, the hon. Members for Lewes (Norman Baker) and for Reading, West (Mr. Salter) and my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley).

The Minister rather disingenuously suggested in an intervention on the hon. Member for Lewes that by expressing concern we were against any form of centralised funds. Of course some centralised funds will be required, such as that for the DNA database. The concern that I and others have expressed is about the huge increase in centralised funds year on year.

The rural fund is only £30 million, which is small as a proportion. One can make a case for it being centralised at the moment until the Government change the distribution formula, but there is no justification for the crime fighting fund being centralised. There is no reason why that could not have been disbursed to authorities for their own purposes. The only defence of centralisation came from the hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston). I accept his argument about local accountability, but if he wants to defend the Government, I suggest he read clause 7 of the Police Reform Bill, which shows just how far they want to go in controlling what the police do, and it is quite frightening to most people.

A number of Members raised the issue of wastage. The latest figures show that wastage rose by some 5 per cent. in the year to September. That is not a large figure, but it is of some concern. If we strip out the retirements, deaths, transfers and dismissals, we discover that straightforward resignations rose by 18 per cent. in that year. That shows the widespread loss of morale in the police service. Police officers do not like the way that they are being treated.

Many hon. Members have referred to the Thames valley and the cost of living allowance. The hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) has come back into the Chamber. I maintain my view that getting rid of the housing allowance was the right way forward. If there is a problem—I am happy to accept her word and those of other hon. Members—I suggest that it can be dealt with through the cost of living allowance.

Fiona Mactaggart *rose—*

Mr. Paice: I shall not give way, if the hon. Lady does not mind. I want to give the Minister time to respond.

Addressing the cost of living allowance is exactly the course of action suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) and others. My hon. Friends the Members for South Cambridgeshire, for Newark (Patrick Mercer) and for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) referred to the importance of visible policing. There is no doubt that that has suffered seriously during the past few years. Police numbers fell dramatically in the Government's first three years in office. Of course we welcome the fact that we are now back to where we were—73 above to be precise—and in response to the accusation that I am being churlish, I welcome the extra police officers in Cambridgeshire. However, we have only got back to where we were, and have not made significant progress.

Several of my hon. Friends referred to the special constabulary. Under the Government, there has been a cataclysmic decline in the number of specials of some 40 per cent. It would be wholly wrong to lay the blame for that entirely at the Government's door. People's lifestyles have changed and they may be less willing to undertake voluntary work. However, a decline of 40 per cent. cannot be completely attributed to a gradual change in people's lifestyles in the past few years. I am disappointed that in the White Paper, which has raised its head several times in the debate, the Government did not set out any strong proposals substantially to revitalise the specials, other than making nice warm noises about the need to increase the special constabulary.

The principal issue remains that of the shift towards the council tax, and it was raised by a number of hon. Members. I wish the Minister would be straightforward with the House and say whether it is the Government's intention to shift the bulk of the cost of policing towards the council tax payer. That is what is happening. I gave figures, which hon. Members supported with figures from their own constabularies. It looks as though many authorities will be raising their council tax precept by 20 or 30 per cent. just to stand still. Others may decide not to raise it by that amount, and to face up to having to make cuts.

I come back to the Government's targets for the number of police officers. If some forces are not able to access the crime fighting fund this year because they have had to cut their recruitment and do not meet the gateway criteria, does the Minister realistically expect to meet his target of 130,000 officers by next year? If he does, will he tell the House what he expects the rise in council tax precepts to be on average for police authorities across the country? He cannot have it both ways: either council taxes will have to rise dramatically or he will not get the police officers he and all of us want by this time next year.

6.49 pm

Mr. Denham: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to reply. I thank the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) for leaving me 10 minutes or so. I hope to deal with the main themes of the debate in that time, although I shall not be able to respond in detail to each point. I am sure that hon. Members will understand.

This has, in general, been a helpful debate, although inevitably there has been a degree of special pleading and some presentation of creatively argued cases from police authority treasurers determined to show the situation in the worst possible light.

A number of speakers from, I think, both sides of the House drew a contrast between the average grant increase of 2.8 per cent. and the overall spending increase of 6.1 per cent. That, as a number of other speakers made clear, is not the point. The missing amount has not been whipped away for nefarious central purposes. A substantial extra amount, over and above the grant increase, will be spent by police forces in local areas on delivering policing to communities. The crime fighting fund, the rural policing fund and the capital fund—which, as I have said, is being increased by more than 30 per cent.—will be spent in local police force areas. That alone amounts to an increase of 4.34 per cent. in England and Wales.

Mr. Cameron *rose—*

Mr. Denham: May I make a little progress? I gave way to every intervention earlier, and I have not much time. I will give way later if I can.

Thames Valley police have featured many times today. If we take account of the increases in the crime fighting fund, the rural policing fund and capital, they are receiving 5.18 per cent. When set against an average increase of 6.1 per cent. across the country, that is not at all bad. There is a good case for some of the central funds and central initiatives to which some Members have objected.

The hon. Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) rightly said that the public wanted more police, and wanted to see more police on the beat. I have chided the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire for the decline in police numbers set in train by the last Government in 1993, and he has chided me for the fact that it took us a couple of years to sort out the economy and enable the numbers to start rising again. The fact is, however, that without a mechanism like the crime fighting fund, which ring-fenced resources for the recruitment and salaries of additional officers, the numbers would not be going up now.

If Ministers are to be accountable for the overall number of police officers, I shall want to ensure—as will my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary—that there is a mechanism to translate the money we are investing into the officers that the hon. Lady and my hon. Friends want to see patrolling the streets, and providing intelligence-led policing in communities.

Mr. Paice: Is the Minister saying that if he gave the money to police authorities they could not be trusted to spend it on policemen?

Mr. Denham: I certainly believe that if we had not ring-fenced it, we would not have seen such a rapid increase in the number of police officers. I will defend that judgment, although it required a degree of central direction. As we would be held to account if the public did not benefit from seeing us head for record police numbers this spring and 130,000 officers next spring, I think we have a right to take the measures that are necessary to ensure that that happens.

The hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) spoke of going out with the police and observing that they could not communicate properly because their radios did not work. That is the reason for the Airwave initiative. Our police service has a history of failure to implement coherent approaches to information technology and the development of communications technologies because of a series of 43 separate, unco-ordinated decisions made by 43 separate police forces in 43 separate police authorities.

It is all very well defending, as I will, the key role of police authorities in the tripartite partnership, but if the police service in England and Wales is undermined by the inability of forces to talk to each other—if, to preserve their own safety, they cannot communicate in the event of a motorway crash on the border of two counties, or an armed incident, because their radios do not work—there must be a central national initiative, and that is what Airwave is all about. Similarly, there is no point in having a database enabling scene-of-crime samples to be checked against DNA records if half the country's police forces cannot take advantage of it.

We are talking not about some overbearing centralisation, but about an arrangement that is supported by the vast majority of chief constables and others who recognise that, while we take tremendous pride in the identity of local and community policing and policing by consent, tackling modern criminality involves issues that must be dealt with on a coherent national basis. I believe that we have the balance right in the settlement, and in the overall approach set out in a police Bill for whose Second Reading we have heard some rehearsals today.

Most Members also mentioned recruitment and retention in the south-east. Let me repeat some of what I said earlier. We realise that that is important, which is why—unlike the last Government, who abolished the housing allowance—we have presented proposals for low-cost home ownership and low-cost loan schemes. As we said in our White Paper, we want to establish a link with the NHS low-cost housing co-ordinator. I think there is scope for more partnership schemes involving housing associations and others.

As well as introducing regional allowances, we want to address such important issues. We must, however, ensure that we are doing the right things in the most effective way. We need a much better understanding of why some forces in the south-east have a much lower wastage rate than others, and why some have a much more effective recruitment rate. We must see what is good, and build on the best. I do not rule out any approach beyond that, but before saying "Here is an obvious simple solution" let us do what we are doing now. Let us work with the forces that are doing extremely well and also with those that appear to have a problem, and see what we can do.

I do not understand the reasons for this, but 60 per cent. of Thames Valley recruits come from outside the Thames valley area. The force can attract recruits, but there is a built-in tendency for people to return to their home areas. It would be interesting to know why such a high proportion are from outside; home-grown recruits would be less likely to drift away. We are determined to tackle all the issues, but I want to do that on the basis of an understanding of what is really going on.

The last Conservative Administration set in train a decline in the number of police officers that we have had to reverse. Crime doubled under that regime. The Conservatives introduced huge delays in youth courts, preventing young offenders from being brought to justice quickly. The level of resources that we are discussing now was undreamt of under that Government.

[Mr. Denham]

We have presided over a period in which crime has fallen. According to the British crime survey, last year's fall was the biggest in the survey's history, and the chance of being a victim of crime was the lowest since it began in 1981. I am in no way complacent, however. Crime levels are still too high, and there are serious problems—such as street robbery, which has been mentioned a number of times—that we are determined to tackle. Although I am pleased with what we have achieved so far, I realise that there is a great deal more to do.

Police forces and officers do a tremendous job, which is why we were happy to negotiate heads of agreement with the Police Federation that would make the vast majority of officers better off, benefiting from a fairer pay system. They deserve and will receive our support. We will reform the police service to free its time. Former chief inspector Sir David O'Dowd is leading the battle against red tape and bureaucracy. We need to give more support to police officers by investing in capital. That is why part of the capital we have announced this week will be spent on improving working conditions for police officers and visiting conditions for the public in police stations.

We want to free officers' time so they can be out in the community—not wandering the streets, but patrolling in an intelligent, targeted way to tackle antisocial behaviour and persistent offenders. We are determined to support the police better in the job that they do so well for us already. The resources that we have discussed today will enable them to do just that.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Police Grant Report (England and Wales) 2002–03 (HC533), which was laid before this House on 28th January, be approved.

Local Government Finance

7 pm

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I beg to move,

That the Local Government Finance Report (England) 2002–03 (HC545), which was laid before this House on 28th January, be approved.

The subject before us today, important as it is, is just part of the means by which we establish a sound working partnership between central and local government to meet the needs of all the people served and represented by local government. Councils are in the front line, providing services to their communities. We should remember just how wide ranging those responsibilities are: the quality of the local environment that each of us experiences; education to raise standards and expectations; care of some of the most vulnerable members of our society; housing; transport; street cleaning and lighting. All those and many more depend on the work of councils.

It is Government's job to provide the framework within which councils have the incentives and opportunity to deliver high-quality services and effective community leadership. That is why our White Paper on local government set out our approach to the respective responsibilities of central and local government. We will work with the Local Government Association to clarify what Government can expect from local government, and vice versa.

We will establish a national framework of standards and accountability for the delivery of high-quality services. In some areas, there will need to be agreed national minimum standards, with local flexibility on how those are delivered—and, we hope, exceeded. In other areas, particularly where councils have a proven track record of high-quality performance, we will give them a freer hand to determine and to deliver priorities locally.

We will help all councils by cutting red tape, reducing central prescription and increasing the support that they receive to improve their overall performance. There will be rewards for the best performers and carefully targeted measures to tackle poor performance.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Can the Minister deal with an issue that follows directly on from the point about performance? My borough, which he knows well, has the largest publicly owned housing stock of any in London—it has about 50,000 properties. A lot of that needs capital investment. How much do the needs criteria—there may, for example, have been a stock assessment—overrule performance criteria? If the treatment of a council is always going to be governed by its performance historically, it may never get the money that it needs.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman raises important issues that go deep into the performance management system that we are introducing. I shall not detain the House too long by describing that because it is only tangential to the report before the House, but may I explain the three main elements of the performance assessment? First, best value performance indicators; secondly, the inspections carried out by the housing inspectorate of the performance of specific elements in the housing service; thirdly, an overall corporate assessment of the authority's ability to cope with the many corporate pressures that it faces. That will be handled by the Audit Commission, independent of Government. The commission will come to a judgment, based on that basket of indicators, of the overall performance of the authority.

The hon. Gentleman specifically raised the subject of housing. He will know that we have made very substantial increases in the capital allocations available to local authorities for the renovation and improvement of existing stock. I appreciate that in an area such as his, which has a huge backlog of poor-condition property, there is a need to look creatively at additional means of attracting finance. I am sorry that, at the Aylesbury estate and elsewhere, opportunities for raising substantial additional sums have not turned out to be feasible because of tenant opposition, but I hope that the authority and tenants in the area will continue to work constructively to find ways of levering in additional finance, on top of that which the Government have already contributed to the authority.

Simon Hughes: That is very helpful. I pick up the last point. We have had a vote on the Aylesbury estate, a very large estate. We are facing decisions on the Tabard Garden estate, another big estate, and possibly others around the Elephant and Castle. Can the Minister give an assurance that, in terms of meeting the need, carrying out the repairs and so on, no disadvantage will follow from a specific decision by tenants either to stay with the local authority or to transfer to another landlord? Will he confirm that there will be no prejudice in terms of money coming in if they decide to remain local authority tenants?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman is tempting both me and the House by moving from the subject of this particular debate—the local government finance report—to the issue of housing finance, which is separate, but clearly if the option of additional private finance to support the public money already offered by the Government—we had made some substantial offers in relation to the Aylesbury estate—were turned down, I could not guarantee that alternative sums would be available for Southwark in addition to the public finance, but we certainly do not wish to penalise areas that choose to retain the housing under local authority control. We have always believed that there should be options for tenants, and that tenants should decide in their best interests, but clearly some of those options will have greater financial potential than others. That is the nature of the operation.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): I apologise for intervening immediately after the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) but the point is pertinent because the Minister is raising the question of performance. I know that he sets great store by the performance of local authorities, as indeed we all do. I am extremely concerned about the position with regard to school places in Norfolk, which has certainly had increases in funding. Of Norfolk's 52 secondary schools, only 22 can take extra pupils at the moment. That has a knock-on effect on every aspect of Norfolk life. I draw that to the Minister's attention and ask him to look into how that situation, which is unparalleled in my 30 years' experience, could possibly have arisen.

Mr. Raynsford: The specific issue of Norfolk is obviously important. The right hon. Lady will be aware that the grant to Norfolk has increased by 6.8 per cent., which recognises the needs of the area. I have no doubt that my colleagues at the Department for Education and Skills will be only too pleased to deal with the specific point that she has raised. I will ensure that it is passed on to them. She will appreciate that, as it is a specifically educational point, it is ultimately their responsibility. I shall ensure that she receives an answer from them.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I would like to make a little progress because literally only one sentence of my speech has related to the local government finance report. I have been happy to take questions in relation to education and housing, but I would like to make a little progress and I will then give way.

Over the past five years, we have been tackling a backlog of under-investment and inadequate general revenue funding. For 2002-03, total revenue support from Government will amount to £47.4 billion, an increase of £3.3 billion, or 7.5 per cent. on this year. The general grant formula distributes £40.3 billion of that, including the police grant, which the House has just debated. Excluding police grant, the remaining formula grant for 2002-03 will total £36.5 billion, an increase of £1.8 billion or 5.3 per cent. on the current year. Those are very substantial increases at a time when underlying inflation is running at under 2 per cent.

During consultation, local authorities impressed upon us that they still face financial problems this year, particularly in the case of social services. We considered those points and we will continue to discuss the needs of social services authorities with representatives of local government. We have already demonstrated our willingness to respond to the evidence presented by social services authorities in the initiative agreed late last year by the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, and the Secretary of State for Health to respond to bed-blocking pressures.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): On social services, the Minister will be aware of the case made by Devon county council. The high number of retired people in Devon has created a problem with its social services budget. I hope that the formula that the Government intend to change in time for the following year will equalise the per capita allowance for retired people, because there is a considerable differential. Devon receives a much lower rate than other parts of the country, and we are also disadvantaged in terms of sparsity. On sparsity and the way the formula for retired people is calculated, will the Government seek to achieve equalisation?

Mr. Raynsford: I will discuss a little later our proposals for changing the standard spending assessment formula in future years, but the hon. Lady will recognise that we are operating the same methodology this year as in previous years. She will be pleased to learn that Devon

[Mr. Raynsford]

county council has received a 6.6 per cent. increase in Government grant. That is a substantial increase that is well ahead of inflation, and compares favourably with that received by many other county councils, so this year's settlement in no way disadvantages Devon. I accept, however, that there may be issues relating to the construction of the SSA formula—of course, it was devised when the hon. Lady's party was in government—that we will need to address in our review in the coming year. However, as I said, so far as this settlement is concerned, Devon has not been disadvantaged.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): Despite the generosity of this year's settlement when compared with those of the previous Conservative Government, several points have been made about the general settlement. Reference was made to the crisis in social services, but we should also remember the unfairness of the population-based calculation, anomalies in education grants and the rules governing them, and late changes to the area cost adjustment, all of which impact heavily not only on metropolitan authorities in general, but on Gateshead council in particular. Has my right hon. Friend any good news to impart in that regard?

Mr. Raynsford: I have a number of items of good news to impart, including the future review of the SSA formula, to which I have already referred. I recognise that areas with declining populations have particular problems, and that savings cannot always immediately be made to take account of such decline. There is a difficulty, in that areas that face extra pressures because of population increases naturally feel such pressures immediately, and want compensation as soon as possible. Given that the impact of such population increases is immediate, devising a system that allows a time-lag before the consequences of population decline are felt clearly involves a funding gap, which must be filled by some means or other. We understand the problem and we will address it in the review, but there is no instant and easy solution to it.

With regard to the area cost adjustment, in that and every other aspect of the settlement we are committed to using the most up-to-date and accurate information. Last autumn, it became clear to us that figures published by the Office for National Statistics in July, which were based on data from the new earnings survey, did not give an accurate picture of the changes, because a significant proportion of the sample was omitted by mistake. When, late in the process, the error came to light, we felt it only right and proper that the figures be adjusted to take account of the correct data. Otherwise, we would have knowingly proceeded on an incorrect basis. We have made similar late adjustments in relation to a number of other factors, and as part of the settlement it is always our policy to implement the most recent, up-to-date and accurate data that we can.

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): The Minister will know that the gap between council spending on social services, and the spending that is necessary according to the Government's SSA, has widened in the past 10 years to 12 per cent. What advice can he give to his Labour colleagues who serve on my local authority in the London borough of Sutton? Their concern is that, as a result of the settlement, the gap has widened to 13.5 per cent. Will that gap be closed through an increase in charges or in council tax, or will there be sufficient grant? It is clear that, at the moment, the grant is insufficient.

Mr. Raynsford: As I thought I had acknowledged, we recognise that there are very real pressures on social services, and we have been discussing them for some time with social services departments and authorities, and with our colleagues in the Department of Health. I mentioned the specific additional finance, some £300 million in total, that was made available last autumn—the bulk of it will take effect in the coming year—to help relieve bed-blocking pressures. We have made it clear that in our view the SSA formula, which has fallen behind in a number of ways, is not an accurate reflection of the current position. It has become increasingly unrealistic in terms of actual spending patterns, and we need to change it. That is why we will conduct an extremely thorough review to try to put in place a better formula with effect from next year.

I hope, however, that the hon. Gentleman recognises that it would have been wrong to rush forward with an inevitably defective stop-gap measure that required further amendment. It is clear that local government should not have to operate according to formulae that change year on year. We need more certainty, and the ability to plan ahead with reasonable confidence in the likely level of support. Obviously, certain variations will be needed to reflect changes in demography, but constant changes in methodology are simply dispiriting to those who must plan ahead.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): The first Standing Committee of which I was a member considered what became the Local Government Finance Act 1987, which introduced the poll tax and the standard spending assessment. We got rid of one of them, and thankfully we are now able to get rid of the other. Will the consequences of that Act—it has resulted in cumulative loss in many areas, but a cumulative bonanza in various others—be taken into account? The position of authorities such as Derbyshire, which were deliberately targeted by that legislation, needs to be corrected.

Mr. Raynsford: We are well aware of the problems that my hon. Friend and his Derbyshire colleagues have encountered. I hope that he agrees that this year's settlement, which, I suspect, gives Derbyshire a more substantial increase than was initially expected, has gone some way towards redressing the balance. Of course, he will recognise that we cannot overcome the legacy of many years of inappropriate calculations at one fell swoop. However, through settlements agreed in the past five years, we are seeking to increase local government resources in general and to redress the balance. During the coming year's review of the SSA formula, we will try to establish a proper and fair basis for the future. There is a difficulty, however—I will discuss it later—in that everyone expects to do better out of the review. It is the nature of politics that we are all conscious of the defects of the settlement arrangements and the formula as they impact on our own authorities. Everyone expects that those defects will be put right, and that the settlement will benefit them in future years.

Although I have many abilities, I cannot perform magic—the new arrangement cannot magically improve the allocations to every local authority. We will try to devise a system that is fairer, better and above all more comprehensible than the current one. One iniquity of the current scheme is that it is virtually impossible for anyone other than a local government finance anorak to understand how the system works.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): On the SSA review, will the Minister clarify one point for hon. Members' benefit? In his pre-Christmas statement on the local government settlement, the Secretary of State said that the revised SSA would come into force from the 2003–04 financial year. If the review to which the Minister has referred takes a whole year, the new SSA will not be available in time for the 2003–04 figures.

Mr. Raynsford: I am very happy to put the hon. Lady's mind at rest. The review is already progressing, and will be completed in the course of the coming year so that it can be implemented from the start of the financial year 2003–04. This time next year, therefore, we will be debating a different formula—a different basis for allocation—that will apply from 2003–04.

However, this is a complex matter. The hon. Lady will be well aware of the complexities involved. The change will take time, and it will be several months into the year before we are in a position even to begin to consult about the overall framework.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe) *rose—*

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon) *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I shall give way again when I have completed this response.

The hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) will appreciate that a number of separate components are involved, such as education, social services, the environmental, protective and cultural services block, or whatever. Each of those components has to be satisfactory to the people concerned, and there must be consistency when they are put together. Account must also be taken of the overall impact. All that has to be done in an intelligent way, and models must be designed to determine the consequences. In that way, it is possible to avoid the unforeseen consequences of what might appear, on the surface, to be an entirely rational approach.

The process is complex, and will take time. We are not going to rush it. That is why, as I indicated in my response to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow), we did not make a change this year. Any such change would have been rushed, and we did not consider that to be satisfactory.

Mr. Betts: I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way, as I want to return to the issue of social services, mentioned by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow). The Government are looking at the problems facing local authorities, but those authorities still have choices. Will my right hon. Friend comment on—and join me in criticising—the actions of the Liberal Democrat council in Sheffield? Over the past two years, it has managed to find an extra £1 million for its corporate publicity budget, and it has just increased senior executive officers' salaries by 30 per cent. However, when an elderly person who cannot get in and out of the bath wants a shower to be installed instead, help with the necessary adaptation is refused if that person can manage to have a strip wash. Those are the Liberal Democrat priorities in Sheffield.

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend makes a very fair point about the importance of local government focusing on delivering services to people in need. Certainly, the whole purpose of our performance assessment and management framework is to put real pressure on local authorities to deliver services and not spend money on items of lesser priority. When that performance management and assessment system is introduced, I hope that my hon. Friend finds that it has a desirable effect. We are conscious that the settlement gives an increase for social services, but we are clearly aware of the pressures, as I said. We will keep the matter under review.

As hon. Members will recall, 2002–03 is the last year in which we will use the system of standard spending assessments. I have already said something about the changes that we intend to make in the calculations for future years.

A number of fire authorities, and honourable Members, have made representations about the continued use of the fire calls indicator in the SSA formula this year. We recognise that it is a perverse incentive, which penalises authorities that do effective fire prevention work, and it will not be part of the new grant formula. However, to be fair to all authorities, we cannot make exceptions here or there to the decision that we rule out changes in the methodology. That decision also covers the suggestion that we use data on fire calls differently by averaging over a longer period.

On 4 December, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced our intention that, for 2002–03, all authorities would receive a grant increase at least matching inflation. That increase, and other comparisons that I shall make, are on a like-for-like basis.

In line with the Government's priorities, authorities with education and social services responsibilities will receive at least 4 per cent.—up from 3.2 per cent. last year. I can confirm today that we will put some £52 million of new money into revenue support grant, so that—as was not the case in 2001–02—no authority in this group below the ceiling will have its increase reduced to pay for the floor.

It became clear in consultation that the fully adjusted basis that we had used to make like-for-like comparisons from one year to the next was not regarded as fair by shire district councils. That was because the main adjustment was in respect of education, a service that shire districts do not, of course, provide.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State told the House on 18 December, we therefore agreed to introduce an alternative baseline for 2001–02 that, in effect, only adjusts for transfers of service for which shire districts are responsible. In order to guarantee a minimum 2.3 per cent. increase for all shire districts, on a like-for-like basis,

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we will give each district whichever increase is the greater for it: 2.3 per cent. on the original baseline, or 2.3 per cent. on the alternative. The grant allocations now proposed for shire districts take full account of that guarantee.

Following the close of consultation, we have decided to extend that guarantee to police and fire authorities. Together with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department, we have agreed to put extra resources into the settlement to fund that guarantee, without imposing an unduly high scaling factor on grant increases for authorities above the floor.

As a result of representations made in consultation, we have also decided to change the way in which adjustments to the base year were made for the transfer of regulation and inspection functions from social services departments to the new National Care Standards Commission. The adjustments do not now take account of new money transferred from SSAs to the commission. That will give authorities at the floor or ceiling a higher base position, and thus higher cash increases. Again, we have ensured that other authorities do not lose as a result. Taking those initiatives together, the Government have put some £73 million of new money into the settlement to support the cost of floor increases for all authorities.

I confirm that I intend to promote capital investment by excepting from the floor and ceiling limits grant increases that result from new capital allocations. I also confirm that, where grant increases for authorities that are neither at the floor or the ceiling are scaled back to help pay for the floor, this will only apply to that part of the grant increase above the floor. That should help solve the problem that was characterised last year as

"the nearly poor paying for the really poor".

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): According to some measures, such as primary SSA, my authority of South Gloucestershire is at the bottom, so we hope that any new formula will move us in the right direction. However, our nightmare is that the new formula will be more generous but that it will be phased in through tight ceilings over many years. My constituents are angry and feel a sense of injustice after years of unfair funding, and their fear is that that unfairness will continue for years. Can the Minister offer my constituents any assurance that the new system, where it addresses long-standing injustices, will not be phased in so slowly that those injustices effectively persist?

Mr. Raynsford: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will welcome the fact that we have been able to give Gloucestershire an increase this year of 6.9 per cent.

Mr. Webb: That is not correct.

Mr. Raynsford: I was referring to the county of Gloucestershire. However, if the hon. Gentleman is referring to the district council—

Mr. Webb: The unitary council.

Mr. Raynsford: I am sorry. I meant the hon. Gentleman's unitary council. I shall refer to that unitary council separately, when I can find the right page. The hon. Gentleman will know what a nightmare it is constantly to be looking for the respective figures for individual authorities. However, I assure the hon. Gentleman that we recognise that the new formula will cause there to be both gainers and losers. I made that clear in response to an earlier intervention. It would be only fair, therefore, to continue the floors and ceilings framework, as that will prevent local authorities—especially those facing potentially large losses—from facing excessive changes as well. It would be quite unreasonable for authorities in that position to have to deal with both matters at one fell swoop. That is why we want to ensure the continuation of a floor and ceiling framework. I think that most people would regard that as fair.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): My right hon. Friend the Minister does not get many bouquets at the Dispatch Box, but he deserves to be congratulated on these refinements to the floor and ceiling framework. After all, the concept was introduced for the first time only this time last year.

However, will my right hon. Friend say what proportion of this year's distribution of revenue support grant will be held back by Departments for ring-fenced grant? Have central and local government agreed a target for a smaller proportion in future years?

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend offered some kind words to begin with, then threw a dart. We recognise that there is real concern in local government about the increase in ring fencing. There are good reasons for ring fencing in certain circumstances, when there are no other means of ensuring that certain outcomes—hugely important, and regarded as national priorities—can be delivered. However, we believe that circumstances have now reached a point where it is necessary to rein back on ring fencing. We made clear our commitment to do that in the White Paper. In the course of the coming spending review, we will obviously be looking to reach agreement with our colleagues in other Departments on an appropriate framework for the future. That framework will ensure that, although the benefits of ring fencing are not lost, local authorities will be able to expect to benefit from the greater flexibility that will arise when a greater proportion of grant is available through general grant, rather than ring-fenced grant.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Would it not be helpful if the Minister answered the question asked by the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney)? I suggest that his answer might be that the proportion of total Government grant going to local councils that is ring-fenced has increased from 5 per cent., when the Government came to power, to nearly 15 per cent. today.

Mr. Raynsford: I do not want to quibble with the hon. Gentleman, but I think that he exaggerates slightly; the figure is probably nearer 14 per cent. However, I will not hold that against him.

I have flicked through my papers and can reassure the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) that the increase for South Gloucestershire, which I am sure that he will welcome, is 6.7 per cent., almost exactly the same as for the county of Gloucestershire, which has 6.9 per cent.

Ms Drown: I represent an authority that hopes to gain by the new formula, and refer my right hon. Friend to next year's settlement. Is he aware of the frustration of some of the lowest funded authorities, such as Swindon, which face more challenges than many other authorities in terms of raising standards in education and social services? However, an unfair formula distribution is further exacerbated in that Swindon's increase has been less than the average. We are looking at some difficult choices locally, and I would be grateful for my right hon. Friend's assurance that he will continue to work with the council to ensure that valued services, particularly in education and social services, will be preserved as the council goes through a difficult round of decision making.

Mr. Raynsford: We have ensured, through the floors and ceilings mechanism, that every local authority has received an increase this year that at least matches that of inflation. No authority will have to cope with an increase that is less than inflation, and most benefit from substantially larger increases than that.

We shall review the system in the coming year. As part of that review, it will be our objective to ensure that the new framework is fairer and reflects the circumstances that lead to real needs for spend for all authorities. I hope that my hon. Friend can take comfort from that. I appreciate that in certain cases, where there have been changes as a result of local government reorganisation, the patterns of spend have not necessarily fully reflected the need to spend. It is our wish, through the review of standard spending assessments, to have a better framework for the future.

With the good grant increases that we have provided this year and the prospect of stable grant settlements, all authorities should be able to deliver improvements to public services while setting reasonable council tax increases. This year, we have made changes to what must be shown on council tax bills. *[Interruption.]* Liberal Democrat Members seem to think this a matter for humour. Their electorate will not find it humorous if their authorities impose unreasonably large council tax increases when there has been an overall 7.5 per cent. increase—three times the rate of inflation—in Government grant to local authorities. We expect local authorities to make full use of the generous settlement that I am announcing this evening and to ensure that they do not impose unreasonable increases in council tax on their council tax payers.

Mr. Don Foster: I do not find the situation humorous. What I found humorous were the shakes of the head from many Labour Members in response to the Minister's statement that councils will be able to deliver improved services as a result of this settlement. On the increases in council tax, what is the right hon. Gentleman's estimate of the average increase that is likely to result from today's settlement?

Mr. Raynsford: This is a matter for local authorities rather than for the Government. It is not for me to make an estimate. I hope that local authorities will discuss this with their council tax payers and come to a sensible and appropriate conclusion.

There is already evidence that a number of authorities are making decisions showing their awareness of the need to be moderate in their demands. Liverpool city council, for example—a Liberal Democrat-controlled council—has indicated that it does not expect to increase its council tax at all. I welcome that. I wish that a number of other Liberal Democrat councils that are talking about large increases would follow suit. A number of other authorities have indicated to us the likelihood of modest increases. The treasurers of the Special Interest Group of Municipal Authorities predict an average increase of some 4.5 per cent.

I put it to the House that given a settlement of 7.5 per cent. in increased grant, it should be possible for all authorities to budget for the coming year with moderate increases. I do not welcome the alarmist figures that have been put around by some commentators and some hon. Members, nor the behaviour of one or two local authorities which appear to be stoking up unreasonable expectations. I cite only the Mayor of London, whose proposed 34 per cent. increase in budget rightly aroused real concern among members of the Greater London Assembly, who have sought to scale down that figure. I welcome moves to achieve a more reasonable settlement in London.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): I note what my right hon. Friend says. Durham county council is a very well run and moderate council, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who represents Sedgefield, also knows. Durham is facing a critical situation this year because of having one of the lowest settlements of the shire counties. Some £2.7 million has been taken away or lost because the education support grant received last year is not being provided this year, and the council faces imposing an increase in council tax of between 10 and 17 per cent.

Mr. Raynsford: I am aware of the pressures faced by Durham county council. My hon. Friend has spoken to me about this and I have responded by looking at a number of issues relating to Durham county. Under the settlement for Durham the overall increase of 5.6 per cent. is more than double the rate of inflation. Durham has also benefited from a number of initiatives, such as the one that I referred to earlier on bed blocking. That has secured an additional £1.8 million for Durham county.

I do not underestimate the pressures on social services. I acknowledged those when meeting my hon. Friend and in my earlier contributions to the House. I hope that when Durham county comes to fix its council tax for the coming year, it will have regard not just to the need to maintain its services but to economy and to what it is reasonable to expect council tax payers to contribute.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Raynsford: I will give way for the last time. I really must make progress.

Mr. Chope: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. He is being uncharacteristically coy about giving a prediction for council tax increases in the coming year. Can he confirm that the council tax increase at standard spending, which is the increase if a council spends at standard spending next year and is doing so this year, will be more than twice the rate of inflation? Why is he so coy about mentioning that in public?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman, who has been a Minister, will know that there is no question of a standard

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increase in council tax for an authority spending at standard spending. The reality of the system, as he will know, is that there are huge variations between actual patterns of spend and SSA. That is one of the reasons that we are conducting a review of SSA. For authorities that are receiving an increase in grant which averages 7.5 per cent, there is no reason why unreasonably large council tax demands should be made. We expect authorities to approach this in the sensible way that a number are already doing, and I have highlighted one or two examples. I hope that all authorities will be prudent, because the public do not expect unreasonable demands to be made in council tax.

To encourage this, we have made changes in the current year to what must be shown on council tax bills. Voters will see clearly which of their councils are responsible for any increase in council tax that they are required to pay. Bills will show clearly how much different tiers of authority are charging. They will also show how much in percentage terms each tier has increased its part of the council tax compared with the previous year. Any substantial increases will therefore show up clearly on bills. If some councils set substantial increases, their council tax payers and local electorate will have every reason to question their council's decision.

Although we have reserve capping powers, the Government do not operate a system of crude and universal pre-announced capping—unlike the previous Government. Decisions on council tax are primarily for local authorities to take after consulting their local electorate and tax payers. Given this very good grant settlement, councils will find it hard to justify any unreasonable increases.

The Government have taken the necessary steps to set up a proper framework for partnership between local government and central Government. We have listened to the points made to us in consultation and we have responded. The local government settlement that I have outlined continues the trend under the Government of steady and substantial investment in local government and in the services that it provides, and I commend the motion to the House.

7.40 pm

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): We have heard the same record playing this year as in each of the past four years of the Labour Government, and it is is getting rather worn and thin. Every year, Ministers promise a generous settlement for local authorities and every year they say that there is no reason for high council tax rises; but every year council tax has risen by three times the rate of inflation—not just this year or last year, but in each year that the Labour Government have been in office.

In December, the Secretary of State claimed that there would be an increase in Government grant and business rate of 7.4 per cent. He said that there was no reason why we should see large increases in council tax next year.

Last year, the Government announced a 6.7 per cent. increase in revenue support. The then Minister for Local Government, the right hon. Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong), pledged:

> "I am confident that councils will be able to implement reasonable council tax increases, lower than last year's".—[*Official Report*, 27 November 2000; Vol. 357, c. 659.]

She used the same word that the Minister has used this year: "reasonable". Despite that, in 2001–02 the average council tax in England rose by 6.4 per cent.—three times the rate of inflation.

I noticed with interest that the Minister ducked the question put by the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) as to the right hon. Gentleman's predictions for council tax rises in the coming year. Let me give the right hon. Gentleman some help. It comes from one of his Labour colleagues—Mr. David Wilcox, the secretary of the county councils Labour group. He wrote to one of his colleagues:

> "Coming local elections are causing some concern with Labour authorities that perhaps should be going for increases of around 10% but that consider they may have to cut the rise back in an election year.
>
> So far the highest proposed rate rise that I have been notified of comes from a jointly controlled council and is at 12%, although it could come down below 10% at the end of the day."

Then comes the killer punchline:

> "At this moment 9.9% feels like safe ground with 8.9% looking attractive."

That was a letter from the Minister's colleague.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman referred to a gramophone record at the start of his speech. Does he not think that we are hearing exactly the same record that he played yesterday in the House? Does he recall that when he quoted the same letter I told him that I regarded that figure of 9.9 per cent. as unreasonable? Does he acknowledge that that is the Government's position?

Mr. Moss: Making the same point twice does not undermine the fact that it is a good point. If the Minister thinks that the figure is unreasonable, perhaps he should take issue with some of the Labour-controlled county councils that seriously fear they will have to come up with council tax increases of below 10 per cent.

The Government seem genuinely perplexed that, despite their trumpeting of the above-inflation increase in grant that they have given every year, there have been even larger increases in council tax. Is that because councils have been inefficient or profligate? Not so, says the evidence. During the past four years, the majority of councils, of all political persuasions, have experienced great difficulty in maintaining a standstill on services, let alone funding real improvements to those services.

In the equivalent debate last year, complaints about the settlement came raining down from the Labour Benches on the then Minister. I do not see much difference in this evening's debate. The explanation for the large increases cannot lie with inflation, which has averaged about 2 per cent. over the relevant period. Nor do we believe that the overall total settlement figure is inadequate. At 7.4 per cent. it is, as the Minister said, well above inflation.

The answer to the conundrum lies in the double whammy imposed on local authorities by the Government and by the Minister's Department. On one hand, they have increased the regulations and burdens on councils, while on the other they have fiddled with the funding formula, put up taxes that directly affect local authorities' costs and altered the way that grant is distributed so that less money—not more—is going to front-line basic services.

Let us examine those extra costs and burdens, which have risen far faster than Government funding.

Mr. Clelland: I, too, take issue with the Minister on some of the points he made about the 7.3 per cent. average increase, because local authorities such as Gateshead are receiving only 5 per cent. which will cause them difficulty. However, does the hon. Gentleman realise that during the first three years of the Labour Government the average increase in grant to Gateshead council was about 4.5 per cent? In the last three years of the Conservative Government, the increase was 0.7 per cent. In those circumstances, who does he recommend that the people of Gateshead vote for?

Mr. Moss: If the people of Gateshead are prepared to tolerate yearly council tax increases of three times the rate of inflation, I suggest that they may not be voting for the wrong party.

In relation to the extra costs and burdens, there is the real impact of the Government's stealth taxes. Advance corporation tax has increased the cost of providing pensions. The hidden iceberg of costs for local government pensions is estimated at £300 million each year.

Fuel tax rises have increased transport costs for councils, and the Government's insistence on bumping up landfill tax each year without a commensurate reduction in other taxes to compensate is causing councils a real problem. Local councils paid out £163 million in 1998–99, and by 2004 it is estimated that landfill tax will rise to £348 million a year.

Another obvious burden is that of best value. That has led to an excessively bureaucratic centralising regime and has proved itself not only incredibly complicated but—even worse—extremely expensive for councils to operate.

The Government would argue that they have recognised those increased costs, but the allocation of £40 million for central best value administration falls woefully short of the real costs to councils. The Local Government Association has complained that it costs an extra £175 million more than the allocated amount.

Criticism of best value does not come only from those on the Conservative Benches. In Wales, the National Assembly decided to abolish the regime. Labour Finance Minister, Edwina Hart, conceded that the system was "terribly bureaucratic". The Labour leader of the Welsh Local Government Association, Sir Harry Jones, stated that councils were spending more time on process than on actual service delivery.

The Government recognised that they have problems with best value. They could hardly have been unaware of the howls of protest coming from the councils, but their response—to hold a review—is pathetically inadequate. They should admit their error and scrap this absurd regime at the earliest opportunity. We would.

The list of new obligations does not end there. After the recent highly damaging floods, the costs to councils were not remotely covered by the emergency grants from the Government. Only this week, in the Civil Defence (Grant) Bill, the Government proposed restricting by 25 per cent. contingency and emergency planning expenditure in order to reduce their own liabilities. In the wake of 11 September, there are likely to be higher—not lower—costs for local government and the fire authorities.

On asylum funding, there is still a shortfall between the costs to councils and the Government's grant aid. Last year, the Association of London Government stated:

> "Government grants made no provision for the education and social care costs of supporting asylum seekers in the year 2000–01. This is a problem because data lag means that authorities can wait up to two years before the asylum seeking child appears in the SSA formula for funding."

Additional costs are incurred when councils switch to the new cabinet system from the former committee system. For example, last year Cheshire county council said that the switch would cost it £660,000 a year.

Finally, on waste and recycling, we have the ridiculous situation whereby, from this January, fridges will be subject to the ozone depleting substances regulation, with very little extra grant being made available. The most ludicrous situation of all is that there is as yet no facility in this country that can do the necessary disposal. The Government must have known that that directive would be implemented this year. Why was there such woeful preparation and why is there such inadequate funding? The Government's offer of just £6 million is laughable. The LGA has estimated the total cost to local authorities to be some £60 million, so the legacy of the Government's mismanagement of the issue will be mountains of rusting fridges littering our landscape for years to come.

Perhaps the key area of budgetary pressure, for those councils tasked with the responsibility, is that of personal social services. There is real concern that the resources have not increased by any more than the forecast totals of 5.4 per cent. in the 2000 spending review.

Mr. Betts: The hon. Gentleman has just listed a catalogue of problems facing local government and the extra costs that he believes that local authorities have. Would he like to say by how much the grant to local authorities should be increased in excess of what the Government have recommended?

Mr. Moss: If the hon. Gentleman had been listening, he would have heard me say some moments ago that we have no argument with the total level of funding at a 7.4 per cent. increase, which is generous in relation to inflation. I am arguing that the Labour Government have burdened councils with all sorts of extra regulations and red tape and then not given them the money to deliver. That is the issue.

I return to the subject of personal social services. Why have the Government stayed with those outdated figures when all the evidence points to severe and increasing demand for children's services and care for the elderly? The Government know that local authorities are already spending more than £1 billion over the total SSA to try to meet those increasing demands. To ignore the facts, to ignore the crisis, is to condemn thousands of the most vulnerable people in our society to a life of misery.

> "The present system is not working. Older people are suffering and will continue to suffer as a consequence. They deserve better."

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman has just said, in response to an intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts), that he has no quibble with the overall level of grant that we are proposing. How does he reconcile that with his latest comment—that he regards the social services grant increases as inadequate?

Mr. Moss: The Minister must be patient. I shall come to that later. There was last year, and has been promised

[Mr. Moss]

this year, £200 million from the health budget to help alleviate bed blocking. That is a source of money that a Conservative Government could certainly turn to, as the present Government have turned to it, so there is no magic in all that.

The words that I just used about social services were quoted from the report of an inquiry, chaired by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis). He recently chaired an independent commission of inquiry into social services in Birmingham. The report also concludes that:

> "Birmingham's problems are not unique. There is national underfunding of social services—especially the services for older people. However it is inescapable that it"—

the council—

> "either finds the money or reduces the service it provides. Significant extra funding must be made available for Social Services as a whole . . . the identification of funding on a suitable scale is largely the responsibility of Central Government."

Mr. Chope: Does my hon. Friend agree that what matters is not just the overall level of funding for social services but the way in which it is distributed? Will he express some sympathy for the people of Dorset, where there are 88,000 citizens aged over 65 and the amount of funding for social services per person over 65 is £183 less than the national average? Does he agree that that is totally unacceptable?

Mr. Moss: I agree with my hon. Friend, who makes an important point.

The crisis in social services is of the Government's own making. Where is the sense in formulating ever more regulations for the nursing and residential home sector when private homes are closing down at a rate of knots? There are now some 47,000 fewer care beds than there were in 1997. That is a scandalous record, brought about by an incompetent Government. There appears to be little or no communication between the key Departments that have an input into this problem. At Prime Minister's questions, the PM himself seems totally oblivious to the time bomb that is ticking away under his nose.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): My hon. Friend has just mentioned Prime Minister's questions and the Prime Minister's complacent answer when attention was drawn to the crisis in the East Kent hospitals at the moment. Those problems are heavily driven by the loss of more than a quarter of our nursing home beds over the past three years.

Mr. Moss: My hon. Friend makes my point for me.

Those, then, are the key cost pressures for local government. Now let us take a look at the funding pressures.

In 1998, the Labour Government altered the methodology by which the revenue support grant was to be distributed. Those changes are still in place. They perpetuate the initial inequalities and unfairness and they penalise the better-managed councils.

Over the lifetime of the last Parliament, the shire counties lost an estimated £700 million in grant funding, while London lost £450 million. We are not arguing that the shire counties have not received any grant increases; rather, we are arguing that they would have received more grant if the funding formula had not been changed.

In the current settlement, the Government have also perpetuated the flawed funding system of floors and ceilings in their grant allocation. What is the point of having an elaborate system of SSAs, dependent on the collection and appraisal of huge quantities of data, if that exercise is subsequently ignored because the Government do not like the outcomes?

Mr. Raynsford: If I give the hon. Gentleman the figures of the cumulative increase in standard spending assessment for London, metropolitan areas and shire areas in the course of the lifetime of Labour Governments and compare it with the Conservative Government, he might find those figures instructive. Over the past four years, there have been year-on-year increases of 4.4 per cent. for London, 4.3 per cent. for metropolitan areas and 4.6 per cent. for shire areas. The respective figures during the Conservative Government's period of office from 1994–95 to 1997–98 were 0.6 per cent., 1.3 per cent. and 1.8 per cent. respectively. All categories—shire, metropolitan and London—have done very much better under the Labour Governments.

Mr. Moss *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. There have been several long interventions in the debate. A number of hon. Members are very anxious to speak and unless interventions are briefer, or perhaps non-existent for a while, a lot of hon. Members will be very disappointed.

Mr. Moss: A wink is as good as a nod, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Moss: I shall now return to the floors and ceilings issue. What could be more illogical or perverse than to have poor councils coughing up some of their grant to help even poorer councils? Only the present Government could come up with the philosophy of robbing Paul to pay Paul.

The unfairness of that redistribution is felt particularly by those councils in the south-east planning region that enjoy the area cost adjustment. Many of these have seen their grant reduced even though the SSA calculations were based on real need. If that is the Government's answer to the reform of the area cost adjustment, they should come clean and tell us. Reform, I would remind the House, was promised by the Prime Minister in Cambridge in the run-up to the 1997 general election. Five years later, we are still waiting—yet another example of a broken promise.

One of the most detrimental changes to local government that the Labour Government have made is that of the switch since 1997-98 from block grants to specific grants. As well as treating local councils as nothing more than mere agents of central Government, that practice actually takes money away from basic front-line services.

Non-police specific grants have increased from 4 per cent. in 1997-98 to over 14 per cent. in the current settlement. Not only are these specific grants unobtainable by certain councils but they frequently involve a complex bidding and allocation mechanism. That adds to the bureaucracy, and costs councils time and money.

The LGA is concerned about that increase in the proportion of resources devoted to ring-fenced funding, particularly for education and social services. Is not the planned increase in specific grants this year perverse in view of the Government's conclusion in their recent White Paper that the growth of ring fencing is "excessive" and that

> "it threatens to erode local decision-making responsibility, limit authorities's ability to tackle environmental priorities and to increase council tax levels."

In education, for example, specific grants have increased so much in the current settlement—up from £2.6 billion to £3.7 million—that out of the 8.8 per cent. overall increase for education, only 5.7 per cent. has actually gone to the education SSA increase. Given the proposed increases in teachers' pay, there is precious little new money available in those figures for service improvements above inflation. The teachers' pay increase will cost local authorities a further £240 million above the 2.5 per cent. provision for pay increases in the 2000 spending review. Increases in superannuation contributions will cost an extra £140 million.

Finally on education, there is the fiddle of the funding transfer from post-16 education to the Learning and Skills Council. Many councils and the LGA believe that too much has been transferred out of the revenue support grant total because of an overestimate in the growth of sixth form numbers. The £16.8 million post-16 budget support grant does not compensate in full for that loss.

So what is the outcome of this misdirected and incompetent double whammy of extra burdens on the one hand and fiddled funding on the other? Every year, council tax has soared by three times the rate of inflation, despite the Prime Minister's promise before the 1997 election that he had no plans to increase tax at all. Over the past four years, council tax has risen by £212 on band D homes—equivalent to a 30.7 per cent. increase.

At least this year the Government have come clean and planned for that increase three times above the rate of inflation. In the small print of the November 2000 pre-Budget report, council tax receipts across Britain are budgeted to rise from £14.8 billion to £15.8 billion—a 6.7 per cent. increase. Of course, as we know, inflation is predicted at 2 per cent. in that report. Actual increases are likely to be higher in the shire counties, as I have already mentioned in referring to the letter from the secretary of the Labour group.

That hike in council tax—it is likely to break the £1,000 barrier significantly for band D homes for the first time—is one of Labour's more effective and less obvious stealth taxes, but it hits the most vulnerable in society disproportionately. In fact, it is a form of regressive taxation—something the Labour party in opposition said it would never countenance.

Let us consider pensioners. Between 1997 and 2001, a couple's basic state pension rose by £837. At the same time, band D council tax went up by £212. Therefore, 25 per cent. of the couple's pension increase was grabbed back in council tax, and the figure for single pensioners is 30 per cent.

Despite all those pressures, Conservative councils still have the lowest council taxes in the country. Currently, the average household pays about £88 a year more on a band D council tax bill in a Labour council and £63 more in a Liberal Democrat council, compared with Conservative-run councils. Labour and Liberal Democrat-controlled councils have the highest council taxes in England, and 13 of the councils with the 20 highest council taxes in England are Labour controlled—none is Conservative.

The message is clear to all those who have a vote in the forthcoming local elections: vote Conservative for the lowest council tax. People should not blame their local council for council tax increases at three times the rate of inflation—the blame lies with the Labour Government and this team of Ministers. The sad thing is that all that is avoidable. The problems are all of the Government's own making; they are caused by their spin philosophy, which promises all and delivers nothing; their craving for central control; their fiddling of the funding formula; their switch to specific grants that they can control; their imposition of additional burdens, costs and red tape; and their total failure to address the inherent and severe problems in social services.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I remind hon. Members that the 12-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches starts now.

8.4 pm

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am aware of the 12-minute limit; it is one of the reasons why, although I am sorely tempted to debate with the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss), I shall refrain from doing so, except to express agreement with a specific part of his speech, but not the arguments that surround it. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the problem of social services, and as the Minister recognises, there is a real problem with them not only in delivery, but in financing them locally. Although the Government are aware of that problem, I am sure that they realise that a solution must be found before the implementation of the next financial settlement in 2003. Unless that problem is addressed seriously, it will not only persist at its present level, but escalate.

I wish to make a parochial speech on the problems that are specific to Leicester, as well as to one or two other local authorities in England. Before I do so, I congratulate the Government—a rare phenomenon for me—on the real-terms increase in this year's local government financial settlement, in which real-terms expenditure is increased by 7.5 per cent. and the SSA by 5.5 per cent. Last year's increase, coupled with this year's increase, represents a real advance in local government resources.

I also welcome the Minister's comments on the floors and ceilings scheme. I do not know what outsiders makes of that phrase, but I presume that at least hon. Members know what it means. The scheme will ensure that no authority with educational services will receive less than a 4 per cent. increase in Government grant compared with 2001-02. Again, I welcome that on the national level, but the Minister will be aware that, on these occasions, hon. Members always have local bleats, and I now wish to turn to them.

Although the grant increase nationally is very good, it will not prevent local authorities from continuing to face difficulties. The Minister will know, even though he is

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looking at his notes, that the increase in SSA that Leicester has received is lower again than the national average. I know the reason for that, as well as the Minister does. There is a falling population, which therefore gives us a smaller proportion of the national pot, but we do not necessarily accept the reasoning behind that argument. As the Minister will also know, even though a population may be falling, it does not remove the difficulties. In some cases, the difficulties can be enhanced by the problems arising from a falling population. I hope that that point will be addressed in the overall review of the formula for 2003-04.

Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): I totally agree with my hon. Friend about falling populations, but does he accept that equal problems need to be addressed in constituencies, such as mine, that have a rapidly rising population?

Mr. Marshall: It was implicit in what I said that I recognise that there are problems on both sides. I am concerned that the way that the formula works at the moment seems to neglect the problems arising from falling populations, while recognising the problems of increasing populations. Clearly, both types of local authority have problems, but they are necessarily different kinds of problem. I hope that both will be recognised in the new formula that will come into force in 2003–04.

However, the Minister will be aware that Leicester city council has approached the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions about the specific problems that have faced Leicester in the past 18 months, which will continue into 2002–03. We will require additional funding to finance the burden faced by Leicester's education and social services departments in dealing with a large influx of European Union nationals who came from the Netherlands but who were originally of Somali origin.

As I believe my right hon. Friend the Minister is aware, in 2001 approximately 300 to 400 Dutch Somali families moved to Leicester from the Netherlands. I emphasise that they came as EU nationals and not as asylum seekers, but Leicester is inevitably incurring significant additional expenditure to support those families. The social services department must provide the money to cover their daily living costs until those European citizens acquire habitual residence in the United Kingdom. Other support services also have to be provided. The social services department estimates that an additional £300,000 is required to finance those services in this financial year and that a further £400,000 will be required in the next financial year.

As my right hon. Friend will also recognise, the impact on the educational service is even more acute. Some 900 Dutch Somali children of school age have arrived in Leicester over the past 18 months, with 488 of them—54 per cent. of the total—arriving since September 2001. These arrivals have resulted in an increased requirement in the budgets delegated to schools. On average, the sums are £1,400 per primary pupil and £1,900 per secondary pupil but, in most cases, there has been no matching increase in the standard spending assessment.

Other educational costs, such as the need to provide additional language support and additional support for admission procedures, will also have to be incurred. It is estimated that the education department in Leicester will need to spend more than £500,000, rising to more than £2 million next year, to support those children.

However, as the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire pointed out in relation to asylum seekers, the SSA calculation does not recognise most of these pupils for financial assistance. That is because the calculation for primary pupils is based on their number at the beginning of the previous year's spring term while that for secondary pupils is based on the number the previous September. Therefore, all the new primary pupils who have arrived since January 2001 and all the secondary pupils who have arrived since September 2001 have not been included in the SSA calculations.

I hope that, even at this late stage, my right hon. Friend will recognise the problem and that he will be prepared to make a financial adjustment. I realise that it is too late to change the formula and too late to include those children officially in this year's settlement, but I hope that he and the Government will consider the problem, perhaps with a view to providing the type of specific grant that is available to local authorities that are faced with a sudden increase in the number of Army personnel with children in their area. Additional finance can be found in such cases.

Leicester has an enviable reputation as a multicultural city. I should hate to see the difficulties that I have described made any worse because of a lack of financial resources. On behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, West (Ms Hewitt), and myself, I urge the Government to consider the problem seriously and to come up with a solution that will provide further financial assistance to the city council in Leicester.

8.14 pm

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): Given the interest that there was in the earlier debate on police grants and given the number of Members present for this debate, I wonder why we discuss both issues on the same day. More time was made available for the police debate than for the local government debate even though local government is responsible for a wide range of services. Perhaps the Minister and the usual channels might like to consider that point.

> "The central message from today's debate is that, in the coming year, council tax payers will end up paying more and getting less. As happened last year, there may be a few parts of the country where the council tax does not rise or where services to local people are not reduced, but in most places the council tax will go up and services will come down; local people will have to pay more, and will get less."—[*Official Report*, 31 January 1996; Vol. 270, c. 1028.]

Those are not my words or those of anyone on the Opposition Benches, but those of the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) in the debate on the final local government settlement of the previous Conservative Government.

A year later the right hon. Gentleman said:

> "The local authority associations and individual local authorities accept that, while the Government are in power, all that they can expect is fine tuning of the system. The more I look at the system, the more I believe that it needs to be changed root and branch because it is a racket."

It is a racket, and the racket is the standard spending assessment that we have had to live with since 1990–01 when it was introduced He also said:

> "The undertaking that I give is that we shall have a fair system of allocation. The present one is manifestly not fair."—[*Official Report*, 3 February 1997; Vol. 289, c. 694-95.]

We are still stuck with that present, manifestly unfair racket of a system.

The authorities that have been most disadvantaged by that system suffer from it year on year. Although this year's increase is, indeed, the highest increase that we have ever seen in local government, it does not make up for those lost years for those disadvantaged authorities. When the Minister comes to the Dispatch Box to say, "It is a 7.4 per cent. increase. We do not expect any unreasonable council tax rises," that is only half the truth. Not every authority receives 7.4 per cent. Some authorities receive much more; others receive much less. Even if those that receive much less get more than the inflation rate that the Minister mentioned, it is the retail price inflation rate. It is not the pay inflation rate or the inflation rate that local authorities have to deal with in their real world.

There are some good things in the proposals. I have mentioned the size of the settlement—that is good. Although the Minister did not mention it in his speech, the fact that the council tax benefit subsidy is to be abolished is another good thing.

However, there are some very bad things in the proposals and among them are the constant top slicing and the fact that councils are made to bid for funds. In 1997-98, 4 per cent. of funds were in that category, but the figure is nearly 15 per cent. today. It is a terribly wasteful system for councils, particularly those that go through the effort of applying for funds and do not succeed. It wastes officers' time and council tax payers' money.

The overall increase is not distributed across the board to all local authorities. The main losers from that are county and unitary social service providers. They are hit in two ways. The first is because the formula does not recognise the amount of need that there is in such areas. A number of sources say that local needs are not met by the formula. The second is because the funds are not fairly distributed. Two sectors of social services—children's social services and elderly care—face real problems. Our hospitals are filling up with people who need social services care, not hospital treatment. That fact must be tackled and, although extra money has been made available to help the social services that are under pressure, it is peanuts compared with the scale of the problem facing hospitals and social services departments in many parts of the country.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): Untypically for a member of his party, the hon. Gentleman is making a persuasive argument. However, will he also point out that the local authorities that suffer from the problems that he has described are also often burdened with additional regulations and certainly with additional demands and statutory requirements? On top of the problems that he has described with the formula funding, that creates real tensions for personal social services throughout the country, which, he may be interested to know, were £50 million worse off in the first year of this Government.

Mr. Sanders: That is a helpful, and untypically friendly, contribution from a Conservative Member, and I thank the hon. Gentleman for it. I was going to mention regulation.

The numbers and costs involved in children's social services in particular are beyond local authority control. The Government have to accept that. If a social worker says that a child has to go into care, that cannot be covered by a target. In smaller authorities, especially some of the small unitary authorities, it takes only a handful, or even less, of children going into full-time residential care for them to have a massive social services underspend. Something needs to be done to address that problem within smaller authorities.

Correspondence between south-west social services local authorities and the Government has highlighted many of the problems that authorities face, in particular the huge discrepancy between children's SSA and actual spend; the emerging and rapidly increasing disparity between SSA and spend on younger adults, especially those with learning disabilities; the cross-funding of those essential services by holding down spending on older people's services, with consequent destabilisation of the residential and nursing care markets; and the inevitable negative consequences on health care strategies to provide more care within the community. My constituency has a well above average proportion of residential care homes, so I am well aware of their problems. They are closing almost by the week because the fees do not enable them to carry on trading.

Those problems have been pointed out by the corporate director of social services for Somerset, writing on behalf of another 14 social services authorities, including Torbay and Bath and North-East Somerset, which is represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Foster). The corporate director goes on to say:

> "These are national trends. This demonstrates clearly that there is a chronic funding problem."

Hon. Members have reflected that chronic funding problem, but it will get worse. There is a demographic time bomb because older people are living longer. The Government might say that the answer is to cull old people, but I do not think that they would—no party could come to power on that basis. The problem is, however, that they have to do something about the problem. We welcome the fact that older people are living longer, but we have to recognise that that takes more money from the public purse.

Mr. Burstow: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the dilemma that local authorities face when it comes to funding services for older people. Does he find it alarming that councils, because of their financial difficulties, face the prospect of having to allow someone in a care home to die before they can fund a new place?

Mr. Sanders: That is a tragedy and all too common. Indeed, it has even cropped up in my area.

In addition to the demographic time bomb, there is a pensions time bomb. Local authority pensions, like hon. Members' pensions, are an end-of-life deal in which

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people receive a proportion of final salary. That has been underfunded over the years by central Government. They have not recognised the additional costs that have to be met for pensions, which come out of local authority budgets.

The Government impose costs themselves. Best value has been mentioned. The inspection regulation regime is necessary to provide a common standard of service, but if a council is not recompensed for the full costs of implementing that administrative system, the money has to come out of cuts or from increases in council tax. Again, that is where the settlement does not meet actual need.

There is also the whole agenda of corporate government to consider. This year's increased settlement will be swallowed up chasing the extra costs that Government impose. It does nothing to help a council that is disadvantaged by the grant formula to catch up. Funding gaps will have to be filled by increased council tax, cuts in services, asset sales, privatisation, stock transfers, increased charges or borrowing. Councils can use a raft of measures, but most of them are negative. They are not wanted and should be unnecessary.

Most councils will increase their charges—my hon. Friend the Member for Bath has studied those at some length—way above the rate of inflation. They will bear no relationship to the retail prices index. Council tax is part of the problem, together with the formula. It hits the poorest hardest, in particular people on fixed low incomes, who tend to pensioners. Let us change the formula and have one that is based on local needs. Let us scrap the council tax altogether and have a taxation system that is based on the ability to pay—a local income tax.

The Minister is on record as saying that he wants to improve service delivery, and service delivery is the key. The settlement leaves a gaping hole in some local authority budgets. There are spending shortfalls almost across the board. We have highlighted social services, but no doubt it would be as easy to talk about the gross underfunding of transport and highways. The Minister tells local government to stand and deliver while he robs the highways budget. The Secretary of State has admitted that the funding formula is unfair. The Labour party promised five years ago that the problem would be fixed. Sadly, we are still waiting for treatment.

I conclude with a final quote from the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras. He said:

> "The incoming Labour Government will be based on the supposition that democracy depends on the people who take the decisions carrying the can and the people who carry the can taking the decisions. So we shall be honest in our relations with local councils and we shall take responsibility for our share of those decisions. We shall not roam around the country blaming local councillors for decisions that we have taken in the House of Commons."—[*Official Report*, 3 February 1997; Vol. 289, c. 701.]

It would be nice if the Minister endorsed those comments. My question for him is the question that every council tax payer will ask: who is to blame for council tax rises and the cuts to services—Government or local councils?

8.28 pm

Mr. Chris Mole (Ipswich): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in the debate. I am not a great lover of tradition, which perhaps makes me ill equipped for service in the House, but I suppose that that makes me ready to join the ranks of the modernisers. I gather that the tradition for maiden speeches is to mention in equal parts the subject at hand, the constituency and my predecessor. Fortuitously for me, there are threads that link all of those.

This is the gateway to the only speech in one's parliamentary career in which hon. Members do not seek to make interventions. I am not afraid to take advantage of that tradition. I speak in this debate on the local government finance report as the leader, until recently, of one of two local authorities serving the needs of Ipswich; my predecessor, the late Jamie Cann was the leader of the other before he came to the House. Ipswich has a tradition of being well served by its local authorities; Ipswich borough council has won multiple charter marks and this year Suffolk county council was acknowledged by the *Local Government Chronicle* as council of the year.

People in my constituency recognise the contribution that their councils make to their quality of life, economic development and as community leaders. Jamie Cann, as leader of Ipswich borough council, made such a contribution throughout the 1980s. At his memorial service, the people of Ipswich feted him as a man of the people, a plain speaker and a hard-working constituency MP, and for his many achievements as leader of the council. Despite the growing restraints on council spending, Jamie found the means to develop leisure facilities for hard-working families and began much of the regeneration that has made our town a more thriving and attractive place; he still found time to save the Regent theatre and the Ipswich Witches speedway club. He will be sadly missed.

The first Labour MP for Ipswich, R. F. Jackson, was also the first Labour councillor and council leader in our town; I was the first Labour councillor to lead our county council. I am sure that R. F. Jackson would have appreciated the way in which Jamie's efforts added to the development of Ipswich, and would understand that councils must have resources to make partnerships work and deliver progress.

Perusing the maiden speeches of my predecessors, I could not detect any agreement on whether the Danes or Vikings first saw the benefit of Ipswich as a natural haven. Recent archaeology has shown that the Stoke Bridge area was an early settlement of the Angles; some local historians therefore see Gippeswic as the birthplace of modern English. It is certain, however, that following the granting of a royal charter by King John more than 800 years ago, the town developed strongly around its port. Such was the commercial prominence of the town that Edward III and the Black Prince gathered 500 ships off Ipswich. I wonder what they would make of the more than 500 boats that bob in Ipswich wet dock, another product of regeneration, with a new marina, new housing and new businesses, and more than £20 million of investment from sources as diverse as Associated British Ports and the East of England development agency's single regeneration budget.

Ipswich has moved on. My predecessors spoke of manufacturing, which is now much reduced, but the arrival of BT, my own former employer in the late 1960s and early 1970s at what is now Adastral park, has had a lasting effect on the town, which has become a primary location for the development of knowledge-based e-business. A manifestation of the growth of that sector is the IP-City partnership, which is successfully developing one node of the Ipswich to Cambridge hi-tech corridor. That partnership, along with the Suffolk development agency, in which local councils are major players, is driving the regional economy toward the future. If I can be permitted one glance over my shoulder, it would be to recognise that that sector needs the development of skills that would be better provided if we had a university in the town. Indeed, Members can see in the House of Commons Library a depiction of Cardinal Wolsey on his way to Westminster; he was the last civic leader to try to develop higher education facilities in Ipswich. Unfortunately, the only remaining manifestation is Wolsey's gate, which is largely held up by three reinforced steel joists.

Ipswich is blessed with local councils and councillors who are committed to their role as community leaders and to working in partnership with the private sector and other public agencies to help the town develop in a sustainable way and with due regard for the environment and social inclusion. However, I should like Ministers to note that in promoting partnership working all partners must be able to bring something to the table. Councils such as Ipswich borough and Suffolk county, which are not high spenders, want to provide community leadership in partnership, but they must be able to negotiate with resources to make those partnerships work; that is not getting significantly easier for them.

I welcome the local government finance report as something of a curate's egg. The settlement again allows for a real-terms increase in Government support; as someone who put council budgets together between 1993 and 1997, I can assure the House that it is a welcome turnaround from those dark days. We need to be realistic about the implications for council tax; all parties in the Local Government Association accept that more local spending needs to be financed locally, which has led to significant increases in council taxation over the past ten years. Not to accept that reality would be to prevent our councils from tackling challenges such as the placement of difficult young children—much of the problem stems from the Children Act 1989, which was passed under the previous Government—and the community care of the elderly, which has only recently attracted specific, but as yet not continuing or recurring, Government support.

I welcome unreservedly the increase in education standard spending, as Government estimates finally catch up with the level of spending that Suffolk county council has been making for many years. Our schools welcome the certainty that has kept them part of the LEA family—an LEA that was recently assessed by Ofsted as one of the top six in the country.

That leaves me only to introduce the fourth element of an Ipswich Member's maiden speech, for *Hansard* shows that it is traditional to congratulate Ipswich Town football club on its recent success. I hope that the club is in the middle of another one—at 8 o'clock, I understand, the score was one-nil. I have no difficulty in congratulating the club, which has played large in my life recently. It played Milan away on the evening of my selection as a candidate, and at home on the night of the by-election, in what turned out to be a notable double victory.

I look forward to future debate in the Chamber. In the present debate, I encourage my hon. Friends to support the Government.

8.35 pm

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): It is a pleasure to follow the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Mole). He said that he was not a great fan of tradition. A few moments later, I noticed that the Labour Deputy Chief Whip arrived in the Chamber, so clearly the hon. Gentleman has already made his mark in that regard. We should not worry—he will become a fan of tradition after he has been here for a little while. After all, his affection for Ipswich Town football club denotes a gentleman with considerable faith.

We all subscribe to the hon. Gentleman's gracious remarks about his predecessor, whom we shall miss, as the people of Ipswich already miss him, but they will soon learn that their new Member of Parliament has brought to this place a great deal of experience of local affairs. He spoke of their history with affection, a little teasing and a great deal of understanding. I am sure that he will soon feel at home with us, and we will feel at home with him.

When I was a Minister, with responsibility for local government, the hon. Gentleman came to see me, I suspect, to ask for more money, but there again, almost everybody did. The only point that I make about Ipswich is that in the return match against Dynamo Kiev, the club lost handsomely. I would not wish to draw any analogies about the next election result on that basis. Being a supporter of Bolton Wanderers for reasons that are too complex to explain, I have some doubts about wishing to see Ipswich rise above the bottom three in the table, because I know which team would replace it.

I hope that I am not regarded as eccentric for wanting to make a speech, rather than an intervention, in the debate. I note that total standard spending for local government is about £60 billion in England. That is a quarter of all public expenditure. I cannot help but note that when the Chancellor delivers a Budget, we spend five days debating it, and when we are speaking about the distribution of 25 per cent. of total public expenditure, we spend three hours debating it. Perhaps we should reflect on that allocation of time.

I accept that the settlement is relatively generous. I am grateful for the abolition of the council tax benefits subsidy limitation scheme—a wonderful mouthful. I served on the Committee that passed the relevant order, and I said at the time what a silly idea it was. It was a means of making the almost-poor subsidise the poor. I am glad that the Government have at last come round to my way of thinking and got rid of the wretched thing, which only pushed up council taxes at the expense of those least able to pay, in those local authorities with the largest number of houses in the lower bands, multiplying the effect of hitting the people whom, in theory, the Government were trying to help.

As the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) said, the increases in RSG and SSA necessarily have implications for the level of council tax. In a sense, they pull the council tax up with them. If a council raises a third of its money locally, if the Government say that spending should rise by, say, 7 per cent. and insist on the passporting of all the SSA through to the services, and if the Government further provide only two thirds of that increase, it follows as night follows day that the other third must come from the council tax in roughly the same sort of volume as the increases that the Government have

[Mr. David Curry]

made. In North Yorkshire, that pull-through effect automatically means that a council tax increase of some 4.5 per cent. is necessary to make the settlement whole.

Although the settlement may be relatively generous, serious problems exist. Like other hon. Members, I shall talk about social services. Three years ago in North Yorkshire, we "lost" £3 million because of a change in the method of calculating the formula. Social services are historically underfunded; they do not have the same lobby as education. All head teachers suddenly became wonderfully acquainted with the area cost adjustment, even those who taught in schools that were nearer the Scottish border than the south-east region.

Social services funding is fragmented by its nature. The people whom it helps are not perhaps the most eloquent in arguing their case. Social services are therefore the Cinderella of local government. In North Yorkshire, we have had to overspend more than £3 million to keep social services afloat. That has almost exhausted the reserves. We must now rebuild the budget, stabilise it and reconstitute the reserves.

The reserves are used to deal with not only the demand on social services but natural disasters such as foot and mouth disease. The Selby rail crash happened in my constituency, and the coroner's costs fell on the local authority. Flooding also occurred there. Reconstituting the social services budget and covering the emergency costs are worth another 4.5 per cent. or more.

A curious quirk of the Bellwin formula, which I am sure that the Minister recognises, means that the amount of money that the Government allocate to alleviate emergencies depends on the number of teachers that the local authority employs and their grades. It kicks in after 0.2 per cent. of the budget, which is largely determined by the teachers' pay bill. *[Interruption.]* I await the Minister's wonderful new scheme. I remember his predecessors' words about finding a way through the area cost adjustment. They knew that the north-west passage was somewhere in the ice floes. Boat after boat got stuck in the ice because the north-west passage did not exist. The Minister will find it difficult to negotiate his way when the wonderful sons or daughters of SSA come into existence.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Curry: I am afraid not because I am time limited.

The build-up of pressure on social services is remorseless, and demography partly accounts for that. However, the increase in demand is most acute in children's services; it is not surprising that local authorities decide to play it safe after so many high profile cases of social services failures. The implications are enormous. The Government know that the funding is inadequate, that the inadequacy will continue and that that invites a crisis.

We all know that local authorities currently spend £1 billion above their SSA on social services. The Minister is an intelligent man; he knows that that constitutes a crisis. I am sure that he would have loved to use some of the Department's transport underspending for social services, but the Treasury would not allow him to make the transfer, and he simply got stuffed.

Our case in North Yorkshire is eloquent. We can foresee the pressures. Elderly people whose care was previously funded directly by the Department of Social Security, now the Department for Work and Pensions, under the so-called preserved rights will be funded by the local authority. There are approximately 1,000 cases in North Yorkshire. Let us consider the fees. The weekly fee for ordinary residential care is £229 under preserved rights, but North Yorkshire pays £275; the fee for highly dependent people is £265 under preserved rights, but North Yorkshire pays £300; the nursing fee is £342 under preserved rights but £390 for North Yorkshire.

It is inevitable that care home owners will ask for the equalisation of those fees. North Yorkshire has not paid that money without heavy negotiations with the care homes. In my constituency, care homes gave notice to the local authority to terminate contracts for people, including those in their 90s, who had been in homes for years because the owners believed that they could not make a living, the local authority could not pay more and the victims tended to be the least able to understand the problem or to defend themselves. Those scattered incidents will become more common unless we consider the structure of the services.

The county has received short-term funding through the building capacity and partnership scheme, for which we are grateful. But the Minister talked about the need for certainty. He said that that was why he was reforming his system. Well, we are all sitting here agog, waiting for the next phase of the spending review before we know whether that funding will continue in the third year, so there is no continuity there.

The Government have also issued guidelines on charging. North Yorkshire's local authority has had an extensive range of charging, but some of that will have to be discontinued, as its estimated cost is more than £500,000 over six months. That is just for social services departments. In addition, the rules have changed on the educational standards fund, so that the Government's participation goes down.

Then we have the wonderful, complicated business of the transfer of funding from the local education authorities to the learning and skills councils, which makes the Schleswig-Holstein question look elementary. That has been done in a way that has left a number of local authorities, including Durham and North Yorkshire, having to subsidise education below the levels of their sixth forms because of the way the money has been passed back, after having been taken from the local authority. This means that the counties are going to have to subsidise education in that way.

In general, I welcome the settlement. I look forward—as one who has been there and got the tee-shirt—with eager anticipation to what comes after it. I exhort the Minister to take seriously his own promises about ending the ring fencing, and to urge his Secretary of State to take seriously what he said in Harrogate, which was that he was going to dismantle some of the apparatus—the great gendarmerie—that is supervising best value. That great inspectorate has taken over most of the democratic and accountable functions in large parts of our public services. I look forward to what is to come. As the clown said to Cleopatra:

> "I wish you joy of the worm."

8.46 pm

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): Having listened to my hon. Friend the new Member for Ipswich (Mr. Mole), I am convinced that he is going to be a formidable debater in our proceedings. I was pleased to hear his praise for his predecessor, a fine man who is sadly missed in this place. I encourage my hon. Friend to retain his zest for modernisation, speaking as a member of the Modernisation Committee with a full agenda for modernisation in this Parliament.

Local government is big business. In this financial year, councils in England are spending more than £61 billion on delivering daily the broad range of services with which we are so familiar. The Government send those councils three quarters of that spending power: half in the form of revenue support grant and a quarter in non-domestic rates. So only a quarter of the spending by English councils comes from the councils' own resources—council tax, fees and charges.

Last December's White Paper says that this imbalance of income is less important to address than what the White Paper calls an imbalance of control. Most directly, this phrase refers to local education authorities passing Government grant through to individual schools. My view is that both are vitally important and that it is time to look at more radical ways of giving councils more control over their income. This is a complex issue, but I would like to see the time come when councils collect a range of taxes that are payable locally and spent locally.

How the Government share out their revenue support grant is of intense interest to all hon. Members and their constituents. The present formula, dating back to 1991, is widely discredited. It comprises an obscure set of values grafted on to outdated standard spending assessments, and causes great disparities in funding between councils. These are disparities that this Labour Government say that they cannot justify.

The case for reform of the system was definitively set out in the Government's Green Paper on local government finance, published in September 2000. In general, the Government hold out the prospect of a fairer system with simplified formulas, floors and ceilings, safety valves and a limit on the use by Departments of ring-fenced grant.

For education in particular, the White Paper published in December promises us a standard pupil entitlement that can be tracked through the system from the Government settlement to the individual school budget. The only enhancements to Government grant for education would be for deprivation and for high costs of recruitment and retention. I would strongly welcome a system such as that for distributing Government grant to councils. It is my profound regret that we do not have such a system yet.

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): Does my hon. Friend share my impatience with the slow progress of change? Many of us who represent constituencies that have been adversely affected by the current system have lobbied assiduously for change for the past four or five years. Does my hon. Friend agree that the outcome of the current review is so impatiently awaited that it could be described as a "last chance saloon"?

Mr. Kidney: We have been waiting a long time for change. I am probably more forgiving of the Government's conduct than some hon. Members, because I have followed the subject closely and I know the huge scale of the challenge and the sincere commitment of the Government. My right hon. Friend the Minister has been pressed hard tonight to confirm that the new system will begin from next year's local government settlement, and he has said that it will. May I say to my right hon. Friend that, in working out the details of the new system, I hope that the Government will be open with us. Hon. Members have a keen interest in what has been developed, and rightly so.

It would not be correct to say that the Government made no changes to the present system after the 1997 election. In a written answer to me in 2000, the then Under-Secretary of State at the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Beverley Hughes), informed me that there were 15 changes in the method of determining SSAs for the 1998–99 local government settlement and 20 changes for the 1999–2000 settlement. One of those changes, in respect of children's services within social services, has benefited Staffordshire county council by about £1 million a year.

However, it is in education funding that the greatest dissatisfaction is expressed. That is because of the vastness of the disparities of funding and the importance of the service. Year after year in the 1990s, in the league table of education funding for shire counties, Staffordshire was stuck in last-but-one position. Parents, school governors and teachers would compare our lowly position with the high position every year of Hertfordshire, and would ask why their children's education was worth less than that of children in Hertfordshire.

Many changes have been made since 1997. The Labour Government have increased overall spending on education. The rising tide of funding for capital as well as revenue spending has benefited Staffordshire. For example, in 1997–98 Staffordshire's education SSA was £279.1 million; by 2000–01 it was £336.4 million. In 1997–98, Government grants were £12.9 million; by 2000–01 they were £21.5 million. In 1997–98, capital spending was £7.4 million; by 2000–01, it was £34.2 million.

Frustratingly, the disparity with our friends in Hertfordshire has not closed; it has not even stayed the same, but has continued to grow.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): As a Member representing a Hertfordshire constituency, may I ask the hon. Gentleman to recognise the simple fact that because of higher housing and salary costs, Hertfordshire's local education authority has higher costs?

Hon. Members: Rubbish.

Mr. Kidney: As the hon. Gentleman will have gathered from many sedentary comments, there is not much sympathy for that argument. If the new system is developed according to the Government's intentions, it will include a factor for recruitment and retention costs, which are higher in some parts of the country than in others.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): My hon. Friend rightly referred to Staffordshire's ever present bottom-but-one place in the league table for primary and secondary school SSA. I regret to say that Leicestershire

[David Taylor]

has had an ever present place in the bottom slot. Does he acknowledge that the problems that he described in Staffordshire are even worse in Leicestershire?

Mr. Kidney: There is some variation each year, although Staffordshire and Leicestershire are among those counties that often appear at the bottom of the pile, as my hon. Friend says.

Two years ago, the 40 worst-funded local authorities decided to band together to draw attention to the injustice of the disparities and to the discontentment across the country, and to campaign for a fairer settlement. Whether metropolitan or shire, unitary or non-unitary, and whatever their shade of political control, the authorities formed a fair funding forum. They called themselves F40 for short.

Inside Parliament, I have been willing to make contact with hon. Members from both sides of the House who have constituencies within the boundaries of F40 authorities. Together, those hon. Members and authorities have mobilised a strong force for change. That was vividly shown by the 14,402 representations that the Government received from F40 campaigners in support of the case for change set out in the local government finance Green Paper.

I believe that the F40 campaign has been the stimulus for changes that have already taken place. There has been the Green Paper proposal for a new pupil entitlement, the introduction of floors and ceilings into last year's and now this year's settlement, and the introduction of flat rate payments to all schools.

I pay tribute to all those who have helped to organise the F40 campaign, and to those who have supported it. I also pay tribute to Ministers who have given us a fair hearing, and have acted when convinced of the justice of our cause. Things are changing. I described Staffordshire's perennial position next to bottom of the funding league table for shire counties. I see from a written answer on 15 January that we are now seventh from the bottom.

Tomorrow I face an audience of 400 angry parents, governors and teachers in Stafford. They will tell me that all this is too little, too late. When I say to them that a fair, fully funded new system will be in place for next year's local government settlement, I sincerely hope that the Government do not subsequently let me down. More importantly, I hope that they do not let down those parents, governors and teachers who have waited so long.

8.56 pm

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley): The previous two speeches—my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) is about to skip out as fast as he can—brought back memories. My right hon. Friend and I looked after local government under the last Conservative Government, although that way of putting it is debatable. I can remember much the same complaints and points being made then by different Members representing different parts of the country. I look forward to this breath of fresh air: this new idea that is brightly being proposed. However, if the formula has any indicators or recognition of need—I certainly hope it does—we will have exactly the same thing all over again. I suspect that the sign of the albatross may be appropriate given some of the Minister's comments. I must say that they caused a smile.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon has stolen some of my thunder, especially on social services. In Surrey, social services are at crisis point, particularly the care of the elderly. Reference was made to the value of property in the south-east. Many of the elderly in Surrey are looked after in large, old, high-value homes. They require changes to be made to comply with new regulations, so many of them have closed. It is of more value to the owners to sell them and to use the profit to move to a better life, perhaps in another country with more sunshine—that was said with a touch of bias on my part—than to pay for the necessary changes.

I was intrigued by the fact that the Minister went on at some length about the size of the announced increase. At 7.5 per cent., it is a considerable increase, but that does not necessarily mean that all is simple and clear. Underneath the Minister's smile and spin presentation are some nasties. The obvious one is the specific grants, which have increased annually and been top-sliced. Funds are specifically designated to selected local authorities, apparently at ministerial whim. The volume of specific grant allocation has tripled since 1997, and the Government have voiced woolly aspirations to reverse the trend.

We should reflect on the fact that this year there has been a 40 per cent. increase in educational specific grants, and a 100 per cent. increase in Department of Health specific grants. All those are tied closely to defined expenditure in uniquely prescribed modes, with all the accompanying bureaucracy and expense of guidance, conditions, reports and audit.

The grants are designed in such a way as to knock flat the Government's claim of increased stability and predictability in local Government finance. Local authorities are being forced to rely increasingly on major specific grants that can be withdrawn at any time. Major grants are now to be attached to local public service agreements. Most major authorities are negotiating on those grants now. They will be heavily dependent on fairly unpredictable factors such as road accidents, graffiti and, perhaps, the examination results of small groups of pupils. I suspect that that could present the Minister with another albatross.

The Minister has said quite frequently, as did his predecessor, that freezing the SSA methodology brought stability. That has been questioned by Members on both side of the House today. Many of us think that the Government have refused to consider any desirable changes suggested by local authorities and introduced their own changes, necessitated by their own policies, while pretending that they are data changes rather than methodology changes. As we are well aware, authorities are now faced with the complete unpredictability produced by the new grant formula.

There is no doubt that the Government's paranoid obsession with central control has landed local authorities throughout the country with enormous volumes of regulations and requirements. Along with my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon, I served on a Committee that warned the Government about the so-called best value regime. We told them that the costs would be astronomic, and would not be justified by the results. That warning has been proved correct.

I believe that last year the cost of installing the best value system, with its myriad officials, meetings, consultations, audits and auditors' reports, swallowed many authorities' grant increases. The size of the Audit Commission has more than doubled, the extra being funded by local government. As I said yesterday, I understand that the internal costs of the monitoring of councils by the Department's officials has risen to £600 million, charged to the taxpayer. Local authorities' extra costs have been increased by the replacement of the traditional clear, open committee system with a choice of systems. The Minister said yesterday that there was a choice, but no one wanted it. It was a choice between three bad options, the fourth having been withdrawn. While adding dramatically to authorities' costs, that has led to a diminution in the transparency of decisions and a general reduction in council tax payers' interest in the activities of their local councils.

This extraordinarily centralistic Labour Government purport to be a friend of local government, but clearly are not. I have no doubt that if the trend continues, next year's local government finance report will make sad reading.

Underlying the setting of council tax is the way in which local authorities use the position in relation to the services they provide. They have opportunities to make distinctive economic changes, which the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders)—who is not here now—failed to recognise. I do not think he has heard of the word "efficiencies". I am sure that, on average, Conservative councils will end up charging council tax payers less, but I am also sure that the Minister will ignore that and turn to the percentage argument.

Year by year, Labour Ministers choose to ignore the fact that a small increase in a small council tax may be large in percentage terms and, conversely, a large increase in a huge tax may be small in percentage terms. The percentage argument does not work; what counts in the end is the quality of service received by the public, and the size of the bill that arrives through their doors.

A very simple example has come up. In times gone by, the media regularly took part in the sport of comparing Wandsworth with Lambeth. Interestingly, that comparison is still valid. The cost of a quality household waste collection in Wandsworth is approximately £24 per household. There is a poorer contrast next door because the cost in Lambeth is approximately twice as much per household.

I am not alone in making that comparison. This afternoon I was handed a copy of a cutting from the *South London Press*. It details a visit from the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) to the south London Patmore estate. That estate is split by a boundary line. Part of it is under Labour-controlled Lambeth and part of it is under Tory-controlled Wandsworth. She explained to the *South London Press:*

> "There is a huge difference in the level of service provided between the two boroughs.
>
> The Patmore co-operative is fantastic but they are being let down by the local authority"—

Labour Lambeth.

We must remember that the public, the council tax payer, the firms that pay business rates, are footing the bill. There is not enough recognition by the Government of the need to take the load off local government and to give democratically elected members the opportunity to produce quality services without myriad auditors and other people peering over their shoulders at their every move.

9.6 pm

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): The report essentially does two things. First, it sets out the overall amount of grant that central Government will give to local authorities. There have been expressions of support, certainly from Labour Members, for what the Government have done. The settlement is reasonably generous; the increase is well above the level of inflation. Secondly, it distributes the money among the individual local authorities.

As a Sheffield Member, I can accept the Government's position this year. They have gone for stability in the light of the fact that, next year, fundamental changes, for which we are all waiting, will be made, but from Sheffield's perspective today's settlement is another in a long line of unacceptable and unfair grant distributions, although it is considerably less unacceptable and unfair than the grant distributions before 1997. The Government have brought some improvements to Sheffield's position since that time.

At least we can celebrate the fact this is the last time that we will have to discuss this form of settlement—the standard standing assessment—in the Chamber. We have been promised that next year we will not simply get a settlement derived from tinkering with the formulae but one based on a completely new system. My right hon. Friend the Minister has said that that system must be transparent. It is important not simply that the anoraks can explain it to us as politicians, but that we as politicians can explain it to our constituents. That needs to be a fundamental part of any new system.

We should not be surprised that the present system, with all its regressions and proxies, is not transparent—it was not designed to be. Hon. Members talk about this Government's control freakery. Where were they in the 1990s when that system was invented and developed? It was not transparent because it was meant to hide the fundamental attack by the Conservative Government on local government spending. It was meant to hide the sleights of hand to pass money to councils such as Westminster and Wandsworth. Fundamentally, it was part of the Tory Government's command and control policy towards Labour local authorities.

On one side of the coin, we had the standard spending assessment, which is about not just grant distribution, but controlling spending levels; on the other, we had the arbitrary system of council tax capping. The two went hand in hand. They were a system of control over local authorities. That is why there is no transparency; the system was not just about grant distribution but control. The changes that the Government have introduced are welcome.

Just to show that the current system is nonsense, one of its peculiarities affects Sheffield. The chief executive has written to me about it. I have been critical of the approach of the Liberal Democrat council in Sheffield to housing benefits over the past two years, which has caused chaos and confusion among my constituents. At least the council has got on quickly with introducing the benefits verification framework, and has sought to bear down on benefit fraud. That has led to a reduction in

[Mr. Clive Betts]

benefit claimants, because the people who should not have been claiming benefits in the first place have been taken out. As the council accepts, the direct cost of that process has been borne by central Government, but there is a twist in the tale. Among the myriad formulae and proxies that constitute the SSA, one proxy for poverty and deprivation is housing benefit case loads. Under this wonderful system, if a council bears down on fraud by reducing the number of fraudulent claimants, its area is deemed to be less poor and less deprived, so it gets less grant. That is just one nonsense in the system, but it has cost Sheffield £1.2 million this year. Such stupidities cannot be explained to the public, there is no rationale or reason for them and they must be fundamentally reformed when we get the changes that we are promised.

The new system will doubtless be complicated as well, and my right hon. Friend is right to say that it cannot increase everyone's grant. However, on looking at the totality of the current system, one can instinctively tell that things are wrong with it. I can see no reason why Sheffield and similar authorities receive less grant per head. People can show me the formula and the calculations, but they cannot convince me that the system is right, and I cannot convince my constituents. Given that Sheffield's neighbouring authority, Barnsley, is bouncing along the bottom of the grant table, and given Barnsley's needs compared with authorities that get far more grant per head, the system is clearly unfair and unreasonable and needs to be changed. It is against such benchmarks that we will judge the new system.

One particular and peculiar problem of the current system deprives my local authority of resources. Because of the formula's averaging process, if an authority has areas of poverty and real deprivation, and some of great affluence—Sheffield has such areas—it will probably lose out on grant altogether and get nothing even for the very poor areas. I know that my right hon. Friend is aware of the problem, and I hope that it will be addressed through future arrangements.

On occasions such as this, many hon. Members usually berate the area cost adjustment. I suspect that that has not happened today because this is the last of such arrangements. However, we have not forgotten it and we are still unhappy about it, and we are looking for change. Everyone accepts that the cost of employing staff is higher in some parts of the country—particularly in central London—than in others, but the ACA does not work fairly across the country. We accept that the settlement constitutes a minimal change, but the ACA needs to be reconsidered in future.

Hon. Members have commented on social services, and I intervened on my right hon. Friend the Minister to point out that there were choices for local authorities. In Sheffield, higher priority could be given to important social services spending, rather than to matters such as corporate publicity and the salaries of senior officers. I accept, however, that there are real pressures on the budgets of social services, which may not have always managed their resources well in the past. We have rightly focused attention on large increases for education and on encouraging local authorities to spend that money accordingly; nevertheless, social services have been left behind. I am pleased to hear my right hon. Friend say that the Government are aware of that issue, and I hope that they will develop some real proposals.

There is one final matter that I hope the Government will consider. As I have said, the settlement is generous overall, but generosity can be a two-edged sword. Central Government give local authorities a big share—about 80 per cent.—of local authority budgets, and they control such expenditure to a degree by determining how much a local authority will be allowed to spend. That causes enormous gearing problems. If a local authority decides to increase its budget and therefore to increase council tax, and if council tax constitutes only 20 per cent. of its spending, the 4:1 gearing ratio proves a real disincentive to responding to the wishes of the local electorate by spending extra money to improve local services.

Ring fencing has been raised by other hon. Members. I believe that there will be a problem in the long term arising from the fact that central Government control 80 per cent. of local authority grant, compared with the 20 per cent. that comes from council tax. Moreover, central Government increasingly seek to determine how the grant that they give to local authorities is spent.

Those two factors are fundamental and crucial. They go to the heart of local democracy and the freedoms of local authorities. They are also central to efforts to get people re-engaged with local politics. I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister will not be able to deal tonight with the problems that remain, but I hope that the Government will address them in the future. I look forward to Ministers returning to the House on a future occasion with proposals to tackle the problems that I have described.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If all hon. Members who wish to speak in the debate can confine their remarks to about seven minutes, they will be successful. If they cannot, they will not be able to speak in the debate.

9.15 pm

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I shall take note of your request.

I shall begin by welcoming the headline increase of 7.9 per cent that has been proposed for Hertfordshire county council. That reflects the record increase in the county's school population, the growing elderly population, and the higher costs that the county faces. I am sure that the last factor is something that the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) and I could discuss at greater length, given the opportunity.

It is good that the Department has listened to the representations from me and other hon. Members with constituencies in Hertfordshire, and from county council officers. It has recognised our needs and the pressures that we face, but I hope that the Minister will understand why I was somewhat disappointed by the subsequent imposition of the floors and ceilings cap. That has meant that Hertfordshire will get £2.6 million less than it sought.

Given that the Department listened to representations, discussed people's needs and looked at the pressures involved, I fail to understand why it then imposed a simple, crude cap in a rather arbitrary way. I do not think that that has helped the process, as I hope that the Minister will understand.

The result is simple: Hertfordshire county council's budget has been reduced by £2.6 million. That includes a reduction of £1.6 million in the schools budget, which could not have come at a worse time. Hertfordshire has one of the fastest-growing school populations of any county in the country, and that puts considerable pressure on school places.

Every week, I receive letters from distraught parents who are trying to get their youngsters places in nursery, primary or secondary schools. The rising school population and the funding that is about to be made available mean that there will be more letters and more disappointed parents and pupils.

The problem is compounded by the teacher shortages that we suffer. Those shortages are evident at primary level, and secondary school head teachers in my area tell me that the problem is also being felt at secondary level, especially in Hertford. That reflects one of the elements that the Department originally recognised—the fact that, in Hertfordshire and the other home counties, it is extremely difficult to retain senior staff.

The third reason why the budget cut has come at an especially bad time for our schools is that the pupil-teacher ratio in Hertfordshire is bad and getting worse. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) has rightly and recently made it clear that pupil-teacher ratios in Hertfordshire, unlike other parts of the country, have worsened over the past five years. Indeed, they have worsened every year since this Government came to power. I say that with considerable regret, which I hope that the Minister will understand.

The settlement involves a cut of £1.6 million in the schools budget. Contrary to the Government's promise in 1997, if the budget cut is implemented things are only going to get worse in Hertfordshire schools.

Two other uncertainties remain, and I would welcome any response from the Minister with regard to them. The first is related to previously housed asylum seekers, an issue that was raised before. I know that ceilings have been imposed on the costs involved, as other hon. Members have mentioned. The difficulty in Hertfordshire is that there is a £1 million gap between the cost to the county and the money that is forthcoming from the Government. The ceiling has been relaxed in Oxfordshire and for London authorities, and I should welcome any indication from the Minister of a similar flexibility for Hertfordshire.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) referred to preserved rights. I do not claim to be expert in the finer details of local government finance, but I understand that this relates to elderly people who were in residential homes before 1993. The county council is quite prepared to accept responsibility for these people, and has done so, but on the basis that the Government are willing to provide the funds. At this point, the funds from the Government are £2.2 million short. I know that the county is making representations to the Minister, and I ask him to bear those in mind.

The cost of running services in Hertfordshire and other home counties is high and is rising faster than in other parts of the country. The pressures are great, particularly with regard to our school population. I was pleased that the Government listened to our representations about the SSA, but deeply disappointed that they were ignored, given the arbitrary nature of the floors and ceilings mechanism. The mechanism is crude; it contradicts the aim of matching spending to need. In Hertfordshire, it will betray every child in our schools.

9.21 pm

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall), who is no longer in his seat, I intend to be parochial and raise the dire situation faced by Durham county council this year.

The Minister has referred to an average settlement of more than 7 per cent. Durham's allocation is just over 5 per cent., one of the lowest settlements of any county council in the country. Durham county council has always been moderate and responsible. Even during the 1980s, a time of lunacy in some London boroughs, Durham was a responsible council that worked within its means. It went through some tough times, with the closures of the steelworks at Consett and the Durham coalfield, but it came through and worked in partnership with local business and local people. This year, however, it finds itself in a depressing situation.

Social services and education have been mentioned tonight. Durham, like many other county councils, is facing pressures due to the growing numbers of elderly people in the community. That is exacerbated in County Durham. Its long industrial past has meant a legacy of industrial-related diseases to elderly people, and they need intensive care from social services.

The other pressure is children's services, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders). He is right to say that those services are expensive and there is no control over them. Durham's intake this year is up by about 30 per cent., and the council cannot budget for that. A colleague of mine on Newcastle city council, Colin Gray, the chair of finance, used to say that it would be cheaper to send someone to Eton or Harrow than it would be to have them looked after by the local authority. Education services are very expensive and councils such as Durham have very little control over the number of children in their care.

It has been announced that Durham will receive an additional £1.8 million mainly to deal with bed blocking, which has been a problem for Durham and most other councils this winter. That compares with last year's figure of £1.6 million, which does not bring a great deal of joy to the county council. It has been estimated that to deal with its social services problem, the council needs about £10 million. That raises a bigger problem, faced by many councils, of how to make the connection between councils, social services departments and the health service, because £10 million is a drop in the ocean to the health service but not to a council such as County Durham.

The council is making some difficult decisions this year about the closure of homes. It is undertaking rationalisation that the present leadership realises is long overdue. The council is also making a capital investment of £10 million in new provision. That capital receipt came from the council's share in the sale of Newcastle airport. The council is facing up to its social services problems and tackling them.

In Durham, education offers a good example of non-joined-up government. Last year, the county council received £2.76 million in education budget support grant.

[Mr. Kevan Jones]

That was withdrawn this year so it will be difficult for the council to meet the standard funds for investment in schools. That is sad. In my constituency and throughout Durham, since Labour came to power in 1997 there has been some good capital investment. For example, almost £3 million has been spent on Pelton Roseberry school and we can see the difference that has made. However, Durham will have to find that funding this year.

Furthermore, money has been taken from council budgets for the learning and skills councils, as has been mentioned; £850,000 has been taken from Durham county council's budget that was not spent on sixth form provision. The result is that primary and secondary schools will suffer because that money was arbitrarily taken from the budget. When I made representations to the Minister about that, he said that it was a matter for the Department for Education and Skills. However, I plead with the Government to use joined-up thinking on such decisions.

Durham is not an irresponsible council. It has had to take many difficult decisions during the past few years but we shall face a record rise in council tax this year, whether we like it or not. According to my estimate, after today's announcement, grants of about £300,000 will be allocated to Durham county council. That is a drop in the ocean when education has lost £2.76 million alone, apart from the pressures on social services.

I plead with the Minister to consider Durham's case. The problems will not go away and the council will find it difficult not to impose council tax rises of 10 per cent. or more. Several hon. Members have referred to the new system that will apply next year. I accept that, but I agree—with some trepidation—with the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) who pointed out that we are trying to find a system that will please everybody, but clearly we cannot do so.

Durham faces a tough year and local politicians will have to take some hard decisions. I plead with Ministers to reconsider Durham's case. We will not be able to avoid a council tax rise of at least 10 per cent.

9.28 pm

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): There are parts of four councils in my constituency: two district councils, one unitary council and the county council. In our local newspaper, all the predictions are that although council tax may rise by less than 10 per cent. in one or two places, the rise for the councils in my constituency and for neighbouring authorities will be much more than 10 per cent.

The Minister might have given me good news for the district councils although I am not sure. If the news is not as good as I thought, I shall write him another letter.

I shall concentrate on the county council and the unitary authority and, yes, I shall speak about social services again. I make no apology for being repetitive because they are so important. Last year, throughout the south-west region, 13 of the 15 authorities spent 72 per cent. above the SSA for children's services, so we cannot point the finger at individual authorities.

I am a member of Poole unitary council. I promise that I will not go through the budget line by line—I shall choose a few examples. Poole is a small authority and, as several hon. Members have pointed out, that makes things doubly hard: just one change has a big impact. Spending on children's services is an enormous 70 per cent. above SSA. In the social services budget for 2001–02, with an SSA of about £23 million, Poole unitary authority is heading for a £2 million overspend. That might not sound a huge sum, but it certainly is in relation to the budget. That obviously signals tremendous problems for next year.

Many hon. Members have mentioned the problems in social services. We cannot take risks with our precious young people. We must respond to real-life problems. I cannot believe that the Minister is actually asking us to look for cuts in the social services budget when it is so tight.

On Friday I had a meeting, along with other MPs, with Poole unitary authority. I asked why, when most authorities were reporting an overspend on social services, Poole's overspend was so large proportionately. The answer was that there were special factors, such as an inability to find enough foster parents and a consequent need to buy in extra help, and the fact that some children needed very expensive education.

Poole, as an authority, has a low council tax. It is in the lowest quartile for the country. It is one of the lowest spending authorities throughout the south-west—it has been in Liberal Democrat control for the past 10 years. One cannot really accuse Poole authority of being an irresponsible high spender, but what is it to do unless there is some response to all the cries, from throughout the country, about the particularly severe situation regarding social services?

I beg the Minister to listen tonight. We hope for better with the new formula, but the crisis is with us now. We cannot afford to wait another year before that may be addressed. I put that plea for all the councils with the same problem, because it is so serious and the individual cases are harrowing. I shall be in a position to vote, and I certainly cannot vote for any shortages on the social services budget.

We are short of time so I shall change topic rather abruptly and move on to fridges for a while, to illustrate my point. I repeat that Poole is a small unitary authority. I thought that there was a mistake in an e-mail that I received tonight, but I can now see that the figures do add up. Poole has been allocated £17,000 to store all the surplus fridges, and officers from Poole unitary authority have told me that that amount is about £180,000 short. That is a very big sum for a small unitary authority.

I thought that that figure was wrong, but the Local Government Association predicts that storage of surplus fridges will cost between £60 and £65 million—10 times the £6 million that has been allocated. Whereas I responded in a similar way to the Minister when I read that e-mail, thinking that it was wrong, I now, having heard the LGA figures, think that it is right.

The question for my council and many other councils is whether they should budget for costs of £180,000 or whatever and build that figure into the council tax because they have to find that money, or hope that the Minister will monitor the costs closely and address the matter if the costs exceed £17,000, or whatever amount each authority has been allocated.

Our biggest concern must be the fact that there will be high percentage increases in council tax. It was refreshing when the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire

(Mr. Moss) said that the high percentage increases in council tax would be down to the Government. In my area, we usually find that if it is a Liberal Democrat-controlled council, various leaflets say that it is the Liberal Democrats' fault. If it is a Conservative-controlled council, those same leaflets say that it is the Government's fault. It is bad that we have a blame culture.

The only point that I want to raise on reform of the area cost adjustment is that it must be clear, open and transparent so that local councillors are genuinely accountable to their electorate, which they are not at the moment. At the moment it is a case of who tells the best story and how many times. We have some amazing graphs that go off the pages referring to council tax increases in Liberal Democrat councils, but at the end of the day my authority and Dorset county council have relatively low council taxes, so that is not the issue.

However, a large percentage increase is an issue for many elderly people and others on fixed incomes. It is not easy to say that the problem is that we have not spent enough over the years on our services and that we have got to up the money to cover the social services this year. That really hurts those at the other end of the range—the elderly and the vulnerable. We need much more help than is offered in the local government financial settlement for 2002–03, and I urge the Minister to consider funding for children's social services in particular.

9.35 pm

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I am grateful to the House for the opportunity to contribute to this debate. There is a certain symmetry in being the back marker in this debate because Cambridgeshire has the dubious distinction of receiving the lowest SSA per head of any shire county.

I welcome the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Mole). We at the other the other end of the A14, as part of the Cambridge to Ipswich corridor, would probably be happy to trade a bit of Cambridge's knowledge, industry and expertise if Cambridge United received a bit of footballing expertise in return. He mentioned higher education expertise, and I recognise that that matters. Given that he thought Cardinal Wolsey was the last person to promote such expertise, perhaps he should have a word with the Lord Chancellor, who seems to see himself in like guise.

I want gently to chide the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones) and, to be evenhanded, my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) on their contributions to the debate. It is very interesting to consider the respective SSA per head of shire counties. Hertfordshire, at £774 per head, and Durham, at £771 per head, contrast dramatically with Cambridgeshire at £647 per head for 2002–03. If my hon. Friend reads the report of my little contribution, he will find that one of the pressures on school places in Hertfordshire is that there are those in my constituency, just over the border from Hertfordshire, who are trying to place their children in schools in Hertfordshire, rather than in Cambridgeshire. They do so because Hertfordshire has £270 per pupil more to spend on schools than we do in Cambridgeshire.

Although my hon. Friend may claim a fast-rising population and high relative costs, the population of South Cambridgeshire is among the fastest growing anywhere in the country. The cost of employment, housing and living in Cambridgeshire are at least as high as in many parts of Bedfordshire, Essex and, indeed, Hertfordshire, including Hertford and Stortford, yet those counties receive the area cost adjustment, whereas Cambridgeshire does not.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) remarked on the lack of comment on the area cost adjustment in the debate. He wondered why that was—if for no other reason, it was because I had not spoken at that time. The Minister will recall that the first debate on the Adjournment that I was able to obtain in the House took place in July 1997 and was on the area cost adjustment. One of the more recent—not the most recent—debates on the area cost adjustment took place in January 2001. In response to the debate in July 1997, the Minister said:

> "I assure him"—

he was referring to me—

> "that we shall study the further surveys carefully and discuss them, as a matter of urgency, with the local government associations. We shall not be precluded from taking decisions at the earliest opportunity about possible adjustments that might be appropriate."—[*Official Report*, 18 July 1997; Vol. 298, c. 670.]

In January 2001, three and a half years later, the then Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Beverley Hughes), changed the Government's position. She said:

> "We are not rushing to make hasty solutions".—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 30 January 2001; Vol. 362, c. 14WH.]

All that was in pursuance of the commitment made by the then Leader of the Opposition—now the Prime Minister—on 30 April 1997, days before the general election. He said:

> "We will review the area cost adjustment in time for the next financial year".

I am afraid that the Minister must understand why my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May), the shadow Secretary of State, has pressed that matter a little. We have found in the past that, when we have been told that something will be reviewed in time for the next financial year, four years have gone by and nothing has been done. Something must be done about the area cost adjustment. It must reflect costs accurately across the country. The kind of cliff-edge effects that currently occur are unsustainable. Respective costs across the country must be acknowledged.

I shall not continue to describe how that change should take place. However, I shall say two things. First, the grants must be disaggregated to district council level—with respect to my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss), there are big differences between his constituency and mine in Cambridgeshire. It is deeply unsatisfactory that a fast-growing district council, such as South Cambridgeshire district council which is in an area of national importance in terms of development and infrastructure, should have a 2.3 per cent. increase in grant. Not only the county council but the district council—which has such a large planning function—have been woefully under-provided with grant by the Government given the councils' responsibilities.

Methodology may not have changed, but the data have. It is unsatisfactory, from our point of view in Cambridgeshire, that we have seen another increase in area cost adjustment factors, which had the net effect of

[Mr. Andrew Lansley]

taking £300,000 out of Cambridgeshire's relative allocation compared with what would have been allocated in 2000-01 when the previous factors applied.

The Minister referred to the importance of using the latest data. Data from 16 October 2001 was used for the council tax. Therefore, when the local authority's resources were assessed for the purposes of grant, up-to-date data were being used. However, when population was assessed, estimates for 30 June 2000 were used. For somewhere such as South Cambridgeshire, the difference between the estimate of a 1.3 per cent. increase in population per annum and the actual increase in population of more than 1.5 per cent. meant that that increase was not reflected in the allocation of grant.

Many hon. Members have spoken about the implications for council tax. I agree with what was said about the stress being put on local authorities as council tax reflects an increasing proportion of the cost of providing services. The same is true in relation to the national non-domestic rate, because of a 9.8 per cent. increase this year. The product of that rate is a further burden on businesses.

Cambridgeshire county council is currently consulting on the basis of a 9.8 per cent. council tax increase, and the district council is considering anything up to a 40 per cent. increase—from £50 to £70. We discussed the police, who are considering an increase of 20 or 30 per cent. to sustain their position. The net result could be an overall increase of £95 in band D council tax this year, which is the equivalent of nearly £2 per week.

As my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Cambridgeshire rightly said in his opening speech, a very high proportion of the additional money being provided to those on fixed incomes—through the basic state pension, for example—could be taken up next year by the increases in council tax, much of which is a product of distortions in the Government grant distribution system.

9.44 pm

Mr. Moss: With the leave of the House, Mr. Speaker, I begin by complimenting the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Mole) on his maiden speech. He spoke authoritatively on local government finance and shared his experience and expertise of local government with us. He was gracious and generous in his comments about his predecessor who was an assiduous Member of the House and achieved much for his constituency. The hon. Gentleman showed that he is a worthy successor.

The debate has been useful. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) that, given the enormity of the money involved as a proportion of total Government spending, it is ridiculous that we have only three hours to debate local government finance when we spend almost a week on the Budget.

Many hon. Members took the Minister up on his promises, especially to review the SSA and, by implication, the area cost adjustment. I intended to mention my experience of the area cost adjustment in Cambridge, but my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) took care of that authoritatively. It makes no sense to have the cliff-edge syndrome, as he described it, in which one side of the county boundary receives substantially more money per pupil than the other. That needs to be addressed. The hon. Members for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) and for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) also mentioned that.

The Minister said that the SSA is unfortunately so complicated that only boffins in anoraks can understand it and, by implication, that he, perhaps, did not. *[Interruption.]* If any hon. Member can tell me that they understand the formula in the report, I shall willingly take my cheque book out. It is extremely complicated and we wish the Minister good speed in coming up with something that is agreeable to all. I suspect, however, that he is setting himself an impossible task and that those who have suffered low SSAs will be disappointed when the fruits of the reorganisation do not materialise as they expect.

There were recurrent themes on both sides of the Chamber. The crisis in social services was emphasised in particular. We all know that that is a problem not just for local government funding and local government, but for government as a whole. We would be more than happy to co-operate with the Government to consider that in a broader perspective so that social services are given the right funding without necessarily making councils rob Peter to pay Paul.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Sir P. Beresford) and the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) mentioned best value. My hon. Friend also raised problems of ring-fenced funding, as did the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe. The important point was made that if 80 per cent. of local government money is funded by the Government and 15 per cent. of that goes to specific grants, that reduces significantly the flexibility of every council to pursue its responsibility to ensure that it has a balanced approach to the provision of services across the board.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon also mentioned the transfer of funding for post-16 education. That has not been calculated correctly. I know that the Government have made some adjustments from the initial announcements made late last year, but some councils still believe that they have been penalised because of the inadequate compensation. The floors and ceilings mechanism was not universally welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House. It is possible that the Government are devising a crude way to even out differences, especially in relation to the area cost adjustment.

We will not seek to divide the House on the report. We want money to go to local councils as soon as possible and cannot understand why the Liberal Democrats want to vote against the Government. Perhaps the Government should sit on their hands. Liberal Democrats might then have the difficulty of explaining to their local councils why there is no money in the budgets next week.

9.49 pm

Mr. Raynsford: With the leave of the House, Mr. Speaker, I should like to reply. We have had a good, thorough and extensive debate, which has covered a wide range of issues. I shall try to do justice in the short time available to the many speeches that we have heard.

The hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss), speaking for the official Opposition, deftly tried to damn me either way by picking up my remark about the complexity of the system and the fact that it was probably only intelligible to anoraks; he then suggested that probably even I did not understand it. If I agree, I condemn myself for not understanding the system; if I do not, I condemn myself as an anorak. Either way, I cannot get out of that. *[Interruption.]* I ask Members to wait until the end of the speech before judging.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall), who opened the debate from the Back Benches, welcomed the real-terms increase in grant and highlighted some specific questions from Leicester, particularly the addition of 488 pupils to the school register since the annual census, largely as a result of the influx of Somalis from Holland. That unique and special problem will be considered by the education funding strategy group. However, we cannot make an immediate change to a formula which has been generally agreed and will not be changed in the course of this year. We understand the problem and shall obviously look at it.

The hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders), speaking for the Liberal Democrats, acknowledged that the grant increase was generous overall, but expressed concern, as many Members did, about particular difficulties in relation to social services. I acknowledged that issue in my opening remarks. The hon. Gentleman highlighted failings in the grant distribution formula which, as he knows, we have pledged to replace. My hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Mr. Mole), in an impressive maiden speech, paid tribute to his predecessor, Jamie Cann, whom we all miss; he was an assiduous Member of Parliament, as well as an assiduous and dedicated leader of Ipswich borough council before coming here. We all miss him. My hon. Friend highlighted the importance of community leadership and spoke with knowledge and authority about the financial pressures on local authorities; I am sure that he will contribute authoritatively to many future debates on the subject in the House.

The right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), in a characteristically thoughtful speech, remembered his own days in the post that I currently occupy. I have been thinking about him; when I went to meet the LGA after the publication of the provisional settlement, it began by reminding me of its meeting with the right hon. Gentleman six years ago, which he opened with the words, "We've all been stuffed by the Treasury." I am pleased that that was not the experience this year.

Mr. Curry: I am delighted to have afforded much innocent pleasure over many years to many people in local government, who no doubt have a great nostalgia for the Minister who was honest. The right hon. Gentleman and I have shared the occasional glass of something and the occasional meal. Now and again, we have mused about the behaviour of the Treasury; in those conversations, I have not noticed a sharp difference in view between us.

Mr. Raynsford: I look forward to continuing this conversation with the right hon. Gentleman, perhaps over another glass of wine one evening.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) made a powerful case for the reform of the standard spending assessment to end the disparity in the treatment of different counties, particularly his own. That is a complex issue, which I shall pick up when I deal with the contributions of other hon. Members. The hon. Member for Mole Valley (Sir P. Beresford) criticised the best value regime, which is not surprising, given that he was very much committed to the discredited compulsory competitive tendering regime, which it replaced. There is no appetite in local government for returning to CCT. We shall continue to refine and improve the best value regime; as it beds in, and as we cut out unnecessary complexity which, I accept, has been present in the early stages, there will be genuine benefits in driving up services.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) made a passionate case for the reform of the SSA system, which has particularly disadvantaged areas of great need in south Yorkshire and neighbouring areas. He mentioned a perverse incentive in the current housing benefit arrangements, and said that reduction in fraud could reduce local authorities' grant entitlement. We accept that that is a fair point and we will examine it in the formula review.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones) highlighted the difficulties facing his county. There is no question but that there is real pressure there in relation to social services, which I have acknowledged in discussion with him. The grant increase for County Durham is 5.6 per cent. It is a little lower than the shire county average of 6.1 per cent., but it is a good increase, well above inflation, and compares with 3.2 per cent. last year. It involves an additional £15.8 million for County Durham.

The hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) drew attention to social services pressures in her area and also to the matter of refrigerators. The £6 million Government grant is designed to cover the cost of storage of fridges up until March this year—only in the period from January to March—and should not be confused with an annual figure. We will consider the position urgently and determine what further action is required beyond March to help deal with the issue. I hope that that reassures the hon. Lady.

The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) also presented the problems facing county councils and in doing so highlighted the dilemma. Whatever changes we make to the formula, there will inevitably be some authorities that receive less than others, either per capita or in an overall figure. That is the nature of a formula system for distribution of grant.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that a formula system is better than an arbitrary system of allocation by ministerial fiat. He has drawn attention to the problem that arises when a formula is used. I do not underestimate the difficulties of trying to create a fairer and better system in the future than the one that we have at present, but I believe that we can make progress in simplifying the system, making it slightly less opaque than it is, and addressing some of the genuine unfairnesses that are inherent in the current arrangement.

The report that we have debated this evening confirms a generous settlement which gives an average increase of 7.5 per cent. in funding for local authorities in England. Some speakers criticised aspects of the settlement or expressed concerns about the current position in their constituency, but almost all acknowledged that this year's settlement is generous. It is not a panacea for all local

[Mr. Raynsford]

authority problems. We recognise the very real pressures that local authorities face, not least in respect of social services, but it is a settlement that gives real-term increases in grant to the vast majority of authorities and a guaranteed increase of at least inflation for every authority in England.

How very different was the experience that local government had under the previous Government. The average grant increase in the last five years of the Tory Government was just 2 per cent. per annum—just 2 per cent. per annum over that five-year period. Since 1997, we have seen an average of 6 per cent. per annum, and this year the increase is 7.5 per cent.

This is a good settlement from a Government who are committed to local government and to forging a new relationship with local government. We recognise the hugely important contribution that local government makes to meeting local needs and delivering services to people in its area. We are determined to work in partnership with local government and to help local authorities meet their responsibilities and deliver to their residents the high quality services that their residents expect and need.

We are making real progress in establishing a far better and more positive relationship with local government—a relationship based on trust, the removal of unnecessary red tape and bureaucracy, giving greater freedoms to local authorities, and putting that in the context of a performance management system that will drive up standards. The ultimate aim is to deliver high quality services to people in need. All of us, whether from the local government or central Government perspective, want high quality services to be delivered to the people whom we represent. This is a good settlement, which I commend to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 286, Noes 40.

Division No. 149] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Corston, Jean
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug

O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive

Southworth, Helen
Speller, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Angela Smith and
Dan Norris.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Breed, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Carmichael, Alistair
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*

Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Heath, David
Hermon, Lady
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Keetch, Paul
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
Moore, Michael
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*

Sanders, Adrian
Shepherd, Richard
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny

Webb, Steve
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. A. J. Beith and
Mrs. Annette L. Brooke.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Local Government Finance Report (England) 2002–03 (HC 545), which was laid before this House on 28th January, be approved.

PETITIONS

Eye Clinics

10.12 pm

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): I am particularly grateful for the opportunity to present this petition tonight on behalf of the people of Bromsgrove and Redditch. They are concerned about the prospective loss of their eye clinics, especially given that they raised some £70,000 to pay for eye treatment to be delivered locally. The petition of the people of Bromsgrove and Redditch declares:

Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust proposes to transfer the eye clinics at the Alexandra Hospital, Redditch and the Princess of Wales Community Hospital, Bromsgrove to Kidderminster and Worcester; that the eye scanners used in both clinics were bought by funds raised through a public appeal to the residents of Bromsgrove and Redditch, organised by the *Bromsgrove Advertiser/Messenger* and *Redditch Advertiser*; and they object to the loss of this valuable service.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Secretary of State for Health to review the proposals and ensure that the eye clinics remain in the communities they were established to serve.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Crown Post Office

10.13 pm

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): This petition is presented by the residents of Croydon and others, supported by more than 4,000 people. It declares that the petitioners object to the Post Office's proposal to close east Croydon's Crown post office and states:

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to take appropriate action to ensure East Croydon Crown Post Office remains open.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Inner Cities

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dan Norris.]*

10.14 pm

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): It gives me great pleasure to have secured this debate, and I want to focus on how we should strive to break the cycle of poverty in our inner cities. Poverty manifests itself in a number of ways: lack of access to good-quality housing, poor health, high levels of unemployment, low rates of pay, high crime rates, and poor educational performance. Unlike the Tories, the Labour party believes that poverty breeds further poverty, that unemployment can lead to crime, and that living in poor, overcrowded housing can result in poor health and have a detrimental effect on a child's education. Each aspect of poverty is linked, and we cannot effectively tackle one aspect without tackling all of them.

I want to use the debate to focus on the effects of unemployment on our inner cities, and to consider how poverty affects pensioners, who have passed employment age, and children, who have yet to reach it. I shall focus on my constituency, but I shall also use our experiences in Glasgow to examine the position more broadly in Scotland and in the United Kingdom as a whole. Above all, I want to use this opportunity to pose questions and to offer solutions.

Our children are our future, so tackling childhood poverty is crucial, not least because our children need and deserve to grow up in a secure and protective environment, and because childhood experience lays the foundations for later life. Children's experiences and their outcomes in later life are fundamentally influenced by their family circumstances. Children growing up in low-income households are more likely to have poor health, do badly at school, get involved in crime and later in life become unemployed and earn lower wages. That is why I welcome the pre-Budget report "Tackling child poverty".

I welcome the excellent start that the Government have made. Families with children in the poorest fifth of the population are now on average £1,700 a year better off. There have been increases in child benefit, and the introduction of the children's tax credit has been announced. There are now 1.2 million fewer children in poverty as a result of the measures that we have introduced since 1997. If we are to reach our target of halving child poverty by 2010, we must ensure that this programme continues, that progress is regularly monitored, and that the initiatives are implemented as a result of changing circumstances.

I should now like to consider how poverty affects our pensioners. My constituency has one of the highest concentrations of people aged over 60, not only in the UK but in Europe. Almost a third of the electorate are over the age of 60. I wholeheartedly welcome initiatives such as the minimum income guarantee and the pensioner credit, which have taken some of our poorest pensioners out of poverty.

Although I realise that the introduction of the stakeholder pension will ensure that future pensioners have an income that will protect them, a great many elderly people in Glasgow, Anniesland do not have any pension other than the state pension. The Government must ensure not only that we protect future pensioners, but that the needs of today's pensioners are recognised and addressed.

Approaches are being taken to ensure that successful regeneration is shared by our citizens and, in particular, helps unemployed people get back into work. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Ann McKechin) has an Adjournment debate on Friday, and she will draw attention to the problem of unemployment in Glasgow. I shall focus on a few key areas.

I have had a long-standing interest in schemes designed to reduce unemployment, particularly the intermediate labour market and transitional employment initiatives. The Wise group pioneered the ILM approach in Glasgow some 18 years ago, and local authority housing was insulated and improved at the same time. From 1996 to 2001, ILM projects in Glasgow ensured that some 7,500 long-term unemployed people found jobs.

Glasgow's economy has been doing rather well in recent years. The number of jobs in the city rose by 8 per cent. between 1996 and 2001—from 346,000 to 375,000, which is an increase of 29,000 jobs. Over the same period, the number of jobs in Scotland as a whole grew by only 0.2 per cent. Registered unemployment in Glasgow has fallen from 32,000 in 1996 to the current figure of 18,000, which is a fall of 44 per cent. compared with 34 per cent. for Scotland as a whole.

Despite that initially positive picture, it must be remembered that the starting point is poor. The unemployment rate in Anniesland is 6.9 per cent., more than double the national average, and some areas in Glasgow still have some of the worst unemployment levels in the United Kingdom. Despite a recent upturn in its economic performance, parts of Glasgow are missing out. In its deprived areas there are social inclusion partnerships, known as SIPs, where additional help is given. There are two SIP areas in Anniesland, but that is not enough.

In some parts of Glasgow the average employment rate is only 33 per cent., compared with a Scottish average of 78 per cent. The employment rate in Glasgow as a whole is only 58 per cent. Why are parts of the city not benefiting from the recent economic upturn? One reason is that about half the jobs belong to commuters, who work in Glasgow but do not live there. The other main reason, on which I shall focus, relates to the large number of people receiving some form of income support.

In 1999, 19,000 people were officially registered unemployed but more than double that number—39,000—were claiming incapacity benefit. A further 19,000 were receiving lone parent premium, and 42,000 were receiving other benefits. That amounts to a grand total of 119,000. The officially defined unemployed form only 16 per cent. of the total number of unemployed people in the city.

That is partly due to the last Government's manipulation of the unemployment figures. They deliberately moved people out of those figures, and into the benefit figures. Those unregistered unemployed people would be better described as the hidden unemployed. Incapacity benefit claimants, in particular, significantly outnumber the officially registered unemployed in Glasgow. Even if we accept that many of the hidden unemployed could work given suitable support and opportunities and that real medical, physical or social reasons prevent many others from entering the labour market, that still leaves a large number who are unemployed and capable of work, but not included in the official unemployment figures.

Some may ask whether this really matters. I happen to think that it does. If Glasgow's employment rate is to get anywhere near the Scottish average, we must find ways of helping the hidden unemployed to get into work. Glasgow needs more of its people to be actively engaged in the labour market.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): Is not one of the barriers the high rent and council tax in Glasgow? The loss of rebates is a serious disincentive to becoming employed. Glasgow city council has come up with a useful proposal that would allow them to be continued for those who stay in work, but a council tax cut is also needed. Glasgow needs a fair share of the money that is available.

John Robertson: That is an excellent point. It is part of the reason why people get into such a state with the benefits system. My hon. Friend has obviously read part of my speech, although I did not let him see it in advance.

At present most schemes designed to help unemployed people are restricted to the officially registered unemployed, but in Glasgow, as I have said, there are far more unregistered unemployed residents. Many more unemployed people, both registered and unregistered, need to work in the city to get near the Scottish average employment rate. Does it make sense for so many Government and European schemes to be artificially restricted to helping jobseekers alone?

There are some signs that things are changing—for example, the new deal for the disabled with its emphasis on incapacity benefit claimants, and the action teams for jobs with their remit to assist the workless. But given the nature of unemployment in Glasgow and the number of unregistered unemployed people, we need more flexibility to use existing systems or new programmes to help that large group.

In the 1990s, the economic development agenda in Glasgow tended to focus on measures designed to reduce the official unemployment rate. That agenda needs 21st century ideas to concentrate on a more subtle strategy designed to increase the city's employment rate. Glasgow's economic potential cannot be effectively maximised until we get significantly more of our residents into work. Getting on one's bike to look for work is not the answer for those people. The last Conservative Government caused the problem and the Labour Government need to solve it. ILMs and transitional employment initiatives have a key role in implementing that agenda by focusing on those furthest removed from the labour market—what some call the hard-core, long-term unemployed.

Some pioneering developments involving ILMs are being developed by Glasgow city council in partnership with other local agencies. A proposal called the Glasgow full employment initiative is being developed, which aims to create full employment in specified deprived parts of the city. Each scheme would cover 400 to 500 households.

Within full employment areas, there would be a commitment that individuals or indeed whole households would be offered a regular job with continued after-care support, or a subsidised job with a full wage through an ILM scheme. They would be offered quality support and advice to overcome barriers to employment and full access to and integrated support from all existing employment services already available in the area.

If people later lost their job, the FEA would start them straight away in other alternative employment, which may be on an ILM scheme. The aim is that people will never again have to go on the dole. In effect, the FEAs would be offering a job guarantee. I would be interested to know whether the Minister can find ways to support that initiative.

The work of the FEAs will also involve proposals to the Scottish Executive and the UK Government for a pilot actively to use unemployment benefit and/or income support in a benefits transfer package. Technically, the legislation already exists to do that. At present, that is only available to registered unemployed working links clients. Permission will be sought for a benefits transfer pilot to be available to all the unemployed people with the FEA—registered and non-registered unemployed.

Glasgow's unemployment problems cannot be easily solved without changes at a national level in terms of the welfare structure and the avoidance of benefit traps. However, that does not mean that nothing should be tried locally to achieve full employment in deprived areas.

I think the Minister will agree that we need more flexible and innovative local labour market measures. We need fewer one-size-fits-all, top-down imposed approaches and we need to break down the artificial barriers that mean that help is available only to the registered unemployed and not to the non-registered unemployed. We need more freedom to explore the active use of unemployment and income support payments to meet individual employment and training needs.

There is no quick fix or magic cure as regards the best way to relieve poverty for the young, the old or, for that matter, the long-term, hard-core unemployed. For those furthest removed from the labour market, we will continue to need an array of different approaches and measures. However, I am sure that within the economic development toolkit there will always be a place for ILM or transitional employment type measures. The Minister will, I hope, be interested in what I have said about Glasgow's latest efforts in that regard.

The old adages, "No experience, no work" and "You need a job to get a job" still hold true for many people in Glasgow and other UK cities, particularly those furthest removed from the labour market. Because ILMs tackle that issue head on and provide unemployed people with much needed work experience, they must continue to be a major plank in economic development policies for cities. ILMs are not competing with the work first approaches of the employment zones or action teams for jobs. Instead they should be seen as complementary. Indeed, why not refer all those people who are failing to get jobs through the employment zones, action teams for jobs or the new deal to an ILM straight away?

I have raised important questions and, I hope, some solutions. They are a blueprint not just for Glasgow; I believe they could be developed in any of our inner cities. To use that much used saying, much has been done but there is much to do. I want to see this Government do it.

10.30 pm

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): Good evening, Mr. Speaker. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) on securing a debate on inner-city poverty. I am also grateful for his kind comments on the Government's initiatives to tackle child and pensioner poverty, and the general poverty of those of working age. This debate is a unique experience, because I see in their places my hon. Friends the Members for Stirling (Mrs. McGuire), for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Lyons), for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan), for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy), for Glasgow, Maryhill (Ann McKechin), for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) and your good self, Mr. Speaker, representing your beloved Springburn. My accent tends to give away my previous incarnation and even my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Mr. Turner) can claim that his mother was born in Cathcart. He just failed to get across the border and was born in Carlisle. My only question is where is the Scottish National party? We are debating strategies to end poverty in Scotland and the SNP is not even here.

We are absolutely committed to eradicating child poverty by 2020. Our strategy is outlined in "Opportunity for all", the annual report that sets out our progress. Significant progress has been made, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland made clear, much more remains to be done. There is a clear political commitment to tackling the problems of poverty and social exclusion. Poverty and social exclusion are complex, multidimensional issues and are not just about low income. My hon. Friend highlighted that point eloquently in his contribution this evening.

We are determined to ensure that there is opportunity for all, not just the privileged few. Tackling poverty is not just a social objective or a moral issue. It is also an economic necessity, because we all pay the price of poverty. Research shows that work is the best route out of poverty. Our strategy is to provide work for those who can and security for those who cannot. We are making real progress. I listened carefully to my hon. Friend's speech and to the intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok and I am very interested in the initiatives they described. I give my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland a commitment that I will arrange for officials from Glasgow city council and from the Scottish Executive to meet officials from my Department to explore these proposals further. I will write to him when I have made those arrangements, which I hope to do shortly so that we can take forward the ideas that he set out tonight.

It is clear that the measures that we have already introduced are having positive effects on people's lives. We will continue to work to improve the opportunities available to all people looking for work. Today, as a result of a stable economy and measures to help people into jobs, some 300,000 fewer children live in a household where no one works. We are introducing new tax credits to tackle poverty and make work pay.

There are more than 1.2 million more people in work now than in 1997. We have increased the household incomes of 2 million of the poorest pensioners by at least £15 a week since 1997. We are tackling the legacy of poverty and social exclusion that we inherited. We are making progress, but, as my hon. Friend said, it has been slow and painstakingly difficult in some areas.

Mr. John Lyons (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): Will my right hon. Friend accept that the national minimum wage, presently £4.10, has played a constructive part not only in bringing people from unemployment to work, but in giving them some security when they take up work? We should try to uprate it regularly because that would make it more attractive for people to take up work.

Mr. McCartney: As the Minister who introduced the national minimum wage, I am more than happy to endorse my hon. Friend's observation that, together with the working families tax credit and the changes in child benefit, the national minimum wage has made a significant difference. Women in my constituency were earning £1.20 an hour; after the introduction of the minimum wage and the WFTC they now have incomes of £11 an hour and four weeks' paid holiday. The minimum wage has risen consistently since its introduction, following the recommendations from the Low Pay Commission. We have also given the lie to the Tory claim that its introduction would cost a million jobs. Since its introduction, we have created more than a million jobs.

I thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks and I will tell my father tonight that his Member of Parliament is doing a damn good job for him—although at 82 I am not sure that he wants to go out and earn the national minimum wage.

Colleagues, we have set clear objectives that require long-term commitment to year-on-year investment. They need more than just a short-term investment. For people of working age, we are rebuilding the welfare state around work, for both individuals and families. As I said earlier, paid work is the best form of welfare. It is the most secure means of averting poverty and dependence.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the drug culture in many Scottish communities is also one of the aspects of poverty that has to be addressed?

Mr. McCartney: My hon. Friend is right. From bitter personal experience, I know that the drug culture in Scotland damages communities and families, and that it tragically destroys many young people's lives. Across Britain, 3,000 young people a year die from drug abuse. To destroy that culture, there must be action in the community against the criminal. That action must involve young people and investment in treatment and rehabilitation. Part of the rehabilitation culture must be the introduction of young people to education, training and employment opportunities.

The drugs problem is prevalent in the east end of Glasgow, where initiatives have been set up similar to those in other parts of Glasgow described by hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland. I welcome the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, South in that regard.

We are also changing the culture of the benefits system. We are moving away from a strategy based on the question "What money can we pay you?", to one based on the questions "How can we help you become more independent? How can we help families to help themselves? How can we help communities to rebuild and regenerate themselves, and to develop a self-confidence and a feeling of self-worth and commitment?"

Our approach works on two fronts—making it easier to move into work, and ensuring that work pays. One of the problems facing people moving into work is the gap between their final benefit payment and their first pay cheque. That is why we have introduced initiatives to ease this transition. Examples of that are the simplification of the housing and council tax benefit of the mortgage interest run-on, the lone parent's benefit run-on and the job grant.

We have introduced a number of measures to ensure that when people take up work, that work pays. Mention has been made of the working families tax credit and the national minimum wage. The House may want to know that, since the working families tax credit was introduced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, 120,000 families in Scotland have benefited. Moreover, 110,000 families in Scotland are benefiting from the national minimum wage. The combination of both those innovations means that no family with one person working full-time earns less than about £11,000 a year. That is a major step forward.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland pointed out, the Government have had great success with reducing unemployment. Since 1997, we have reduced long-term unemployment by more than 50 per cent. in Glasgow in general, and in the Anniesland constituency in particular.

Nearly 6,500 young people have found work in Glasgow through the new deal. Another 1,000 long-term unemployed have moved into work through the new deal 25 plus scheme.

We are constantly improving these new deals to help clients to match their current skills to vacancies in the labour market. New deals also help clients to gain new skills through education and training to meet the needs of local employers.

As we announced in November, we will soon be launching our pilots for our new StepUp programmes. In April, a pilot will start in east Ayrshire and another pilot will begin later in Edinburgh. These pilots will test out the provision of transitional jobs to act as a stepping stone for long-term unemployed people moving from benefits into work. In his speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland asked the Government to consider that matter specifically.

We have also introduced employment zones to help long-term unemployed people in some of the most deprived areas. Employment zones are looking at innovative ways to find local solutions to local problems. The employment zone in Glasgow works with local organisations such as the Wise group, and has already helped nearly 2,000 people find work.

I also agree with my hon. Friend that our focus needs to be wider than just those traditionally classed as unemployed. We must look to help more jobless people who would like to move into the labour market. We have launched 56 pathfinder offices for our new service, Jobcentre Plus, and their locations include Aberdeen, Livingston, Greenock and Port Glasgow. The offices will be rolled out over the next few years across the whole of Scotland.

This new service will give all benefit claimants the opportunity to find out about the help and support available to them if they move into work through work-focused interviews. Lone parents whose youngest child is of school age already benefit from having a work-focused interview at the start of their claim for income support. From April, these interviews will be extended to lone parents whose youngest child is three years old or older.

All lone parents who are out of work can benefit from our new deal for lone parents. This offers specialist help and advice to enable them to take up work. By the end of October, we had already helped more than 2,200 lone parents in Glasgow, and in Anniesland nearly 300 lone parents have been assisted in taking up employment.

Specialist help is also available for people on incapacity benefit through our new deal for disabled people. During the pilot phase, more than 8,200 people have been helped into work. In the summer, we launched a national network of job brokers who work with people on incapacity benefit to help them access the labour market.

These national programmes are complemented by our action teams for jobs. The teams work with local organisations to find innovative solutions to problems faced by people from disadvantaged groups such as those with disabilities, lone parents, homeless people and people with drug or alcohol problems. The action team in Glasgow was so successful at the start of this year that the team has been split into four and their collective budget has been increased by more than 700 per cent. to one in excess of £3.5 million.

That demonstrates our clear and specific strategy on employment. It works alongside initiatives taken by Glasgow and the communities there to develop self-help and a co-ordinated approach between central Government, local government and the community to the regeneration and refurbishment of communities for individual families and the community as a whole.

In his opening remarks, my hon. Friend alluded to the need for the Government to end pensioner poverty and design new systems to end it. He is absolutely right. Our pension strategy is simple: we want to ensure that all pensioners have a decent income in retirement. That is why it was important to introduce the minimum income guarantee, rough and ready as it was. We have been the first Government for two generations to take a positive decision to target elderly people who were being left out of the basic pension system and, as a consequence, were living in poverty. From a standing start, almost 2 million elderly people now receive on average between £15 and £20 a week that would never have been available to them had we not taken action. However, that was a short-term action; to deal with poverty now, we must modernise a pensions system to prevent future pensioners from falling into poverty.

In their Lordships' House is the State Pension Credit Bill which will soon come before this House. The Bill is about modernising the whole basis and concept of the pensions system, so that it will ensure a minimum guaranteed income for all pensioners, irrespective of how they access the pensions system, as well as for millions of hard-working pensioners who, under the current system

[Mr. McCartney]

and particularly under the Tories, were trapped at 100 per cent. for having small savings and small second pensions. The modernised state system will not only pay their basic minimum guarantee but will pay them extra for having small savings. They will benefit from having small savings or a small second pension.

In addition, we will take steps to assist people who work for employers have no form of pension savings. From a standing start, in the first seven months 80 per cent. of employers required to register for stakeholder pensions have registered. The big task is to turn those registrations into pension entitlements for many people who last year, before stakeholder pensions, had no pension opportunity. This year they have a pension opportunity.

The Government's step-by-step approach is working, but we cannot beat poverty in a few years. We certainly cannot beat poverty—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at sixteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

CORRECTION

Official Report, 28 January 2002: In col. 125, after "Clause read a Second Time" delete ", and added to the Bill".

House of Commons

Thursday 31 January 2002

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF LONDON (WARD ELECTIONS) BILL *(BY ORDER)*

Order read for further consideration, as amended by the Chairman of Ways and Means.

To be further considered on Thursday 7 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Common Fisheries Policy

1. **Andrew George** (St. Ives): What progress she has made in securing reform of the common fisheries policy. [29536]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): The Government are committed to securing fundamental reform of the common fisheries policy with the aim of achieving an economically and environmentally sustainable CFP. The Government submitted a formal response last September to the European Commission's Green Paper on the forthcoming review of the CFP. Copies are available in the Libraries of the House.

Andrew George: I am grateful to the Minister for that response. We have to be optimistic because, after all, even the Commission would be hard pressed to produce a policy more disastrous than the present one. The Minister and I share a commitment to achieving effective devolution in any future plan. In that spirit, will the Minister agree to replace the funds that his Department has taken from Cornwall's objective 1 programme to fund its decommissioning scheme? If he permits objective 1 funds to be used for decommissioning, will he allow Cornwall to run its own decommissioning scheme to ensure real economic benefits to Cornwall rather than to Spanish quota hoppers?

Mr. Morley: That was an ingenious way of working in a local issue on the back of a national question. On the wider issue, the Commission's Green Paper on CFP reform points in the right direction. It acknowledges the issues that our fishing industry wants to be included in that reform, and we will be pressing for that.

On decommissioning and objective 1 funds in Cornwall, the £6 million fund available for decommissioning covers the cost of that decommissioning through objective 1 funding in Cornwall. About £1 million has been paid through objective 1 to cover decommissioning bids. Although it is true that one of those vessels is Spanish-owned, it is Cornish-registered, and has a record of landing in Cornwall. Therefore, whether we like it or not, the vessel is eligible under the rules.

I am glad to say that the measures that we introduced on the economic link conditions have led to a fundamental change in the number of quota hoppers. As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, we inherited the situation, we did not create it.

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): I wonder whether my hon. Friend has seen the controversial debate on commercial fish stocks on the pages of the *Grimsby Telegraph*. That debates centres around seals and their effect on fishing stocks. What evidence does he have to show that seals are having a detrimental impact on commercial fish stocks? Does he have any opinion on the support expressed in some parts of Grimsby for culling seals to increase fish stocks?

Mr. Morley: I am reluctant to get involved in a dispute between my hon. Friends the Members for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) and for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), not least because the headline in the *Grimsby Telegraph* was "Clubber versus Cuddler".

The research carried out so far illustrates that the connection between seals and the food chain is complex. There is no clear evidence that seals seriously affect commercial fish stocks. We are, however, continuing to undertake further research to obtain a clear understanding of the role of seals within the marine ecosystem.

Angus Robertson (Moray): In line with the first question on devolving a reformed common fisheries policy, can the Minister tell the House what weight the Government are giving to moves to establish zonal management as part of the reform of the CFP and what discussions he has had with the Scottish Executive on this subject?

Mr. Morley: We keep in close touch with the Scottish Executive. Our position on the CFP is agreed between ourselves and the devolved Administrations, which have been involved at every stage of formulating policy.

I support the concept of regional management and, indeed, zonal management. However, the concept of zonal management and enlargement is much more advanced within our country, as is discussion of how we can have regional, devolved fisheries management. Those arguments are new to many European countries, but we are engaging them to demonstrate that devolving the CFP is the best way forward in order to make it more flexible and responsive. We must recognise the enormous differences in fishing patterns in our own country, let alone the rest of Europe.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his success at the December Fisheries Council meeting in securing the quotas that our fishermen asked for, thus proving the value of good dialogue with the fishing industry. Does he agree that in the context of CFP reform and annual quota negotiations, we need a long-term view of where the UK fishing industry is going. Will he establish a Government industry taskforce, like the oil and gas industry taskforce, to work out where we want to be and how we can get there?

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend puts forward an interesting idea and I know that he is in close contact with his local fishing industry. We have set up a high-level group to engage the fishing industry, from catching to processing, and it has valued the chance to have such a forum. There will be opportunities to develop that and I will give it some thought. The last Fisheries Council had a good outcome for the United Kingdom fishing industry because we stuck to the science and the industry accepted the scientific case. We obtained changes where the Commission went beyond science without justification and where the case for our bids was backed up by firm scientific evidence based on sustainability.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Does the proposed cod and hake recovery programme, which will presumably be applicable before the end of the year, override the current western waters effort limitation scheme as set out in its entirety in European Union regulation 650/95? Will the programme be directly applicable to all member states?

Mr. Morley: The cod and hake recovery programmes will apply to all member states. The western waters effort management regime is in place, but the cod and hake programmes will take precedence. Indeed, the point of those programmes is conservation management. Western hake is in serious difficulty and we must take firm action. I am pleased that our industry's argument for the use of increased mesh sizes in the bay of Biscay has been accepted.

Lindane

2. **Mrs. Anne Campbell** (Cambridge): To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will ban the use of the pesticide lindane. [29537]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): The use of all lindane-based products is being phased out. No products may be sold or supplied in the United Kingdom and all products intended for agricultural use must be used up and disposed of by 20 June 2002.

The approvals for the use of lindane wood preservatives have already been revoked and stock must be disposed of by November 2002. Some insecticides remain approved for storage and use until January 2003, but must then be disposed of by January 2004.

Mrs. Campbell: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. She will be aware of the link that has been made between the use of lindane and the worrying increase in the incidence of breast cancer. Can she assure me that, as well as being phased out for commercial, agricultural and horticultural use, lindane will be phased out for domestic use throughout Europe?

Margaret Beckett: Obviously, what happens throughout Europe is a matter for other authorities, but I can assure my hon. Friend that we keep closely under review issues relating to lindane. I am aware that concern has been expressed about a link between its use and breast cancer, but my hon. Friend will also know that reservations have been expressed about the strength of that link and whether there is a risk. It remains the case, however, that lindane is on the way to being phased out for the uses listed by my hon. Friend.

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): As the Secretary of State will be aware, the steering group that oversees the voluntary package of measures designed to reduce the use of pesticides in farming in general is due to produce a report on its progress this week. Has she received such a report and, if so, will she publish it?

Margaret Beckett: I have not yet received it. When it is received, the consideration for which the hon. Gentleman asks will be given. As he knows, as and when we can, we put as much information as possible in the public domain.

Agricultural Shows

3. **Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will make a statement on the resumption of local agricultural shows. [29538]

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): Agricultural shows are very important to rural communities and we hope that they will be able to go ahead later this year, but those shows will need to be licensed and meet strict biosecurity standards. We will announce the details as soon as possible.

Mr. Edwards: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Does he agree that the resumption of agricultural shows will be a great boost to the morale of the agricultural community and that such shows play an important role in the calendar of rural areas? Also, they bring together rural areas and towns. Will he join me in commending all those who work so hard to organise the annual Monmouth, Chepstow and Usk agricultural shows?

Alun Michael: If I may stray back over the border for a minute, I am happy to pay tribute to all the work that goes on. As a Government, we want to put as much confidence as possible back into rural communities. That is why, earlier this week, we launched the campaign "Your countryside, you're welcome"—not as a Government campaign but as Government support for 50 organisations, ranging from farming to tourism and voluntary groups such as the Women's Institute. Like the people who put effort into organising the shows, such partnerships make the countryside work and it is important that they are given every confidence for the future.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): In December, I asked the Minister a question on behalf of the Devon county show about the movement of livestock. He was good enough to say that he would try to give us a reply by the end of January. Today is the last day of January: has the right hon. Gentleman any news that I can pass on to the organisers of the Devon county show? Will they be able to show livestock this year?

Alun Michael: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman understands that we must be extremely sensitive and that we must not take risks, even at this point when it appears that foot and mouth disease has been eradicated. That is why great care is being taken in drawing up regulations on animal movements and associated activities. We need to be very careful. However, we hope, within a few days, to be able to respond in respect of the agricultural show about which he asked. On a previous occasion, I said that as I had visited the Devon show last year, when no animals were shown, I appreciated the show's importance in the hon. Gentleman's county. We hope very much that it will be able to go ahead without constraints this year. We shall get back to the hon. Gentleman very soon.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): Does my right hon. Friend agree that agricultural shows are about much more than rural affairs and agriculture? They are a celebration of allotment holders, gardeners and a multitude of skills. Certainly, the Keighley agricultural show is a rare celebration of town and country combining in the various ways that I mentioned. It is a wonderful occasion for the people of Keighley and the surrounding area.

Alun Michael: My hon. Friend makes her point well. During the period of devastation by foot and mouth disease last year, many people in towns and cities came to appreciate what was put in danger as a result. It is thus extremely important that shows are supported by people in towns and cities as well as by those in the countryside. They help us to get over what is perceived in some places as a divide, but which should not be a divide.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): The Minister's comment that he would be able to announce a decision within the next few days will be warmly welcomed by all those involved in agricultural shows. As the House is aware, the cancellation of many of those shows cost a large number of people a great deal of money. As the hon. Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer) said, there are effects not only on the farming community but on the wider rural community. About 300 agricultural shows are held every year and they attract 8 million visitors. Which shows do the right hon. Gentleman and his ministerial team intend to visit this year to demonstrate that they have full confidence in them and that they are welcome in the countryside?

Alun Michael: I hope that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues will be equally enthusiastic. As I pointed out, I went to the Devon show last year. Wherever possible, we intend to visit shows, but their importance lies in what they do for town and country and for the individuals and communities that they represent. We must give people the certainty to go ahead. They need to know which qualifications they should meet as soon as possible. We shall do that.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): Will my right hon. Friend visit the Royal Lancashire show—the oldest show in the country? If he does so, he might be able to ensure that there is an exhibition from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to put the case about what we are doing as a Government for rural society. I am sure that my right hon. Friend agrees that at those events country and town come together to show the best of rural affairs.

Alun Michael: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for demonstrating that DEFRA Ministers are popular on both sides of the House and that our visits are anticipated with enthusiasm. I assure him that whether or not we attend particular shows, we strongly support their importance to their local communities, as he described.

Sue Doughty (Guildford): Will the Minister bear in mind that some shows, such as the Surrey show, had to be cancelled last year? It is now a matter of urgency that the shows are able to put in place arrangements for their exhibitors, particularly those who bring animals along as part of their exhibit. There will be extra costs for cleaning and disinfection, and extra paperwork. Will the Minister be able to provide any assistance to the organisers of county shows, which provide such a wonderful showcase for our agricultural community?

Alun Michael: The problems to which the hon. Lady refers are well understood. We have to be realistic; we have just been through the most devastating and unprecedented outbreak of animal disease and, while we all want to look to the future, we must ensure that we take no risks in so doing. I am sure that the hon. Lady will appreciate that. As soon as possible, we want to give the shows certainty about what they need to do to be able to go ahead, and then to provide them with the enthusiasm and support that she and other hon. Members have suggested that they need. The shows need customers—the public—along with certainty as to what they need to do to attract them.

Recycling Directive (Fridges)

4. **Mr. Nigel Waterson** (Eastbourne): If he will make a statement on the cost to (a) local councils and (b) individuals of implementing the EU Directive on the recycling of refrigerators and freezers. [29539]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): I understand that the current charges levied by waste management companies for the storage and processing of fridges are in the range of £22 to £35 per unit, but that these are likely to fall once additional recycling facilities are operational. There should be no significant increase in costs to members of the public.

Mr. Waterson: Will the Minister confirm that in the UK we dispose of some 3 million fridges a year, and that the fridge mountain is reckoned to be growing at a rate of 6,500 a day? Does he also accept that the funding currently available to local authorities is woefully inadequate? Why should my local council have to raid other budgets to find the estimated £700,000 of new costs to deal with this problem in East Sussex?

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman is approximately right: about 2.5 million—perhaps up to 3 million—fridges enter the waste stream each year, either for scrapping and decommissioning or for refurbishment and selling on to the domestic market. On funding, in December we announced a £6 million package to cover the cost to the end of the current fiscal year. We made it perfectly clear then that we are urgently considering what further funding might be necessary for the storage and processing of fridges in the next fiscal year. We believe that that is perfectly adequate. I would also point out to the hon. Gentleman that, in the current three-year spending period—spending review 2000—we have provided for an increase of £1.1 billion for environmental protection and cultural services, which includes waste management.

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Will the Minister tell us when he expects the new capacity to be on stream to deal with the problem of removing the chlorofluorocarbons from the insulation material in fridges? The longer we have to wait for that, the more the costs will grow. Does he acknowledge that we are in this situation because the Government have been led by the nose by the EU directive rather than initiating their own programmes, and failed to recognise that the directive had a mandatory requirement, which they discovered only three weeks before it came into effect? Is not the same problem going to arise with the disposal of cars? Does the Minister not recognise that it is not the job of the EU to tell us what to do? *[Interruption.]* It is our job—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let the hon. Gentleman finish.

Malcolm Bruce: Hon. Members should contain themselves. What the EU is telling us to do is highly desirable, but we should not be waiting for it to pass directives. We should be implementing our own policy and shaping EU policy, rather than being the late followers-on behind initiatives that have been taken by other countries. Does the Minister admit that we have left it too late in this instance, and that that is why it is costing us so much?

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman's first point is perfectly sensible, and he is right to say that storage costs will continue to mount up until we can get the recycling plant in place. We have made every possible effort to obtain that technology, which is not currently available in this country, since we realised in June 2001 that it would be necessary in order to extract CFCs from insulating foam. A number of companies are investing in new plant; I am aware of up to a dozen which have expressed a strong interest, and I expect some of them to introduce it shortly. I certainly expect a number to be operational in the spring.

On the second point, the hon. Gentleman should not get so excited about being led by EU directives, which are introduced by member states as a result of agreement between them all. In this case, an EC regulation drafted in 1998 required the extraction of CFCs from the coolant gases in fridge motors, but not from insulation foam. However, just before the regulation came to the Environment Council in 1999, a change to article 15 caused uncertainty as to whether it applied to insulation foam.

From that point, late in 1999, my officials made repeated requests to the Commission for formal clarification of that article, and I have a record of every such instance. We did not get a formal reply until June 2001. We were badly let down by the Commission, and that is not the way in which EU legislation should be passed. However, since we finally found out about insulation foam in June 2001, we have taken every step to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): After speaking to local authorities, I can tell the Minister that it is clear that, due to Government incompetence, the extra costs are £30 to collect an old fridge, £30 to store it and at least £10 a fridge for bulk delivery to a recycler—that is, when they start to operate. For 3 million fridges a year, that is an unnecessary and unbudgeted cost of more than £200 million.

On 14 January, the Minister said:

> "We are . . . taking the realistic view that if extra duties are imposed"—

on local authorities—

> "they should be reasonably funded. That is the Government's policy."—[*Official Report*, 14 January 2002; Vol. 378, c. 125.]

Will the Minister confirm that central Government will pay that £200 million? When will local authorities get the bulk of that money?

Mr. Meacher: First, as I thought I had made perfectly clear—I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was listening—the incompetence is nothing to do with the UK Government; it is entirely the responsibility of the Commission. Secondly, I do not accept the figures that he produced. The cost will not be £200 million a year, or anything like it. I have made clear, and I repeat, that the reasonable costs of local authorities will be met by the £6 million available until the end of March, and we will make a further announcement in due course on what we believe are the reasonable costs that need to be met beyond that.

The most appropriate way to distribute the £6 million to the local authorities is through the rate support grant mechanism, so they will receive it in their standard spending assessments, as they have generally made clear that they want grant aid paid in that way. Local authorities should have their reasonable costs covered; we are trying to minimise those costs by securing investment in new technology and new plant as soon as possible, and we have protected householders from any interruption in the buying and selling of fridges.

Waste Recycling Targets

5. **Mr. John Baron** (Billericay): What financial support her Department is giving to local councils in order to help them meet their waste recycling targets. [29540]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): The Government are increasing funding for the environmental protection and cultural services block, which includes waste management, by £1.1 billion over the SR 2000 period. There is also a ring-fenced fund of £140 million for local authority recycling and £220 million for the private finance initiative waste projects over the same period. Councils will also benefit from the £40 million that the Government have given to the waste resources action programme to overcome market barriers to re-use and the recycling of waste.

Mr. Baron: I thank the Minister for that response. Given that Britain has just nine years to triple the amount of waste that it recycles, or face stiff EU penalties, and that organisations such as Friends of the Earth and Waste Watch have criticised the Government for the amount of assistance that they are giving to councils compared to what those organisations believe is required—something like £375 million a year—can the Minister now respond to Greenpeace's accusation that Labour is the party of incineration?

Mr. Meacher: As I have already said, now and on many previous occasions, the amount of extra funding that has been provided to reach the statutory recycling targets for local authorities is generous by any standard. Let me make it clear that this is not just a question of resources. Although the recycling record of some local authorities is abysmal—at 3 or 5 per cent.—many local authorities are in the 15 to 20 per cent. bracket, and some are meeting targets of more than 25 per cent. and even up to 30 per cent.

It is a matter of local political will and of providing the appropriate local facilities—notably, kerbside collection. I do not accept that the suggested funding is necessary.

I find the hon. Gentleman's last point extraordinary. Under the previous Government, there were about 20 or 30 incinerators in this country; there are now 11. There are no plans for any further increase in incineration, provided that we can meet the EU landfill directive targets and achieve the statutory recycling targets. The Conservative party presided over a much larger number of incinerators than we are conceivably planning.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his announcement of extra money for recycling will be warmly welcomed in the north-east, especially as local authorities in the county of Durham have had a very poor settlement this year, despite Government protestations to the contrary? But I warmly welcome his statement that this is not just a matter of money. Is he also aware that, in the Bishop Auckland area, all kinds of voluntary groups and, indeed, the business community are bubbling up with imaginative ideas for recycling, but the local authorities seem to be unable to respond supportively?

Mr. Meacher: My right hon. Friend is right because, let me I repeat, this is not simply a question of resources—those resources must be adequate. We are sure that we are providing adequate resources. Three things are required: first, the targets to drive the programme; secondly, the money to finance it; and, thirdly, the all-important markets, to which he referred. There is no point in recycling large amounts of paper, glass, tin, aluminium or whatever unless it can be sold on. The purpose of setting up WRAP—the waste resources action programme, which is business-led and chaired by Vic Cocker, who is a water industry chief executive—is to provide local authorities with good business sense, at arm's length from Government, on the markets for recycling. We think that that is very important. There are many innovative ideas, and there is no excuse for local authorities not to adopt them.

Derek Conway (Old Bexley and Sidcup): Is the Minister aware that Bexley council has a good recycling record? However, as well as encouraging such councils, is he aware that in places such as Welling the recycling site is located close to residential properties, so the local authority spends considerable amounts trying to protect residents from the inevitable noise generated in pursuit of what is unquestionably a very good cause? Recyling also has human consequences and local authorities need support from the Minister to deal with them.

Mr. Meacher: Of course I accept that any industrial process, including an integrated waste management facility, involves a certain amount of noise and lorry journeys, and I am well aware that it can cause dust and nuisance. Obviously, this is matter for local authorities. In the past such facilities have been re-sited as a result of planning applications, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman's local planning authority has taken account of the wider environmental impacts.

I repeat that integrated waste management facilities may be required in the future, and I believe that the necessary finance is available. However, it is a matter for local authorities to locate such facilities sensibly.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I congratulate the Government on their record on recycling and praise my right hon. Friend for his personal commitment to this issue. Will he consider assisting local authorities to deal with a particular item of domestic waste: used domestic batteries? He will know that, except for an excellent scheme in Lancashire, there are hardly any schemes that allow for their recycling. Will he consider ways of encouraging local authorities to recycle domestic batteries and to work with industry to achieve that?

Mr. Meacher: That is a useful point. *[Laughter.]* I do not think that it was amusing.

If batteries are thrown away and collected by local authorities to end up in landfill, that is not the most environmentally sensible way of handling them. There needs to be kerbside collection and separation at source. There is an EU proposal for a producer responsibility directive for batteries. Obviously, in the light of experience of other matters, we shall need to examine the proposal's drafting and we shall consider it carefully. However, the concept is sensible.

It is already possible for local authorities to put in place arrangements for kerbside collection. We believe that statutory recycling targets will require virtually all local authorities to do that. However, there is nothing to stop them doing that now. I therefore urge local authorities to put in place arrangements for the kerbside collection of products, such as batteries, that should not go into landfill.

Landfill is not the most environmentally sustainable way of handling them, and kerbside collection will enable them to be collected and reused in a better way.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): I was intrigued by the Minister's scathing remarks about local authorities that achieve recycling rates of only 3 to 5 per cent., which he described as abysmal. Does that apply to the authority in Oldham in his constituency, which achieves 4.5 per cent. recycling? Will he compare and contrast that with the position in Tandridge council in my constituency, which achieves 21 per cent. recycling? Will he congratulate Tandridge on that?

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that none of the £140 million to which he alluded—it has been ring-fenced to help local authorities—has yet been spent? It is no good boasting about the money, because none of it has been spent. Will not robbing environmental trusts of funds in a desperate bid to bolster the Government's failing recycling strategy deprive many environmental projects of much-needed funding while still failing to save the Government's face over the shambles that they have made of recycling? Their own performance is abysmal.

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman is getting better, but he still has some way to go.

I congratulate those local authorities, such as his, that have a good recycling record. I am delighted about that. I do not know what Oldham's exact position is, but it is certainly in one of the lowest groups. I am targeting precisely such authorities through the £140 million recycling fund in an attempt to help them raise their performance. I point out, however, that Oldham is a Lib-Dem controlled council.

The £140 million recycling fund is, indeed, ring-fenced and it can be used only for waste-management purposes. We have just completed a consultation about how it will be distributed and we shall make a statement, I hope, very soon, on our conclusions. However, I cannot, of course, at this moment say how much will go to any individual local authority.

It was a bit rich of the hon. Gentleman to talk about robbing environmental trusts because he is actually referring to the fact that we are reconsidering the landfill tax credit scheme. We want to use that scheme, which we of course inherited from the previous Government, to support sustainable waste management objectives. It has by no means been focused on that. That is why we are reviewing it. We have published indicative guidelines saying that 65 per cent. of the spend should be towards such schemes, including one third of it specifically on recycling. In the next few weeks, we shall issue a consultation paper on the full range of options, from the status quo to full replacement via a public expenditure programme.

I have said repeatedly to the Wildlife Trust and the other environmental bodies that I am keen that the amount of money that they receive—valuably—for the important projects over which they preside should not be reduced in any redistribution that might be achieved. That remains my position.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): The Minister has referred several times to the importance of recycling in cutting incineration, but is recycling not also an important way to cut the number of landfill sites? Is he troubled by the fact that Rhondda, Cynon, Taff council, which, to inform my right hon. Friend, is run by the Welsh nationalists, has only now begun a pilot recycling scheme? Will he undertake on the next occasion that he speaks to his counterpart in the Welsh Assembly to raise his concerns on that matter?

Mr. Meacher: I am certainly happy to do that, although we have made very clear over a long period the need for a fundamental transformation in the way in which this country handles waste. We are driven by the EU landfill directive. At the moment, we landfill probably more than any other member state—around 85 per cent. of household waste. We must reduce that to no more than 35 per cent. of the 1995 level, which is of course much lower than today's.

On our reckoning, if we continued current practices all the way to 2016, by which time the change must occur, which of course we certainly shall not, we would in that year have to shift about 33 million tonnes away from landfill. That is why there must be action now on a significant scale.

The first requirement is waste minimisation—not creating the waste in the first place. Secondly, if the waste is generated, it should be—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I very gently say to the Minister that I have to get through the Order Paper, and the answers are too long.

Livestock Markets

6. **Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger** (Bridgwater): What the (a) timetable and (b) mechanics are of opening livestock markets. [29524]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): The Government plan to allow the reopening of some livestock markets from 11 February, subject to biosecurity conditions. Further details will be announced shortly and placed in the Library of the House, published on DEFRA's website and made more generally available.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: Does the Minister realise just what problems there are in trying to get cattle and sheep off places such as Exmoor? One market now serves that area. The market at Bridgwater has gone completely and there is trouble opening Taunton. Will he ensure that the decision to reopen is made—I am glad to hear the date of 11 February and hope that there will be a full opening on that day—and that DEFRA does not impose licences or put other obstructions in the way of that? If it does so, social deprivation on Exmoor will continue, and it is getting desperate.

Mr. Morley: We are not interested in putting obstructions in the way of the livestock sector but in bringing it back to normality without taking a risk, for example, with latent disease in some of the sheep flocks. We made our proposals available to the livestock industry on 18 January. We have had extensive consultation with the sector because we are trying to strike a balance between ensuring proper biosecurity and minimising risk, and recognising the needs of the sector. We have had tremendous co-operation from the livestock sector on that point, and that is why 11 February is the very latest stage of the process. As soon as we can bring the proposals forward, we will do so.

Charlotte Atkins (Staffordshire, Moorlands): Despite the excellent impact of the market towns initiative on Leek, is my hon. Friend aware how anxious communities and farmers are to reopen the livestock market in Leek when the necessary biosecurity measures have been implemented? That would have a huge impact on the morale of farmers and everyone involved in the rural economy. I urge him to ensure that such markets can open as soon as possible.

Mr. Morley: I understand the case that my hon. Friend makes and how important livestock markets are to the local and regional economy. For that reason, we are in the final stages of our proposals and I am sure that a workable scheme will be in place to achieve the balance that I have outlined.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Is the Minister aware that livestock markets are the only method by which livestock farmers can get a fair and transparent price for their animals? It is a matter of the greatest urgency that livestock markets, such as Chelford, which lies within the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) and also serves my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton), can operate fully at the earliest opportunity. Will he ensure that costs associated with licensing and all other safety measures are kept to an absolute minimum so that those markets, which are at the centre of rural agricultural activity, can open again to serve the livestock producers of this country?

Mr. Morley: I assure the hon. Gentleman that administration costs will be kept as low as possible. I emphasise again the risks of spreading disease. We need to think carefully about that, and it is not an issue of contention between us and the livestock industry. I accept what he says about the importance of livestock markets and their social function in communities, a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Charlotte Atkins). However, a range of innovative ways to market livestock have been developed and we should not rule them out. We want to encourage all sorts of innovation and enterprise, wherever that may be, while recognising the role of livestock markets.

Poland

7. **Mr. Wayne David** (Caerphilly): If she will make a statement on the issues discussed with the Polish Government on her recent visit to Poland. [29543]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): I visited Poland on 13 and 14 January and had one-to-one meetings with the Agriculture Minister and the Environment Minister. I encouraged Poland to play an active and constructive part in preparing itself for European Union membership, congratulated the Government on reaching a conclusion on the environment chapter and stressed the importance of maintaining the implementation and enforcement programme.

Mr. David: I thank my right hon. Friend for her reply. I am sure that she will agree that EU enlargement, including Polish membership, cannot wait until we reform the common agricultural policy. Does she also agree that the development strategy is extremely important post-enlargement and that there is already a great deal of common ground between the Polish Government and the British Government?

Margaret Beckett: I entirely accept what my hon. Friend says. The UK Government have always taken the view and approach that CAP reform should be pursued, and we strongly support enlargement. We wish to pursue those separate developments in parallel, but I agree that one is not conditional on the other. I also agree that it is important to do what we can to support rural development. He is right to identify from our discussions that the Polish Government see eye to eye with us on a number of issues.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): During the Secretary of State's discussions with her Polish counterpart, did she have an opportunity to discuss the role of good administration in a representative democracy? I wrote to her predecessor, the right hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East and Wallsend (Mr. Brown), the right hon. Lady herself and each of her Front-Bench companions. Since March, I have sent no fewer than nine letters on matters concerning their Department. I tabled a written parliamentary question in November which was not answered, nor were any of my other letters—

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is nothing to do with Poland. Can the Minister answer the question?

Margaret Beckett: In so far as I followed it. If the hon. and learned Gentleman has written to my Department and not received a reply, I offer him the most profound apology. He will know, because we have written to every hon. Member—I hope that that letter at least has arrived—that there have been enormous problems with handling correspondence in my Department. Strenuous attempts have been made to overcome that. We are under the impression that a great deal has been done to tackle the backlog, but I shall look at once into his complaint.

Rural Strategy

8. **Mr. David Drew** (Stroud): If she will make a statement on the recent discussions about rural strategy she has had with parish and town councils and their representative body. [29544]

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): The Government are breaking new ground in engaging with the work of parish and town councils. I am very encouraged by the response to the quality local scheme on which we are consulting at present. The National

Association of Local Councils is represented on the national rural affairs forum, and will therefore be able to put concerns directly to Ministers.

Mr. Drew: I thank my right hon. Friend for that encouraging news and declare an interest as a town councillor.

There is much to be done. I know that liaison with the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions is very good, but this first and important level of government often relies on the work of parish clerks in terms of capacity. In the past week, I received a letter from one of my best parish clerks, Jane Roberts of Kings Stanley parish council. The council is under a great deal of pressure. It is pleased to have been brought into this aspect of government, but we need to ensure that both clerks and councillors can handle that pressure. How could that be done?

Alun Michael: My hon. Friend is right. I have met parish clerks who act as a powerhouse, enabling parish council members to do a great deal. That is why we have established support for training parish clerks, as we have for training town and parish councillors. We want to give these organisations the capacity not just to represent but to act as a driving force in their communities.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): When will I receive an answer to the parliamentary question that I tabled on 15 January, which in turn asked when I would receive an answer to my letter of 3 December asking for a meeting between Upton-on-Severn town council and the Government to discuss matters connected with rural development?

Alun Michael: The hon. Gentleman will receive an answer very quickly, having asked his question today.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, she recently wrote to every Member explaining that we had discovered a basic systems failure in the correspondence arrangements. Ministers and officials at the Department are putting considerable effort into dealing with the enormous backlog—not a surprising backlog, because of the tremendous problems resulting from foot and mouth disease, which had an impact on Members' postbags and hence on the number of letters to the Department. We will catch up as soon as possible, and I assure the hon. Gentleman that the specific example that he gave will be dealt with quickly.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): My constituency contains three excellent councils, Askern, Stainforth, and Thorne and Moorends. Does my right hon. Friend agree that town councils are a fundamental part of our local democracy? Will he confirm that the Government's policy is to strengthen and enhance their role?

Alun Michael: We certainly want to strengthen and enhance their role. I was encouraged the other day in the Forest of Dean when my hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Diana Organ) invited parish council members along to discuss the consultative document that I mentioned earlier. More than 100 parish and town council members turned up, and were enthusiastic, engaged, questioning and responsive. I think that the potential exists throughout the country for lifting the game of town and parish councils, and we want to encourage that.

Meat Imports

9. **Alistair Burt** (North-East Bedfordshire): If she will make a statement on the progress her Department has made in reforming the regulations governing meat imports. [29545]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): Controls on the import of meat into the United Kingdom from non-EU countries are covered by EU legislation. In the light of the foot and mouth outbreak, we have strengthened the enforcement powers of local authorities in respect of meat that could not have been imported legally, but is found on sale in the UK. We have also taken a number of steps, working with other Departments involved, to improve our ability to prevent and detect illegal imports. We are continuing to keep all measures under review, and are developing other options for further action.

Alistair Burt: Is the right hon. Lady aware of a case about which I have written to the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, in the context of his responsibility for Customs, concerning my constituent Sue Parke, who travelled from Gatwick on 14 September, three days after the New York outrage? She observed a man—who had reached the train untroubled by Customs—loading some eight 4 ft-square containers into the passenger carriage. She wrote to me

> "The smell of either rotting fish or meat was so strong we immediately stood up to move further up the carriage . . . The smell was so vile it reached half way down the carriage. The lady next to me felt sick. She apologised for opening the window and letting in the cold night air but I too was glad of some relief from the stench. We travelled for 35 minutes like this."

My constituent asks me, and I ask the right hon. Lady, why—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that the Secretary of State can answer the question now.

Alistair Burt *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I told the hon. Gentleman that he had finished asking his question; he must sit down.

Margaret Beckett: The hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) knows that we are a trading nation. We export and we also allow imports, which must be properly controlled and handled according to the rules. I shall certainly see whether we can discover any information, and should be grateful if he would let us have as much detail as possible about his constituent's case, which seems extraordinary. While we encourage the speedy and effective detection and pursuit of such issues, I must admit that, at first glance, such a case appears inexplicable.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): When I held a joint consultation with the Women's Farming and Food Union, it raised this issue. The hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) is asking why, when millions of us pass in and out of the country, we never see any evidence that the Government think that this is a serious issue.

Margaret Beckett: I share my hon. Friend's view that we do not have sufficiently effective publicity—but there is work in hand—to highlight the issue to people as they land in the UK. British travellers would not come into contact with this, but when people make arrangements to come to the UK, they are given advice and information about what is, and is not, legal by travel agents and, for those who require visas, by consulates and embassies; they are told firmly what they are, and are not, allowed to do by those outlets. I share my hon. Friend's view that more should be done as people arrive at the port of entry, and we are working on that.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): This afternoon, two Ministers have warned that we need to be on our guard against future outbreaks of foot and mouth. Does not the biggest single risk of another outbreak of foot and mouth come from the fact that we could import it again, simply because our import controls are slack?

My hon. Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) raised a constituency case, but the right hon. Lady should know about recent reports that on one flight arriving at Gatwick airport from Africa, 110 people were found to be carrying illegal imports. That was a spot check. How many imports are coming in that are not found? There are reports of suitcases dripping with blood and covered with maggots or packed with bush rats, antelope meat and monkeys. Who on earth eats that stuff, I cannot imagine. When will the Government begin to take the issue seriously? Is it not the case that as things stand, we could re-import foot and mouth again tomorrow?

Margaret Beckett: It is not the case that our import controls are lax—*[Interruption.]* Let me remind Opposition Members that we have strengthened the import controls that we inherited from them. Our import control procedures have been in existence for many years. I take the hon. Gentleman's point; all of us are dismayed when we read the stories about the amount of meat that some individuals bring in. However, the reason why he knows about those stories—*[Interruption.]* He says that there should not be any, but people are allowed to bring in such material under European Union rules.

I have raised the issue with the relevant Commissioner, and pressed him to look again at that aspect of the rules. The reason why the hon. Gentleman can cite such cases is that the meat has been identified, detected and found. Many of the stories that are used to create concern and alarm are evidence of the effectiveness of our import controls.

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): The Secretary of State made it clear that she has already strengthened controls, but needs to do more. However, any campaign on import controls could lose an important focus if it does not heed the lesson of the foot and mouth crisis that we need strong biosecurity measures in our own country. Any campaign that does not recognise that will fail.

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend is correct. We cannot afford to neglect any aspect of preventing such disease or its spread. He is right to identify that point, however the foot and mouth outbreak started; we do not yet know, and perhaps will never be absolutely certain how it began. It could have been caused by an import that had come into the country via another member state, but however it came here, biosecurity issues, farming practices, movement of animals and so on are all matters that must be handled and are part of prevention and control.

Cod Stocks

10. **Mr. John Wilkinson** (Ruislip-Northwood): If she will make an assessment of the impact of conservation measures for cod stocks in (a) Icelandic and Norwegian waters and (b) waters under the aegis of the EU common fisheries policy. [29546]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): Assessment of cod stocks in Icelandic and Norwegian waters is a matter for those Governments. The package of technical measures for rebuilding certain cod stocks in EU waters that came into operation on 1 January 2002 is designed to make a contribution to bringing stocks back to within safe biological limits, but it will be some time before fisheries scientists will be able to assess the results.

Mr. Wilkinson: Is not the assessment of cod stocks in Icelandic and Norwegian waters essential for proper evaluation of the total potential catch of Atlantic cod? Is it not a fact that the common fisheries policy has been an economic and ecological disaster of the first magnitude? If we were a free independent country and conserved our stocks as well as the Norwegians and Icelanders do, the cod stocks in the north Atlantic would not be under such threat.

Mr. Morley: Both Norway and Iceland have had their problems with fisheries management and indeed with fisheries conservation. I might remind the hon. Gentleman that this country managed to wipe out its herring stocks before it joined the common fisheries policy. Although the CFP of course has its failings and weaknesses, which we want to address from the UK, whatever the arguments about it, we must have a Europe-wide fisheries conservation measure. That is essential. We must also have such co-operation on the international front in relation to fish conservation.

Mr. Speaker: Before I call business questions, may I indicate that I am extremely disappointed that we have reached only Question 10 on the Order Paper? The House can co-operate by making sure that we have only brief questions and, of course, brief replies.

Business of the House

12.31 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): May I ask the Leader of the House for the business for next week?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): I shall be as brief as possible, Mr. Speaker.

The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 4 FEBRUARY—Opposition Day [10th Allotted Day]. Until 7 o'clock there will be a debate entitled "Failure of the Government to Negotiate a Bilateral Agreement on Asylum with France" followed by a debate entitled "Failures of the Government's Pensions Plans". Both debates will arise on a Government motion, or rather an Opposition one—*[Laughter.]* We might table a Government amendment, it has to be admitted.

TUESDAY 5 FEBRUARY—Progress on remaining stages of the Education Bill.

WEDNESDAY 6 FEBRUARY—Conclusion of the remaining stages of the Education Bill.

THURSDAY 7 FEBRUARY—Remaining stages of the Tax Credits Bill.

FRIDAY 8 FEBRUARY—Debate on Government measures to regenerate disadvantaged areas on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

The provisional business for the following week will be:

MONDAY 11 FEBRUARY—Remaining stages of the Land Registration Bill *[Lords]*.

TUESDAY 12 FEBRUARY—Remaining stages of the Employment Bill.

WEDNESDAY 13 FEBRUARY—Remaining stages of the British Overseas Territories Bill *[Lords]*.

THURSDAY 14 FEBRUARY—Debate on Defence Policy on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 15 FEBRUARY—The House will not be sitting.

The right hon. Gentleman raised with me last week the future of the St. David's day debate. I am pleased to respond to him and announce that there will be a Welsh debate on 28 February, which is as near as I can get it to St. David's day.

The House will also wish to be reminded that, as the Chancellor has already announced, the Budget will take place on Wednesday 17 April.

On Tuesday 12 February, there will be a debate relating to the fight against fraud in European Standing Committee B, and on Wednesday 13 February, there will be a debate relating to the equal treatment directive in European Standing Committee B.

[Tuesday 12 February 2002:

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Union documents: 9208/01, Protecting the Communities' Financial Interests—the fight against fraud; Commission's Twelfth Annual Report 2000; 9207/01, Protecting the Communities' Financial Interests—the fight against fraud; Action Plan for 2001-2003; Unnumbered Document, Court of Auditors' annual Report 2000. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Report: HC 152-xii, (2001-02).

Wednesday 13 February:

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Union document: 14492/01, Commission Opinion on the European Parliament's amendments to the Council's common position regarding the draft Directive amending the 1976 Equal Treatment Directive. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Report: HC 152-xii (2001-02).]

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to the Leader of the House, especially for his announcement about the St. David's day debate. At least he had the courtesy to announce it to the House and it was not leaked. Pennies drop at varying rates in this place.

Can I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to early-day motion 226, which he will know has today attracted 292 signatures and counting?

[That this House supports the democratic principle that any revised Second Chamber of Parliament should be wholly or substantially elected.]

The motion was tabled by some of the Leader of the House's hon. Friends but it is now supported by nearly 300 hon. Members. As he knows, this is the final day for replies to the consultation on his White Paper on reform of the upper House. In light of the spectacular support for that early-day motion, can he give us an early statement on the Government's intentions as to where we go from here following the disastrous White Paper? The Government are now totally adrift from opinion in the House of Commons and elsewhere.

The Leader of the House has announced that on Monday there will be an Opposition day debate on asylum. I am told that a White Paper on asylum may be imminent. Whether he can confirm that or not, will he pledge that any White Paper on asylum, or indeed on anything else, will be announced first in the House and there will be no spinning, leaking or anything else ahead of its announcement in the House and the opportunity for hon. Members to question the appropriate Secretary of State?

I gather that Lord Birt, who is, apparently, a crony of the Prime Minister and who has been asked by him to do something rather important—namely, to look at the long-term future of our transport system—has refused to appear before the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions. If that is true, is it not yet another example of the utter contempt in which the Prime Minister and his cronies hold the House, its Committees and the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), who chairs the Committee, and her colleagues? Will the Leader of the House give an undertaking now that he will use his undoubted influence and respect for the House of Commons to persuade Lord Birt to do what he should be willing to do anyway—to come before the Select Committee and give an account of himself? I hope that we can get that undertaking from the Leader of the House today.

I remind the Leader of the House that, in relation to the proposed September sittings of the House, he said:

> "I am also advised that there will be roadworks outside the Palace."—*[Official Report, 24 January 2002; Vol. 378, c. 1010.]*

In that connection, has he had discussions with his erstwhile friend, that nice Mayor Livingstone, about the Mayor's plans for extensive alterations to Parliament square? I am sure that the Leader of the House will want to be satisfied that any extensive roadworks initiated by the Mayor relating to Parliament square do not have a serious effect on the ability of the House to perform its functions. I hope that he will be able to report back to us at an early stage on the outcome of his discussions with his nice friend.

Mr. Cook: In response to the right hon. Gentleman's initial statement, I am partial to leeks in the pot but we will try to keep them out of the announcements of the business.

The right hon. Gentleman reminded us that this is the final day for consultation on the Government's White Paper on Lords reform. It would be a bit premature to attempt any statement when the final day has only just arrived. In any case I anticipate that people will wish to make submissions for some time afterwards, but there is no great secret. For the past month, I have said to the House, and indeed to anyone else who would listen, that when consultation finishes we will need a period of reflection in order to establish where the centre of gravity lies behind reform. When we have come to the conclusion of that period of reflection, it will be proper to have a statement in the House.

I follow the early-day motion with weekly interest to see how many hon. Members have signed it, and I have had a number of individual and collective representations from those who signed it. I listen to all views in the House. I repeat what I have said: once we have reflected on all this, it is important that those who want reform find a proposal behind which they can gather.

On asylum and immigration, it may help the right hon. Gentleman if I say that I anticipate that there may be a statement to the House next week. We have promised a Bill on asylum and immigration. I anticipate that that will be before the House this Session. We will have ample opportunity to debate those matters.

On Lord Birt, the Government stand ready to ensure that full evidence is provided by Ministers and senior civil servants. It has not been customary for special advisers to give evidence to Select Committees. I am not aware off hand of a case where an unpaid adviser was summoned to a Select Committee. If that becomes the practice, we may have some difficulty in seeking expert advice from those outside Government ranks.

On Parliament square, I clocked the point made by the right hon. Gentleman last week. We have a right to be considered in this matter. I am often frustrated by the difficulty of getting from Birdcage walk to Parliament square. I hope that we can achieve an outcome that will make things easier, and I will try to resist anything likely to make things more difficult.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): My right hon. Friend might be surprised to find that many mean-minded employers have no intention of paying their hourly paid workers for the public holiday to be held for the Queen's jubilee. Is it not time for a debate about when workers are entitled to be paid for public holidays, recognising the fact that we have fewer public holidays than almost any other country in Europe? It is always the hourly paid or the lowest-paid workers who lose the most.

Mr. Cook: As my hon. Friend will be aware, we introduced the working time directive which, for the first time, provided a right to paid holidays over Christmas and at times such as Easter for 2 million people who had never had paid holidays at those times. Given that the bank holiday on 4 June is to commemorate Her Majesty's jubilee, we would expect all patriotic employers to ensure that their employees can enjoy that day, and enjoy that day with pay.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Can we have an urgent debate to put into context the widespread public and press perception that it is possible, and has been possible for some time, to buy access to and influence over Parliament and Government? In view of the revelations during the past few days from Enron, Arthur Andersen and RMT and now the resignation of Lord Wakeham, which has been announced in the last few minutes, should we not try to achieve a proper sense of direction and perception on these matters? As the Leader of the House will have seen in *The Independent* this morning, it is important to review the funding of democracy in this country.

Will the Leader of the House ask for an urgent statement from the Chancellor or the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions about the apparent lack of clarity over where the £2.2 billion that the Secretary of State announced on Tuesday in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) is to come from? He said that the additional money will not be taken from the

"roads, buses or local transport budgets."—[*Official Report*, 29 January 2002; Vol. 379, c. 151.]

This morning there was an announcement via a Treasury statement and, to quote *The Guardian:*

> "Gordon Brown ordered his officials to pull the rug from under Mr. Byers after learning the transport secretary had asserted the deal was secured during a meeting the two men had over the weekend.
>
> In a terse statement the Treasury denied any conversation had taken place. It also said the £2.2 billion was not new money but part of an allocation announced last April. Officials suggested the £2.2 billion would almost certainly be taken from the roads budget."

Why should we put up with two Cabinet Ministers making directly contradictory statements within hours of each other?

Mr. Cook: We had a long debate on political party funding during the last Session, in which we passed a significant Bill, and we can keep under review whether there is a will in the country or the House to return to the matter. There was a substantial debate only two years ago and I am not sure that there would be an appetite in the House to make it a priority. *[Interruption.]* I remind the shadow Leader of the House that the chief executive of Enron in Britain went on record this week saying that there had been broadly similar payments to the Conservative party as to the Labour party. The funds given to the Labour party were for the purchase of tables, and were not donations to the party.

I regard with some mystification why it is thought unusual for a Minister with responsibility for energy to meet representatives from what was, at that time, a major energy company, particularly since the outcome of those discussions was a Green Paper that curtailed rather than expanded the opportunities for Enron within the British market. It is for the hon. Gentleman to explain what BSM received in return for its major donation to the Liberal

[Mr. Cook]

Democrats. I am sure that we would wish to return to that in some detail if we were to have a further debate on this subject.

I welcome the extra £2 billion that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions announced is available for the rail industry. The travelling public will be more interested in extra investment in rail and a response to the current crisis than in arguments about who telephoned whom over the weekend.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): My right hon. Friend will realise that I am touched by the concern of the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), but the reality is that it is increasingly difficult for Select Committees to perform their task of scrutiny properly when advisers who take major decisions and give serious advice to the Prime Minister are apparently not available for questioning. I ask my right hon. Friend seriously to consider the problem. Select Committees are told that decisions relating to Government policy are being taken elsewhere than in the specific Departments that they monitor. If that is so, Select Committees must have the right to call such advisers before them.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her observations, and I am happy to say that I will continue to consider those matters. I recognise that temerity is required, but if I may I will correct her on one point. Advisers do not take major decisions. Decisions are taken by Ministers, and they are assisted in that task by senior civil servants. It is right and welcome that the Government occasionally ask others outside government to look further ahead, on an unpaid basis, than we are able to do from day to day. Such activities do not constitute taking decisions. The people whom the Select Committee should hold to account are those who are going to take the decisions.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Is the Leader of the House aware of the great demand for a full debate on Zimbabwe? Such debates have taken place in Westminster Hall, but we surely need a full day's debate in Government time. Every day brings new stories of intimidation, torture and murder of opposition politicians. Draconian laws of the former Zimbabwean Parliament stifle freedom of speech, so how can there be free and fair elections? Why will the Government not act? Is it because they are ashamed that their ethical foreign policy is a shambles?

Mr. Cook: Brushing aside for a second the hon. Gentleman's concluding remark, I agree that it is important that this House sends a clear and united message. The situation in Zimbabwe is alarming and deplorable, and the attacks on opposition politicians are outrageous. I fully agree with the hon. Gentleman that, even if we start now, it will be difficult to ensure that an election held four weeks from now is free and fair. Having said that, we have worked hard through the European Union and the Commonwealth to ensure that external observers are present to try to curb the worst of the intimidation—an approach that the opposition forces in Zimbabwe have warmly welcomed.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has worked hard to be robust on this issue. He attended yesterday's meeting to seek Zimbabwe's expulsion from the Commonwealth, and secured the support of half of those in attendance. However, we have some way to go before we can achieve the unanimous supported needed to secure expulsion.

Mr. James Wray (Glasgow, Baillieston): I should like to draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to early-day motion 690 on asthma and schools.

[That this House recognises that one in seven children has asthma and many children are not getting the support they need at school; believes that children should be able to have immediate access to their inhalers and have a school environment free from dangerous triggers such as tobacco fumes, with members of staff with knowledge to help those in the event of a serious asthma attack; and hopes that more local education authorities will respond to the National Asthma Campaign and implement an asthma policy.]

The National Asthma Campaign is holding a national asthma day in February. It would be nice to debate the matter in the House, because we seem not to have a policy on asthma with regard to schools.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for ventilating an issue that is of considerable concern in many areas—particularly the one that he represents. One matter that puzzled me during the years in which I followed health policy—it is now a pressing issue—was the reason for the significant increase in asthma-related cases, especially among our young people. I shall draw his observations to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, who will doubtless want to respond to them.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): In a week in which beleaguered rail passengers in my constituency have again suffered at the hands of the RMT and its irresponsible industrial action, will the Leader of the House explain why Lord Birt has not appeared before the Select Committee? Is it not true that, according to Standing Orders, a Select Committee can demand that someone appear before it? In an earlier answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), the Leader of the House said that there was no need for such a person to appear if he was not paid, or if he was just an adviser, but can that be right? Lord Birt is a Member of the other place—a parliamentarian—so surely he can be called upon to appear before the Select Committee.

Mr. Cook: The right hon. Gentleman undermines rather than reinforces the case for Lord Birt coming before the Select Committee. Lord Birt has nothing to do with the RMT, South West Trains, or the present strikes. The right hon. Gentleman merely illustrates the danger into which Lord Birt would be sucked if he came before the Select Committee.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the announcements that have postdated this week's debate on the postal services? First, there was a leaked and possibly erroneous rumour that 3,000 of the 9,000 urban sub-post offices were to close. Secondly, the Post Office watchdog made some remarks today about the privatisation of parts of the postal service. Such rumours and remarks are bound to cause massive concern to the public, who want a universal and nationwide postal service. Can we have an early statement on the matter? Does he accept that, when management is not up to scratch, as on the Titanic, the answer is not to scuttle the boat but to get rid of the captain?

Mr. Cook: First, what Postcomm published today were proposals for consultation about competition. Most certainly, we will be following the competition proposals and the consultation on them with the closest interest. We fully understand their great significance to the public and to those who use the Post Office. The one imperative in any judgment that we reach is that we must preserve the universal service provided by the Post Office.

Secondly, there has been no proposal of the sort that has been leaked to the press. If such a proposal were to be made, I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry would wish to keep the House informed.

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): The Leader of the House will be aware of the imminent arrival of the Boundary Commission proposals for Scotland. I know that the subject is especially close to his heart. Does he agree that the continued stability of this House depends on fair and equitable representation for all parts of the United Kingdom? I know that the right hon. Gentleman moves in lofty circles, so will he play his part in ensuring that the proposals are implemented in time for the next general election? Will he put behind him the electoral interests of the Labour party, and his own search for a seat?

Mr. Cook: I am reassured to learn that I move in lofty circles. The Government have complied fully with a commitment that we made when we brought in the Scotland Act 1998. We are now carrying that commitment forward, and I understand that the Boundary Commission may make its first report shortly. It is then a matter for the commission to make progress on the subsequent representation and appeals process, which is set out in statute. If we receive the commission's report in good time, I see no reason why it should not be implemented in time for the next general election. That is our current plan.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston): My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will no doubt recall that, earlier this week, the House decided who would be its two representatives to the convention on the future of Europe. I should declare an interest, in that I have the honour to be one. Has my right hon. Friend given any thought as to how those representatives will be supported by the House? They will be representatives of the House and not of the Government, so the House will need to be informed of progress, and to have the opportunity to take part in the debate and shape the convention's decisions. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that he will give full support to the delegates? Has he had some preliminary thoughts about the shape that that support might take?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises the important point of principle that those appointed by this House and the other place to represent Parliament in the convention are representatives of Parliament, and not of the Government. It is therefore important that they receive support from Parliament. I am pleased to say that the Parliament office that we have established in Brussels, in the office of our representative to the European Union, will be happy to support and assist my hon. Friend and her colleague. I know that the Clerks of the House have also invited her to come and see them to discuss how they can make sure that proper resources are available to assist the representatives, in terms of travel arrangements, research and policy briefing. We will be very happy to help in any way that we can.

Derek Conway (Old Bexley and Sidcup): Will the Leader of the House assure me that, when the Government publish their response to the consultation exercise on the code of practice for dealing with the remains of the deceased in hospitals, the House will have an opportunity to consider the matter? The right hon. Gentleman will be aware of the unhelpful and sad case at Queen Mary's hospital in Sidcup that involved the disposal of the body of James Fernandez. That baby's death was a tragedy for his parents in the first place, but the subsequent handling of his remains obviously caused them additional sadness. I am sure that the House will extend its sympathy to the family.

The hospital has committed medical and management teams, and the staff are deeply distressed by the exercise. The Leader of the House will understand why, in the fullness of time, we should have the opportunity to debate the resources, assistance and procedures available to the hospital to ensure that such a eventuality does not occur again.

Mr. Cook: The House will wish to echo the hon. Gentleman's deep sympathy and condolences to the parents for what must have been an appalling experience. We all share those views. I also echo the hon. Gentleman's tribute to the staff at the hospital. I have been impressed by the speed and thoroughness with which the hospital management—the trust board—has responded to this appalling event. It has put in place systems to ensure that it cannot happen again. That has to be the right way to respond, but it cannot alleviate the distress caused to the parents.

Mr. George Mudie (Leeds, East): Will my right hon. Friend use his powers to bring the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry here to make a statement on the Post Office? Since the debate on Tuesday, we have heard that 8,000 post offices face closure as a result of the new benefit changes. Today's announcement by the regulator that within eight weeks one third of the Post Office's businesses will be privatised is a disgrace.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is quoted today in the press as saying that it is not a matter for her but for the regulator. Does the Leader of the House agree that when half the post offices in this country face closure, a process that will accelerate next year, and the regulator announces a change that will push the redundancies in the post offices beyond the 30,000 already announced, that is very much a matter for the Secretary of State? It is certainly a matter of great interest to Labour Members.

Mr. Cook: It is, of course, a matter of clear and close interest to the Secretary of State. The regulator is entitled

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to publish what it wishes to publish, but it could not secure the proposals in the consultation paper without primary legislation. That is very much a matter for the House and for the Government, who will be following that consultation closely.

On the figures quoted by my hon. Friend for the closure of post offices, I repeat that Ministers have received no such proposals. The House should be careful in interpreting the figures that have appeared in the press so far and will no doubt appear again in the weeks ahead.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): The right hon. Gentleman may be aware that today is the first anniversary of the initial announcement of the loss of 3,000 jobs from Corus in south Wales. He will understand, therefore, how shocked we were to read in the Welsh newspapers that at the same time as Corus workers were battling to save their jobs, the Labour party was lining its pockets with a donation of £125,000 from one of Corus's main competitors. It was not for tables or for drinks—it was hard cash from the chairman of Ispat International.

In the wake of Enron and Andersen, the fear is that the Government's decision not to back the employee buyout was due in part to knowing that a hefty cheque was on its way. We need an urgent statement from the Prime Minister on this. He needs to come clean and not plead the fifth amendment yet again.

Mr. Cook: I am not aware of any donation of the kind that the hon. Gentleman describes. I will investigate the matter and make sure that one of my colleagues responds to the hon. Gentleman. However, I find it unlikely that contemplation of any donation from a competitor of Corus would have any bearing on Government decisions on Corus.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Given the announcement that cattle markets are about to be reopened, when can we debate early-day motion 750?

[That this House welcomes the reduction in animal suffering and costs caused by the sale of farm animals through video links, the Internet and direct sales during the enforced closure of animals markets; and calls on the Government to encourage non-market sales in order to reduce risk of infections and to avoid the stress for animals in avoidable journeys and cramped conditions in stock markets.]

We should congratulate farmers on their ingenuity in finding alternatives to cattle markets by selling their animals via direct farm-to-farm sales, video links and the internet? These methods have been a great improvement in reducing animal suffering and costs. Should we not recall that the main way in which foot and mouth was spread was via animal markets and encourage the use of non-market sales to reduce animal suffering and infections?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend rightly identifies one of the major vectors of foot and mouth in the recent outbreak as the enormous—surprisingly high—distances travelled by sheep and cows to market. If one of the consequences has been to promote more local slaughter and sales, I would regard that as welcome. That step would be helpful in ensuring that we can contain any future outbreak, and I endorse my hon. Friend's remarks.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): This morning, we heard difficult news about the A400M transport aircraft from the BBC. It was suggested that the Germans were about to renege on their obligations to the project and, more disturbingly, that the British Government were looking for alternatives. In light of the problems faced by the aerospace industry, in particular in the north-west of England, may we have an early statement from the Secretary of State for Defence to establish the facts of the matter and what this Government are doing to ensure that the German Government honour their obligations?

Mr. Cook: I fully understand the problems that the aerospace industry is facing and we have discussed them a number of times in business questions. The right hon. Gentleman asked what we were doing to make the German Government take a particular course of action. We cannot do anything. They are a sovereign Government and will reach their own decision. Of course, we are making strong representations to them and will continue to do so; and we will consider any statement that they make later today.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): If there is a debate on the Post Office in the near future, will my right hon. Friend pass on the message that some of us want to know the process and the procedures for sacking regulators? This fellow Corbett, or whatever his name is, has gone too far already. He is going to become an embarrassment to this Government, just like Woodhead before him—we all know what happened to him: he finished up working for *The Daily Telegraph* and the Tory party. Let us get Corbett out before he causes more damage.

Mr. Cook: I am not sure whether *The Daily Telegraph* is in the market for more columnists, but I am sure it will note what my hon. Friend has said. I fully understand his point. The more cherry-picking of the large commercial contracts by other parts of the market, the more challenging it becomes for the Royal Mail to maintain its universal service. Obviously, that is a matter that must weigh with us when we consider any outcome of the consultation process. In the meantime, I shall ensure that someone furnishes my hon. Friend with a full description of the process of sacking a Postcomm regulator.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): The Leader of the House will be aware that a growing number of issues are seriously affecting the ability of Members of the Parliament to carry out their job in this house and elsewhere—data protection matters, tax allowances, expenditure on parliamentary trips abroad and so forth. Some of those matters may require legislative changes. Will he allow an early opportunity for this Chamber to debate some of those issues in detail?

Mr. Cook: I have had exchanges about a number of those issues with the hon. Gentleman and I am grateful to him for keeping me posted on the views of Opposition Back Benchers. I fully share his concern about some of those matters, in particular the way in which the Electoral Commission has pursued the matter of the passes provided to all hon. Members by BAA plc, which is plainly not a political donation in any meaningful sense of the word.

On data protection, I hope that my last letter to the hon. Gentleman will have been of some assistance. We stand ready to consider whether legislation requires amendment. I hope that we can find a solution to those questions short of primary legislation, but it is important that hon. Members should be able to go about their business and be free to make representations on behalf of their constituents without facing undue legal obstacles.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): May I draw the attention of my right hon. Friend to the plight of asbestos sufferers who are still awaiting compensation, including some of my constituents? Despite the great efforts of the Secretary of State for Scotland, among others, it appears that every time that we take one step forward in this matter we take two backwards. Will the right hon. Gentleman arrange for an urgent statement or debate that would allow all hon. Members the opportunity to get to the bottom, once and for all, of why it is taking so long for much needed and deserved compensation to get into the hands of those who are afflicted by that terrible disease?

Mr. Cook: I am glad that my hon. Friend has had an opportunity to raise on the Floor of the House an issue that is important to him and which he has had diligently pursued for some time. I welcome the fact that that issue has been ventilated in debates in Westminster Hall, which underlines the importance of that Chamber in enabling hon. Members to raise issues of concern to them and their constituents. I will draw my hon. Friend's observations to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and ensure that my hon. Friend receives a further letter.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I am sure that the Leader of the House understands and knows of my deep interest in Zimbabwe, and that he is aware of the affection and respect in which I hold its people. Although I respect the robust position adopted by our Foreign Secretary at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting held yesterday, will the Leader of the House please understand that unless a substantial number of observers and monitors are sent to Zimbabwe now, there is not the slightest chance of a free, transparent and fair election? Inevitably, Zimbabwe would thus be breaching the fundamental principles of membership of the Commonwealth. Will the right hon. Gentleman please arrange for a statement to be made to the House as to the precise attitude and position of the Government, and hopefully of the Commonwealth, in respect of Zimbabwe, so that the opposition parties fighting the election can believe that they have some support overseas?

Mr. Cook: I entirely endorse what the hon. Gentleman said about his longstanding interest in this matter. Indeed, I remember him asking questions during my previous incarnation at this Dispatch Box. It is tragic that, in Zimbabwe, President Mugabe portrays Britain as the enemy when in fact there are so many people both in the House and throughout Britain who regard themselves as friends of Zimbabwe and want to see the country prosper.

The hon. Gentleman asks about our position in respect of electoral observers. Let me again make it clear: we robustly and vigorously insist on the right of the international community to observe those elections and on the right of the ordinary public in Zimbabwe to have that international presence in order to curb some of the intimidation and thuggery to which they are subject, and we shall continue to do all that we can to try to deliver that.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): I have a registered interest in my question, as patron of the Society of Registration Officers. Last week, through the Economic Secretary, the Government published a White Paper entitled "Civil Registration: Vital Change". It certainly will be vital change. I have heard that the changes may be made by delegated legislation. If that is so, there should be a debate on what will be one of the biggest reforms of the registration service in probably a century. Will my right hon. Friend arrange for such a debate in this place?

Mr. Cook: I cannot commit myself on whether the matter will be dealt with by delegated or primary legislation—I am not sighted on that point, although I see no immediate prospect of primary legislation on that important step forward. If it should proceed by delegated legislation, there is provision for the House to debate delegated legislation of importance and substance. My hon. Friend rightly identifies this matter as one of substance and I shall consider his point carefully.

Mr. Charles Hendry (Wealden): The Leader of the House will have seen the report of the Institute for Fiscal Studies concluding that taxes will have to rise by £7 billion if the Government are to meet their spending commitments, and that the Chancellor is in danger of breaching his so-called golden rule—that he will borrow only in order to invest. As we have not held a debate on the economy since the election and as the Budget is still 11 whole weeks away, does the Leader of the House understand why we feel that the House needs a full opportunity to debate the economy? In the light of the IFS report, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that we need an emergency mini-Budget in the time-honoured tradition of Labour Governments?

Mr. Cook: As Leader of the House, I counsel the House not to press for a mini-Budget as well as the real Budget on 17 April—I am not sure that would be an efficient use of the House's time. As for the Institute for Fiscal Studies, in my recollection, it has been predicting that taxes would rise for the past four years and has always been wrong.

Mr. Eric Joyce (Falkirk, West): Will my right hon. Friend find time for an urgent debate on the Geneva convention? There has been much comment and debate in the House during the past few weeks on the subject of the al-Qaeda prisoners in Cuba. There has been much confusion over who is actually a prisoner and who should be subject to criminal trial. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that could put British armed forces personnel in danger, and that a debate would help to inform our future discussions about the prisoners in Cuba?

Mr. Cook: I appreciate the point that my hon. Friend makes about the legal complexities. However, as I have

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told the House previously, the nub of the matter is not whether the Geneva convention applies: it is that the prisoners should be treated according to the humanitarian standards that we all recognise and uphold whether or not the convention applies. I am therefore pleased that the Red Cross has now secured a permanent presence at Guantanamo bay and has been able to confirm that the conditions observed there are consistent with the convention.

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): I urge the Leader of the House to listen to his own Back Benchers a little more carefully than I fear he has done hitherto today, and to allow an early opportunity for a debate in the House on the future of postal services. In particular, I refer to the proposals announced this morning by Postcomm to deregulate postal services, the first tranche of which deregulation will take place in the next eight weeks. The Leader of the House may be aware that my constituency includes some of the few communities not covered by the universal service obligation. Frankly, we view with alarm the prospect of a deregulated service, which will not be able to serve the more remote island communities that I represent.

Will the right hon. Gentleman give the House an assurance that, if there is to be a decision to deregulate postal services and to end the universal service obligation, it will be made here in the Chamber? We must not be bounced into such a decision by a body such as Postcomm proposing, as it did this morning, a meaningless decision to take the first step within eight weeks.

Mr. Cook: I fully understand the importance of the universal service obligation to the hon. Gentleman's constituency and many others in Scotland—and, indeed, to quite a number of people in the more landward areas in my own constituency. That is why the Government have always made it plain that there is no question of removing the universal service obligation from the Post Office. Postcomm does not make Government policy; nor do we write its documents. Any attempt to undermine the universal service obligation would have to come back to the House and, on the basis of what I have heard this morning—which does not surprise me—I do not anticipate that the House would countenance such a proposal.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is it not rather strange that the regulator's report should come out just two days after our debate on the Post Office? I was among the Labour MPs who strenuously opposed and voted against the Tories' proposals to privatise the Post Office, and I have not changed my mind in the slightest. I hope that Ministers will seriously reconsider a scheme that would be totally unacceptable to many of us on these Benches.

Mr. Cook: Of course I remember my hon. Friend's opposition to the privatisation of the Post Office, particularly as—if I recall correctly—I occupied the Opposition Dispatch Box in those debates. There has been no proposal from the Government on the privatisation of the Post Office. It is only a year or two since we gave the Post Office the commercial freedom that it wanted, so that it could operate in the public sector—with commercial freedom of the kind that it would enjoy in the private sector—and meet the competition. I have listened with interest and care to the points that hon. Members have raised, and I shall certainly draw to the attention of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry the deep concern felt in the House.

David Winnick: On this side.

Mr. Cook: Well, on both sides, in fairness to my hon. Friend. I always try to build consensus, even if it sometimes eludes me. I repeat that this morning's statement was not made by Government, and it is not Government policy. We had no control over its timing, and I recognise the concern to which it has given rise.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Last week, I raised with the Leader of the House an issue relating to correspondence with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Today, I have received the following letter from the Department:

> "You will be aware that the Rt Hon Margaret, Secretary of State at DEFRA, will be in your Constituency on Tuesday 5 February, on a Regional visit to Cumbria. She will open Hartington Hall Youth Hostel."

Will the Leader of the House inform the Secretary of State that Hartington is in Derbyshire, that her constituency abuts my constituency, and that if she is opening Hartington Hall youth hostel in Cumbria, she is going to be in the wrong place again?

Mr. Cook: I am sure that my right hon. Friend will be very grateful for that advice, which I will draw to her attention. We will also make sure that the correspondence unit at DEFRA has an adequate map of the British isles.

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): Is my right hon. Friend aware that children as young as nine are being issued with firearms certificates in this country? Does he share my concern that some shooting bodies, in an effort to boost recruitment, feature children as young as three in magazines and on websites, posing with guns and dead animals, and sometimes smeared with blood? Is it not time that we introduced an age restriction and tougher guidance on children's access to firearms? Will my right hon. Friend arrange an early debate on this matter?

Mr. Cook: The whole House will share my surprise that there is access to licensed weapons at the age to which my hon. Friend refers. Weapons are dangerous enough in the hands of some adults, without letting them into the hands of children. I shall certainly draw the important point raised by my hon. Friend to the attention of the Home Office.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): It is all very well for the Leader of the House to agree with the remarks about Zimbabwe by my hon. Friends the Members for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) and for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), but he shows no sign of urging the Government to grant a debate in Government time or make a statement on the terrible situation there. The Government have done too little, too late to protest about Zimbabwe, and the failure of the Commonwealth to take any action can only lead people to conclude that the Commonwealth, the United Nations and the British Government, taken together, have taken less effective action against Robert Mugabe than did the gay campaigner Peter Tatchell. Will the Leader of the House now promise us a debate or a statement on the terrible situation in Zimbabwe?

Mr. Cook: I wholly repudiate what the hon. Gentleman says about our record on Zimbabwe. We have taken every possible step to bring home to the Government of President Mugabe our deep concern and alarm at the state of affairs within the country. We have wound up all economic assistance to that Government, while maintaining humanitarian aid, and we have withdrawn our military team from the country. We have acted against Zimbabwe in the European Union, where we have now secured a consensus in favour of economic sanctions if we do not secure free and fair elections, and we have started a debate in the Commonwealth, in which yesterday we got the support of 50 per cent. of those present. We are vigorously taking action and leading international opinion on this matter. Frankly, the hon. Gentleman does not help his cause or those on whose behalf he claims to be speaking by trying to undermine the degree of the concern felt by the Government and the people.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling): Will my right hon. Friend arrange a statement or an early debate on young people's participation in politics? He will know that the UK Youth Parliament had a meeting here yesterday. Surely one of the most important issues facing us all must be the apparent lack of interest in this place shown by our young people. It is one of the most important debates in which we in this Chamber could engage.

Mr. Cook: I shall certainly reflect on how we can take forward that discussion among ourselves. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of drawing young people into participation in politics. All of us, whatever view we take of the result and whatever side of the House we sit on, must be concerned about the substantial reduction, at the last election, in the number of young people who voted. We must all find ways in which we can engage their interest and participation to ensure that, next time, there is a higher turnout by young people.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I join, on behalf of the people of Northern Ireland, the voices in the House calling for further debate on the Post Office.

I remind the Leader of the House that Scottish Members have in the past complained about too many English Members asking questions at Scottish questions. In fact, on one occasion, a Member said, "I spy strangers." May I press the right hon. Gentleman to consider that, for some time, now, Northern Ireland Members who have tabled questions for answer at Northern Ireland questions have not been coming up in the first five and thus do not get their question answered in the House? I thank the Speaker, who has been very helpful in trying to give Northern Ireland Members an opportunity to speak at Northern Ireland questions. This is an important issue, especially when it appears that some questions have been franchised, and are not those that Northern Ireland Members would want to ask.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the important principle that this is a United Kingdom Parliament in which all Members are equal. I understand the frustration to which he refers, but I am not sure that it is within the gift of myself, the Speaker or indeed the Clerks to achieve a different outcome. The placing of questions on the Order Paper results from a random ballot, and if we tamper with that ballot, it is not only Northern Ireland questions that I will find myself receiving questions about.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): Further to the question that I asked my right hon. Friend on 8 November about Zephyr Cams—a company that is now in receivership—does he agree that it is a scandal that, while the 65 people who have lost their jobs are still owed wages and have not received any redundancy money, with the possibility that the taxpayer may have to pick up the bill, the owner of the company, Mr. Kenny Joseph of Wells Industries, New Jersey, remains unscathed, enjoying the luxury of his multi-million pound apartment in New York and his even more expensive house in The Hamptons? Can we have a debate on insolvency law, especially as that individual did the same sort of thing with two other companies in Weston-super-Mare a few years ago?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend has raised that distressing case before, and I am glad that he has had the opportunity to ventilate it again in the House; he draws attention to what must be a local scandal in his constituency. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is currently examining insolvency and bankruptcy law, and I will draw her attention to the observations that my hon. Friend has made about that case.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): When can we have a debate to discuss the Government's total indifference to the plight of small firms being put out of business by Government regulation? Is the Leader of the House aware of the plight of firms involved in the British embalming industry and the impact on that industry of the biocide products directive? Is he aware that, in the opinion of the British Institute of Embalmers, the regulation will,

> "in the case of funeral businesses, turn the clock back at least 100 years to the bad old days of rotting corpses being commonplace at the funeral"?

Does it not show absolute contempt for that industry that I wrote to the Secretary of State seven weeks ago and he has not even had the courtesy to reply to the concerns that I expressed on behalf of that industry and an individual embalmer in my constituency?

Mr. Cook: I must confess that I am not up to speed on the present position in relation to the British embalming industry, but I shall try to rectify that as quickly as I can after this exchange. I will certainly speak to the appropriate Secretary of State to ensure that the hon. Gentleman gets his reply. I can assure the House that the Government do not intend, as he put it, to return to the days of rotting corpses at the time of the funeral. We will certainly ensure that that does not happen.

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): Given that the 400th anniversary of the gunpowder plot will occur in 2005,

[Shona McIsaac]

will my right hon. Friend consider commemorating that anniversary by restricting the sale of explosives in the form of fireworks to the general public, as has been eloquently articulated in early-day motions 346, 419 and 682, which have been signed by many hon. Members from both sides of the House. The first of them reads:

[That this House notes the increasing nuisance caused by reckless and dangerous use of fireworks, and that the sale of fireworks is taking place for many weeks before 5th November; further notes that the 400th anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot will occur in 2005; and believes that before that date the Government should bring forward legislation better to regulate and restrict the sale of fireworks.]

Mr. Cook: I am fully aware of the deep concern in the House about the sale of fireworks and the importance of ensuring that they are properly regulated and that there is proper safety for our constituents. We all know of local cases where things have gone tragically wrong. I will convey my hon. Friend's remarks to the appropriate Secretary of State to ensure that we consider all that can done. I am not entirely sure that it would be wise to start to plan now for a big event to celebrate the gunpowder plot in 2005; some people could probably think of ways to celebrate it that the House would not wish to encourage.

Mr. Mark Simmonds (Boston and Skegness): Will the Leader of the House consider holding an urgent debate on illegal hare coursing—an issue of great concern to hon. Members on both sides of the House? Gangs of thugs currently roam the countryside, intimidating residents and torching the yards of farmers who try to stop them rampaging across fields full of crops. That is completely unacceptable, and I would be grateful to the right hon. Gentleman if he could arrange an urgent debate, because the police fully support a change in the anachronistic laws that currently cover those crimes.

Shona McIsaac: What about hunting?

Mr. Cook: May I tell my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) that—whatever view we may take of hunting, which is legal—hon. Members on both sides of the House can agree with the hon. Gentleman that there is no basis on which any of us should countenance illegal hunting of the kind that he describes. I will certainly ensure that we reflect on the point that he makes, to find out whether we can ensure that it is covered at an appropriate time in future.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): Will the Leader of the House find time for an early debate on the treatment of cancer patients in the national health service? Such a debate would provide the House with an opportunity to debate the Government's proposals to run down cancer services at Southend hospital, thus forcing many patients, many of whom are elderly, to travel possibly as far as Suffolk for their treatment. That is a matter of great concern to all residents in south-east Essex, so I wonder whether time can be found for such an important debate.

Mr. Cook: I am not aware that the House is short of opportunities to debate the health service, and I am confident that it will continue to remain high on our agenda. On cancer services, I remind the hon. Gentleman—I am sure that he is aware of this but it may have slipped his mind—that there is a substantial programme for the expansion of oncology services, and specifically for the expansion of oncology specialist consultants. We shall continue to press ahead with that. I cannot comment on the decision taken by his local health authority on local services, but the national picture is one of improvement.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): As the Leader of the House is no doubt aware, Arthur Andersen is involved in 37 of the Government's private finance initiative projects, and Ministers have referred to the Andersen report on 44 occasions in support of the private finance initiative. Could we therefore have an early statement about the status of the Government's PFI, given the extremely serious allegations of corporate malpractice by Arthur Andersen?

Mr. Cook: I compliment the hon. Gentleman on his arithmetic in counting up references by Ministers to Arthur Andersen. I remind him that Arthur Andersen receives a smaller number of Government contracts than many other major accountancy firms, and that the PFI has been examined not only by Arthur Andersen but, as the Prime Minister reminded the House, by PricewaterhouseCoopers and by the National Audit Office, which is a public sector body that invigilates Government decisions. They have all reached the same conclusion—that the PFI provides value for money.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for granting several debates in recent weeks in Westminster Hall in relation to London infrastructure issues—in particular, the congestion charge, the London underground and the funding of the Metropolitan police. However, will the Leader of the House ensure, as a matter of urgency, that the House has a full debate on the entirety of London infrastructure, because the issue causes great concern not only to London's 13 Conservative Members but to Liberal Democrat Members and Labour Members?

Mr. Cook: I announced earlier that, according to tradition, we would have a debate on Wales on St. David's day. I am aware that other parts of the United Kingdom may also want a debate to examine their regional issues, and I shall bear in mind what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): This week has seen not only the state of the union address in the United States, which has implications for the fight against terrorism, but the visit of Mr. Hamid Karzai to London and the continued participation of our forces in operations in southern Afghanistan and with the security force there. The Leader of the House said that there would be an Adjournment debate on defence. However, can time be found to debate the war against terrorism and, especially, Afghanistan—we have not done so for some time—not least so that our service men involved in those operations know that they are at the forefront of our thoughts?

Mr. Cook: I am confident that next week's debate will make it clear that British servicemen, especially those who are on service abroad, are at the forefront of the thoughts of the Government and the House. I was present when Hamid Karzai addressed the Cabinet this morning. His speech was impressive. There is a strong commitment to making sure that we rebuild his country so that it does not again become a threat to other nations, whether through terrorism or through the export of drugs.

I can report to the House that Mr. Karzai expressed warm appreciation of the role that Britain has played in securing that success in Afghanistan. I am tempted to have a further debate on international terrorism so as to explore the relation between that and the speech that I understand that the Leader of the Opposition is giving today, which offers a narrow definition of the national interest in terms of defence. Such a definition would not have made it possible for us to do what we have done in Afghanistan.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): At last week's business questions, I asked, in the context of the Adoption and Children Bill which will shortly come back to the House, whether the Government will support moves to enable unmarried couples to apply for joint adoption of children. The Leader of the House said that

> "the Government's position . . . is that the interests and welfare of the child must always come first."—[*Official Report*, 24 January 2002; Vol. 378, c. 1023.]

The vast majority of the constituent members of the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering believe that it can be in the best interests of the welfare of the child if unmarried couples are allowed to apply for adoption and if the merits of their case are considered by the courts and adoption agencies.

Will the right hon. Gentleman therefore clarify that the Government will support an amendment to allow such couples to apply for adoption, or at least provide a free vote in the light of the cross-party amendment that was tabled in my name? Given that the amendment has received the support of Labour Members and Conservative Members, it should be allowed to be considered without a Whip being applied, at least on Government Members.

Mr. Cook: I would not want the remark that I made last week to be read as ruling out adoption by unmarried couples. Indeed, on the contrary, I thought that I was saying that we should judge each case on its merits and ensure that at the end of the day the best solution is found for the child. I am sure that any discussion during the remaining stages of the Adoption and Children Bill will reflect that.

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): In Fareham, there is one NHS dental practice and one dental access centre to cope with the dentistry needs of nearly 100,000 people. Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on the crisis in NHS dentistry, which affects many constituencies and not just mine?

Mr. Cook: I am well aware of the problems in the dentistry service. They of course reflect more than anything else the way in which the previous Administration ratcheted up charges for NHS dentistry to the point where, for many patients, it was not worth while going on the NHS, and many were then forced to go private, as were many of the dentists. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should address some remarks to the team in office during that period.

Points of Order

1.31 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You know better than anyone the contents of Standing Order No. 152 relating to Select Committees, in which it says that they

> "shall have power . . . to send for persons, papers and records".

You will similarly know that *Erskine May* says on page 647, among other things, that

> "when a select committee has the power to send for persons, that power is unqualified".

Flowing from that, could you remind the House and the Leader of the House that very few people are exempted from the powers that we—the House of Commons—have given Select Committees? Among the very small groups exempted, as it happens, are Members of the upper House, which makes one wonder whether the Prime Minister selected a Member of the other House to be a special adviser on transport precisely to give him that peculiar immunity—but that is a matter not for you, Mr. Speaker, but for the Prime Minister.

I ask you to clarify one important matter. The Leader of the House, no less, appeared to imply in one of his earlier statements that in some mysterious way special advisers and unpaid advisers to the Government should not and may not be summoned to appear before Select Committees. Will you confirm that the contents of Standing Order No. 152 and of *Erskine May* entitle and empower Select Committees to summon anyone other than Members of this House and the House of Lords to appear before them to give evidence?

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will be aware that a Select Committee of this House is currently examining precisely what role Select Committees should have. In view of the concern among members of all parties that Select Committees should be allowed to do their job properly and to scrutinise the work of Government, will you take it on yourself to tell the Modernisation Committee that, if there are loopholes in the Standing Orders, as implied a few minutes ago, they should be assessed again in order to ensure that the views expressed by the Chairman of the Select Committee concerned and of members of all parties are urgently considered?

Is it not clear that although the witness concerned may not be able to give the Select Committee the results of his study, he should at least be able to appear before that Committee to indicate his remit, the advice and support that he has received, and what job he is doing, especially bearing in mind the fact that the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has indicated that the purpose of the exercise is just to keep Lord Birt occupied?

Mr. Speaker: The Chairman of the Select Committee concerned will have heard the hon. Gentleman's comments.

I say to the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), the shadow Leader of the House, who gave me some notice of his point of order, that a Committee's power to send for persons other than Members of either House is not limited in this way. Generally, of course, witnesses attend Committees without compulsion, sometimes after discussion. Full details are set out on page 646 of *Erskine May* and later pages.

Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill *[Lords]* (Programme) (No. 2)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [28 June 2001],

That, pursuant to the report of 24th January 2002 from Standing Committee D, the Order of 8th January 2002 (Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill *[Lords]* (Programme)) shall be varied as follows—

Consideration and Third Reading

1. Paragraphs 5 and 6 of the Order shall be omitted.

2. Proceedings on consideration and Third Reading shall be concluded in two allotted days.

3. Proceedings on consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Nine o'clock on the second of those days or, if that day is a Thursday, at Six o'clock on that day.

4. Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock on the second of those days or, if that day is a Thursday, at Seven o'clock on that day.

5. An allotted day is one on which the Bill is put down on the main business as first Government Order of the day.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Travel Concessions (Eligibility) Bill *[Lords]*

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

Clause 1

ELIGIBILITY FOR TRAVEL CONCESSIONS: AGE

1.34 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 1, line 5, at end insert—

> '(1A) In section 94(1) of the Transport Act 1985 (administration of schemes: reimbursement, etc), after paragraph (a), there is inserted—
>
> "(aa) the method by which the authority is to be reimbursed, whether through the Revenue Support Grant or otherwise, in respect of any expenditure arising from the operation of the Travel Concessions (Eligibility) Act 2002.".'.

The Bill is narrowly drafted and it was with only some ingenuity that we managed to table an acceptable amendment. A layman may find its purpose more clearly set out in new clause 1, which states:

> "The Secretary of State shall reimburse each local authority for the full and actual cost of any concessionary fares scheme by special or specific grant rather than through the Standard Spending Assessment."

The Bill provides for additional costs to be reimbursed through the normal SSA mechanism. The full compliance cost has been subject to debate. It was originally estimated to be £50 million. On receiving better particulars, however, the Government increased it to about £54 million, and I hope that that is the full cost.

The problem is that some small local authorities—my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) will raise the case of his particular authority—receive no reimbursement through the SSA system. The Government are inflicting an imposition that is one of a long list of impositions that they have placed on local authorities that are not being fully funded. The best value initiative is the most expensive, but others, such as the increased cost of pensions as a result of the abolition of additional advance corporation tax requirements, are also a problem.

The Bill imposes a requirement on local authorities and not all of them will be fully reimbursed for implementing it. That is not true of some larger metropolitan authorities. Under the SSA, a global figure is calculated for each authority and included in the rate support grant settlement each year. Whereas a large chunk of money will be allocated to the larger metropolitan authorities, a small amount, or none at all, will be allocated to smaller authorities.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Is that not the story of local government across the board? Broadbrush figures are produced, as in this case; no effort is made afterwards to discover whether they are fair; and smaller and typically rural authorities almost always lose out.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend is right: smaller and largely rural authorities are likely to lose out.

Having outlined the problem, let me turn to the solution. The amendment would ensure that local authorities are specifically reimbursed for the actual costs that they incur. That is a simple requirement. If the Government are to fund the scheme in full, it should be largely revenue neutral. Some larger metropolitan authorities will be overcompensated and other authorities will be undercompensated, so the net cost should be little, if any.

The Government have increased a number of special grants. Surely it would be very simple either to allocate a block of money through the SSA system and make a reimbursement afterwards, or to let authorities make an estimate at the beginning of each financial year, in which case an adjustment could be made before the next financial year on production of properly audited records of the scheme's costs.

We consider the amendment to be eminently fair and eminently workable. I shall listen carefully to what the Minister says.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): As was suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), my purpose in tabling the amendment was to draw attention to a gross and unjust anomaly affecting the two district councils in my constituency, Christchurch and East Dorset. The concessionary fares legislation in the Transport Act 2000, implemented last year, has required them to incur additional costs that are some £250,000 higher than the Government's so-called reimbursement. That is very unsatisfactory.

The amendment would add to the list of matters in respect of which regulations can be made under section 94(1) of the Transport Act 1985, and would enable the Secretary of State to produce regulations relating to the method by which an authority responsible for the administration of a travel concession scheme is reimbursed in respect of any expenditure arising from the operation of the Bill.

We cannot do anything in this Bill about what has happened as a result of the earlier legislation. What we can do is try to prevent the Government from making the same mistake again. Obviously, extending the scheme to cover men aged between 60 and 65 as well as those over 65 will involve an additional cost. It was estimated for the purposes of the 2000 Act that local authorities' total costs would be £54 million. At the time, the Government said that they thought it fair for Government to pick up the tab—for the national taxpayer to pay; because this was Government policy, they would reimburse local authorities.

If we ascribe to the word "reimbursement" the meaning it is assumed to have in common English parlance, it means giving back to an individual or an organisation money that that individual or organisation has spent on a particular project or for a particular purpose.

Mr. Brazier: Surely my hon. Friend does not wish to stretch the House's imagination by suggesting that the Government use English in the way in which most of us are accustomed to use it.

Mr. Chope: That is an excellent point.

[Mr. Chope]

It is interesting that the Minister for Transport is not replying to this debate, because he dealt with the issue in Committee. During the Committee's first sitting, he said

> "The Government have to deal with a different dilemma—to decide the extent to which national minimum standards are set and to deal with the financial consequences of that and of ensuring that local councils do not lose money."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 20 November 2001; c. 26.]

If that is indeed the Government's objective, they manifestly failed to deliver on it in relation to the original scheme. They already have the power to change the reimbursement system—the amendment is not necessary in that regard—but they have decided not to do so. I do not understand why, but I suspect that the councils that are losing out as a result of this new Government imposition are largely Conservative-controlled, and those which will gain disproportionately, and have already done so, are Labour-controlled.

1.45 pm

That is not an academic or pedantic point of debate; it is one of substance and may significantly affect council tax payers in my area. At the moment, East Dorset district council is spending £160,000 a year on concessionary travel as a result of the Government's minimum statutory standard, in addition to the £97,000 that it has previously spent on its local discretionary targeted scheme. There are a lot of pensioners in East Dorset—22,740, representing more than 25 per cent. of the population. How much did East Dorset district council get back as a contribution to the additional cost of £160,000? The answer is a big round zero; it got nothing back at all because it does not get any revenue support grant, just redistributed business rates. The idea that the Government are going to reimburse East Dorset district council and its council tax payers for the cost of those concessionary fares is pie in the sky.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Is my hon. Friend aware that his small district council will be required by law to provide those schemes? The de facto situation is that it is not being fully reimbursed, so it will have to make up the difference with an even bigger increase in council tax. I believe that my hon. Friend's local authority is already proposing one of the larger rises in council tax in the country in any case.

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend is right. East Dorset district council is not getting back any money at all from the Government to compensate for the additional statutory duty placed on it by concessionary fares legislation. Under the Bill, additional costs will be incurred and, again, the council will not receive any additional money from the Government. Ironically, the additional cost of £160,000 must be paid for by council tax payers, many of whom are pensioners. The Minister will know that the impact of council tax on pensioners is twice as severe as it is for people who have not yet reached pensionable age. As I said in the House the other day, as a result of Labour policies, more than 1 million pensioners now spend more than 10 per cent. of their disposable income on council tax. The position for East Dorset residents is getting worse as a result of those Government impositions.

The situation in Christchurch is a little better. The Minister may know that we have 14,287 pensioners, constituting 32 per cent. of our population. Christchurch borough council spent £74,000 on a targeted concessionary fares scheme before legislation was introduced. In the current year, it had to make an additional budget provision of £93,000 for the mandatory scheme, which was restricted to travel within the borough boundary. That limited and narrow scheme did not go down well with local people, who much preferred the previous scheme, which offered more generous concessions for those in greatest need. The consequence now is that Christchurch borough council is thinking about whether it can afford to introduce a Dorset-wide scheme. If it did so, however, the costs would increase from an additional £93,000 to an additional £150,000 a year. How much do you think the council received in reimbursement under the revenue support grant formula, Madam Deputy Speaker? It received £20,000 in respect of additional costs of £93,000—costs that will continue to increase as a result of the new statutory requirements in the Bill.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): My concern is that council tax will have to be increased most in the areas where the largest number of pensioners live and that those who win on their bus passes will therefore lose when they get their council tax bill. Does my hon. Friend share that concern?

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The largest proportion of my correspondence is currently from pensioners on fixed incomes who are again faced with the prospect of council tax increases that are significantly above the rate of inflation and far higher than their pension increases will be. That is happening at a time when the interest on their savings and investments is declining significantly as a result of low inflation. I enthusiastically support the policy of low inflation, but it has had a devastating impact on the budgetary arrangements of a number of pensioners who had planned on the basis that their investments would produce a rather higher yield than that which they are now receiving. In order to pay for these new impositions, such pensioners are having to cut back on other items of expenditure. Council taxes are, by definition, unavoidable, so they have the first call on the limited resources of the individuals concerned.

In Committee, the Minister for Transport said:

> "We are committed to the new burdens principle, which means that we will reimburse local authorities for the extra cost that they face as a result of local authority concessionary fare schemes requiring action under the Bill."

He went on to say:

> "If it is an existing scheme that must be amended to comply with the Bill, the Government will reimburse local authorities for the extra cost."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 20 November 2001; c. 30.]

Unfortunately, it does not appear that that will happen. The amendment gives us the opportunity to press the Under-Secretary for a commitment that she will reimburse local authorities for the extra cost. We all know that the House has a system whereby hon. Members are reimbursed out of taxpayers' money for the cost of stationery and office equipment. It would be extraordinary if, in pursuance of the principle of reimbursement, the House authorities said that some hon. Members were to receive more than they had spent and that others were to receive less or indeed nothing. If the word "reimbursement" means anything, surely it is putting the local authorities or individuals in the position in which they would have been before the new imposition. If the new burdens principle to which the Minister for Transport referred means anything, surely it should apply to each local authority on an equal basis. I cannot believe that that principle was intended to mean that the burden on one local authority would be reduced by imposing fresh burdens on another.

The Minister for Transport used opaque expressions in Committee to try to parry the probing questions of my hon. Friends the Members for Cotswold and for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner). He said:

> "The mechanism will be that the extra costs will be fed into the rate support grant, at the lower end of the environment protection and cultural services block. All other things being equal, local authorities will broadly receive additional funding in proportion to their current share of the EPCS local tier."

My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight asked:

> "Is the Minister saying . . . that he will pay to authorities—broadly or otherwise—only the sum that enables them to pay for the minimum laid down by the Government?"

The Minister for Transport said:

> "No. We are saying clearly that the change in legislation places an additional burden on local authorities. Accordingly, the Government will make money available to cover that additional cost."

I see the Under-Secretary nodding. I hope that that indicates that she will undertake on behalf of the Government to reimburse East Dorset district council and Christchurch borough council for the additional costs of the new statutory requirements imposed by the Government.

The Minister for Transport went on to say:

> "We are in discussion with the local authorities as regards the methodology involved, following the well-established procedure for the rate support grant. If that procedure throws up significant anomalies, local authorities, as the hon. Gentleman will probably accept, will not be backward about raising the issue."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 20 November 2001; c. 27-29.]

I quote extensively from what the Minister for Transport said because I do not want the Under-Secretary to start using the same language. That language was no doubt designed to give the impression of reasonableness and to comfort the victims of unjust distribution, but effectively the words were a sham; indeed they were a confidence trick calculated to deceive. We know that the procedure for reimbursing local authorities under existing legislation has thrown up significant anomalies, some of which I have drawn to the House's attention already and which continue to be drawn to the Government's attention by local authorities and local authority associations. What are the Government doing about it? Absolutely nothing. That is totally unacceptable. I hope that the Under-Secretary will have some words of comfort for my local authorities and citizens in my area.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend is making a compelling case for the amendment. Is he aware that the Minister for the Environment recently said that

> "under the previous Government . . . more and more burdens were placed on local authorities and allegedly funded from efficiency savings."

This is the important bit:

> "We"—

that is the Government—

> "are abandoning that practice and taking the realistic view that if extra duties are imposed they should be reasonably funded. That is the Government's policy."—[*Official Report*, 14 January 2002; Vol. 378, c. 125.]

Does my hon. Friend agree that, as the Minister for the Environment made that statement to the House, there is no reason why the Government should not accept the amendment?

Mr. Chope: I agree absolutely. The trouble with the Government is that they consistently say one thing and do another, and they use words ambiguously to give people a misleading impression. We are not talking about any additional costs to Government. All we are talking about is a fair distribution of the costs that are incurred by local authorities as a result of Government-imposed legislation and ending the two-tier system. Today the financial services ombudsman has had something to say about the two-tier system operating in the Halifax building society. The Government have been presiding over a multi-tier system for reimbursing local authorities for the costs of concessionary fares, which is totally unjust.

It is not as though we are asking the earth. There is already a system in place to reimburse London authorities for the actual costs of concessionary fares, rather than the notional or pooled costs, so there is no reason why the Government could not introduce a system that reimbursed local authorities for the actual costs of the statutory concessionary fare scheme, rather than using the formulaic system of distribution which is so unjust.

I had no quarrels with the old system, under which concessionary fares were regarded as a matter for local discretion. The local authority could decide how much money to spend on concessionary fares and what sort of scheme to operate. In so far as they were able to draw on resources in the environmental services block grant, they could do so.

2 pm

The Government changed the rules and there is now no option for local authorities but to comply with the new rigid and centrally imposed rules. It is right and proper that local authorities should be reimbursed accordingly. As I said at the outset, this gives the Government an opportunity to admit that they have made a mistake, that they are willing to learn from it, and that, from now on, they will reimburse all the local authority costs incurred as a result of the legislation. If they did so, it would enable councils such as Christchurch and East Dorset to impose much lower council tax increases next year than are currently in prospect.

During yesterday's debate on the revenue support grant and the level of the finance settlement, the Minister for Local Government said that the Government were being generous to local authorities. Some of us were left with the impression that the Minister was more generous to some local authorities than to others. Today, the Under-Secretary has an opportunity to demonstrate by her actions and words that she believes in justice and equity for local authorities and that she accepts that it is unfair that some local authorities should benefit by more than

[Mr. Chope]

the costs they incur while others receive less than their costs. The amendment is a simple and equitable proposition and I hope that the Minister will accede to it.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): I support the amendment and endorse the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope). It would be perverse in the extreme if the Government did not reimburse local authorities. As my hon. Friend said, some local authorities have had to impose inflation-busting council tax increases over the past few years. In my area of west Norfolk we have consistently had council tax increases of about 8 per cent. or 9 per cent. over the past five or six years.

This is not just a problem for Norfolk county council. My local borough council, King's Lynn and West Norfolk, has not been getting a fair deal from the Government. Interestingly, the Labour leader of the local borough council explained in a letter to the local press the other day that the council tax in our area will have to go up by so much because the Government have not given Norfolk a fair enough deal. That is why it is vital that the amendment is supported and that the Government reimburse local authorities.

Will the Minister look at the words of the Minister for the Environment, who said:

> "under the previous Government . . . more and more burdens were placed on local authorities and allegedly funded from efficiency savings. We are abandoning that practice and taking the realistic view that if extra duties are imposed they should be reasonably funded. That is the Government's policy."—[*Official Report*, 14 January 2002; Vol. 378, c. 125.]

That is a good reason for the Under-Secretary to agree with what we are saying.

I support the amendment, as do many of my constituents. My constituency is similar in many ways to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch in that there are many elderly retired people, especially along the Norfolk coast in villages and towns such as Brancaster, the Burnhams and Hunstanton. Many of them are retired couples from places such as London where they have enjoyed concessionary fares, often amounting to 100 per cent. They are disappointed to receive only a 50 per cent. reduction in my area. If they find that this Bill does not benefit them in the way that is intended because local authorities will not be reimbursed, they will be very disappointed.

Unfortunately, I say all that in the context of declining bus services—the picture throughout most rural counties. We all know that 15 or 20 years ago we saw double-decker buses trundling around country lanes with one or two people on board. Every village had a regular bus service. It is clear that those days could not continue, but unfortunately many bus companies have not shown enough imagination and have responded inadequately to the demands and requirements of local communities.

In west Norfolk, communities have been cut off as a result of reductions in bus services. I am thinking in particular of two cases that have arisen since my return to the House, one of which involves the hamlet of Gayton Thorpe, where the bus service has been abandoned completely. Only last week, I received a letter from a constituent who lives in the village of Tilney All Saints, which until recently enjoyed a reasonable bus service. Now, there are only two morning buses from Tilney All Saints to King's Lynn, and only one returning to the village in the evening, which leaves King's Lynn at 4.45 pm. The bus goes through the northern part of the village, but the constituent who wrote to me lives in the southern part. Her daughter attends the local College of West Anglia, where she is training to be a chef. On leaving the bus she has to walk more than half a mile, which is a long way for a student in the dark.

The Government are attempting to do what all of us feel is the right thing, but if they fail completely to reimburse local authorities and penalise constituents such as mine through higher council tax, they will be making a big mistake. I hope that the Minister will look at our amendment sympathetically and respond to the detailed and technical points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch, which I wholly endorse, and to some of my more general points.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): I begin by apologising to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to the Minister for arriving late for the start of this debate. Today has been rather frenetic because of the launch of the Select Committee report on the rail industry, but happily we will be discussing this afternoon another subject that is close to the hearts of me and my constituents.

Members will know that the constituency of Epsom and Ewell lies just beyond the London boundary to the south. My constituents and Surrey county council—our local transport authority—face real problems in the provision of bus transportation, which will be exacerbated if the Bill is enacted and fails to deliver full reimbursement to authorities throughout the country. It was particularly disturbing to discover in Committee that, despite being pressed to do so, the Government were unable to give a clear, unequivocal and categorical commitment that they will reimburse every local authority for all the costs associated with changing the scheme under the Bill.

I hope that the Minister will take this opportunity to make such a commitment, because without it local authorities such as mine will have, in effect, two options—to cut other services or to increase council tax. That seems a wholly inappropriate burden to place on them at this time. In the case of Surrey county council, it is especially inappropriate, given the huge disparities in public support for Surrey and neighbouring London. Yesterday, the Minister kindly sent me a letter giving details on this issue. According to it, the Mayor is allocated £714 million a year for public transport, which will rise to just over £1 billion next year. In comparison, the sums allocated specifically to bus services in counties outside London are minuscule. Even wrapped together, all the transport budgets for all other authorities in the south-east will receive only £179 million for local transport projects in 2002-03.

In other words, under the Mayor's leadership local authorities across the border in London have a sum to distribute for transport support that is more than five times greater than that allocated to the home counties. The consequences of that disparity are becoming all too clear in the provision of concessionary fare schemes and of more general bus services.

Most particularly, the disparity's consequences are evident in the loss of a number of operators running services across the boundaries into London. They have been driven out of business by competitors in London that benefit from the substantial subsidy available to them.

The problem will get worse if the Minister goes ahead with the Bill as it stands. In effect, if the Government fail to deliver full reimbursement to local authorities for the cost of the scheme, more transport money will be taken away from authorities outside London. I believe that the Government should fulfil what I believe is their duty to reimburse, as local authorities outside London will be less able to deliver the support to bus services that their counterparts across the border in London can deliver.

As a consequence, services will continue to lose out financially. Operators will find it more difficult to make money on routes, and will tend to walk away from the business. The people to lose out will not be the vast majority of my constituents who use cars, but the schoolchildren and pensioners who depend on the buses for their daily transportation. They can ill afford to see the buses disappear.

It has been a matter of great concern to me that such a large disparity exists between the public support given to bus operators in London—and to local authorities there to enable them to support the operators—and the equivalent support given to counties just outside London. I hope that the Minister will not make the problem worse through an inappropriate application of the Bill.

The failure fully to reimburse local authorities for the cost of the scheme would have consequences that go beyond the nature of the services provided. Also affected would be the ability of local authorities to deliver any sort of proper concessionary fare scheme.

It is a cause of great grief to many of the elderly in the northern part of my constituency—those who live in places such as Stoneleigh, Worcester Park and Ewell—that their neighbours just across the boundary in London benefit from the free bus passes that are available to them under local authority schemes. Those local authorities are able to deliver those free bus passes because of the extra financial support that they receive.

Surrey county council does not receive the financial support that would enable it to provide free bus passes. It has tried extremely hard to deliver a concessionary scheme that goes some way at least towards relieving the burden of costs faced by our older travellers. The council has been able to help a little financially, but my elderly constituents are only human. They look up the road—sometimes only a few hundred yards—and wonder why they cannot have a bus-pass scheme such as exists in Sutton or Kingston. The reason is that the money for such a scheme is not available.

The Bill will make it more difficult still for my county council—and I suspect for many other authorities around the country—to introduce the schemes for bus passes and concessionary fares that benefit pensioners in higher-cost areas.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Has my hon. Friend concluded that there is a particular irony about the problem, in that the further that one gets away from London and the other major metropolitan areas, the worse the bus service tends to be? If the amendment is rejected, the effect will be that local authorities are likely to cut back on discretionary spending on bus services. That will further reduce the number of services, especially in areas such as that represented by my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham), and in my area of the Cotswolds?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend is right. Many services depend absolutely on local authority support to keep going. Such services are nowhere near the principle routes. They deliver more a social service than a commercial one, and they benefit from the support of local authorities. If local authorities get less money, there will be fewer of those services. That has to be a matter of great concern for hon. Members considering the Bill.

2.15 pm

Quite rightly, the Government have an aspiration to see concessionary fare schemes grow. Many parts of the country have nothing like the level of such schemes that are available in London. Many of the authorities in those areas would like to do more. My authority's aspiration is, at the very least, to charge pensioners a 50p flat fare for buses.

However, if the additional costs of concessionary schemes are placed, in whole or in part, on local authorities, it will be more difficult for those authorities to introduce improved schemes. Moreover, although no one could argue with the aims of the Bill, the irony is that it will make it more expensive for local authorities to introduce expanded schemes in the future. By definition, they will have to find budgets to cover people aged between 60 and 65, as well as those aged over 65. As a result, it is less likely that local authorities will be able to afford new schemes in the future.

I hope that the Minister will give the matter careful thought, and that she will consider the consequences of failing to fund local authorities in full. I hope that she will give us this afternoon a commitment to providing full funding, and that she will think about those areas in the country that do not have the sort of schemes that would be desirable. The Minister must look at the potential extra costs that will arise, as a result of the Bill, if local authorities try to improve their schemes. Moreover, I hope that the Minister, when she looks at her Department's financial planning for the future, will encourage local authorities to go ahead with fare schemes and, where appropriate, give them the financial support that they need.

In conclusion, I welcome the Bill very much, and I also commend my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) on the amendment. I hope that the Minister will accept it. If she does not, I hope that she will at least accept the principle behind it, and give our local authorities the support that they undoubtedly need to implement the Bill.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): I appreciate the way in which the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) introduced the amendment. He clearly acknowledged that the form of words used is something of a device and that the intention behind the amendment is better expressed in new clause 1. I shall not talk about the new clause, but I will deal

[Ms Sally Keeble]

with some of the different ways to tackle the financial arrangements, as I think that that is the subject that most worries Opposition Members.

The question of funding has been a recurring theme in debates on this Bill in this House, in the other place and in Committee. I am afraid that I must disappoint the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) by telling him that I do not agree with his interpretation of what my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport said. If I do not use the same words as my right hon. Friend, it is only because I cannot be as eloquent.

I appreciate the concerns about funding, and about the need to get the formula right. I shall therefore go through some of the arguments explaining why the Government chose the approach contained in the Bill.

The amendment would add another stage to the system of funds distribution. Given that the hon. Member for Cotswold admitted that it would also require an additional round of consultation, it would be inconceivable for us to get the scheme up and running even in time for the next financial year. I urge Opposition Members to think hard about that, especially as amendment No. 3 deals with commencement. In addition, the amendment could undermine the method of distribution of Government support for the expenditure of local authorities.

Before I move on to some of the other issues, I shall deal with the concerns raised by hon. Members, and make some general comments. The hon. Member for Christchurch talked about the new burdens principle and the discussions that took place in Committee. In adopting the new burdens and revenue support grant approach, the Government are utilising the usual channels for local authority financial arrangements. As a result, the scheme will be introduced in a manner that, if not super fast, is speedy and orderly. The Government's approach also allows for proper discussion of the distributive mechanism through the local government channels. That is important because of the two big issues in local government funding—the size of the cake and how it is shared out. There must be discussions with the local government associations about both issues, particularly the latter.

Mr. Chope: What system could be fairer than one which reimburses local authorities, on an individual basis, for the costs that they have incurred as a result of the legislation?

Ms Keeble: I was going to come to that point later. That would mean a ring-fenced grant, which one of the amendments suggests, but it would lead to delay. In contrast, the Bill provides for an orderly and fair distribution of the total costs between local authorities.

It is true that some time ago concerns were raised by local authorities about the fairness of the distribution. I understand that the discussions between officials and the local government associations have been successful and that the margins that were talked about, which were in multiples of a million, have been whittled down to a small amount.

The hon. Member for Christchurch, along with other Conservative Members, argues that his local authorities are losing out. All Members think that their local authority is losing out. In fact, the way in which the mechanism works means that local authorities that already have more generous concessionary fare schemes in place, such as Merseyside, Reading and the West Midlands, are more likely to be under pressure than the local authorities that started from scratch or from a lower base in introducing concessionary fare schemes. I do not accept that the hon. Gentleman's authorities have necessarily lost out, nor those of his hon. Friends. In checking with officials, they do not seem to have raised that concern with my Department. Therefore, I do not think that this system, which is the normal one, discriminates against the hon. Gentleman's local authorities.

Mr. Chope: Does the Minister accept that the two local authorities in my constituency have incurred additional costs as a result of her legislation of £250,000 a year and have got back, between them, £20,000 a year? Which local authorities have been getting the extra £230,000 that should be going to Christchurch and East Dorset? Why is that money going to the West Midlands and Merseyside which are already over-resourced?

Ms Keeble: I am sorry, but the hon. Gentleman has misunderstood me. Local authorities which are the most likely to find that they have unmet costs as a result of this mechanism have, in the past, had more generous concessionary fare schemes in place. The total cost of the new burdens are put into a general kitty and then carved up. Councils which have in the past had more generous schemes will have higher new burdens under the Bill. Authorities such as the West Midlands and Reading, rather than getting more money out of the scheme, are most likely to be under pressure.

Chris Grayling *rose—*

Ms Keeble: I should like to continue, because I will come on to the concerns of the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling). I should also like to deal with the concerns of the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) about bus transport in rural areas, particularly for pensioners. He said that pensioners moving out of London would lose the valuable benefit of the free bus pass which London local authorities have had in place for many years. They kept the scheme going even when they were under acute financial pressure under the last Conservative Government. The decision to keep the free bus pass was made by Conservative and Labour councils in the teeth of considerable opposition. It was a recognition of local needs, and that is how local government should work.

We have recognised the problems of people in rural areas who need bus transport and have provided front-end support for them in the form of the rural bus challenge and a big increase in the subsidy for rural buses. We had the last round of the rural bus challenge last Friday. I believe that the hon. Gentleman's local authority, although it might not have been his constituency, benefited from that challenge.

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater) *rose—*

Ms Keeble: I should like to finish this point about rural buses. We recognise that people in rural areas do not just want to go short distances. That is why we are looking at a fuel duty rebate for coaches in return for some concessionary fares. That will be an important step and will meet particular needs.

The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell has raised his concerns a number of times. I have heard the exposition at least twice. His particular concern is that because his constituency is just over the border of London, people feel more strongly about not getting the free bus pass. Local authorities need to look at close working across local government boundaries. That is an issue right across the country. Local authorities have the discretion to make extra provision, as the authorities in London did, for the fact that people in their area may want to travel longer distances or go into London.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned schoolchildren. There is support for children in particular circumstances, depending on how far away from school they live and how old they are.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The Minister seems to be dismissing the arguments of Conservative Members as trivial. The Local Government Association briefing says:

> "As well as the aggregate financial consequences of the Bill, authorities individually will be affected to varying extents depending on the type of scheme or schemes currently offered locally . . . the imposition of this specific new burden with its widely varying local consequences requires an innovative look at whether there can be transitional measures to ease the particular problems which some authorities may face."

As my hon. Friends are urging me to consider dividing the House on this matter, can the Minister assure us that if she does not accept the amendment, she will at least continue to investigate the problem to see whether there are any mechanisms for every local authority to be reimbursed for the actual costs that they incur?

Ms Keeble: I am not dismissing the concerns that are raised. I recognise that concessionary fares are extremely important to the public and that the issue of finance is of great concern to local authorities. I am simply pointing out that some of the issues raised by Conservative Members are about non-metropolitan, rural areas and that other support is being provided for people in those areas. The concessionary fare scheme is not the last word as regards what we are doing to support bus travel. We are considering the organisation of the financing. There has been careful discussion in the local government associations—the proper way to do it—and what started out as wide variations have narrowed to quite a small sum. I am sure that those discussions will continue. By the time that the scheme comes into operation in April 2003, I am sure that local councils will feel satisfied that they are being properly reimbursed.

2.30 pm

The local authorities mentioned by Opposition Members did not raise their concerns with the Department. If those authorities provide the information, I will ensure that officials take a careful look at it.

Chris Grayling: I am sorry but the Minister has already heard my explanation two or three times. I can assure her that she and her colleagues will hear it many more times in the House and other places. She has made various references to different impacts on different authorities, but is she saying that some authorities will end up paying part of the costs of the scheme out of their current budgets, rather than new budgets?

Ms Keeble: I am sorry if I have not been clear. On the way in which the funding mechanisms work, I have been saying that we have gone through the normal channels and procedures, if for no other reason than we do not want to delay the introduction of the scheme. We want it in place by 2003.

We have recognised the new burdens principle, which is that if a new burden is placed on local authorities it has to be met. That applies to the total cost of the scheme, which we estimate to be about £50 million. That will be the new burden to be imposed on local authorities as a result of the scheme. The issue is how that amount will be divided up among the local authorities. It is to be done on a per capita basis. Local authorities would receive funding according to the size of their population. I should have thought that that deals with the concerns about the relative funding for London and Surrey. Clearly, the local authorities are discussing exactly how the mechanism should work to ensure that it is as fair to them as possible. The authorities have to discuss that among themselves.

Referring back to what my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport said, we would expect the pressures to be on the margins. The authorities that are most likely to experience those financial pressures are those that historically have had the most generous concessionary fare schemes. I do not want to go into all the detail again, as I shall sound like a gramophone record if I do.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The Minister has been generous in giving way. She stated that the effects of the Bill will be felt only at the margins. If she genuinely believes that—the Opposition think that it will be a bit more than at the margins—she is implicitly admitting that the revenue cost is small, if it is a cost at all. Therefore, why will she not consider implementing the amendment?

Ms Keeble: Although I am not reading the words used by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport, the form of words that I am using is pretty much same when I say that the pressures will be felt at the margins. The formula for cutting up the cake between the local authorities—there are more than 300 of them in England, which is why it is a substantial undertaking—is down to the discussions with those authorities. It appears that those discussions have gone well and that the areas of conflict are now very small.

As the hon. Gentleman rightly said the amendment is a peg. It refers to a different Bill and a completely different provision. The ring-fencing process that concerns him is not in the amendment. Furthermore, it would result in major delays, which would mean that we would be unlikely to get the scheme up and running by 2003. The devolved Administrations have already got such schemes up and running, so we would be lagging far behind. I shall now move on, as we have discussed that issue several times and have more or less exhausted the arguments.

[Ms Keeble]

At present, most Government grant to local authorities is paid by way of general grant. It is for local authorities to spend the money in the way that they consider appropriate, based on their judgment of local needs and circumstances and their overall financial priorities.

Mr. Chope: The Minister said that the grant is allocated to local authorities so that they can decide how to spend it. Concessionary travel comes into a different category, however, as the Government have decided, for their own political benefit, to announce a statutory scheme and impose legislation on local authorities. The Government have also announced the principle of burdens. Will the Minister explain how it can be fair to impose an additional burden of £250,000 on two small local authorities in Dorset, and to reimburse them with only £20,000?

Ms Keeble: I have said that we have recognised the new burdens principle. The extra funding is on that basis. The hon. Gentleman is arguing for a ring-fenced grant. In general, local authorities rightly say that they want more discretion as to how they spend their money. As the funding is part of general funding, local authorities are free to top up their schemes and to use part of their general grant to do so. There is no contradiction.

The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the Conservative party wants a special grant; it does not want the money to be part of the general grant. As I have said several times, if it were part of a special grant, further consultation would be required and the introduction of the scheme would be delayed until after 2003. We believe that local authorities should be responsible for their spending and taxation decisions and be accountable to their local communities for them.

We all recognise that reimbursing local authorities at the current cost of concessionary fares is expensive, but we none the less believe that the system is in balance, not least because we have received few complaints from authorities about it. I give this undertaking to the hon. Members for Cotswold and for Christchurch: if the information about the local authorities mentioned is provided, we will certainly consider it carefully.

In England alone, we reimburse local authorities to the tune of £490 million a year. This legislation will increase that amount by about £50 million. We are working with local authority associations to finalise the figures so that the local government settlement will cover in total the cost of the extension of the travel concession to men aged 60 to 65.

As my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport explained at some length in Committee—including in a lengthy discussion of the new burdens principle—the basis for distributing the concessionary fares funding is in line with other transfers to local government of this size. We really do not think that there is a case for the separation of that element of the revenue support grant, especially in comparison with other aspects of expenditure. We do not think that element should be ring fenced by a special grant mechanism.

More generally, as I have said several times, we want to ensure that the system of distributing grant is as fair as possible. We are working to create a local government finance system that distributes grant fairly and effectively and which gives councils greater financial autonomy to help them better to meet the needs of their local communities. We shall be working with local government as a whole to build consensus as far as possible.

We have discussed funding at great length. I completely understand the concern of Opposition Members to ensure that their constituents receive the benefit of concessionary fares and also that their local authorities are properly reimbursed or compensated. We believe that the system is fair and efficient and that it will facilitate the orderly and expeditious introduction of this very, very important concession. I hope, therefore, that the hon. Member for Cotswold will withdraw his amendment so as not to delay the scheme; and that we can get the measure through and ensure that men aged between 60 and 65 receive the benefits of the Bill.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The one thing on which the House can agree is that the Bill is important and that we want it on the statute book as soon as possible.

The Minister uses an interesting device to try to reject the amendment—threatening us that it could delay the implementation of the measure. She has certainly anticipated that she will not accept our amendment so that she can bring forward the implementation of the measure. That is a new parliamentary device and we may be breaking new ground. However, I hope that the Minister will keep an open mind as to the amendments that we have not yet debated.

I remind the Minister of the genesis of the Bill. As long ago as 10 October 1997, Michael Matthews took his case to the European Court. The Court hearing was on 28 November 2000, and on 17 February 2001 the Deputy Prime Minister announced that primary legislation would be introduced to amend the law so as to equalise at 60 the age at which men and women qualified for travel concessions.

The Government have had a huge amount of time to put the Bill on to the statute book, so there is no excuse for them not to accept our relatively straightforward and wholly fair amendment. Surely, if a council is out of pocket due to the obligations imposed on it by the Government, it should be reimbursed by the Government.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: May I make one more point?

The Minister mentioned the system of fair burdens. My hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) referred to the remarks of the Minister for the Environment and I repeat the Minister's words. He said:

> "We are abandoning that practice and taking the realistic view that if extra duties are imposed they should be reasonably funded."—[*Official Report*, 14 January 2002; Vol. 378, c. 125.]

The Opposition take the view that if the Government impose any duties on local government, they should be fully funded. If the Government impose duties, the Government should fund them.

I shall now give way to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster)—*[Interruption.]* He no longer wants to intervene so I must have dealt with the point that he wanted to make.

Mr. Foster: Very effectively.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I may be damned with faint praise later, so I shall keep going while I am ahead.

Mr. Chope: Will my hon. Friend address the fallacy in the Minister's argument that the authorities under the greatest financial pressure were those with the most generous schemes? Surely, the authorities that did not have generous schemes were under financial pressure—that is why their schemes were not generous. They wanted the money that would flow from the Government under the new system to enable them to introduce more generous schemes.

2.45 pm

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The Minister's argument was fallacious in that respect.

Ms Keeble: We have just heard a different version of what I said. I said that those local authorities that had traditionally had the most generous concessionary fares schemes were those that would be the most likely to be under financial pressure as a result of the Government using this formula. Those were not the authorities represented by Conservative Members—they were places such as Merseyside and the west midlands.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Until I read the record, I shall not be entirely sure whether the Minister has repeated what she said before or whether she is saying something slightly different. The argument still sounds fallacious, so I shall need to examine the record carefully. My hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) is right: the smaller rural authorities are likely to be most disadvantaged by the provisions of the Bill.

We have held a long debate on the subject and we need to move on. The Opposition remain dissatisfied that the Government are introducing extra burdens for local authorities—especially small authorities. Because of that and because the Minister has not wholly convinced us that the Bill would be fair, we shall seek to divide the House so that our local authorities can see that we are protecting their interests to the full.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 128, Noes 262.

Division No. 150] **[2.46 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Bruce, Malcolm
Burstow, Paul
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maples, John
May, Mrs Theresa
Moore, Michael
Murrison, Dr Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Peter Luff and
Mr. Peter Atkinson.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin

Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Galloway, George
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and
Mr. Nick Ainger.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Don Foster: I beg to move amendment No. 4, in page 1, line 21, at end insert—

> '(4A) Subsections (1) to (4) above shall not affect the operation of any travel concession scheme more generous than that provided by section 145(1) (mandatory concessions outside Greater London) of the Transport Act 2000 and by section 242 (requirements as to scope of concessions which must be given if free travel scheme is not to have effect) of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 as amended by section 151(12) (concessions inside Greater London) of the Transport Act 2000.'.

The amendment follows on logically from the important discussion that we have just had about the cost of the Government's proposals. The Liberal Democrats welcome the broad thrust of the Bill and, like the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), we wish it good speed and a speedy implementation. Like the hon. Gentleman, I am conscious, however, that action on this issue should, and could, have been taken sooner. Indeed, during the passage of the Bill that became the Transport Act 2000, I moved amendments that would have had exactly the same effect that this Bill is intended to have. In other words, the matter could have been done and dusted more than two years ago, and it is a great pity that we are still here debating it.

3 pm

I want to express my gratitude to the Minister because in speaking to the previous amendment she almost made my case for me, and in a moment I shall quote her remarks in support of this amendment. When the hon. Member for Cotswold spoke to the previous amendment, he referred also to a new clause that was related to it but had not been selected. For ease of understanding, I shall follow the hon. Gentleman's sensible precedent, because I tabled new clause 2 as well as amendment No. 4, and the new clause succinctly expresses the intention of the amendment. It states:

> "It is hereby declared that nothing in this Act shall inhibit the operation of any existing travel concession scheme, whether statutory or otherwise."

I tabled amendment No. 4, which would have the same effect as those words, to be helpful to none other than Lord Falconer. In the debate in the other place, he said that

> "it is regrettable if local authorities have taken the decision to offer their elderly and disabled people less generous schemes as a result of a statutory minimum requirement."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 18 October 2001; Vol. 627, c. 743.]

The noble Lord would, rightly, be concerned if, as a result of the introduction of the minimum requirement and the further change to it now being imposed by the Bill, local authorities reduced the quality of existing non-mandatory provision.

If the money provided by the Government to recompense local authorities in the manner described by the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) and others is not sufficient, they may have little choice but to make up that deficit by removing money from more generous schemes already in existence. During our discussion in Committee, hon. Members gave examples of schemes that are already under threat and considerable concern was expressed on both sides of the Committee about the possible demise of more generous schemes. It was because of those concerns that Lord Falconer made his remarks in the other place.

As I said, the Minister has made it abundantly clear that she, too, is concerned about that possibility. She also made it clear, however, that there is uncertainty even as to the level of funding that the Government will have to provide to meet their existing promise. The debate on the previous amendment dealt with the rights and wrongs of the method of dividing up the pot, but there is still a debate to be had about whether the pot itself is large enough.

In the earlier debate, the Minister said that it was her understanding that debates between her officials and the Local Government Association about the funding that might be required were so successful that the difference between them had been whittled down from millions of pounds to a small amount. She later told us that the additional burdens imposed as a result of the Bill would be round about £50 million. That is worrying. We were told earlier that the figure might be £54 million and that discussions with the Department continue. I hope that when the Minister responds to the debate she will tell the House the precise amount that the Government believe is necessary collectively to compensate local authorities for the imposition of the new burdens.

In response to the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Cotswold, who was ably supported by several of his hon. Friends, the Minister clearly said that the local authorities who already provide generous concessionary schemes are

> "more likely to be under pressure".

When the hon. Member for Christchurch suggested that she had said something rather different, she asserted that such authorities are

> "most likely to be under pressure."

My concern in speaking to this amendment relates to those authorities and others.

Ms Keeble: My reference to authorities being under pressure related to the division of the cake, not the size of it, and to the previous amendment.

Mr. Foster: The Minister made that absolutely clear earlier, and I entirely accept that we are now discussing the size of the cake rather than how it is divided up. As I said, I am concerned that the cake may not be big enough fully to recompense councils collectively, and that may lead to some councils dropping more generous schemes. I come now to the point that the mechanism for distributing the cake will, according to the Minister herself, have an impact on a number of local authorities who already have more generous schemes.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: In my opening remarks on the previous amendment, I alluded to concerns about the total cost of the Bill. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is aware of the LGA briefing prepared for Members of Parliament. It states:

> "The LGA is still in discussion with the DTLR about the actual level of additional costs to local authorities for providing the statutory minimum scheme set out in TA2000"—

the Transport Act 2000—

> "for which the Association feels the Department may have under-estimated",

even with the increase in aggregate revenue support grant provision of £54 million in England, an increase over its initial assessment of £47 million. The Minister and the DTLR are having continually to raise their estimate of the Bill's costs and no doubt will continue to do so.

Mr. Foster: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and he reminds us that there are two stages to the process. First, the Transport Act sensibly introduced a statutory minimum requirement, which placed burdens on local authorities. As he said, discussions continue as to whether local authorities are being properly recompensed by the Government for those burdens. Secondly, we have the Bill, which could have been incorporated in the Act but was not. It will place an additional burden on local authorities, and discussions continue about the collective cost of that to local authorities who run such schemes.

I hope that the Minister will at least make it clear to the House where we stand with the negotiations on the costs that specifically relate to the Bill, but if she can provide any additional information about continuing discussions on the costs of the original legislative requirement under the Transport Act 2000, I am sure that the House will be pleased to receive it. However, as I have said, the problem is not only that the cake may not be enough, but that the method of dividing the cake may put pressure on certain local authorities that already operate generous concessionary schemes above the

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statutory minimum. Lord Falconer has made it clear in another place that he does not want such schemes to be removed.

The purpose of the amendment is to ensure that we state clearly in the Bill that nothing will reduce the quality of existing services, whether mandatory or non-mandatory. The Minister referred to several places where that may be the case. She said that Merseyside, the west midlands and Reading were most likely to be put under pressure as a result of the Government's proposals. There will also be additional pressures in London. Reference has been made already to the generous freedom pass scheme that operates in London, and there is much discussion about the operation of that scheme. I have recently corresponded with organisations that are genuinely concerned that, in an attempt to make eligibility for the freedom pass scheme uniform throughout London, several local authorities are tightening up the criteria so that some people, especially disabled people, are losing out.

The London scheme is more generous than the legislative statutory minimum requirement, so a larger number of men in the 60 to 65 age group will benefit from it and an additional cost will have to be met to pay for those people who have been added to the more generous scheme. Does the Minister genuinely believe that the additional costs in London, the west midlands, Merseyside, Reading and many other parts of the country have been taken into account in the sum that will be provided?

The purpose of the amendment is clear: to ensure that nothing done as a result of the Bill will in any way reduce the ability of local authorities to provide those existing schemes that are more generous than the legislation requires them to provide. If the Government disagree to the amendment so that the current schemes in the areas to which I refer can be whittled away—that has sadly already happened in several areas—they will reap a poor reward for their actions. I hope therefore that the Minister will support the amendment.

Ms Keeble: I appreciate all the concerns raised by the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster). I do not want to have a very long discussion about the financial arrangements, especially as we have discussed them exhaustively in Committee. I suspect that I would simply end up saying what I have said previously, and we would go round the houses again. The financial figures that I have cited are those that I have been given most recently, so they cover the current state of play. I give an undertaking to ensure that hon. Members are properly notified of any further developments.

3.15 pm

Mr. Foster: The Minister gave from the Dispatch Box a figure of about £50 million, but the figure that she and her colleagues have cited most frequently is £54 million. For the sake of clarity, will she confirm that that is the current figure, agreed by her departmental officials and the LGA? Given that she said that there was a small discrepancy, can she tell us what it is?

Ms Keeble: I too have heard the £54 million figure. The figure that I have been given most recently by officials is £50 million. I have previously given an approximation of the remaining difference, which is down from the several millions that it was previously. I do not want to go back around that or to mislead anyone about the continuing discussions. It would probably be more helpful if we made absolutely sure that hon. Members received exactly the right figures, and I undertake to write to hon. Members about them when we know whether those discussions have produced any further results.

In answer to the question about the different local authorities, I said that they were the ones most likely to be under pressure. The point of the negotiations and discussions that are taking place is to ensure that they are not under pressure and that we reach the right the final formula. At the end of the day, the Bill will greatly benefit many people. Overwhelmingly, that will be its impact, and I have no doubt that the concessions that will be extended to 64-year-old men will be very welcome indeed. Of course, we have to ensure that the financial details are right, but we would be unwise to lose sight of the fact that this will be an overwhelmingly popular and practical measure that will produce real improvements for a substantial number of people.

I understand the concern that the hon. Gentleman expresses about ensuring that there is an equalising up, not an equalising down. I shall put things simply before going through my formal notes so that they are on the record. Under the Bill, local authorities will have to do for men what they are doing for women of the same age. If women get free bus passes, so must men. That is the Bill's effect; this is not a discretionary issue. If the local authority runs a half-fare scheme, men will pay half fares. Whatever scheme operates, it must be extended to men aged 60 to 64.

Of course, local authorities can introduce new schemes if they decide to do so at some stage in the future. Indeed, that is the point of local government, as the hon. Gentleman well knows; the Liberal Democrat party is totally in favour of local discretion. All the evidence shows that when people are given concessionary public transport, the pressure is to increase the concessions, not to reduce them. All the discussions about concessionary bus passes—for example, those in the west midlands and Greater Manchester—clearly show the enormous value that is placed on those facilities.

Mr. Foster: There is no disagreement in the Chamber about the enormous benefits that the Bill will produce. May I ask the Minister to turn to the specifics of the issue? For example, the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) said that his local authority's aspiration was to provide a flat-rate 50p travel scheme for people over the age of 60. If his local authority already had in place such a scheme, the Bill's introduction will result in a significant additional cost to that authority for providing a flat-rate scheme for a much larger group of people—men between the ages of 60 and 65—than in a neighbouring authority that was only providing the statutory minimum.

My question to the Minister is simple: will she ensure, by whatever means—let us not argue about the methodology—that that mythical local authority will not lose out and be forced to cut its more generous concessionary scheme?

Ms Keeble: I do not want to return to the finance debate, as we have had that discussion several times and

I would end up saying the same thing as was said in Committee. The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) was talking about aspirations, although I was not sure whether he was talking about what is in place. I accept that the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) might have liked the debate to be the other way round.

This short Bill, apart from bringing enormous benefits to an important section of society, will make sure that men aged 60 to 64 receive the same benefits as women in that age group. We have undertaken to finance any new burdens that that imposes on local authorities—we have had that debate—but it will not be possible to provide men aged 60 to 64 with different benefits from those provided to women. If, at a future stage, local authorities wish to change their concessionary fares scheme, they may do so.

I have dealt with the arguments about the political realities, rather than the financial realities, of taking such a decision. That has been clearly demonstrated by the concerns that have been raised, much more in the debate about the original concessionary fares schemes than in this debate. We are aware of the concerns that have been expressed in the west midlands and Greater Manchester, and of the reality of what happened subsequently. As I understand it, in all areas, the levelling was up, not down, once the mandatory scheme was introduced.

Chris Grayling: I appreciate that the hon. Lady feels pressed on this point, but the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) has raised an important issue. Will any local authority be forced, as a result of the changes, to reduce the concessionary fares scheme that it provides for its local people, or to divert money away from other services to fulfil the terms of the Bill—yes or no?

Ms Keeble: That point came under the debate that we have just had. The Government have recognised the new burdens, we have sized and cut up the cake and made it as fair as possible.

Mr. Phil Woolas (Oldham, East and Saddleworth): And put cream on it.

Ms Keeble: Yes, and a cherry on top, too. That is the point that we have reached.

The amendment is about making sure that schemes are not reduced as a result of the Bill. The Bill specifically says that, if a scheme is in place, it must be extended to men aged 60 to 64. If a free pass scheme is in place, those men must have free travel, as, of course, the pass must be free. If a 50 per cent. fare scheme is in place, that must be extended to men aged 60 to 64. That is what is being financed, and that will be the effect of the scheme. I have explained that repeatedly and, I hope, as clearly as possible. I shall now make progress.

At the risk of going over the same ground, the Bill will extend all existing schemes to men from age 60. Therefore, as I said, if the local authority offers a statutory minimum of a half fare with a local free bus pass—they cannot be charged for the pass—that must be offered to men aged 60 to 64 once the Bill comes into effect, which should be in April next year. Similarly, in areas where schemes that are more generous than the statutory minimum are offered, those schemes should also be extended. The Bill will therefore extend rather than reduce the existing schemes.

It is vital that we do not fetter the discretion of local authorities to operate the concessionary fare schemes that they consider best meet the needs of their areas. We do not expect local authorities to use the Bill as a reason to reduce the scope of their current schemes. We are confident that the funding that will be provided through the new burdens procedure will compensate local authorities for extending their schemes to men aged 60 to 64. We are keen to retain local democracy, and we do not want the Bill to reduce the discretion afforded to local authorities on the matter. I am sure that the hon. Member for Bath would support that. It is down to local authorities to decide, in the light of local circumstances, what type of scheme they want to operate.

Mr. Foster: The Minister seeks to reassure us that everything that the Government intend to do will ensure that the Bill does not result in a reduction of the existing, more generous, schemes. Will she add to her reassurance by providing some of the information that must be available to her? Her noble Friend Lord Falconer said in another place:

> "We are presently undertaking a survey to measure the effects of the implementation of the statutory minimum requirement. The survey is one of a series undertaken whenever there are significant changes to the concessionary travel regime. The results of the survey, which should be available early next year, will identify whether there is a problem of concessions having been reduced or whether there are just a couple of isolated examples."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 18 October 2001; Vol. 627, c. 743-44.]

Will the Minister tell us the result of that investigation?

Ms Keeble: We do not have the results of that investigation yet. There has been discussion of the impact on some schemes, and I have mentioned them. The matter has also been discussed in Committee and probably on Second Reading, too. In most instances, the matter has been resolved by the original schemes being reinstated. That is largely because of the popularity of concessionary fares. As soon as we get the results of the survey, I am sure that they will be made available to hon. Members, as they will be very important.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's concerns. They have been raised in correspondence by a number of hon. Members, and there has been a lot of discussion about them. I assure him that nothing in the Bill will cause any existing scheme to be reduced in scope or otherwise curtailed. With those assurances, I hope that he will be able to withdraw his amendment.

Mr. Foster: The Minister provides warm words of encouragement, but unfortunately she cannot yet provide evidence from the survey that she acknowledges is being carried out as to whether similar assurances were given in respect of the introduction of the earlier statutory minimum requirement, and whether its introduction led to such reductions. I note with interest that some schemes, as she rightly said, were referred to in Committee—for example, the west midlands scheme, which, although it was going to be removed, has now been reinstated. She explained that it was reinstated because of the popularity of the scheme, and one can well imagine that local councillors in those areas were put under enormous pressure. However, she did not say that the schemes were reinstated as a result of Government assurances that

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additional money to meet the additional cost would be made available; they were reinstated merely because of the political pressure placed on councils in the area.

Ms Keeble: I believe that those schemes were resolved in such a way. I do not want to mislead the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Foster: So the Minister is agreeing that the resolution of the problem was not a result of Government intervention.

The point that I have sought to make throughout is that it would be far better if the Government made it absolutely clear that they will introduce systems within the Bill's purview to ensure that the problems that we have discussed do not occur again. The Minister has said in warm words that it is not the Government's intention that such problems will occur, and that they are working very hard to ensure that they will not. I promise to look closely at the matter over the weeks and months to come, but with that assurance I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 2

COMMENCEMENT AND TRANSITIONAL PROVISION

3.30 pm

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 2, line 5, leave out from "on" to end of line 7 and insert—

> 'the day six months after Royal Assent has been signified to the Act.'.

The amendment's basic purpose is to ensure that the Government enact the provisions as soon as reasonably practicable. Since the Minister used the interesting parliamentary device of saying that she could not accept amendment No. 2 because it would delay implementation of the Act, I had anticipated that she would similarly turn down this amendment. I hope that I have anticipated her wrongly, because I am certain that all the men out there aged between 60 and 64 will be looking carefully at this debate to see when they are likely to be able to qualify for concessionary fares. Indeed, no less a person than the Speaker's Secretary made representations to me earlier today, saying that he hoped that the Bill would be on the statue book as soon as possible.

Having rejected amendment No. 2 because it will be simpler to operate the provisions under the standard spending assessment, the Minister is on much weaker ground in rejecting this amendment, as there is now less reason still why the Government cannot enact the provisions sooner rather than later.

The Minister said that she intended that the Act would come into effect on 1 April 2003. I am reliably informed by the Clerks that, as the Bill has completed all its House of Lords stages, theoretically there is no reason why it should not come into operation in a matter of days.

Mr. Woolas: Tomorrow.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The Government Whip, who one would not normally anticipate saying anything, has just made an interesting comment. He has just said, "A month."

Mr. Woolas: Tomorrow.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: All right, tomorrow.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. I do not want to encourage sedentary comments, and I hope that the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) will not provoke them.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Member for Oldham, East and Saddleworth (Mr. Woolas) made a helpful, illuminating comment, showing that if the Government moved with great speed, they could enact the Bill very quickly indeed. However, let us be generous and allow enough time for the parliamentary procedure to proceed at an orderly pace and assume that the Bill could be on the statute book by 1 March. Under our amendment, the provisions would then be brought into effect on 1 September—a full seven months earlier than the Government intend. The 1 million men who are likely to benefit from the provisions would warmly and heartily welcome that. I therefore urge the Minister to consider the amendment seriously.

Chris Grayling: Has my hon. Friend considered the perhaps mischievous possibility—I am sure that it is not really a possibility—that those men will have to wait an extra year because it is less convenient for the Chancellor of the Exchequer to spend the money in the next financial year?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am sure that there are expenditure implications, and that might be one of them. I hope that it is not, because Mr. Matthews first took his case to the European Court as long ago as 10 October 1997, so the Government have had four years' warning that they would be likely to lose such a case. To delay implementation until 1 April 2003 therefore seems unnecessary, as they should have been able to conduct all the necessary consultation to bring the provisions into effect sooner rather than later.

No lesser an organisation than Help the Aged said in its briefing:

> "If local councils were reimbursed through the forthcoming Revenue Support Grant"—

which the Minister has determined to do—

> "then the system could be introduced in the spring of 2002."

I do not know how long ago that briefing was written, but there is no practical reason, unless the Minister tells us otherwise, why the Bill should not be brought into effect on 1 September.

All those watching this debate will need to hear the Minister make a cast iron argument why that should not be so, particularly because the case has already been lost in the European Court of Human Rights. If such cases are to mean anything, the Government should move expeditiously to implement that judgment, which they rightly upheld. We therefore very much look forward to what the Minister has to say on when the provisions can come into operation.

Ms Keeble: Our commitment to equalising the age of entitlement is clear. We introduced the Bill very early in this Session. It made speedy progress through the other place and, hopefully, the House will today give the Bill its blessing and it can go forward for Royal Assent.

If amendment No. 2, which would have changed the basis for the financial calculation, had been agreed to, there would have been a substantial delay in implementation. We expect to have the measure fully implemented by April 2003, and that remains our firm intention.

I very much appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concern; implementation a full year off sounds a long way away. However, it is debatable whether the amendment would help local authorities, as they will have set their budgets and be part way through the financial year. As I said, the arrangements were designed for the efficient and orderly introduction of the scheme, as well as to ensure a proper financial basis. There is also the important point about ensuring that equalisation does not lead to any reductions in the number of such schemes.

There are very good reasons for putting new and changed concessionary travel arrangements into operation at the beginning of a local authority financial year, rather than part way through it. Legislation governing schemes in London requires the boroughs and Transport for London to agree their schemes by 31 December for implementation at the start of the following financial year. So, implementation in London would in any case have to wait until April 2003.

Furthermore, implementing the Act in April 2003 will harmonise other legislation to bring about age equalisation for concessionary fares across England and in Wales on the same day. I therefore hope that the hon. Gentleman will be prepared to withdraw his amendment.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The Minister has been somewhat parsimonious. It would be perfectly possible to introduce the scheme half way through a financial year and to adjust the revenue support grant next year to take that into account. I accept that, from the point of view of the orderly running of government, it is more tidy to introduce it on 1 April 2003, but we are talking about elderly people who may be on low incomes, and every little help makes their life just that much easier. I should have thought that the Government would be only too willing to get the Bill enacted and implemented as soon as possible. From the tone of the Minister's reply, I assume that she will reject the amendment. However, I hope that she will have an open mind on introducing the scheme by the end of the year, if not earlier, outside London—in the rest of England, which is where the bulk of people live.

Mr. Don Foster: The Minister made some sensible points, which the hon. Gentleman acknowledged, on the value of a 1 April date. Does he agree that she should at least stop saying that it is the Government's hope and intention to bring the Bill into effect on 1 April 2003, and assure us that that will be the latest date for implementation?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Before I decide whether to press the amendment to a vote, I am happy to give way to the Minister so that she can give a cast-iron guarantee that the Bill will be implemented on 1 April 2003, because that would help the 1 million men to whom the debate is relevant.

Ms Keeble: Discussions have to take place with local authority associations and Transport for London. Subject to those and the agreement of the House—for all I know, the hon. Gentleman might decide to vote against the Bill—the provisions will come into effect in April 2003.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To be reasonable, that is the strongest assurance that we could hope for from the Minister. We will, however, watch her every move closely and hold her to account if that does not happen. On the basis of her genuine assurance, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read.

3.42 pm

Ms Keeble: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

We are all aware of the purpose of this small but important Bill. It will entitle men to take advantage of all concessionary travel schemes from the age of 60 instead of 65. Equalising the age of entitlement for concessionary fares further demonstrates our commitment to tackling social exclusion and to ensuring that older people in society enjoy a full and active life. We want bus travel in particular to remain within the means of those on limited incomes and those with mobility difficulties. Bus travel is the most used form of public transport, especially by older people, and is of the most value to people as they move about their communities and go about their day-to-day lives.

The House will recall that last year we brought into effect the provisions of the Transport Act 2000, which for the first time require local authorities to offer a minimum of 50 per cent. reductions for pensioners and disabled people on local bus services. The necessary bus travel pass must also be issued free of charge. Those changes are already benefiting 7 million people across England and Wales. In addition, many local authorities have more generous schemes that allow concessionary travel on other modes of transport. Some also provide free travel. The Bill will enable an extra 1 million men aged between 60 and 65 to enjoy the concessionary travel that is offered in their area.

The debate has been constructive at all stages of the Bill's proceedings. I am grateful to those hon. Members who have taken part. I know that many Members have much to say on concessionary travel. I am pleased that there is a general appreciation of and, despite the minor reservations, support for what the Bill attempts to achieve. It will bring real benefits to many people.

3.44

Mr. Clifton-Brown: We had a good debate on Second Reading and examined many issues in Committee on a fairly consensual basis. The Government did not accede to many amendments, but the broad consensus is that the Bill is welcome. It will benefit 1,177,700 men aged between 60 and 64 in England. They will be grateful to

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Mr. Matthews for taking his case to the European Court of Human Rights and to the Government for implementing the judgment. It is worth reiterating that the problem could have been put right had the appropriate amendment to the Transport Bill been accepted.

There is still some dissatisfaction, however. The level of concessionary fares, which are in place throughout the country, varies according to where one lives. We support the principle that the Minister outlined: local authorities should be responsible for their spending and taxing decisions, and we would expect some variance. However, the variance is considerable, and I ask the Minister to urge all local authorities to aim to match the best schemes.

As with all schemes, it would be interesting to discover why thousands of pensioners do not take advantage of the benefits that are on offer. The Minister should not let the Bill be the end of the matter—indeed, perhaps it should signal the beginning of a new era of providing a better service for our pensioners. I have a particular interest in the Bill because my constituency has the third highest number of over-85-year-olds in the country. There must be something about the Cotswold air that makes them live longer. I am delighted about that and hope that the average age continues to increase. Mercifully, advances in medical science are enabling the population to live longer. I am all for it because it means that I shall live longer too, much to the chagrin of Labour Members—but then they, too, will live longer, so we will also have to put up with them for longer.

If we are a civilised society, we should do all that we can to help people at the end of their working life, and the Bill goes a long way towards achieving that. It is interesting that a significant number of men in the 60 to 65 category are still working and may benefit from the scheme, as I said in Committee. I suspect that there might be an uneven take-up among authorities, especially metropolitan authorities in London and those on its edges, because people in that age group who commute are likely to want to benefit from the scheme. I know that the concessions do not apply in normal working hours, but people who are at the end of their working life, especially those in more senior jobs, can work more flexible hours. They may well be able to amend their hours to take advantage of the scheme. That is a good thing.

We will watch the Government carefully on costs. I do not want to go into them in too much detail, but they are important and we need to ensure that the Government make adequate provision for the full costs of the scheme. The Minister for the Environment said that local authorities will be reimbursed for reasonable costs. A good general principle is that when Government impose additional burdens on local authorities, those authorities should be reimbursed for the full costs of those obligations.

The Government have recently imposed a raft of obligations on local authorities, and authorities are losing out because they are not being reimbursed. Examples are the best value initiative, changes in arrangements for the collection and disposal of waste, the fuel tax and extra pension costs, but the list is pretty long. Because the Government have not funded council tax properly this year, most rural shire counties will have to raise council tax by an average of 7.5 per cent., three times the inflation rate. That is one of the biggest stealth taxes imposed by the Government. I hope that, once the Bill has been enacted, all local authorities will consider carefully how it can be applied to their citizens' best advantage.

It is regrettable that the scheme does not apply to local authority boundaries. That is unfair on those living near such boundaries. In Committee, I pointed out that someone travelling from Moreton-in-Marsh, in the north of my constituency, to a hospital in Evesham would have to cross at least one—possibly two—local authority boundaries. The scheme would not help that person if they wished to travel by bus, which would be perfectly feasible.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) nods. His constituents living in and around Evesham might want to make the journey in reverse, and travel to the hospital in Moreton-in-Marsh. I would urge them to do so, because that would benefit the hospital.

We have engaged in a long debate on a relatively simple Bill. I think all Members now wish it godspeed, and hope that the Minister will consult local government associations and major metropolitan counties so that authorities can benefit their citizens as soon as possible.

3.52 pm

Mr. Don Foster: I have already made clear that Liberal Democrats support the Bill. We have engaged in helpful discussions of what is, as the Minister says, a relatively small Bill—discussions that have ranged widely, and have provided an opportunity for a number of further points to be discussed with Ministers.

In Committee, for instance, there was a fair amount of discussion of the need for better facilities for disabled people on public transport. Members on both sides mentioned that. We have been able to discuss the need to extend concessionary fare schemes, not least for young people. More than 50 per cent. of those who have not taken advantage of further and higher education cite lack of public transport as one of the main barriers.

Today we have had an opportunity to ask the Minister for an assurance that existing schemes that are more generous than the mandatory minimum schemes will not be jeopardised. As was pointed out by the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), we have also had an opportunity to discuss other possible extensions to concessionary fare arrangements. The hon. Gentleman rightly raised the issue of boundaries, to which Age Concern referred cogently in a briefing that was used in Committee:

> "The government's present limitation seems to expect that elderly and disabled people should keep all of their family and friends, all their health care providers, all their shopping, entertainment and recreations, all their places of worship—indeed all their possible reasons for travel—in the same local authority area as themselves. The government may believe in strong local neighbourhoods, but this seems to be carrying the principle a little too far."

Members of all parties supported that view then, and I suspect that they still do.

The Committee then moved to the issue of concessionary fare schemes for coaches. When I asked the Minister about that, she replied

> "I cannot at present give a date for implementation, but I shall ensure that the hon. Gentleman and others who are as interested know the implementation date as soon as possible."—*[Official Report, Standing Committee A, 20 November 2001; c. 56.]*

I should be grateful if the Minister would remind us of the implementation date, and also give absolute assurances that the funding regime has been established and accepted by all parties.

As is often the case, we have been ably supported during our deliberations by a number of organisations with particular interests in the issues. It is only right for us to pay tribute to the good work of many of them, such as Age Concern, the Royal National Institute for the Blind, the Local Government Association, the Joint Committee on Mobility of Blind and Partially Sighted People and Greater London Action on Disability. The greatest credit, however, must surely go to Parity, which, by taking the original Matthews case to the European Court, put pressure on the Government to introduce this much-needed and long overdue legislation.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Let me associate the official Opposition with the thanks the hon. Gentleman has conveyed to all those organisations. Without their help, the debate would have been much the poorer.

Mr. Foster: I am more than happy to do so.

The Bill is important. We hope that it will be enacted on the earliest possible date, and if that is 1 April 2003, so be it. Sadly, however, as it leaves this place for the last time a number of questions remain unanswered.

We are still not sure that the Bill will have no impact on existing schemes. We are still not certain that the Government will find a fair mechanism for the distribution of the pot of money that they make available to compensate councils, and we are still not certain that, however it is distributed, it will cover the full cost. That said, however, I echo what was said by the hon. Member for Cotswold and wish the Bill godspeed.

3.58 pm

Mr. Wiggin: Local authorities' power to offer concessionary fares was introduced as early as 1955 under a Conservative Government. The latest Transport Act seeks to ensure that pensioners and disabled people are guaranteed half-price fares or better on local buses. Bus travel is vital for my constituents. Access for disabled travellers at Leominster station is already negligible, and the estimated cost of putting that right is well over £400,000.

Under current legislation, eligibility for travel concessions is linked to the state-pension age, currently 60 for women and 65 for men. I personally welcome the equalisation of the qualifying ages at 60 and accept the wisdom of increasing the qualifying age to 65 by 2020, but I expect that in 2032, when I am eligible, it will have become even higher. Local authorities are obliged to reimburse bus operators for their forgone revenue; in theory, local authorities are reimbursed from central Government through the revenue support scheme. In my area, Malvern Hills district council was forced to introduce concessionary fares by the Government, but did not receive compensation through the revenue support scheme. Indeed, the only money which it received was a tiny sum to help pay for consultation, which forced it to increase council tax. I am worried that that is another gap in the funding chain, forcing councils with higher proportions of elderly people to charge more council tax and further penalise people on fixed incomes, especially pensioners. They may win on the buses, but they end up paying more council tax, as I said earlier. That is not exactly what the Government set out to achieve initially.

The Government's failure to follow their funding through gives rise to serious concern. The travel concessions scheme will cost £54 million, which has been factored into the local government finance settlement. However, distributing funds via the standard spending assessment means that smaller district councils that receive no revenue support grant will not be properly compensated. That is another flaw in the scheme which needs to be corrected. I am not making a spending commitment for the Government, as they have already pledged to fund the scheme; what is needed is a fair and effective distribution of money.

Councils already suffer enough from red tape and stealth taxation without another burden being imposed on those of us who pay council tax. We want guarantees that those holes will be plugged so that we can support the alteration to the concessionary travel age. We want a reduction in ring-fenced funding, which has risen from 4 per cent. to 10 per cent.

The fact that buses cross local authority boundaries gives rise to another problem. It would be fair for travel concessions to be valid across boundaries, which may result in a higher take-up of the scheme. That would be a tremendous asset, as well as a positive and sensible step. It does not make sense for the Government to go to all that trouble to introduce a less popular scheme. Indeed, the target in one of their 10-year plans suggested an increase in bus usage of up to 20 per cent, so it would be wise to budget for a rising uptake. An amendment tabled when the Transport Act 2000 was in Committee gave the Government the chance to equalise the age for concessionary fares. However, despite the fact that ageism and sex discrimination are prohibited and reviled, the Labour Government chose to vote against it. Today, let us put right that wrong.

4.2 pm

Ms Keeble: I shall detain the House only a short time in replying to the points made in our debate.

The hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) urged us to ensure that all local authorities raise their schemes to the level of the best. The Government have repeatedly advised and exhorted local authorities to do just that. However, I pay tribute to all those local authorities, most of them Labour-controlled, but also some Conservative ones, which pioneered concessionary fares for pensioners and people with disabilities, and kept that going through all the years of cuts under the Conservative Government. It is an acknowledgement of their work over the years that the Labour Government are now able to extend the concessionary fares scheme nationally and to back it fully, I remind the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin), with Government funds.

The hon. Member for Cotswold talked about providing better services for pensioners. Again, I remind him that the Government introduced the winter fuel allowance, as well as the concessionary fares scheme, which we are now extending. We abolished eye test payments for pensioners. The Bill is not the last word on what we are doing for pensioners; we are discussing the extension of fuel duty rebate to coaches, an issue raised by the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster). That plan will be introduced. Another

[Ms Keeble]

of our initiatives is the minimum income guarantee for pensioners. We plan to extend fuel duty rebate to community transport, which will benefit many older people. Extra money is going to the rural bus challenge and into rural transport, which will be of overwhelming benefit to pensioners. A number of schemes introduced under the rural bus challenge, for example, will make sure that older people can get to hospital.

The hon. Member for Bath talked about concessions to students, which are being progressed through the Department for Education and Skills, and trialled in local authority areas in the north-east with the aim of a national extension. There is genuine progress on that issue. Interest in the Bill is in direct proportion to its benefits. I believe that I am the only Member in the Chamber at present who will not benefit from it at all. The hon. Members for Bath and for Leominster expressed uncertainties, queries and qualms about it, but I urge the House to give it a ringing endorsement. Whatever the difficulties or pressures involved in its implementation, it gives us the certainty that all over-60s, men and women alike, will have a national system of concessionary fares for the first time ever. That will result in a genuine difference in their quality of life, as they will be able to travel and lead the kind of life that we want older people to lead. For the first time, there is the certainty of a concessionary fare backed by Government funds; people will recognise that a Labour Government achieved that.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, with an amendment.

Agriculture

4.6 pm

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Environmental Impact Assessment (Uncultivated Land and Semi-natural Areas) (England) Regulations 2001 (S.I., 2001, No. 3966), dated 10th December 2001, a copy of which was laid before this House on 11th December, be annulled.

This debate provides an opportunity for the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), to address a number of concerns about the new regulations raised by people who will most feel their impact. It also enables us to explore the way in which the regulations will work in practice and the Government's true intentions. There are questions about the extent to which the Government have added unnecessarily to the intentions of the original 1985 European Union directive.

When the Minister replies to the debate, will he outline the scale of the problem that the regulations are designed to address? How much evidence is there, for example, that valuable heathland, marshland and environmentally important farmland is being ploughed up or changed in a way that the regulations seek to prevent? I am aware that because some unscrupulous people have realised that regulations are in the pipeline, there has been an increase in the ploughing-up of valuable sites. The Government have used existing powers in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to prevent that.

I speak with feeling about that because a few years ago, as the Minister may recall, I introduced a private Member's Bill to protect hedgerows. As a result, I suspect that I am inadvertently the person most responsible for the destruction of hedgerows in the countryside. However, the point is that powers are in existence and can be applied. I should be grateful if the Minister addressed the scope of the problem; how, precisely, will the new regulations address the problem?

The Minister may be slightly embarrassed—indeed, there may be embarrassment on both sides of the House—because the directive behind the regulations dates back to 1985. It has taken 17 years and the threat of infraction proceedings for the Government finally to get round to introducing national regulations. The directive already applies to wide areas of industry, but agriculture is the one that got away. The problem is that, in the end, nothing gets away from EU directives, however long ago they were signed and however inappropriate or anachronistic they may turn out to be when they eventually become enforced under the threat of infraction procedures, as is happening in this case.

In the 17 years since the directive was introduced, life has moved on. As the Curry report, which was published earlier this week, has reminded us, there is now greater recognition of the interlinked relationship between farming, the environment and the whole of rural ecology and the rural economy. Good environmental practice is now much more widely recognised to be good business practice as well. That understanding is not confined to the rural economy; it applies to industry and to the economy as a whole. I think that that it is extremely welcome.

While there will always be a need to take precautions against wide boys and unscrupulous operators, it should no longer be commonplace for Government to set out to catch the entire flock when seeking the black sheep. The Curry report warns of the need to watch the cumulative effect of regulations, especially on small businesses. It recommends that the Government should publish an annual aggregate compliance cost figure for new regulations. It also urges a more streamlined and simple approach to providing information about regulations. We support those proposals and I hope that the Minister will welcome them.

What is really required, however, is a change in the culture of regulation. There is a need for the Government to change their mindset. They should challenge the assumption that they should always do more and ask instead whether they could do less and do it better. A mature relationship between Government and the governed and between the Department and farmers will be based not on rules, regulations and threats of punishment, but on trust. In agriculture more than almost anywhere else, the old command and control mentality still prevails and trust seems to have broken down utterly. Restoring and building trust between Government and the rural community is one of the greatest challenges that we face. Be that as it may, we accept that the Government have no choice but to introduce these measures in some form, even though they are based on the false assumption that they know best and that all farmers are inclined to be rapers and pillagers of the landscape if they are given half a chance.

The issue today is not the fact that the regulations are being imposed, but the way in which they are being introduced. There are a number of concerns. First, on timing, it is unfortunate to say the least that the Government are introducing new regulations on the farming industry after what has been in many ways its worst year in living memory. Foot and mouth disease has left lasting scars in the rural community. New outbreaks of bovine tuberculosis are causing serious problems. Classical swine fever, rhizomania and poor harvests have added to the problems faced by this beleaguered industry. Together with the weakness of the euro and the strangulation of red tape, those problems lie behind the fact that farm incomes are still 72 per cent. below their 1995 level. This must be one of the worst times to introduce new rules and extra costs for the farming industry, but that is exactly what the regulations entail.

I know that the Government carried out two consultations on the regulations during 2001. I am grateful to the Secretary of State for providing on 17 January some information in response to my parliamentary question about the number of responses that the Department received. The Minister might be tempted to take comfort from the fact that not many responses were submitted. The Department received 42 replies to the first consultation and 32 to the second. That is not many, given that the regulations affect every, single registered agricultural holding in England. In her reply, the Secretary of State said:

> "Respondents included statutory agencies (English Nature, English Heritage, Environment Agency and Countryside Agency) and bodies representing environmental and historical interests and the farming industry."—[*Official Report*, ; Vol. 378, c. 482W.]

It is interesting that the farming industry comes last on that list. I wonder how many farmers replied to the consultation and how much notice the Government took of what they said. I can only note that the National Farmers Union has recorded that it is

> "dismayed that many of our key concerns have not been satisfactorily resolved."

I do not know what efforts the Department made to consult individual farmers about the regulations. When I asked one farmer whether he had responded to either of the consultations, he said that he got so many questions from DEFRA these days and had so much else to worry about that he had not even noticed them. I fear that that is typical. The Minister should not assume that silence from farmers signifies consent. It is more likely these days to signify utter demoralisation and, in many cases, despair.

As a result, the regulations have taken many people by surprise. The latest edition of *Farmers' Weekly*, that excellent publication—I have no doubt that the Minister will agree that it is essential reading—reports:

> "Farmers across the country were this week sent a leaflet which explains how the scheme, which comes into force in one week, aims to protect uncultivated and semi-natural land.
>
> Andrew Clark, NFU head of environment, said while it was reassuring farmers finally had some details, they had been given fewer than 10 days to get to grips with them.
>
> 'It doesn't give people enough time to figure out what it is', he said."

Given the very short notice of the details of the regulations, which are due to take effect tomorrow, will the Minister confirm that he will exercise some lenience in their enforcement? After all, it is not the fault of farmers that they have been given only 10 days to assimilate the new regulations and their implications for their land holdings.

There is also the question of the regulations' cost. In replying to my question on the matter, again on 17 January, the Secretary of State admitted that the Government did not know how much the regulations would cost either the Department or the landowners. The Minister shakes his head, but the Secretary of State said that the costs to the Department of administering the scheme are put at between £100,000 and £200,000. A 100 per cent. margin of error seems pretty generous. Compared with the average farm income of £7,800 a year, the sum is considerable. As the Department cannot cope at the moment even with handling routine support payments, the Minister might wish to consider whether the money could be spent rather more productively. The costs to landowners are put at between £20,000 and £28,000 per 100 projects. Of course, that is money that they can ill afford, but it may also represent a fraction of the real cost.

The NFU has expressed concerns about the regulations' impact on the capital value of farmland. It has recorded that it is "extremely concerned" that the new regime will undermine land values by reducing the flexibility of the uses to which land can be put. It has calculated that the capital devaluation for potential arable land could be as much as £500 to £1,000 a hectare, which is about £200 to £400 an acre. Given that the capital value of agricultural land has effectively underpinned the banking sector's confidence in farming during this very difficult period, that is potentially a serious issue. Has the Minister undertaken an analysis of the regulations' possible impact on the underlying value of farmland?

[Mr. Peter Ainsworth]

Uncertainty surrounds the issue of whether set-aside land will be caught by the regulations. The pamphlet issued by the Department merely advises people to call a helpline if they have concerns about such land. I know of a farmer who telephoned the helpline earlier today. He rang 0800 028 2140 and a pleasant voice answered, saying "EIA"—*[Laughter.]* Not "Ee ay addy oh". The farmer said that he had a parcel of land that had been set aside since 1992 and asked whether it would be affected by the new regulations. The person at the other end answered that they did not know and that he needed to speak to the countryside stewardship scheme. They very kindly provided a phone number. He dialled the number and got through to the scheme, but he was transferred and then cut off. He dialled the number again and finally got through to somebody who said that they did not know the answer to his question and that he needed to speak to someone at the environmental impact assessment unit. At that point, he thanked them and they said that they would call back. The service that is being offered to farmers who are genuinely concerned about how the regulations will affect their livelihoods and what they can do with their land is not adequate.

The guidance notes provided by the Department are equally unclear. What steps is the Minister taking to ensure that landowners get proper, timely and accurate advice when they inquire about set aside? Will set-aside land be excluded from the new regime? I would welcome the Minister's comments.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): This is an extremely important point. In my constituency, there are a huge number of apple growers. The booklet on the regulations mentions that orchards come under the EIA. It is essential that farmers in my constituency find out when the Minister replies what the understanding is for orchards. Currently the crops are grubbed up about every 25 years. I wonder whether my hon. Friend could press the Minister for an answer on that point.

Mr. Ainsworth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that important point, which has been raised by outside concerns. It would be helpful if the Minister expressly addressed the issue of orchards, which do need to be grubbed up. The regulations should not impair normal farming practice. I hope that the Minister will confirm that that is not his intention and that it will not happen under the regulations as drafted.

There is concern about the way in which the regulations may affect existing agri-environmental agreements such as the countryside stewardship scheme. The Country Landowners Association has highlighted the fact that land managers entered voluntary agreements on the basis that their options would remain open at the end of agreement period. By potentially restricting the options open to land managers, the regulations change the basis on which the original agreements were made.

That problem could be mitigated if the Department stated that landowners will be offered the opportunity to renew their agreements on equivalent terms once they expire. Again, I would welcome the Minister's remarks on that issue. There is a danger that unless it is addressed, the regulations will act as a disincentive to farmers to enter into new agreements to protect the environment or, indeed, to engage in sensible diversification. I am sure that he would agree that that would be extremely regrettable.

I have received a letter from Mr. Michael Payne, a farmer and environmental consultant, who points out that the regulations could have a particular impact in the areas worst affected by foot and mouth disease. He says:

> "Permanent grassland (down for more than 10 years) is one of the land types most likely to be affected"

by the regulations.

> "This is particularly prevalent in the uplands, and in the wake of foot and mouth, the need for farming businesses to have the freedom to restructure without additional bureaucracy and cost may be crucial."

I hope that the Minister will provide some reassurance on that point. Clearly, it would be wrong for regulations, so soon after the ending of the foot and mouth outbreak and the calamity that that spelt for the countryside, to impact particularly harshly on the people who suffered most.

Mr. Payne raises the general point about the gold-plating of EU directives. That goes to the heart of many of the concerns that have been raised about the Government's proposals. On 30 March 2000, the Government published their action plan for farming. In it, they said:

> "The Government's policy on implementing EU obligations in relation to farming will be to avoid all 'gold plating' of the legislation, its implementation and enforcement; to regulate in the least bureaucratic and burdensome way and to avoid implementing legislation ahead of specified EU deadlines."

They certainly have not implemented the regulations ahead of the EU deadline but what about the gold-plating? Will the Minister confirm that the Government have chosen to ignore the de minimis threshold allowed by the directive? Is not it the case that article 4 of the directive allows member states to set a cut-off point below which farming projects will be excluded?

Paragraph 20 of the guidelines that were issued recently says:

> "We will not work to any specific threshold criteria. We are obviously more likely to consider large projects as significant than minor ones",

but is there not a need to ask whether minor ones need to be considered at all? Will not the regulations add substantially to the administrative costs for the Department, as well as adding to the tangle of red tape that is already tying farmers in knots? Does not the provision amount to gold-plating?

I have secured a copy of the original directive. Article 1 states clearly:

> "This directive shall apply to the assessment of the environmental effects of those public and private projects which are likely to have significant effects on the environment."

Setting aside the fact that many of the schemes caught by the regulations are unlikely to be considered "significant" to any normal observer, it is clear that the directive is aimed at major, large-scale projects such as construction projects.

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that very small areas of land can have a significant impact on the landscape?

Mr. Ainsworth: We are dealing with semantics but I do not think that it was the intention of the directive—if the hon. Gentleman chooses to reason, I think that he will form the same conclusion—to catch some minor change in the method of cropping in the corner of someone's field.

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): An important point has been raised. Farmers do not want to be over-regulated, as the hon. Gentleman rightly says, but organisations such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds say that even a 3 ft margin on a field can have significant implications for the wildlife. The cumulative effect of a lot of very small things has a significant environmental impact. Presumably that is part of what the directive had in mind.

Mr. Ainsworth: I accept the hon. Gentleman's point about the cumulative effects but I hope that he shares the concern about the cumulative effects of regulation on farmers' ability to go about their business at all. Piling regulations on the farming sector makes it less viable, less profitable and in the long run less able to look after the environment that we all care about so much.

It seems that the directive is primarily aimed at things such as gravel pits, motorways and large-scale factory developments. Article 1.2 of the directive makes that clear:

> "'project' means
>
> the execution of construction works or of other installations or schemes,
>
> other interventions in the natural surroundings and landscape including those involving the extraction of mineral resources".

Notwithstanding the point made by the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett), it must be doubtful whether the original intention of the directive was to embrace minor alterations to the corner of a field, or the recropping of a field with a higher percentage of rye grass.

The Government's efforts to make the pill slightly less bitter than it would otherwise be give a faintly laughable tone to the leaflet that they have circulated, and indeed to the guidelines. However they are dressed up, it is impossible to escape the fact that these are new regulations. They impose new burdens on farmers. They threaten fines of up to £5,000 for non-compliance.

It is true that the regulations set up an appeals process but appeals will be made to the Secretary of State, to officials in the Department or to people appointed by the Department, which is the enforcing agency. There is no right of appeal to an independent body. I would welcome the Minister's thoughts on why that is.

There is no getting away from the fact that this is an increase in regulation. One would be hard pushed, however, to work all this out from reading the notes, pamphlets and leaflets published by the Department. I have a copy of a page from the leaflet. It says:

> "What is EIA?
>
> EIA is a way of helping farmers, land managers and others to consider the environmental effects of changing the way they use their land."

The idea that these regulations are primarily to help farmers is pure fiction. The Government might be wearing a double set of kid gloves, but the iron fist keeps poking through at the knuckles. There is no reference in the information supplied to farmers by the Government of the penalties applicable for non-compliance and there is no such reference in the leaflet.

A casual glance at the information would lead one to think that the regulations were, in some way, the answer to farmers prayers; something that they have been asking for rather than something that has caused them considerable concern.

The guidelines state that the regulations

> "contribute significantly to a clearer understanding of good agricultural practice."

So says the Department.

Has the Minister thought to consider the implication of that statement? The implication is that land managers do not have a clear understanding of good agricultural practice. Many of us wonder why the Government believe that they understand good agricultural practice better than farmers do. The Minister should justify that belief in his remarks. It is time to challenge the assumption that has characterised the relationship between agriculture and Government for too long. It is the patronising assumption that politicians and civil servants know better than farmers what is good for them.

There is no other industry in the world in which the machinery of government is so intimately involved in people's daily lives and decisions. Of course there should be penalties for those who knowingly and deliberately set out to wreck important wildlife sites or landscape features. Of course there is a need to recognise in law the public value of a sustainable and diverse environment. Of course there is a need for regulation, particularly where human health is at stake. However, on 3 January, Lord Whitty, the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in the other place said that

> "the benefits from maintaining environmentally valuable areas could provide a significant source of income to farmers as land managers as well as food producers."

If the Government believe that, why do they not let farmers get on with their job without the introduction of new heavy-handed, negative regulations that go beyond the original intentions of the directive?

I regret that these regulations will do nothing to foster the trust that will be central to economic recovery and vitality in the countryside and I doubt whether, in the real world, they will afford much protection to important natural sites, the majority of which are already protected under different legislation.

I look forward to hearing the Minister's answers to my questions and to those that other hon. Members will wish to put to him.

4.34 pm

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I endorse many of the reservations raised by the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth). There are legitimate concerns. I also take the view, however, that the directive requires action by the United Kingdom Government and the question should be about how to achieve the best balance between farmers being able to do their job, as the hon. Member for East Surrey pointed out, and the need adequately to protect the environment.

The nature of farming is that it consists of small and medium-sized businesses. It is difficult for an individual farmer to see the cumulative effect of his actions, and those of many others, on the environment. The genuine debate about the way that farming is changing, in which the public are engaged, involves the extent to which it

[Malcolm Bruce]

has, in some areas, had a detrimental effect on the landscape. That is not necessarily because the farmers were bad managers, but because practices that were accepted in the past have subsequently been found to be detrimental. For example, nitrate use has severe implications in some parts of the country. I know of farmers' concerns. I have a 55 hectare nitrate vulnerable zone in my constituency. I understand farmers who fear the regulations, but I equally care about the environment that the nitrates are destroying. We must do something about it.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): The hon. Gentleman will know that the number of nitrate vulnerable zones is about to be increased across vast amounts of arable land. Does he accept that farmers have been driven by whatever is the thinking at the time? Is not this a question of re-educating people, particularly the next generation of farmers in agricultural colleges, away from the practice of maximum production, which has grown up throughout our lifetime? That has been driven by market forces that should perhaps be tempered, but not with heavy regulations like these.

Malcolm Bruce: That is what the debate is about. It is a fair, reasonable and constructive point. I can make the copper-bottomed statement that farmers are perfectly capable of change and adaptation. They have proved that over many years. However, right now, most of them are not making a living. Whatever the Government do, whether it is implementing the Curry report or these regulations, they must accept that the exchange rate, the fact that they did not receive the agrimoney compensation in full and the market effects mean that most farmers cannot make a living. Unless they make a living, there will be no one to manage the environment or produce the food in the quantities that we need. That is the difficulty facing the Government. The hon. Member for East Surrey was right to say that the timing is unfortunate, but because of infraction proceedings we must do something about it.

I am concerned that the regulations could be bureaucratic. The language in the guidelines is gentle, but it effectively means that every farmer in the country could be in negotiation with the Department. That is perfectly possible. We know that the Department has difficulty negotiating with itself at the moment, never mind negotiating with farmers. The Department's ability to handle this is not reassuring—I am sure that it will not be able to handle the vast amount of work. Paragraph 3 of the guidelines says:

> "Although these procedures are based on legal requirements, with penalties for non-compliance, we will seek wherever possible to apply them in co-operation with the farmers and others who may be involved."

The guidelines go on to make suggestions about agri-environment schemes.

Most farmers will want to know how the regulations will apply in practice, whether there will be a genuine partnership and whether it will be over-bureaucratic. I welcome the fact that the Government have said that there will be a review after 18 months and that there will be an opportunity to see whether the operation should be lightened, tightened or clarified. I give the Government credit for acknowledging that we are not quite there yet and that we need to apply the regulations in law and see how they work.

The Minister must understand that gentle words, which are, nevertheless, legally enforceable, give cause for concern because people do not know when they will be in breach or the costs and the detail in which they will be engaged. It will cost some money to put up schemes for consideration. The time scale is specific. Thirty-five days is not a long time to get advice and, sadly, there is no longer the free or low-cost advice that was available when the agricultural development and advisory scheme was at is height. That is a matter for concern, because it will impose significant costs. I hope that the Minister will assure us that the Department will take an approach that does not require farmers to employ expensive consultants to qualify, or to avoid refusal if they are trying to make some changes to their farm or its management.

The hon. Member for East Surrey mentioned a reduction in the value of farms—a point that has also been made by the NFU—and I noticed that the Minister shook his head. I find it hard to believe the NFU's claim that land values will be affected across the board. However, individual farms could be affected, which would be a legitimate concern for them, and I hope that the Minister will acknowledge that.

I agree with the point that it is less than satisfactory that the right of appeals should be from the Department to the Department. The Department is unlikely to change its mind on appeal if the same people are considering the issue. The right of appeal to an arm's-length, independent body is normal and what people expect. In Scotland, that was an issue in disputes over payments under the IACS scheme and an appeals process has now been established. The Minister is at arm's length and is engaged in the process only as a participant, rather than as the determinant of the appeal. Such a process would be appropriate in this instance.

We have all received representations from the NFU and the Country Landowners Association, but we have also received representations supporting the regulations from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, which—as we should remember—is one of the biggest public membership organisations in the country. It far outweighs the membership of all the political parties combined and carries much clout and muscle as a result.

One farmer in my constituency has long worked with the RSPB. He will admit that he has a personal obsession with the issue and that he is not typical, but his farm provides a fantastic array of habitats and reserves for birds and other wildlife. That has significantly affected the whole area, because he provides—in some cases—the only feeding or resting places for the birds, alongside a successful arable farm. He makes the point that relatively small changes on the margins have substantial positive implications for wildlife.

Farmers ask, "Why should anyone interfere with me when I want to reorganise my fields and change the boundaries?" However, we know that although the removal of one hedge does not make much difference, the removal of all the hedges makes a huge difference. Similarly, ploughing up to the hedge leaves one habitat, but ploughing 3 ft short of the hedge has a significant impact on insects and wildlife. In that case, farmers need uniform guidelines, so that they do not have to go through an individual process. The hon. Member for East Surrey suggests that the helpline is undeveloped, but it could provide the answers. We need clear answers to straight questions, and that would greatly simplify the bureaucracy.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: The issue of hedgerows is now covered by regulations, and the example that the hon. Gentleman has just given of minor changes to field boundaries would not fall within the scope of these regulations. The real question is what the regulations would achieve other than an increase in red tape.

Malcolm Bruce: As a Liberal Democrat, I am—not surprisingly—proposing a third way. The hon. Gentleman is right to be concerned about excessive regulations and, on the basis of what we know at the moment, so are farmers. I congratulate him on instigating the debate, because the questions need to be answered, both today and in the practice and the review in the next 18 months. The Conservatives claim that the regulations are excessive and will not achieve enough. In 18 months, they or the Government will be proved right, and then we may get the balance right.

The Minister is enacting legislation because of the threat of infraction proceedings by the EU, but his proposals are not clear. The industry does not understand them fully and nor do the environmentalists. To be honest, I am not convinced that the Department understand them fully either. However, that is not meant as a devastating criticism. If, during the next 18 months, the Government make an honest attempt to get the balance right and, at the end of that time, the review systematically deals with the issues, we may produce legislation that will work.

The Minister should listen to the concerns about excessive bureaucracy and the consequent costs. He should also make the case for the environmental benefits. He also needs to reassure farmers that he is trying to offer a simple, clear and comprehensible system that they can live with, and which is not too bureaucratic, costly or confusing. Farmers certainly should not face penalties when they did not know that their practices would incur them. I hope that the Minister will address those legitimate concerns now and during the next 18 months.

4.46 pm

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): I endorse the closing remarks of the hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce), but at the start I declare an interest because I own land in Norfolk that could be affected by the regulations.

As my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) said, farming is in real crisis at the moment. In the two years before the outbreak of foot and mouth disease, 42,000 farmers left the industry. Anyone who has visited livestock-producing areas, such as that represented by my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), will know of the sheer devastation in those communities. Compensation for those farmers is a big issue, but other industries—such as tourism—were affected by the foot and mouth crisis and the issue of compensation for them also arises.

Historically, the arable areas have been the most viable and prosperous farming districts. If the prices of one or two crops failed one year, another crop would have a good year. If grain prices were down, people would get a better price for potatoes. If potatoes and grain were both down, they could rely on the prices for sugar beet. Until recently, many farms in Norfolk were very diversified. For example, many had livestock, such as poultry. Now, every farm in Norfolk is making a loss and if it were not for IACS, the farmers would face a disaster on the same scale as those farmers in the livestock breeding and rearing areas.

Mr. Robathan: Will my hon. Friend confirm that not all his local farmers have yet received their IACS payments because of inefficiency and industrial action in the Department? That delay could be critical for a farmer on the cusp of bankruptcy.

Mr. Bellingham: That is absolutely right. People assume that all farmers in places such as Norfolk, Suffolk, Lincolnshire and Leicestershire farm 500 or 600 acres, but they do not. Many smallholders in those counties struggle to make a living, possibly after losing the other job that they used to do in addition to working the smallholding.

As I said, there is a silver lining. The countryside stewardship scheme and other agri-environmental schemes have meant that many farmers receive other incomes. Charles Barratt, a prominent Norfolk business man and stockbroker, recently expressed in his newsletter his gratitude that the country stewardship scheme existed. He was right to do so, as the countryside is changing. The trend to ever more intensive farming has been reversed, and the days of prairie farming are over. More emphasis is now placed on habitat, conservation and biodiversity.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey made a good point when he said that more and more farmers recognise that what is good for the environment is often also good for business. The overwhelming majority of farmers now look for every opportunity to encourage the wildlife on their farms.

I hope that the Minister will recognise the crucial importance of country sports, for example. He goes on about the need to protect jobs in the countryside, but he is part of the campaign to destroy those jobs. That goes down badly with farmers in my constituency.

Travelling around Norfolk, one is struck by the number of tubular tree guards in hedges, which show that new hedges are being laid. One also sees increased conservation headland. Last Friday, I went on an ecological walk around John Alexander's Westwick estate, and every field had a 20-metre headland. I also noticed that a number of rough field corners had recently been moved out of cultivation.

That is typical of many East Anglian farms. The landscape is being transformed by dedicated and committed farmers, in a climate of extreme economic pressure. They are acting partly in response to the incentives that have been put in place, but also out of their love for the countryside.

That is the context into which the regulations that we are discussing are being introduced. They will bring in environmental impact assessment procedures for projects to convert uncultivated land, or semi-natural land areas, to intensive agriculture. The Department's guidelines make clear the type of land that will be affected.

As my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey noted, the regulations were published on 18 January, but they come into force tomorrow. No wonder, therefore, that there is so little awareness of what is going on.

[Mr. Bellingham]

My hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey also said that a number of organisations have voiced considerable concern about the regulations. The Council for the Protection of Rural England supported the regulations, and even said that they did not go far enough. However, the council did not produce a briefing paper. In contrast, a number of other organisations have produced excellent briefing papers, and I have also been contacted by a number of farmers in my constituency who are concerned. Farmers involved in the countryside stewardship scheme or others like it, or those who meet the set-aside obligations, are very worried indeed.

As my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey pointed out, the 25 to 30 per cent. rye grass guideline test is of crucial importance. The measure means that land will be considered uncultivated if it has less than the threshold 25 to 30 per cent. of rye grass—or of white clover, or of other sown grass species indicative of cultivation.

The National Farmers Union has stated clearly that the species of grass used by most farmers to ensure that they meet the requirements of the countryside stewardship scheme are such that, just three months after planting, land will be caught by the 25 to 30 per cent. rye grass guideline. I hope that the Minister will comment on that.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey made a good point when he said that farmers entering into the countryside stewardship scheme did so on a promise and a contract that made it very clear that new restrictions would not be imposed at the end of the agreement term. I hope that the Minister will be able to give some hint of comfort in that regard.

I hope too that the Minister will accept that there should be no disincentive for farmers to enter the countryside stewardship scheme, which everyone agrees is excellent. It would be a great pity if farmers were discouraged from joining it, for the reasons that I have given.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey also spoke about the possible reduction in land values. Everyone knows that the value of farm land is now unrelated and disconnected from its underlying productive capacity. My hon. Friend mentioned the possibility that land values could be reduced by as much as £500 per acre. If he is correct, I hope that the Minister will comment.

I hope that the Minister will also say something about the need for compensation for farmers affected by the measure. Will there be a compensation package of any sort? What is the Government's attitude to farmers who manifestly will be out of pocket as a result of the regulations?

The Country Land and Business Association, among other organisations, is seeking formal assurances from the Government on the definition of semi-improved land. It is also concerned whether IACS-registered set-aside can be excluded on the basis that it is clearly neither uncultivated nor semi-natural. I hope that the Minister will comment on that point.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) asked a moment ago, can DEFRA cope with the burdens of the new regulations? I very much doubt it, because many farmers in my constituency have complained bitterly to me that the IACS payments are well behind. They ring up Cambridge, talk to sympathetic people on the telephone and are told that the payment will arrive soon. I hope that the Minister understands that this money is crucial to cash flow. It is crucial, in many cases, to farmers being able to employ the few remaining staff they have left on their farms, if they employ anyone at all.

I hope that the Minister will also consider whether it is really necessary to have criminal penalties, with farmers breaching the regulations committing a criminal offence. I agree that there must be penalties but should we really give farmers a criminal record and fine them heavily in the criminal courts over a matter that I believe should be in the civil court domain?

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Hugh Robertson) will be concerned about orchards. In the north-western part of my constituency, there are a number of growers of hard and soft fruits in the marshland area. The environmental impact assessment regime could prevent the grubbing up and replanting of redundant orchards. That would be a disaster. It would devalue the land and do the reverse of what the Minister has said on a number of occasions that he wants.

The Minister has been down to my constituency. He came in 1998, looked around various orchards and went round a number of glasshouse complexes in the marshland. He came down to my constituency last Friday as well, but unfortunately did not tell me that he was coming. If he had told me, I would have made sure that we went round an orchard and met a number of small farmers in the marshland part of my constituency. However, perhaps he can make up for it by coming again in the future.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): Take him foxhunting.

Mr. Bellingham: I certainly will. It would be good for him to see what happens on a foxhunt, because I doubt whether he has ever been on one.

In his concise and excellent speech, my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey said that farmers are demoralised and confused. Most are doing their level best to cope in extremely difficult circumstances. He was right to quote from the Curry report, which, on page 72, says:

> "We recommend that Government develop and publish a strategy for implementing forthcoming environmental Directives."

If only they had a strategy for this particular directive. The report continues:

> "Besides describing how progress on meeting each Directive's environmental objectives is to be achieved, monitored and reported on, the strategy should include a regulatory impact assessment based on cost-benefit analysis covering the impact on farms."

That is very well said.

Of course the industry will go along with these regulations. However, it is crucial that they receive the assurances for which we have asked.

4.58 pm

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): This is an important debate in terms not just of the regulations before us but of the wider debate about the nature and purpose of the countryside. That debate has permeated the Chamber this evening.

There has been some talk about how the regulations will affect land values. I am firmly on the side of the hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) in believing that the NFU's assessment may be exaggerated. Like him, I think that there may be effects on particular farms, but in general I do not think that there will be any effect on land values.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: The figure may be exaggerated or it may not be. I was asking the Minister to make sure that he had formed a clear impression of the likely or possible impact on land values, given that they underpin so much in rural England.

Paddy Tipping: The Minister will speak for himself, but I see no evidence of agricultural land values falling. I accept that farming is in crisis and that farm incomes are very low, but I see no sign that land values will fall. I am certainly of the view that the regulations will have no effect whatsoever, except in the smallest case.

The hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) spoke properly and wisely about adding value to the countryside, which is what I want to discuss. The real lesson to be drawn from the foot and mouth crisis is its effect on visitors to the countryside. When the footpath network was closed and people no longer visited the countryside, the rural economy was in crisis. Farmers who are concerned about the regulations—they have a right to be—should be concerned about the need to add value to the countryside so as to create a backdrop that people will wish to visit. In principle, it must be right that we should conserve high-value landscapes. We should build on work that hon. Members have done to safeguard hedgerows, look after stone walls and ensure that land that is uncultivated and has high value is maintained. We may argue about the scale, but in principle that must be the right thing to do.

I have two questions for the Minister. First, the principle of the regulations as they stand is right, but there is a lack of clarity. It would be helpful for people who have concerns if what is meant by the high-value land that is specified and which lies behind the regulations is spelled out more clearly.

Secondly, conservation bodies have a view about how they are to be consulted. The prime interest is the landowner, but other bodies will wish to be consulted. The regulations are clear. The Countryside Agency and the Environment Agency, for example, are to be consulted, but other bodies such as the wildlife trusts and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, which have already been mentioned, have enormous significance and can contribute to the debate. Those organisations have been consulted about the preparation of the regulations, but will they be consulted as a matter of course when applications are made?

We should study the regulations carefully and get the balance right—the balance to create a living and changing countryside. The countryside does not stand still; it will always be changing. The farmer and the landowner are the major stakeholders, but they know that their livelihoods and interests depend on a countryside where the landscape is lifted and the environment enhanced. If properly applied, the regulations can help them. That is why I welcome the commitment that the regulations will be reviewed in 18 months.

It is important that we get right the balance between the people who live and work in the countryside and those who want to visit it and who bring wealth and prosperity to the area. One aspect of this debate that has concerned me is the persistent and misguided argument of those who try to set urban and rural interests against each other. That argument will lead to destruction and pain. A sensible way forward is to see and work for a balanced approach, which adds value to both parties.

5.4 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I have an interest, in that I became a farmer last year—as declared in the Register of Members' Interests. I was one of the people referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth). I was extremely surprised; I had no idea that the environmental impact assessment regulations would be introduced this year until I heard about today's debate.

I use my farm as an example to illustrate the problems of other people because I am fortunate—I do not rely on farm income for my livelihood. Fortunately, the good burghers of Blaby keep voting for me to come to this place. I hope that they continue so to do. I want to farm my land in an environmentally friendly way that conserves and encourages wildlife and birdlife.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey spoke well, and I agreed with him. He and I go back a long way on this issue and have had many discussions about it in the past. I remind the House that he was an instigator of the Hedgerows Bill in 1993. It was not successful but became the basis for further measures. He has an honourable record on wildlife and countryside conservation.

When I was younger, I used to be outraged by the destruction that some farmers wrought on the countryside. They ripped out hedges wholesale. Many of us have seen how the landscape was changed by the work of farmers, but that is in the past.

Mr. Wiggin: Having seen the way the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food handled the foot and mouth crisis, does my hon. Friend agree that farmers plough up moorland and hillside because they are so frightened about the way that they will be treated? It may offer them their only route of escape.

Mr. Robathan: I agree with my hon. Friend. Unfortunately, the regulations point to that result. Farmers feel harassed by their own Department. The fact that it is called DEFRA rather than MAFF makes things seem even worse. Many people call it the Department for the End of Farming and Rural Activity.

I used to be outraged by the activities of farmers, but actually most farmers are just trying to make a living. There should be education and incentive, not over-regulation. My father-in-law was a farmer and my brother-in-law is a farmer and I know many farmers in my constituency. They are not all grain barons, riding about in Range Rovers; many of them are ordinary people who like working on the land. They are using their best endeavours to try to work the land, but they are under huge pressures to make a living—as I said earlier in an intervention on the hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce). When they are going bankrupt, no one could expect them to do anything but maximise the potential of their land.

The regulations in this European directive bring a wry smile to my face because they amount to gold-plating. I do not think that the directive was intended to have that

[Mr. Robathan]

effect—although one might say that it is getting into the nooks and crannies of everyday life. The regulations are gold-plating that will make life more difficult for farmers.

The point that I want to home in on is the countryside stewardship scheme, which was mentioned by two of my hon. Friends. I want to pursue that scheme because I want to make my land more environmentally friendly. As the Minister knows, a large number of farmers throughout the country are also adopting the scheme, because almost all farmers appreciate wildlife. They appreciate hedges. They like to see the land farmed in an environmentally friendly way, but they have to make a living. The countryside stewardship scheme has allowed them to do that, and to reverse some of the destruction that has taken place in the past.

I want to pursue the scheme—as do many farmers—but I have been put on the back foot: I am concerned that if I take up the scheme, I shall end up tying my hands and the hands of farmers who farm my land in the future. The regulations mean that DEFRA will be able to interfere when anyone wants to make further changes on their land. That is a real concern.

Will the Minister tell us whether he believes that the regulations will discourage people from taking up the countryside stewardship scheme? I fear that they may. If so, what mitigation will he offer to encourage what has been a most successful scheme?

Overall, the great concern is that this further regulation will interfere with the livelihoods of people who are already on the cusp of bankruptcy. The industry is in real crisis. We are talking about ordinary people who work all the hours that God gave. I have seen the man who was ploughing my land working at 10 o'clock at night with headlights on. I, too, work at 10 o'clock at night, but not nearly as hard as a farmer does. These people work all the hours that God gave to make a livelihood, yet we are making their lives even more difficult.

I applaud the desire in Brussels and in London for greater environmental aspects to our farming. I applaud the desire for greater conservation, and greater help for wildlife in the countryside. I do not, however, want to see greater interference, and what worries me about the regulations is that they represent further interference that will—

Mr. Wiggin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, particularly as he had not finished his sentence. I want to ask him a question about the compliance cost of this new environmental impact assessment. If we continue to farm land that is currently being cultivated, and which would otherwise have been set aside or used for other environmentally friendly purposes, we shall be putting more food into a market that is perhaps incapable of absorbing it, thus forcing prices down even further. Farmers would do that, however, because they would be frightened of getting hit by an environmental statement, which the Secretary of State estimates will cost between £2,000 and £3,000 to prepare. Would my hon. Friend care to comment on that?

Mr. Robathan: That is a rather big issue, and I do not want to go too far down the line with it at the moment. I agree with my hon. Friend entirely, though, because that is what this is all about. Farmers want to farm; that is why they go into farming. They want to get out there and work the land and work with their animals; they do not want to deal with regulations, which always take time. More and more regulations will take more and more time. A common complaint from farmers is that they are submerged in paperwork, and unable to get out and do the farming. Candidly, many of them were not brought up in a world of form filling, and they find it very tiresome. I find it frightening when my hon. Friend talks about costs of £2,000 or £3,000.

I am sure that the Minister will say that the regulations will not put a burden on farmers. I have not read his speech, but I can guess that that is what he will say. I would just draw his attention to paragraph 6, which sums up my argument:

> "No person shall begin or carry out a relevant project"—

that covers just about any improvement to the land—

> "without first obtaining consent from the Secretary of State."

That is a fairly burdensome requirement.

5.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): I welcome the broad consensus that the regulations have benefits in relation to good agricultural practice and to the protection of our habitats. I understand the points that have been made by the hon. Members for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce), for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham), for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), and for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth), and by my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping), and I shall try to address them.

The regulations were introduced in 1985, and amended by directive 97/62/EC. Equivalent regulations are being made in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. The hon. Member for East Surrey asked about the scale of the problem, and why the measures were introduced. The countryside survey produced by the Countryside Agency estimated that acid grassland has been reduced by 10 per cent in the last 10 years, and that calciferous grassland—which is very species-rich—has been reduced by 18 per cent. It also estimated that about 10,000 hectares of land that might fall into that category are lost annually. A significant amount of damage is, therefore, being done.

The Select Committee on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whose membership included Conservative Members, produced a unanimous report which pressed DEFRA—or MAFF, as it then was—to introduce these regulations as soon as possible, because of the impact of ploughing up downland and river valley land, and because of the problem of run-off and soil erosion, and the effect that that had on flooding. Indeed, in my travels following the floods of 2000 I visited people whose homes had been swamped with mud run-off from ploughed downland that had for a long time been grassland. Turning it into downland was probably not the most appropriate use for it. There are therefore very good reasons for measures such as these.

I am pleased that hon. Members recognise that the language in the guidelines is non-confrontational. The talk is of co-operation and the aim is to make the measure work. I am pleased also that the hon. Member for Gordon and my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood recognise that within 18 months there will be a formal review of the way in which the regulations are working. The idea is to take up the points that have been raised and to ensure that the measures have bedded down. We need to learn from the experience of operating environmental impact assessments whether there is a need to change or fine-tune the regulations. We are trying to be proportionate and co-operative.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: The fact that the regulations will be reviewed is most welcome. The Minister says that there are good reasons for introducing them. It is impossible to resist the temptation to ask why, if that is the case, he has waited to be threatened with infraction procedures by the European Union before doing so.

Mr. Morley: From my days in the old Ministry of Agriculture, I have asked for the regulations to be introduced. The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that there has been a great deal to do, and I point out that there has been over a year of consultation on the measure, and rightly so. It makes a big change; it is complex, and I make no apologies for the length of the consultation.

I am a little surprised at the hon. Gentleman's point, bearing in mind the fact that the measure appeared in 1985, and there was no sign of it being introduced until we began to make progress. He is right to say that there is a threat of infraction procedures, and we cannot ignore that, but I believe that the measure has an important role to play. It is important that we get it right, that it is proportionate and that we take on board the points that have been made about bureaucracy. We have been trying to do that in the consultation process.

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): Will the Minister give an undertaking—I ask not so much as a constituency MP but as the secretary of the parliamentary fruit group—that as part of the review in 18 months' time he will consider horticulture in particular? Many fruit farmers in my constituency and elsewhere produce their trees over a 16 or 17-year economic period and they are very worried about the effects of the regulations.

Mr. Morley: I have not forgotten the point about orchards—I have here a note about it—and I assure the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members that I shall come to it.

The directive requires an environmental assessment to be carried out on projects that are likely to have significant environmental effects. Guidelines have been sent to all farms, and more detailed guidelines are available to all farmers. That information can be found on our website, to which I hope more and more farmers have access. Agriculture projects are the sole subject of the regulations, and other parts of the EIA directive have already been implemented. Town and country planning legislation deals with projects requiring planning permission, and other measures deal with specific matters such as forestry.

We announced in the rural White Paper our intention to consult on implementation of the uncultivated land provisions of the EIA directive. As hon. Members have made clear, there is a strong general wish for farming to be environmentally responsible; indeed, our countryside stewardship schemes have been very popular and are over-subscribed. That desire to be environmentally responsible is reflected in the five-point plan for wildlife-friendly farming drawn up by the NFU and English Nature, and I pay tribute to that. The statute that we are debating forms part of a wide spectrum of measures—voluntary or enforced through regulation where necessary—to ensure a sustainable future for our countryside and our farming industry.

As I said, we have consulted widely on these measures: first on the options for implementation and then on the draft regulations and guidelines. We have been concerned throughout the process to find ways of accommodating and reconciling the need for proper environmental safeguards and the need to avoid excessive regulation and cost for farmers. We are very grateful to the statutory agencies and other organisations for their invaluable help in framing the new procedures.

In the guidelines, we emphasise in particular the Department's intention to apply the measures in co-operation with farmers, wherever possible. If problems arise in implementing the EIA regulations when the farmer is considering changing the use of the land, we will discuss the issue. It is part of the procedures and guidelines that the farmers or landowners can contact our regional offices, and we will work with them to try to find a solution and give them whatever guidance we possibly can.

I was asked whether we would be flexible in applying the guidelines and in the exact contents of the environmental statements, and I can certainly give that assurance. We will be flexible, especially in the bedding-down period when people have to get used to things. I repeat that the statements will be required only for projects that are likely to have significant environmental effects. We will use the full flexibility permitted under the directive in line with our principles of reasonable and fair legislation, so I give that assurance.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): The Minister will know that one of the points that is always made about such regulations is that there is not a level playing field. Can the Minister assure us that no significant change will be dealt with under these regulations that will not be covered by equivalent regulations on the continent? Are we covering any changes that they are not?

Mr. Morley: I made a point of finding out what other countries are doing in relation to these regulations, because it is important that we examine how they are being applied elsewhere. The problem is that various countries have different regulations in the first place, so they are not strictly comparable. For example, in many European countries, farming comes within the planning guidelines. In our country, of course, many farming activities are exempt from the planning guidelines. In many countries, these regulations are applied through the planning process, and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that that is somewhat more onerous and restrictive than the way in which we propose to apply these regulations. It is not right to think that other countries are much more lax about these regulations and do not apply them.

I was asked about the thresholds. We consulted on them in some detail and, in the end, we did not think that specific thresholds would be appropriate because even

[Mr. Morley]

small projects in certain situations can have significant effects. That point was made by the hon. Member for Gordon. Small areas can have significant biodiversity importance, and damaging small areas has a cumulative effect. That is why we think that we should have a threshold, but I hope that our procedures will be quick in dealing with small areas, so that farmers and landowners will not find them onerous.

We have clearly stated that the guidelines for routine farming, such as maintenance of drainage works and watercourses, are not subject to the EIA procedures.

Orchards may be subject to the EIA regulations if they contain old grassland that has not been ploughed for many years. We are thinking of ancient orchards, not modern orchards, in which intensively managed trees generally need to be replanted. They would normally not come within the scope of the EIA regulations, but there are some important orchards that have not been ploughed and contain very old trees, and they are often not commercial.

Indeed, the orchards that I saw in Norfolk had been entered into our stewardship scheme because of their biodiversity value. That is an option for their owners. In other parts of the country, I have seen commercial orchards where organic apples were grown for Bulmers. Those apples received a premium and the orchards were also in our stewardship scheme. There are options for such orchards, but they are the exception in modern fruit management, rather than the norm.

Hugh Robertson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Morley: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me; I really must get on because I want to deal with a range of issues. I will happily answer any question that he may have if he writes to me.

Concern has been expressed about the agri-environment schemes. I understand that issue, but there is no evidence to show that it is putting people off those schemes. We will keep those schemes and the effect that they may have on other schemes under careful review. We are committing ourselves to a major review of the schemes in the light of the recommendation by the commission on farming and food that we should consider restructuring the way in which agri-environment schemes are applied. There is a great deal of sense in that recommendation and, although the construction of such schemes will be challenging, I am more than willing to address seriously the commission's recommendation.

We also intend to renew schemes for those who have entered into countryside stewardship schemes, and who may now be worried that, because of the regulations, we will not be interested in renewing the scheme. That is not our intention. We intend there to be a long-term investment in the countryside, and a long-term partnership with landowners and farmers. We will, of course, renew such schemes.

We cannot give a general undertaking to disregard the environmental impact assessment procedures if land is taken out of an agri-environment scheme. First, some of the land may have fallen within the scope of the EIA whether it was in the scheme or not. Secondly, there may have been a great deal of public investment to help to create environmental enhancements. It is not unreasonable that an assessment should be carried out when changes are proposed for the management of that land.

On set-aside, I can confirm that the directive does not define key terms such as "uncultivated". We do not intend to include generally within the scope of the EIA directive land that has been set aside for a period from arable cropping. I wanted to give that reassurance.

In relation to appeal procedures, we want to be flexible about the type of procedure to be used in each case. The appellant will always have the right to be heard at a hearing or a local inquiry, and the Secretary of State's powers to determine an appeal can be delegated to an independent appointed person. That is provided for in the regulations. We believe that the provisions are fair, and, as with all aspects of the regime, they will be reviewed to see how they operate in practice. I expect the delegated procedure to be used in many cases in reference to an independent person.

On awareness of the new procedures, I mentioned that we have sent an explanatory leaflet to all registered agricultural holdings in England and more detailed guidelines are freely available. A dedicated helpline is operating for telephone inquiries.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: I seek clarification from the Minister. I think I heard him say that an appeal could be heard by an independently appointed person. However, page 13 of the guidance says:

> "The Secretary of State may personally decide your appeal, or appoint someone to decide it on his or her behalf".

Surely, if that person is appointed by the Secretary of State, they are not independently appointed.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman will find that that is the terminology. Those who decide appeals, throughout the range of appeals within DEFRA, are all appointed by the Secretary of State in that respect. However, the bodies are independent, and the appeal would be independent and accountable to the Secretary of State. The hon. Gentleman need not get too concerned about that—the appeal would be heard properly and professionally, and I do not see a problem with that. However, to return to the point, a review will take place in 18 months, and if people are not satisfied with the appeals procedure, and they feel that it needs to be changed, we shall consider that.

Some of the arguments are reminiscent of those used in relation to the Hedgerows Bill which the hon. Gentleman promoted. As he will know, I dealt with that Bill as an Opposition Member, and I fully supported it. It is a case of, "Now the regulations are in, they are nowhere near as difficult as people thought they were going to be." Farmers and landowners have learned to operate within the rules, and the rules have been made as flexible and realistic as possible to achieve the balance that people have talked about.

On land prices, my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood is right. There is no sign that land prices have fallen; indeed, the opposite is the case. Some farming organisations have speculated that the measures that we are considering might devalue land. However, I do not believe that, because we are now entering a new era in which production subsidies will inevitably be scaled down. We cannot say for how long the arable area payments will exist. Much of the value of land is underpinned by such things as its IACS—integrated administration and control—value, for example. As those subsidies are scaled down, more and more money will go into agri-environment schemes; more environmental schemes will be available. Thus, we have land which in the long term will devalue in the sense of the subsidies that it attracts, and land which under countryside stewardship schemes will maintain its value by attracting maintenance and support payments. I believe—I speak personally rather than on any analysis—that the long-term value of land that has environmental value will be higher than that currently underpinned by subsidies, which is unsustainable. Although we shall have to see, I do not believe that the measures will have a long-term effect on the value of land.

The introduction of the regulations for uncultivated land and semi-natural areas plays a vital part in the agenda for sustainable development, which is very much at the heart of the new Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. We attach central importance to it and I believe that the approach commands wide public support. I appreciate that just about everyone who has spoken in the debate supports the principles of the regulations, although not unreasonably has questions about the details. I believe that we can resolve the issues that have been raised reasonably and proportionately, and make the regulations work with the minimum of inconvenience to farmers and landowners.

In the end, the regulations will enhance the value of our countryside and the protection of important habitats, and be of value and assistance to those who are the guardians of the countryside—those who work the land and who I am sure share our desire to ensure that it is managed in a proper, sustainable way for future generations. The measure will protect the value of the landscape and the biodiversity of our countryside.

5.32 pm

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: This has been an extremely useful and helpful debate. Hon. Members have raised a number of points that are important to those on whom the regulations will bear. The Minister's concluding remarks will be read with great care by people who manage the land and by environmentalists. One lesson that we are all learning is that the interests of those two sets of people are becoming more and more intertwined. I sincerely hope that the regulations will help to advance that process and not stand in its way.

I am delighted that the regulations will be reviewed so thoroughly after 18 months. I thank my hon. Friends who have taken part in the debate, which has been a constructive afternoon's work. I am grateful to the Minister for the several assurances that he has given.

Mr. Morley: As I did not answer the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood, I want to take the opportunity to emphasise that the review will of course be open to all interested parties, including conservation organisations and the Wildlife Trust, as well of course as farming and landowners organisations.

Mr. Ainsworth: The Minister has more velvet gloves in his pocket than I originally imagined.

Question put and negatived.

Line of Route

5.33 pm

Mrs. Marion Roe (Chairman of the Administration Committee): I beg to move,

> That this House approves the First Report from the Administration Committee on The Summer Line of Route—The 2001 Opening and Proposals for the Future (House of Commons Paper No. 433).

This is the fourth time, and perhaps the last for the time being, that I have come before the House to present a report of the Administration Committee on the summer opening of the Line of Route. I should like to begin by expressing my thanks and those of the Committee to all those staff of both Houses of Parliament whose hard work contributed to the success of the 2001 opening. The efforts of the visitor manager, the Serjeant at Arms, the director of catering services, the director of finance and administration, and their respective staffs, the security force and the blue badge guides are very much appreciated. I also thank my colleagues on the Administration Committee for their contributions to the report, which was agreed unanimously, and the Leader of the House for making time available for this debate.

On the report, hon. Members will have noted my Committee's two main conclusions: that the 2001 opening was a great success and that, as a result, the summer opening of the Line of Route should be made permanent. As it outlines, Line of Route tours were offered to the public between Monday 6 August and Saturday 29 September 2001, with the exception of Friday 14 September when hon. Members returned to debate the terrorist outrages in the United States. Some 86,284 visitors toured the Line of Route over that period, an increase of 110 per cent. over visitor numbers in the summer of 2000. A further 12,500 people visited Westminster hall and Portcullis House free of charge during the London open house weekend.

The business plan for the 2001 opening specified a challenging target of 85,000 visitors. That the number of visitors exceeded that, despite the problems dogging the tourism industry last summer, is a sign of how well the tours were received. In fact, sampling of visitor response cards and comments in the visitors' book showed that 95 per cent. of those responding said that the tours had greatly exceeded their expectations.

My Committee considered a selection of comments from the visitors' book and I can confirm that the feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with many stressing the importance of the summer opening continuing. Received wisdom in the tourism industry suggests that each satisfied visitor may recommend the visit to 10 others, creating a vast potential demand for the Line of Route. If, however, we are to sustain a high level of visitors, it is crucial that the marketing operation begins as soon as possible, which is why I am so grateful for this early debate.

As the summer opening has run successfully for two summers, we recommend that it be placed on a permanent footing. It would send out the wrong signal about Parliament's accessibility and desire to engage the public were we to decide not to continue with the immensely popular tours. Such a decision would not be understood.

We are not implying that all possible lessons have been learned over the past two years, but if the summer opening is made permanent, it will create a stable and certain basis

[Mrs. Marion Roe]

on which officials of both Houses can best plan and carry out the summer opening. For example, criticisms of the summer opening were mainly about ticketing arrangements which, as any hon. Member who wandered through Westminster Hall this summer will have noticed, were less than ideal. In the context of a permanent summer opening, House officials will be able to review options for the permanent siting of a ticket office, which will address the problems observed this summer. Of course, my Committee will expect to be kept fully informed of the deliberations and plans of officials.

Hon. Members can be assured that the Committee was adamant that the summer operation must operate within certain constraints. The Palace of Westminster is primarily a place of work and the summer opening must not interfere with that work or constrain the ability of either House to sit at any time. This summer's events, with the recall on 14 September, reinforced the importance of that criterion. Arrangements must not constrain the Parliamentary works programme; nor must they impinge on the current rights of Members to sponsor visits to the Palace or on the important work of the parliamentary education unit. Our report laid down a fourth criterion, which was of course implicit at the time of previous openings: that any arrangements for the summer opening must not impede the application of appropriately high levels of security within the parliamentary estate.

I now turn to the thorny issue of ticket pricing. I realise that views differ on both sides of the House. Members will recall that both trial summer openings operated to a planned deficit. The £3.50 ticket price reflected only the charge for the blue-badge guide; the rest of the operating costs were met by the merchandising operation and a net sum from the Votes of both Houses—limited to £232,000, with the Commons taking a 60 per cent. share. Effectively, through the House Votes, the United Kingdom taxpayer subsidised each visitor to the summer Line of Route. In 2000 the notional subsidy per head was £6.26; in 2001 that was reduced to £2.31, largely owing to increased ticket revenues and savings on overheads.

Of course there is always scope for greater efficiency, but the fact remains that should the agreed deficit approach be continued, the United Kingdom taxpayer will continue to subsidise summer visitors, at least half of whom are thought to be from overseas. For that reason my Committee recommends that visitors be charged a realistic rate for summer tours of the Palace—a price that would recoup the costs of the summer opening.

I make no apologies for repeating what was said in the Committee's report, as it is crucial.

> "We are committed to the principle of free democratic access to the Houses of Parliament".

That is in paragraph 23. Paragraph 24 states

> "we do not believe that charging a realistic price for summer tours of the Palace encroaches upon the rights of the public to visit Parliament".

I remind Members of the many opportunities our constituents have freely to view this place at work, and to engage with their Members of Parliament by listening to debates, attending meetings of Standing and Select Committees, meeting their constituency Members, participating in sponsored line-of-route tours, taking part in lobbies and participating in education-unit activities. Nothing in our proposal would impinge on any of those crucial rights. We propose the charging of a fair price for additional access—and a guided tour—when the House is not sitting, and an end to the subsidy of visitors and tourists by taxpayers.

We estimate that the charges would be £7 for adults and £3.50 for those receiving concessions. Carers and the under-fives would not be charged, and we envisage discounts for family groups. I invite Members to compare those charges with charges for similar attractions in London. For example, Buckingham palace charges £11.50 for adult admission, Westminster abbey charges £9, and St Paul's cathedral charges £7.50 for admission and a guided tour.

I hope Members will agree with me, and with my Committee, that our proposed charges for tours guided by professional blue-badge guides through this wonderful building still represent value for money. The ticket price will cover the cost of employing guides and of additional security, and additional staff costs. I am thinking of ticketing facilities and extra costs imposed on the parliamentary works directorates resulting from the summer opening.

Any revenue from merchandising could in future be ploughed back into improvements in the infrastructure and facilities of the Line of Route. As Members will see in the report, the merchandising operation in 2001 learned from that of the previous year and offered a reduced, but more popular, number of souvenir lines for sale. Although there was a net profit of £10,000, there is still scope for a higher spend per visitor. Accordingly, we have suggested that a new souvenir range addressing the wants of summer visitors be considered.

Hon. Members will no doubt ask themselves about the impact of any modernisation initiative. The Leader of the House has already helpfully stated that the recess this summer will follow its usual pattern, so the question does not arise for 2002. We rely a great deal on the flexibility of our officers and staff. I am confident that, should the pattern of the summer recess alter, it is possible for the summer opening to operate around it. The infrastructure of the summer Line of Route does not demand a long period of setting up or striking, as was shown when the House sat one day in September last summer. It would be possible to open the Palace to visitors in August and again in October.

My Committee expects to be kept fully informed of the plans of the Line of Route steering group to that end. As hon. Members will know, any decision on the operation of the Line of Route must be agreed by the House of Lords. Throughout our deliberations, we have kept the House of Lords Administration and Works Sub-Committee fully apprised of progress and our conclusions. I understand that that Committee awaits the decision of the House of Commons on the future of the Line of Route with interest.

I do not wish to detain the House further, but I hope that hon. Members will feel able to support the unanimous report of my Committee. Should it be approved, we can look forward to many more visitors enjoying the tours of the Palace and all its splendours, and finding out more about the work that we all do here. I commend the report to the House.

5.47 pm

Martin Linton (Battersea): I have recently re-read the debate of 26 May 1999, when the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) tabled a memorable amendment, which was accepted. Before coming to the House with proposals, it was incumbent on members of the Administration Committee to ask whether we had met the concerns of everyone who spoke in that debate and whether they would be happy with our arguments.

I must admit that I found it a little difficult to fathom some of the arguments advanced in that debate. For instance, the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) who, sadly, is not here, explained that he had visited 30 state capital buildings in the United States, and looked forward to visiting the remaining 20; they were all free so, by extension, our Parliament should always be free to visitors. He did not mention the fact that some of those buildings are not the tourist attraction that the House of Commons is; never mind.

Having tried to fathom the right hon. Gentleman's argument, I moved on to that advanced by our former colleague, Dale Campbell-Savours, who represented Workington. He recounted an incident in which a senior Member tapped him on the shoulder after he had introduced a particularly incendiary and revolutionary proposal to start sitting at 10 o'clock and finish at 6, and said

> "You cannot change things . . . that have been traditions for decades."—[*Official Report*, 26 May 1999; Vol. 332, c. 404.]

Mr. Campbell-Savours apparently took that advice and believed that it would be wrong to have a summer opening of Parliament. Again, I found it difficult to understand his reasoning.

My hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) recounted that when he was a lad in Wimbledon he travelled up to the House of Commons in summer and visited it for free. He argued that war memorials were free, so Parliament should always be free for visitors. He failed to reveal the fact that it is still free to visit Parliament whenever the House is sitting. However, the Committee has been able to deal with the argument that he advanced.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall, if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will no doubt explain to the House how far we have been able to allay his fears. I can only say in advance of hearing what he has to say that he seemed previously to have two main arguments. First, he argued that the summer opening, which had been proposed but had not yet happened, might be the thin end of the wedge and that we might end up charging people to visit at Easter, Whitsun or Christmas. Indeed, he seemed to fear that we might even charge them for visiting while the House was sitting. I hope that he feels reassured that that has not happened. Despite two summer openings, people have not been charged outside the period when the House has traditionally been closed anyway. I hope that he acknowledges that the policy has not so far been the thin end of any wedge.

As I understand it, the hon. Gentleman's other fear was that the change would lead to the contracting out of many of the services involved, which are better performed by servants of the House. I do not know whether he objects to the use of Ticketmaster to issue the tickets for tourists, but apart from that, I think that all the other services have been provided in house. The report does not propose mass contracting out, but in any case, I do not know whether that is still a live fear in his mind. I shall be interested to hear whether he still has any of the concerns that he expressed in speaking to his amendment.

In so far as other speakers expressed concerns, they related mainly to the analogy with free access to museums. As I have a very modest role at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, I felt that there was an onus on me to consider whether, as we have now introduced free entry to national museums—I am glad that we have done so—the same principle should apply to the House of Commons. I see a world of difference between the two. Museums and galleries are sources of information that one visits not only once in one's life, but regularly. The reason why we believe in free access to museums is the same as the reason why we believe in free access to information and knowledge: museums and galleries are there to inform. The same principle has never been applied to heritage sites. For instance, the Tower of London is a heritage site. English Heritage has many sites where it charges the public for access. Nobody has ever suggested—I have never heard such a proposal from the hon. Gentleman or anyone else—that it is wrong to charge for access to such a site, whether it is Old Sarum at Salisbury or anywhere else. There is a difference in principle.

There is still free access to Parliament as a working building. People can sit in the Strangers Gallery, attend a Committee sitting or see their MP. The only thing for which there is a charge—it applies at any time of year—is a guided tour. When this place is open, people are charged only for the tour. The principle that the Committee seeks to establish is that in the one recess in which the House would normally be closed to the public, the small on-cost of making tours possible should be borne by the person who enjoys the tour.

That principle is also accepted by the British museum. People can visit for free, but if they want a guided tour of the museum, they pay a fee of £8. People can visit the British library for free, because it is a library, but if they want a tour, they pay a charge to cover the cost. People can visit Somerset house for free if they are visiting it on business, but if they want a tour, they pay. Indeed, the same is true across the square in Westminster abbey. Worshippers visit the abbey for free, but if people want to visit as tourists, they pay £9. We are simply abiding by that principle. The House of Commons is open in the summer. As a Member who represents a nearby constituency, I come here every weekday apart from, perhaps, during a fortnight in August. The place is open and I can take people around the building. I can use it all the time, but it is not open to the extent that it could deal with a constant stream of tourists without employing extra staff.

When I first came here, I thought that it was a crying shame that the place was closed throughout August. Every day thousands of tourists milled around Parliament square looking rather puzzled because the House of Commons, which they had imagined they could visit, was closed. Because of that strange anomaly, the House was persuaded to open—in a half-hearted way in my opinion—on a trial basis in the summer of 2000.

Tickets were available only in advance. People had to telephone. They could not come to the House of Commons and buy a ticket. About 95 per cent. of foreign tourists will go to the place they want to visit and buy a

[Martin Linton]

ticket there. Under that scheme, they had to telephone in advance, pick the tickets up in Regent street and find their way here. The Speaker had to intervene during that summer because it was so ridiculous that people could not buy tickets. She insisted that some tickets were available at the House.

In the summer of 2001, the scheme was, I am glad to say, repeated. This time there was a ticket office on-site. As a result, the number of visits more than doubled. Bizarrely, the ticket office was sited in Westminster Hall. People had to go through security at St. Stephen's entrance to get into Westminster Hall, queue for a ticket, go back out of St. Stephen's entrance, go to Black Rod's entrance, queue again and go through security again before starting their visit. Not surprisingly, they found that very frustrating but that was the only way it could be done, given the fact that the House had not agreed to a permanent scheme.

In the summer of 2001 a flat-rate charge of £3.50 was levied, a modest sum when we consider that a visit to the Banqueting hall down the road costs £3.90 and the Banqueting hall is hardly more than a single room—a very nice room but it is not to be compared with the House of Commons. A visit to Westminster abbey costs £9, to the London Eye £9, and to Buckingham palace £11.50. A visit to a commercial tourist attraction such as Madame Tussaud's costs about the same, as does a visit to the Tower of London.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the tourists who came here during the summer were happy. Indeed, they were ecstatic and flabbergasted. The survey of visitors shows that 95 per cent. said that the tour exceeded their expectations. Clearly, having only paid £3.50 they did not expect much. If one reads their comments, one will see that surprise coming through time and again. Despite 11 September, visitors filled 80 per cent. of available capacity over the whole summer. On many days there was queueing in Parliament square. A visitor from Virginia in the United States wrote,

> "Wonderful tour
>
> "PS I'm so glad I finally got in!"

People's main complaint was not the charge of £3.50 but the fact that they had to wait so long to get in. By charging only £3.50, there was a loss of £200,000 on the operation. It seems extraordinary that anyone can operate a tourist attraction such as the House of Commons and make a loss. There were queues in Parliament square and £200,000 was stuffed into the pockets of overwhelmingly overseas tourists, who enjoyed coming here. Most people from this country will visit when entry, although not the tour, is free.

We have established the principle that this is just to do with summer opening and the costs associated with keeping the building open when it otherwise would not be. We have established the fact that, in the rest of the year visits will be free; that the autumn educational tours will also be free; that even in the summer Members of Parliament can take guests around for free; that the only cost charged to the tourist is to cover the extra cost of keeping the House open that one month; and that the alternative is either to make a huge loss for no particular reason, or—this would be criminal—to close the building when hundreds of thousands of foreign tourists are in the area. Given all that, I think that we have made a powerful case for charging a reasonable sum, which will still be modest when compared with all the neighbouring tourist attractions and cheaper than the Government charge for visits to most heritage sites.

This is a phenomenally popular tourist attraction. I shall quote some of the comments made by visitors. I shall quote them in sequence, without editing them or leaving any out. They said, "The tour was magnificent", "brilliant", "Well worth visiting", "It would be useful to have a guide in Italian", "Excellent tour", "Great place to visit", "Wonderful tour". That last comment was from the Americans who said that they were glad to have finally got in. The comments continued, "Well worth a visit", "Most enjoyable", "Excellent tour", "very good", "very interesting" and so it goes on. There is not a single word of criticism, other than about the standard of the toilets.

I am not saying that we should charge people more just because they enjoyed it, but since so many people want to come, they enjoyed it so much and the charge was so much less than for comparable places, it serves no purpose to charge a deliberately low or loss-making price. I hope that the Committee has persuaded those who had concerns before that there is no danger of extending this principle. It is different from the principle of free museums. It will enable us to open this place for the tens of thousands who want to come here in the summer, without imposing a cost on the taxpayer.

6.2 pm

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): I pay tribute to the members of the Select Committee on Administration who have prepared the report. Most of the departmental Select Committees are high profile. Some of them appear to travel frequently and they are widely regarded as prestigious bodies. The domestic Select Committees do not have such a high profile and are sometimes taken for granted. They perform an essential role and, on behalf of the Opposition, I should like to express our thanks and appreciation to all members of those Committees, from whichever party, for their diligence, dedication and hard work.

I am broadly supportive of the report and I shall not seek to divide the House. However, I have some concerns and wish to make a number of observations and comments. It is right that the Administration Committee has as its primary objective the smooth running of this building as a place of work and that any arrangements put in place for visitors must not constrain Members in the discharge of their duties. Also, any such arrangements during these difficult times, must not breach our security. In my view, such considerations must remain at the forefront of any debate on public access to the Palace of Westminster.

The hon. Member for Battersea (Martin Linton) will be pleased to know that I am also firmly of the view that the opening of the Line of Route for visitors who are not accompanied by their elected representatives should be self-financing. I do not see why the taxpayers of east Yorkshire, or anywhere else, should subsidise visitors from other parts of the country, most likely, it appears, from the affluent south-east, or from any country overseas, whether affluent or not.

I refer the House to sections 2 and 5 of the report which deal with duration, volume and costs. I am pleased to see the Leader of the House in his place. My hon. Friend the

Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) referred to his recent modernisation proposals. However, I wonder whether the Committee—in calculating its conclusions and projections—properly reflected on the proposal, announced by the Leader of the House, to change the timing of our summer recess so that, apparently, the House will sit during September. That will surely have a serious effect on revenue, but it is likely to do little to reduce administrative costs.

The report refers to setting up a permanent visitor management office, and we are entitled to ask whether that will prove viable. Given that the House will sit for three weeks in September from 2003 onwards, should not the proposal for a visitor management office be revisited and perhaps abandoned? We should not proceed with any proposal that would leave the British taxpayer out of pocket.

The Committee might therefore need to re-cost some of its plans before announcing the ticket price, and I look forward to hearing the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne on that issue when she sums up. If the figures do not add up, we have two options: to increase the proposed admission fee to cover all the costs, or to abandon the experiment. I prefer the former option, but I would rather accept the latter than allow the proposals to become a drain on the public purse.

I refer hon. Members to paragraph 25 of the report, and in passing I express my surprise—and some concern—at the following, almost throwaway sentence:

> "We suggest that the House authorities explore means of accepting payment in euros as well as sterling."

No, no, no. Why on earth should we? This new, unliked and floundering currency is not legal tender in the United Kingdom, and I hope that it never will be. We should have none of it.

Martin Linton: Does the right hon. Gentleman not acknowledge that every other tourist attraction in London will accept euros by next summer? It is completely contradictory to argue that we should be commercially minded and not accept an extra cost, but that we should not accept euros.

Mr. Knight: In this House, we lead and not follow. If current trends continue, the euro equivalent of a £7 admission fee, if it were accepted in good faith on a Monday morning, might be worth only a fraction of that amount by the time the attendants have cashed up and got to the bank. Why should we have to stand any financial loss caused by a continuing lack of confidence in this dubious currency? The case has not been made for this mother of Parliaments to accept anything but our own currency from any visitor, and I hope that we shall hear no more of this unnecessary and rather offensive suggestion.

The Line of Route to which the report refers is the long-established and widely accepted route that Members are accustomed to and prepared to tolerate. In paragraph 37, the Committee points out that it is not suggesting extending the route, and it is correct, as some Members might find that unacceptable. However, I am rather concerned about the wording. The steering group is expected to

> "keep this matter under review",

and apparently may decide to add to the Line of Route. I sincerely hope that no additions will be contemplated or authorised without reference to the Committee that my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne chairs, and ultimately to the House.

As at present, the proposed Line of Route will end in New Palace Yard, which is the last area of the parliamentary estate that visitors see before they leave. For how much longer will it look as if it is part of a film set for a new production of "Steptoe and Son"? We are right to be concerned about security, but why should the House have to tolerate the hideous concrete blocks that are scattered seemingly willy-nilly across New Palace Yard? They are not present at the entrance to the Lords, where an altogether more satisfactory arrangement exists. There, a metal barrier drops flush to the ground when vehicular access is required. I ask my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne why an identical arrangement cannot be introduced here, and as soon as possible.

Apart from blighting our grade I listed building, the blocks mean that negotiating access to and egress from New Palace Yard is like taking part in an advanced drivers obstacle course, especially for people driving wide and long motor vehicles. The blocks should go forthwith. If necessary, an increased police presence should be provided until a more sophisticated security scheme can be put in place.

Subject to my comments being satisfactorily answered by my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne when she replies, I hope that the House will agree to the report.

6.10 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I do not intend to follow the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) in his limousine, nor to respond just yet to the hon. Members for Battersea (Martin Linton) or for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe), the Chairman of the Committee.

By way of introduction, I want to say that, despite comments to the contrary about my past involvement in these debate, I yield to no one in my admiration for this place, as both building and institution. I want as many of my fellow citizens and visitors from other parts of the world to experience it to its full extent.

However, people did not always admire this building. Yesterday's edition of *The Times* contained a reprinted leader that originally appeared on the same date in 1861. Headed "The Decay of Parliament", it stated:

> "It is fortunate that we English are not superstitious people. If we were given to omens we might be scared out of our senses by the decay of our Houses of Parliament. At a moment when representative institutions are breaking down in America, the House just newly built for the Lords and Commons is crumbling away in preternatural ruin."

It went on:

> "At last, after some four centuries, Parliament was burnt out, and it was resolved to build a magnificent Palace expressly for the sittings of the Imperial Legislature. At a cost perfectly fabulous, the structure has been raised; but scarcely have the workmen quitted the building when its walls are found to be externally in a state of decay".

The leader explained that a commission had been set up to travel the length and breadth of the British Isles to find appropriate stone with which to build this great institution. I do not know the membership of that commission, but I do know a little about how both ends

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

of this place work and I suspect that it contained a number of hon. Members. I suspect too that, as they went round the country, those hon. Members were more interested in making sure that stone from their particular areas was selected. As was remarked to me earlier today, they may also have discussed the matter over a great deal of claret.

Apparently, the commission eventually recommended what was thought to be an

> "entirely new and imperishable stone, such as would last for ages without decay or repair . . . Commissioners were specially appointed to purvey this desirable material. After extensive and laborious researches, they succeeded in discovering a quarry which was said to satisfy the prescribed conditions, and the Houses of Parliament were erected accordingly."

However, the 1861 leader added:

> "The river front of Sir Charles Barry's edifice bids fair to crumble away in the Thames within a few years after its completion."

It concluded:

> "We must stop the decay somehow, for we certainly cannot afford new structures of that kind every 20 years."

Fortunately, in more modern times we seem to have looked after the building rather better. It is in that context that the hon. Member for Broxbourne and her Committee—rightly, I believe—have sought ways in which more people can enjoy it. I have no disrespect for the work that the Committee has done, and any minor criticisms of the report that I may make should in no way be taken to seek to undermine that work.

My first concern refers back to the debate mentioned by the hon. Member for Battersea. I am concerned that hon. Members should steer this exercise, whether it be temporary or permanent. Will the steering group, which is mentioned in passing, include members of the hon. Lady's Committee? It is important, for a number of reasons that have been adduced by the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire, that Members steer the exercise. It must not simply be left to the Officers. I hope that that will mean strict adherence to the principles set out in paragraph 14 of the report and the criteria in paragraph 23. They have been referred to already, and I believe them to be extremely important.

This issue was at the forefront of Members' minds during the debate to which the hon. Member for Battersea referred. It is the thin end of the wedge in the way in which the House would be available to our constituents and in taking away from Members control over constituents' access. That is why I believe that in making a temporary expedient permanent, we should take stock of what is happening. The thin end of this wedge is still quite thin—the report's appendix refers to 26 full days and 20 half days. We must think hard about how that may be affected by the change in the recess arrangements in 2003.

The hon. Member for Battersea referred to the extent to which what he called contracting out might take place. I call it old-fashioned privatisation. I know that under new Labour it is called contracting out, but to me it is privatisation, just as it was when the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) was a Member of the last Conservative Government. I am glad that a major change of emphasis has taken place in 2001. The proportion of the income coming from the direct sales by the House has increased and sales by Ticketmaster, the privatised institution outside the House, have gone down. In round figures, in 2000, Ticketmaster sold £115,000 worth of tickets, which decreased to £72,000 last summer, while our direct sales went up from £5,000 worth of tickets—this is just a temporary expedient—to £152,000. Those of us who want the House to have home rule over its own institution are reassured by that welcome change of emphasis.

I accept the point made by the hon. Lady and her Committee that the subsidy from the House's Vote has been dramatically reduced, and that is to be welcomed. I accept that it would be reasonable to make it revenue-neutral in 2002 for the simple reason that we have, in capital expenditure, provided a wonderful new visitors centre. I hope that we will soon be allowed to look at it. We have spent quite a lot of money on a visitors centre which, while it will be of use to our constituents during other times of the year, will have an important role this year. If anybody asks why the price went up in 2002, the answer is because at long last we have some decent loos. The major criticism of many visitors is that we did not before, so that is a step in the right direction. That is the rationale for the increase in costs.

I do not share the view of the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire about the possible extension of the route into Portcullis House. Whenever I take constituents around the House I like them to see that we have good British architecture in 2001 and 2002 and that Parliament was rather more open-minded about commissioning good modern architecture than some of our immediate predecessors. The fact that Portcullis House was a runner-up for the Stirling prize last autumn was a great achievement not only for the architect but for the House. Many minor problems are being encountered there, such as handles on doors that no one with arthritis could possibly use to get out of an office in the event of fire. Basically, it is a handsome building which is doing its job well. I hope that the security problem, which I understand to be the major difficulty, can be resolved, and that we can include Portcullis House in the tour.

I also hope that we will ensure that the security issue is dealt with properly as regards ticket sales. It makes no sense to bring people in through the security system to buy their ticket only for them to have to go out again. The hon. Member for Battersea made a fair point. The Committee is trying to deal with it and I hope that they do.

Those are my two major qualms. Beyond those, the major concerns were expressed on both sides of the House when we voted on the proposal and when, uniquely in that Session, although those on both Front Benches were in favour of the motion, the majority of Members were on my side and voted for my amendment—I have never had that experience before and doubt that I will again.

At the time of that debate there was a concern that we were commercialising the House. We were putting the work out to tender and reducing the respect that our fellow citizens and visitors would have for it. A sub-current of the debate was that many hon. Members thought that the Department of the Serjeant At Arms and other offices of the House were being privatised. Someone referred to it as a sort of "Ofdesk", and said that we would then have, "Housetrack" as a privatised company running the show. We have a visitor manager, which sounds as though we have gone down that track, but basically the

Administration Committee has done an important job on behalf of the House and has responded to the concerns and anxieties of hon. Members and I wish the report well.

6.21 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Stephen Twigg): I am pleased to speak after the Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), and to endorse what he said. I think that the concerns that were expressed in that debate three years ago have been met judging by the experiments of the past two summers and the report that is before us. I voted for the amendment that the hon. Gentleman proposed two and a half years ago.

I will not be tempted by the Conservative spokesman, the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight), to debate the euro. Suffice it to say that I very much look forward to his hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) robustly defending the Administration Committee report in saying that the euro will be accepted as payment in the summer.

First, I will make some general and brief remarks about the report and respond to the points made by the Liberal Democrat and Conservative spokesmen about the proposals for the summer recess. I am not convinced that it will be a major factor although I agree that the Administration Committee should address it. It is not proposed that the length of time that we are in recess should be reduced; the time will simply be configured differently. The right hon. Member for East Yorkshire is right that there will be less time and, therefore, less revenue in September, but that will be compensated for by extra recess time in July. The revenue implications may even be positive—there may be larger tourist numbers in July than in September.

First, I thank the hon. Member for Broxbourne and other members of the Administration Committee for the work that they have done over the years in producing the proposals for the summer opening. The matter was first debated in the House in 1999 when the Committee produced its earlier proposals. At that time, the Committee noted, in its first report for the 1998–99 Session, that

> "for over 20 years casual visitors and tourists have been denied the opportunity of visiting the Palace and of seeing the home of Parliament and its treasures. This is a situation which the Administration Committee wished to see changed to enable as many people as possible to see the two Houses of Parliament."

The House then asked the Committee to re-examine its proposals for summer opening of the Line of Route. As has been explained today, hon. Members were concerned that there should not be undue restrictions on such an important symbol of democracy, not only for this country but for citizens throughout the world.

In 1999, the House decided that it wanted other options to be explored and costed. When that had been done, it was decided to open the Line of Route with the arrangements that have been in force for the past two years. As the hon. Member for Broxbourne set out clearly, that decision has resulted in two extremely successful summer openings.

My hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint), who is not with us today but is a member of the Administration Committee, described the £3.50 entrance fee as

> "the best deal in town."—[*Official Report*, 26 February 2001; Vol. 363, c. 674.]

when we last debated this matter. Clearly, that assessment is endorsed by the Administration Committee in the report before us.

Between summer 2000 and summer 2001, the number of visitors has more than doubled. More than 86,000 visitors toured the Line of Route in the summer of 2001 and 95 per cent. of those who commented considered that the tours had greatly exceeded their expectations, a similar satisfaction rate to that in 2000 despite the greatly increased pressure on capacity. As the hon. Member for Broxbourne said, the House should be grateful to all those—the staff of the House and the excellent guides—who have worked hard to make the openings such a success.

The motion invites the House to make the opening of the Line of Route permanent, but to do so on a different basis from the experiment and to return to the principle that underlay the Administration Committee's first proposals. The suggestion is that the system should no longer rely on a subsidy from Parliament. The Committee recommended:

> "Ticket prices for visitors should be set at a level to recoup the cost of running the summer opening."

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the then Leader of the House, said when the principle of reopening was debated in May 1999, the matter is one of genuine difficulty and delicacy. She said:

> "No hon. Member would wish to see our constituents denied access to the House—that would be entirely contrary to our parliamentary tradition—but, equally, many may have reservations about whether British taxpayers would wish us to use their money to subsidise access to tourists, primarily from overseas, who may very well be charged for that access by tour operators and organisers outside this place who arrange such visits."—[*Official Report*, 26 May 1999; Vol. 332, c. 390.]

Now, as then, Members will have to decide where the balance lies. This is a House matter, and there is no Government position. If the House divides, I will vote for the report, for the reasons set out by the hon. Member for Broxbourne and other speakers in the debate.

The Palace of Westminster is a workplace and those who visit to participate in our work, or to see us at work, will continue to have free access, as they should. It is easy to underestimate the extent to which the House is accessible during the times that we sit. Visitors are free to come to debates or attend Select Committee hearings as they wish. Our constituents can call for us in the Lobby. It is vital, as all speakers in the debate have said, that this free access to the proceedings of the House and its Committees is maintained. The Administration Committee's proposals reflect that.

However, the House is not a museum; there is no such free access during the recess, when the House is not at work, and there has not been such access for many years. Indeed, before the Administration Committee raised the matter in 1999, access was limited to the guests of Members of Parliament, and to people on education unit tours. People want to see the Palace itself for many reasons—not only to see us at work.

[Mr. Stephen Twigg]

People who visit in summer do so as tourists. There are good reasons for wanting to do that: a sense of history; a sense of the importance of our democratic institutions; and a desire to admire the work of Barry and Pugin. Those are all perfectly legitimate reasons; indeed, I do not see why we should not support the opening on the ground that we, as Parliament, should do our bit for the tourist industry in London.

I hope that the tours will lead to a greater understanding of this place and I welcome that greater access on principle. None the less, as the Committee noted, it is reasonable to ask those who want to visit the Palace as a tourist attraction to pay a fee that covers the cost of so doing. The Administration Committee's proposals will simply mean that those who visit the Palace of Westminster during the summer reopening will not be subsidised by the UK taxpayer to do so. The entrance fee will be set at a level which recoups opening costs, not to make a profit.

I hope that the new scheme will also have the effect that—as recommended by the Committee—the infrastructure and facilities of the Line of Route will be improved by ploughing back any proceeds from merchandising. It is far easier to support spending on improvements for visitors when the operation is not subsidised. That could benefit all visitors to the Palace, not just those participating in the tours.

I share the widespread concern in all parts of the House that the facilities offered to visitors are far from adequate. Although the new visitor cafeteria, which is due to open shortly, will go some way towards improving that, far more could and should be done. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, in his proposals to the Modernisation Committee, said:

> "A dedicated Visitor Centre could put the building and its history in the context of Parliament's place in the constitution and its importance as the expression of our democracy."

I am grateful to the Administration Committee and especially to the hon. Member for Broxbourne for their continued examination of this issue. The proposals offer a fair balance between the need for access and the legitimate interests of the UK taxpayer so I support the motion.

6.29 pm

Mrs. Roe: The debate has been useful and interesting. I thank hon. Members for their views and comments. I shall respond briefly.

I very much value the support of the hon. Member for Battersea (Martin Linton) as a member of the Administration Committee. In this debate, his analysis of past concerns was thorough and his responses and further comments were most constructive, especially as regards the recommended charging policy. I am most grateful to him for his contribution. He made one point that I should like to clarify. There are tours in Italian, French, German and Spanish, although demand has been higher than supply. Increasing—indeed, doubling—the amount of foreign language tours is being considered for 2002.

My right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) was extremely kind in his comments about the work of the Administration Committee. On behalf of the Committee, I thank him for that and for his support for the report. He sought reassurance on any proposals by the Line of Route steering committee relating to the extension of the route. We would certainly expect any such proposals to come back to the Administration Committee. There could be minor alterations owing to the works programme—the Committee will keep an eye on that—but any major initiative would certainly come back to us.

My right hon. Friend mentioned payment in euros. Ultimately, that is not a matter for the Administration Committee, and I understand that the relevant House authorities are now considering the question of accepting payment in other major foreign currencies, which would have an effect beyond the Line of Route. I shall say no more on that matter.

The Minister has already picked up the point about the possible changes—nothing has, after all, been agreed—to the timetable of the summer recess. I partly covered that matter in my opening remarks. If we have a permanent arrangement, we shall certainly be able to be flexible—more flexible, in fact—in relation to any changes that might be introduced. No such changes are expected for this year.

I want to put on record that neither my Committee nor I are responsible for any large blocks of concrete or anything else in New Palace Yard. I am sure that those who are responsible for them will read with interest the comments of my right hon. Friend. I understand that the structures are not permanent, and I am sure that further proposals will be made on the matter in due course.

I am most grateful to the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) for his support for the report. He will acknowledge that we have in the past had many discussions on this issue, not only in the Chamber but outside as well, and I have been extremely grateful for his guidance on how best we might go about this business. I also welcome his comments about ticket sales, and about the input of the House of Commons. We were also pleased to see that input, and we hope to continue it and to make it even better.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the extension of the Line of Route. The Committee has already considered Portcullis House in that regard, but there are security difficulties involved. It is important, therefore, that the Committee should consider any extension carefully, for reasons not only of security, but of any staffing costs that might be involved. This is not a closed door, however, and we shall return to this question if we feel that anything can be taken in that direction.

On the hon. Gentleman's question of double entry, and the security issues surrounding people going in and out several times, we know that this has caused grave frustration for visitors. We are instructing the Line of Route steering committee to consider a ticketing office, which we hope would prevent such problems. That question will then have to come back to the Administration Committee for us to consider.

Mr. Tyler: May I, as I omitted to do so earlier, apologise for the absence of my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton), who had hoped to be here? [HON. MEMBERS: She is behind you.] My hon. Friend has appeared. I now apologise for missing that fact.

The hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) has just referred to the steering committee. I mentioned earlier that it was not clear to me, having read the report, whether there are Members of the House—or members of her Committee—on the steering committee, or whether it is just an officer group.

Mrs. Roe: The group consists only of Officers, but of course they are accountable to the Administration Committee, so we shall consider carefully any proposals and recommendations that they make, and a case will have to be made for them. The membership of the steering group is listed in the report. They are very responsible Officers, and I am certain that any proposal that they make to the Administration Committee will have been thoroughly thought out.

I am grateful to the Minister for his support, as I said, and for his confirmation that any modernisation proposals will not interrupt a Line of Route programme and that times will not be reduced but merely rearranged.

I hope that the House will endorse the Committee's recommendations and allow the summer Line of Route to continue. The amazing reaction of visitors during the summers of 2000 and 2001, which, according to the visitor manager, is probably unrivalled by that of visitors to any other attraction in the country, points the way to the right decision, which is to acknowledge the success of the two trials and open the summer Line of Route to visitors on a permanent basis.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House approves the First Report from the Administration Committee on The Summer Line of Route—The 2001 Opening and Proposals for the Future (House of Commons Paper No. 433).

Richard Neale

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

6.36 pm

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise a most important constituency matter on the Adjournment of the House. I am most grateful to Mr. Speaker for selecting the matter, as I know that he selects the subject to be raised on the Thursday Adjournment. For obvious reasons, it is a long time since I had the opportunity to raise a matter on the Adjournment of the House, and looking at the attendance for such debates, I think that this occasion will be much less noisy than those I was used to as Leader of the Opposition. I am grateful to the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), for being present to listen and respond to my remarks.

I want to talk about the case of the disgraced consultant, Mr. Richard Neale. It is a bizarre, tragic, deeply disturbing and utterly scandalous tale, and it will need briefly retelling in the course of my remarks, although it has become widely known. It is the story of a gynaecologist, Mr. Neale, who was struck off the medical register in Canada in 1985 because of serious incompetence after the death of two patients. He went on, despite warnings to this country from Canada, to practise in the Friarage hospital in Northallerton, which is the principal hospital in my constituency, for 10 years, leaving a trail of pain and sorrow behind him. He then went on, after being, in effect, dismissed—in practice, he was paid off—by that hospital, to practise in Leicester, the Isle of Wight and London, causing more pain and suffering to the women in his care, before finally being struck off for professional misconduct in the United Kingdom in July 2000, 15 years after he was struck off in Canada.

This is an extraordinary story. For the Department of Health, of course, it is an embarrassment. For the patients, whom we might more properly refer to as victims, it is a personal or family tragedy. For the House, it should be a vital matter to ensure that these things do not happen again. Some of the facts of the case have become widely known. They have been documented on the BBC programme "Panorama" and in *The Northern Echo*, a newspaper in the north of England. They have been documented by the action and support group for medical victims of Mr. Neale. I pay tribute to the people who formed that group, particularly Sheila Wright-Hogeland, who has been its inspiration. The decision of the General Medical Council to strike Mr. Neale off the register, albeit 15 years after he was struck off in Canada, was widely publicised at the time.

Some action has been taken; some procedures have been changed and, no doubt, some lessons have been learned. After many representations and requests, the Department of Health has established an investigation into what happened, although it was set out in a fairly low-key announcement last July, with carefully worked out terms of reference, which were set out in a Department of Health document to which I shall refer later.

I put it to the Minister that the investigation announced so far is not adequate to the scale of the scandal. It has a limited time frame, which cuts off the investigation in

[Mr. William Hague]

1995, yet there were things that should not have happened after 1995, or so it seems to me. It is confined to the local health services, yet this matter must concern the Department of Health and the General Medical Council. The terms of reference do not allow consideration of private patients, of whom there were a large number. The investigation will not have the power or terms of reference that it needs, and I believe that a public inquiry is needed.

I have a suspicion that the Minister will say in response to those thoughts that this is a tragic story—it is—but that it is not on the scale of the Bristol babies or the Shipman scandals and that we cannot have a public inquiry into everything. I suspect that she will put it more delicately than that, because it will be set out in a slightly more roundabout way in her brief, but that will be the gist of what she says. Those in the Department of Health may think that we cannot hold a public inquiry into everything that goes on.

I put it to the Minister that this is an almost uniquely chilling case because not only was serious harm done to unsuspecting patients over a long time, but warnings were given to some people, somewhere in Britain's health establishment. Some people working in the health service knew what was happening and how bad a doctor that man was, but nothing was done. So this case is different from many others, and it has not just come to light recently. For a long time someone, somewhere knew what was happening to women in the care of the health service in North Yorkshire and then elsewhere.

The people affected want to know—I want to know, as the Member of Parliament for many of them—what really happened, and an inquiry into local services in a narrowly defined time frame with limited scope may well not be able to tell us all that we need to know about what happened or to ensure that every procedure has been put right and every precaution taken.

Let me develop this story in a little more detail; I am fortunate in having a little more time for this Adjournment debate than would normally be available. Let me make it clear that in no way is this related to current controversies about the national health service. The NHS is committed to openness. In its document on clinical neglect the Department calls for

> "a more responsive and patient-focused approach to both complaints and clinical negligence claims handling".

It calls for

> "greater openness in the NHS to concerns—so patients know that they will be heard, and organisations can learn from mistakes".

So what I am calling for is exactly what the Department of Health has called for in its own document on clinical negligence.

Let me also make it clear that, in general, I have nothing but praise for the staff and management of the Friarage hospital, Northallerton. It is often short of resources, but it has many excellent consultants. What happened in this case is in no way representative of the service that my constituents generally receive from consultants in that hospital or of the management decisions taken by the local management of that hospital—but it did happen, so we must face up to it.

Neale's record in Canada should have rung "loud alarm bells"—not my words, but those of the chief medical officer and the former director of public health in Yorkshire, Professor Liam Donaldson. The disciplinary committee of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario found Neale guilty of incompetence and professional misconduct after the death of a patient whom he was treating. The inquest into that death showed that he had given the patient a banned substance and then attempted to falsify her records. After the death of another woman on whom he had operated against medical advice, another doctor in British Columbia described Neale as

> "completely incompetent and incapable of making reasonable decisions about patients."

Neale's record in Canada was one of dishonesty and clinical incompetence. The former head of obstetrics and gynaecology at the Prince George hospital in British Columbia, Dr. Lee, summed it up when he said that Neale

> "had no judgment . . . should never have become a surgeon."

He continued:

> "He is a menace to every patient that he touches . . . he should never be allowed to practise."

That was the opinion in Canada, and it was not that Neale was a bit of a problem and that he had merely given the wrong prescription now and again. In the opinion of his colleagues, he should never have been allowed to practice.

Neale was struck off in resounding terms by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario. He was charged with

> "failure to maintain the standard of practice of the profession . . . and conduct or an act relevant to the practice of medicine that, having regard to all the circumstances, would reasonably be regarded by members as disgraceful, dishonourable or unprofessional".

This document—hon. Members will be relieved to know that I shall not discuss it all—details what Neale did that was appallingly wrong in the case when the patient died. The report concludes:

> "The Discipline Committee considered the evidence, found the allegation of incompetence against Dr. Neale to have been proved. In view of that finding the committee did not consider it necessary to make a finding on the second allegation. The committee did however consider the second allegation and, but for the finding of incompetence, would have found that the action of the doctor amounted to professional misconduct of a most serious nature."

The chief of obstetrics and gynaecology reported that

> "due to repeated demonstration of poor judgment, Dr. Neale had been asked to withdraw from the call roster for Obstetrics and Gynaecology in their hospital. The other members of that staff did not wish to have Dr. Neale care for their patients."

In British Columbia, as a result of poor judgment and poor procedure, all his privileges had been withdrawn in April 1979. That was the scale of the problem when this man practised medicine in Canada.

Despite having been struck off the register in Canada, in 1985, incredibly, he was able to come to Britain and was employed as a consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist in Northallerton. His references were checked in what was described as the usual way and only later did it appear that there were inaccuracies in them, with the misrepresentation of the status of some of his referees. He did not declare his past record to the Yorkshire regional health authority, but no additional attempt was made to find out the truth about him and there was no automatic checking of his Canadian history.

Sir Donald Irvine, president of the GMC, told "Panorama" in 1999:

> "If we knew today somebody had been struck off abroad we would want to be systematic about inquiries into that doctor's practice. I have to say that has not always been the case. I have to say that in the past our systems have been rather more unsystematic than we would accept as credible now. Even today the GMC is not obliged to investigate doctors struck off in non EU countries".

No action was taken against Neale then because no one knew that he had been struck off the register in Canada.

What is far more alarming is the fact that no action was taken when his record began to come to light in 1986 and he was allowed to carry on practising. Dr. Andy Sear, a former friend of Neale in Canada, telephoned the GMC in Britain in 1985 or 1986 to warn about Neale and his record in Canada. In a statement, Dr. Sear said:

> "I knew that Richard Neale had a job in Britain. I was alarmed that Richard was managing to work as a consultant and that he would harm other people. It was time to warn the authorities before it was too late. I called the General Medical Council in London and was put through to the registration department. I asked them if they were aware of the problems he had had in Canada . . . They said thank you very much, very politely, for the contact. They said they were aware, but that having problems in another country did not preclude a doctor practising in Britain, if he hadn't done anything in Britain. I thought that was very high handed."

So if a doctor had not done anything in Britain, the GMC would not necessarily want to take action.

When the Yorkshire regional health authority found out about the allegations about Neale, it conducted an investigation. Dr. John Green, who conducted the investigation, said that he was

> "unaware that Richard Neale had been struck off and he didn't recall that the health authority knew that he had been asked to go for retraining to avoid being struck off."

He said that

> "the investigators did not speak to the Canadian doctors who stopped Richard Neale operating in their hospitals in Canada, but we decided that they had been unduly conservative."

Even when the regional health authority was made aware of Neale's record, instead of sacking him immediately and terminating his contract, he was able to continue to practise. The GMC was made aware of Neale's history by Dr. Green, but decided to take no action.

This is a very serious matter. At no time were patients warned about Neale's record. If they had been, of course, they would not have accepted treatment from him. Because no action was taken against Neale, he was also able to work at other, private hospitals—based on a supposedly unblemished record at the Friarage hospital in Northallerton.

So the man went on. He even applied to go back on the register in Canada and he was again rejected in resounding terms. People there knew about this man. The Yorkshire regional health authority even provided him with a reference, saying that he was being promoted to chairman of the surgical division at Northallerton, but the Canadians turned him down. The discipline committee of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario issued a report in 1987 when he reapplied to the register in Canada, saying:

> "There was no evidence of a change in the pattern of his impaired judgement. The inability to make good clinical judgements is a condition difficult to rectify . . . Committee members were impressed that he had poor judgement as a young doctor and, in spite of additional training, continued to have poor judgement.
>
> On the basis of deep-seated attitudinal and judgement problems, it was felt that Dr. Neale does not qualify for licence reinstatement."

Even when Neale was refused his licence application, nothing was done in this country. It is unforgivable that a report detailing how he was incompetent, dishonest and lacking in judgment was not acted on. Despite sending a reference in support of his application for a Canadian licence, no one in Britain ever wondered about the outcome or ever found out that his application had been rejected. So he went on to cause great problems for many people. There is a long list of harrowing medical stories. I shall certainly not go through all of them, but I want to give the House a glimpse of what we are talking about.

In 1977, Neale so badly botched bladder surgery at the Shaftsbury hospital in London, where he was before going to Canada, that his patient is still undergoing intensive treatment and reconstructive surgery 25 years later. Neale told her that he would operate after he got back from a lunchtime drinking spree to celebrate his successful job application in Canada. A senior consultant later told the patient that Neale had "just ripped through everything" and torn apart several internal organs.

Neale discharged one patient from hospital prematurely in the face of strong protests from nursing staff. It transpired that the patient had a giant haematoma in her abdomen that caused her extreme pain such that she could not walk and had to crawl, even to the lavatory. Neale refused to re-admit her to hospital and insisted that she was "fine". The haematoma went untreated, became badly infected and ate into her bone, causing irreversible skeletal damage and permanent severe pain. She is now registered disabled. Another victim had the femoral nerve roots to her leg slashed as Neale performed a routine hysterectomy. She was left totally incontinent and unable to walk without the aid of two sticks.

That is just a glimpse of the medical incompetence of the man. The abuse that he also dished out to patients is almost beyond belief. A Jehovah's Witness who could not receive blood was near death after an operation, but Neale declined to order any blood substitute after he had promised to do so. After her husband offered to pay for it, he screamed across the bed over the fully conscious patient, "Can't you see she's dying anyway? It's not worth bothering to order the blood substitute. Either she'll be dead or she won't by the time it gets here." Such, apparently, is the conduct of the man.

Nurses have made statements saying that they knew how bad he was. One nurse of 27 years standing informed the action group for the medical victims that people were perfectly well aware of the clinical and surgical mayhem that he was causing at the Northallerton hospital, as well as being aware, from 1986, of his Canadian history. She said that the hospital insisted publicly that it knew of no clinical problems with Neale over the years, yet a gag order had been placed on all employees who were working with him—they were on pain of dismissal if they spoke openly about him.

The same type of statement—again harrowing reading—has been made by another nurse who worked with him at a private hospital, confirming his refusal to adhere to even the most basic hygiene procedures, pre-operatively or during surgery. She said that he never bothered to "identify structures" but "simply slashed through everything", often including vital organs. That has become the familiar story.

[Mr. William Hague]

It is not a trivial matter, or even just a case of a problem doctor; the issue is more serious than that. After years of clinical negligence and incompetence Neale was finally dismissed in Northallerton on non-clinical grounds. Not being available when on call, bad treatment of junior staff, misrepresenting his role, false travel claims and appropriating NHS supplies for private practice eventually brought about his dismissal by the Friarage hospital. He was also arrested in 1991 and given a police caution after an incident in a public lavatory, behaviour that does not sit easily with being a respected medical consultant. Given that the case against Neale, later proven at the General Medical Council, showed negligence and incompetence dating back to 1986, and given that some people knew about it, it is not clear why no public authority was aware of that incompetence. It is unacceptable that he was not sacked for his conduct, both clinical and non-clinical.

Neale then received a pay-off and a reference from the Friarage hospital to shift the problem elsewhere, one of the most controversial aspects of the whole case. The former director of operations at the hospital told "Panorama":

> "Getting rid of a doctor is not easy and so Dr. Neale was paid £100,000 to leave and given a good reference. I think there was a grave risk we were sending him out to inflict him on others but we were prepared to take that risk because the risk to our own people and service . . . was not one we were prepared to take."

The reference allowed him to carry on practising at Leicester royal infirmary, on the Isle of Wight, at London's Portland hospital and in Harley street. Leicester royal infirmary heard about the matter from the press and complained to the Yorkshire regional health authority that the reference was misleading. At the time, the infirmary's spokesman said that he felt "extreme dissatisfaction" with the reference—not a surprising reaction.

Again, I must emphasise how serious this is. We have all heard of "kind" references about employees who are no longer wanted, but when it concerns a consultant gynaecologist with an appalling track record that many people knew about and who went on to practise on other patients, it is serious indeed. Neale went on to practise until a warning letter was sent out in June 1998 after publicity started to arise about the case.

In January 1998, a BBC North East documentary programme, "Close Up North", carried a story about Richard Neale. At the beginning of February 1998, the director of operations at Northallerton wrote to Professor Liam Donaldson, then regional director of the NHS for the north and Yorkshire, about Richard Neale's record in Canada and his dishonesty in the United Kingdom. It was five months later, in June 1998, before a warning letter was finally sent out around hospital trusts and authorities in the UK warning them about Richard Neale and advising them to consult urgently if they were proposing to employ him.

The story finally began to come out in public. In July 2000, the professional conduct committee of the GMC found Neale guilty of serious professional misconduct and directed his erasure from the register. They found him guilty of 34 out of 35 counts of serious professional misconduct. The president said that it was a shocking and disturbing case:

> "For far too long he caused unnecessary pain and suffering to many women and showed a determined and alarming lack of insight . . . The case, like others recently, raises a number of important, wider issues for the whole system of medical regulation . . . his case highlights serious deficiencies in NHS procedures . . . It is difficult to understand why local action on his poor practice was not taken much earlier . . . The Neale case underlines, yet again, why there is such an urgent need to implement the systemic view of all doctors' practice".

Neale was struck off by order of the GMC with immediate effect. There is a certain irony in that, after the 15-year history of the whole miserable business. The GMC concluded:

> "The Committee have directed the Registrar to erase your name from the Register. They have also concluded that, given the serious and persistent nature of the findings against you, it is necessary for the protection of the public that your registration be suspended with immediate effect."

Thus, 15 years on, he was suspended with immediate effect, firmly locking the stable door after it had been open for so long.

The case is tragic and extraordinary for hundreds of women and their families. It highlights many deficiencies in procedures and within the GMC. A doctor who should never have been allowed to practise in the UK was able to work unnoticed by the authorities for well over a decade, even though the truth about him was given to the authorities in various forms and at various stages while he was practising. I therefore believe that we need a more substantial, open and public inquiry than has been announced so far.

It being Seven o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That This House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

Mr. Hague: I am grateful for the continued opportunity to speak a little longer, but I hope that the Minister will reply soon.

I believe that there is a need for a public inquiry. We know—and no doubt the Minister will enlarge on this—something of the Department's approach and its reasoning for not allowing such an inquiry. An internal memo from Professor Donaldson, the chief medical officer, to Health Ministers, dated 30 July 2001, appeared in *The Northern Echo*. It referred to the carefully worked out terms of reference for the investigation. I have been a Minister, and I know what "carefully worked out terms of reference" means in a civil service memorandum: it means that the terms of reference have been drawn up to limit the scope of the investigation. That is the tone and the meaning of the memorandum, which states:

> "There is some pressure from the Cabinet Office not to challenge the Judicial Review"—

that is, the attempt by the action group to open the matter up to a public inquiry by judicial means—

> "so that an adverse judgement on holding inquiries in private is not registered. This relates to another high profile matter where the intention is not to have a full-scale public inquiry."

I am sorry that the Cabinet Office has tried to enmesh this business in its determination not to hold a public inquiry into the foot and mouth disaster, to which the memo was obviously referring.

The memo continues

> "Capitulation"—

to a public inquiry—

> "would be disastrous. Not only would we end up with three public inquiries"—

the memo refers to two parallel cases—

> "but all these are 'problem doctor' cases . . . There might be 50 such cases a year and we cannot be forced to accept such a precedent. The damage to the NHS of regular public inquiries would be immense."

I put it to the Minister that if there are 50 cases of anything like this nature every year, we will need the inquiry to end all inquiries. We will need a huge public inquiry. Presumably what is meant is "50 cases in which doctors have done something wrong"; but as I hope I have demonstrated, this is not a case of the average doctor who has done something wrong so he needs a wrist-slapping. People may have died because of what he has done. That is clearly what is believed in Canada. This is a case of appalling incompetence, and appalling neglect of the need to protect the public.

The memo says:

> "A further argument is that there is little further to be learned that has not been learned from other major inquiries into health service failures."

Clearly there is a lot to be learned. Clearly much has gone wrong in the last 15 years. I know of no other inquiry that has covered all this ground and resolved all these issues. I therefore submit that a public inquiry is needed.

In a response to e-mails to *The Northern Echo*, the Secretary of State himself said:

> "I am deeply concerned. When things goes wrong we need to learn the lessons. That is why openness is so important."

Openness is very important in this case. I believe that we need an inquiry with an independent and impartial chairman, not from the Department of Health. I know that the Department has already suggested a concession in that regard, for which I am grateful. The inquiry should also be able to take evidence under oath, and have the power not only to subpoena witnesses but to examine the evidence of private patients. Private patients deserve some redress and some consideration from the Government and Parliament of the country.

The inquiry should also have power to determine the role of the General Medical Council, and terms of reference enabling it to examine all the circumstances before and after the employment of Neale at the hospital, not just during his employment. I believe that the inquiry should be conducted in the presence of the press and the public.

The investigation announced by the Department of Health does not meet those criteria. It is said that the victims can attend the inquiry, and can go out and tell the press what has been happening. Is that the form of openness that is now to be preferred in our society? Should not the press be free to report the proceedings, and report them straight? Must it rely on rumour and the passing on of news at second hand, when the matter involved concerns the public to such a huge extent?

The terms of reference that the Department announced for the investigation are inadequate, as they extend only from 1985 to 1995, which is not sufficient to catalogue the inadequacy of the system since 1995 and prior to Neale's appointment in 1985. The investigation may well fail to cover the NHS pay-off and reference, and the GMC claims that it did not receive a complaint from NHS management until February 1998. All that is beyond the scope of the investigation that has been announced.

The investigation will not be able to take evidence from private patients, even though they paid for treatment because of waiting lists or because Neale told them that that was a better way to go. The inquiry's enhanced terms of reference look only at local NHS services, but the Neale case goes wider than Yorkshire, has implications for the NHS and GMC as a whole, and has highlighted serious deficiencies in health service procedures. We must ensure that all the lessons are learned.

Everybody affected by Neale feels that there has already been too much foot dragging. Everything has been done a bit late, and we have had to campaign to get anything. To get an investigation, an action group had to be formed and lobbying had to take place. Throughout the history of this case, officialdom has dragged its feet; everything has been done behind time, when it was too late. It is not surprising that the people affected now want an inquiry out in the open. Ministers have nothing to fear from that. The case extends over a long time; no one is saying that today's Health Ministers bear responsibility for the origin of the problem. That is not their fault as Ministers, but it will be their fault if every lesson for the future is not learned in a fully open and transparent way, which is why we need a public inquiry into this appalling and disgraceful scandal.

7.6 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) on securing this debate and raising an issue that is important and serious both for those who came into contact with Mr. Neale, including the right hon. Gentleman's constituents, and for NHS patients generally.

The right hon. Gentleman made a series of points which I shall try to address as best I can. The Government take these matters very seriously indeed and are determined to ensure that procedures are in place to minimise the risk to patients as far as possible. However, millions of patients have received the highest-quality care from the NHS; it is important that we do not lose sight of the excellent service provided by the vast majority of NHS staff, and I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's opening remarks about the excellent service provided by the NHS in his constituency.

There is universal agreement that patient safety must have priority. Any concerns about the conduct or competence of health professionals treating NHS patients must be properly investigated. Of course no system can be foolproof: when mistakes happen, a service is found wanting, or a professional is found to be incompetent, we must ensure that we learn the lessons necessary to avoid any future repetition to the extent that we are able to do so. That may involve local or national investigations, and of course there are differences of view about how best to approach these issues.

In the case of Mr. Neale, there were clearly great failures in the system. I agree that the case is serious and involves all kinds of unacceptable failings in the system in the mid 1980s through to the mid 1990s. From what we now know, there appears to have been a series of mistakes that badly let down those patients who went to Mr. Neale expecting at the very least a reasonable standard of treatment. Mr. Neale let them down in the way in which he treated them, and the NHS let them down by failing comprehensively to protect them.

The right hon. Gentleman set out a chronology of events and problems at different stages in the employment of Mr. Neale. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will

[Yvette Cooper]

forgive me for not wanting to pre-empt the results of the inquiry that we have launched to ensure a thorough investigation of what went wrong with the NHS systems that were then in place to protect patients. We are determined to learn the lessons of what went wrong in this case, as well as those of other incidents, in order to improve substantially the quality of care for NHS patients and give them the confidence that the right systems are in place to afford them the protection that they need. At this stage, it is important that Ministers do not pre-empt the diagnosis of the problem or the suggestions that result from the inquiry. However, I should like to respond as far as I can to the points that the right hon. Gentleman raised in terms not only of the inquiry itself but of the broader themes that are raised by the events that took place in relation to Mr. Neale.

As the right hon. Gentleman mentioned, the Secretary of State for Health announced on 13 July last year a full independent investigation into the way in which the NHS had handled complaints about Mr. Neale's activities in the 1980s and 1990s. Of course, the NHS has moved on considerably since 1997 and the proposed inquiry was intended to look not only at the systems that were in place at the time but at the extent to which improved systems could deal with the deficiencies exposed by the case. The right hon. Gentleman raised issues about whether the inquiry should be public. As he mentioned, those issues are to be the subject of a judicial review that is due to start on Tuesday 5 February, so there will shortly be full scrutiny of the Secretary of State's decision to hold an investigation into this case other than by way of a public inquiry. As is so often the case in such circumstances, a view must be taken about the right approach for achieving the best outcome. That may involve, as it has in this case, a decision about the relative merits of a public inquiry, as opposed to a private one. Both attract arguments for and against, but in the end, it is a matter of judgment in each case on the basis of the particular circumstances that it involves. It is almost inevitable that the final decision will not satisfy everyone.

In general terms, the decision to hold an inquiry in private was based on the Secretary of State's concern that the systems that were then in place in the NHS for handling complaints should be thoroughly investigated, that the inquiry should be scrupulously fair and that the outcome should restore public confidence in the complaints system as quickly as possible. It was my right hon. Friend's view that those aims would be achieved most effectively by an independent inquiry that took evidence in private and published a report of its findings and recommendations. Following representations, he agreed that the inquiry proceedings could be attended throughout by all the witnesses, affording them the opportunity to hear what was said not only by their legal advisers but by other people.

In making his decision, the Secretary of State has taken account of the many relevant factors and weighed carefully the arguments on each side. He has given special consideration to the views of the group supporting the victims by agreeing to significant modifications to the form that the investigation should take. All the information has been comprehensively stated in the evidence provided for the judicial review by the chief medical officer. It is obviously difficult to attempt to paraphrase or reproduce that careful analysis, which is extensive, but I can say that it covers the benefits of quicker resolution and of being better able to get to the truth if more people are comfortable giving evidence in private because there are sensitive areas of care. Clearly, the matter will be considered by the judicial review and it would be unwise for me to attempt to anticipate or pre-empt the task that will shortly be before the courts.

The right hon. Gentleman expressed concerns about the inquiry's terms of reference. In particular, he mentioned the ability to subpoena witnesses. The Secretary of State has considered the matter and we are not aware of evidence of problems with getting witnesses to testify in similar cases, but my right hon. Friend has said that, if there is evidence that that proves a problem in this case, he is willing to reconsider whether additional powers need to be given.

The right hon. Gentleman raised concerns about the inquiry's terms of reference and scope. Ultimately, its scope will be a matter for the inquiry itself to determine. The terms of reference give the members of the inquiry quite wide scope in deciding the most important issues that need to be investigated. They state that the inquiry will need to investigate

> "the concerns or complaints raised concerning the appointment, practice and conduct of Richard Neale in respect of his employment as a consultant in the NHS.
>
> To investigate the actions which were taken for the purpose of (a) considering the concerns and complaints which were raised; (b) providing remedial action in relation to them; and (c) ensuring that the opportunities for any similar future misconduct were removed.
>
> To assess and draw conclusions as to the effectiveness of the policies and procedures in place.
>
> To make recommendations informed by this case as to improvements which should be made to policies and procedures which are now in place within the health service, (taking into account the changes in procedures since the events in question)."

It is not for me to determine exactly what the inquiry will choose to examine, but the terms of reference give it scope to concentrate on the issues that it feels are most important when looking at the evidence and listening to the testimony that those who have suffered at the hands of Mr. Neale will give.

It is important that we do not think that we need to wait until the inquiry ends before making improvements to the NHS. Many improvements have already taken place but it is critical that we establish a learning culture in the NHS. It must be able to learn from problems, difficulties and failings continuously, not simply when high-profile problems are covered in the national media.

Time after time, the blame culture has led to failures in the NHS, as the Bristol inquiry has recently shown. We have set out to change that culture to one of trust, where there is greater openness and partnership between patients and professionals and where lessons may be learned when things go wrong.

I want to respond to some of the broad themes that arise from the right hon. Gentleman's chronology of the events surrounding Mr. Neale's case. From the evidence we have seen, it is clear that one of the major concerns raised by Mr. Neale's case is the failure to pick up on the clinical problems with his practice, which subsequently formed the basis of complaints to the General Medical Council. Those were simply not picked up early enough. Nor was the extent of the problem recognised despite a series of investigations. It is clear that we need to ensure not only that systems are in place to identify clinical problems early but that they are responded to properly, openly and effectively.

The changes over the past five years or so are aimed at creating a culture change. They focus on improvements in quality and patient safety, reform of professional self-regulation and guidance for professionals. They are aimed at preventing to the extent possible those failures that have led to cases such as that of Mr. Neale.

The introduction of systems of clinical governance places a clear responsibility on the organisation to deliver and continuously improve patient care—it is the mechanism for ensuring, among other things, that NHS organisations can demonstrate that they are meeting the statutory duty of quality set out in the Health Act 1999. We need to have systems in place for local reporting and picking up adverse events, providing the mechanism for identifying and responding to cases of persistent poor practice by individual health professionals.

Improvements include the establishment of the Commission for Health Improvement to review and report on quality improvement in health care organisations. Its principal role is to improve the quality of patient care in the NHS across England and Wales. CHI undertakes clinical governance reviews as well as investigating serious service failures in the NHS when requested to do so.

An office for information on health care performance will be established within CHI with responsibility for publishing relevant information for patients. We are taking steps to publish information about the "success rates" of individual consultants—a move that might have brought some of Mr. Neale's practices to light earlier—building on national audit work already in train. Information about cardiac surgery will become available in 2004, with other specialties following.

In line with the findings of "An Organisation with a Memory" we have established the National Patients Safety Agency to provide a single national system of reporting and analysis of adverse events and near misses that occur within the NHS, and to ensure that effective learning takes place to make the NHS a safer place for patients. We will be taking further steps to rationalise the number of bodies inspecting and regulating health and social care.

We also need to reform the NHS complaints procedure to ensure that there is a procedure in place that can flag up patient complaints, particularly when there are persistent complaints around the same health professional, as was the case with Mr. Neale. The purpose of the reforms in which the Government are already involved is to ensure that the procedure is more independent and responsive to the needs of patients while maintaining the confidence and support of NHS staff. We are aiming to send out guidance to the NHS and commence training in early summer with a view to the reformed procedure being implemented later this year.

We have also established the National Clinical Assessment Authority to help NHS employers assess the small minority of "poorly performing doctors" and make recommendations about whether and under what circumstances they will continue to practise in the NHS. It is important that we do not simply identify the problems, but have proper systems in place to assess those problems effectively and accurately and respond to them, as well as giving NHS employers guidance in being able to respond at local level.

Another major concern in the case of Mr. Neale is the failure of the regulatory system to respond effectively and appropriately when it was found that he had effectively been struck off the medical register in Canada. The right hon. Gentleman made important points about that. If patients are to be protected, we must ensure that professionals are not simply able to move around to escape proper scrutiny or effective regulation. That was a matter of serious concern for the Government in the light of the Neale case.

We have already acted quickly to free up the General Medical Council procedures. In August 2000, we introduced some interim reform measures that significantly improved the GMC's ability to act quickly to protect the public and to make sure that NHS employers know when the GMC is considering a case. New procedures enable the GMC to take into account certain criminal convictions of a doctor when abroad. In the spring, we will extend the GMC's powers to enable it to take into account disqualifying decisions taken by authorities outside Europe, as was the case with Mr. Neale. The GMC will not have to re-prove the case against a doctor, which has been the problem in the past in handling cases such as that of Mr. Neale.

In the spring, we will also announce our proposals for the radical overhaul of all the GMC's fitness-to-practise procedures. That will improve the independence of the hearings in relation to GMC members, who in future will be responsible for the investigation and prosecution of cases but not the hearing of the case. We expect that the new arrangements will speed up the disciplinary processes, which have been subject to frustrating delays in the past, and make the processes and outcomes more understandable to the public.

The establishment of a new council for the regulation of health care professionals, as proposed in the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill, will also help to strengthen and co-ordinate the system of professional self-regulation. I believe that it is essential that professional self-regulation commands public and patient confidence. The new council will work with the regulatory bodies to build and manage a strong system of self-regulation that is open and transparent; that responds; that allows robust public scrutiny; and that explicitly puts patients first. The council should provide for greater integration and co-ordination between the regulatory bodies and the sharing of good practice and information.

The right hon. Gentleman also referred to concerns about Mr. Neale's practice in the private sector. He may be aware that, under the Health Act 1999, the Secretary of State does not have the power to set up an inquiry that would cover that. He is also right that we need better regulation of the private sector. That is why it is right that we will introduce in April regulation of independent health care through the National Care Standards Commission, which will set national minimum standards for the private sector. All providers will be required to meet core standards, and standards specific to the particular services that they provide, which will be patient centred and will specifically address clinical treatment.

[Yvette Cooper]

In drafting those regulations, patient safety was the foremost consideration. Currently, when health authorities register and inspect premises, they take no account of the quality of services provided, and those who own or manage hospitals accept no responsibility for the treatment either. The patient enters into a contract with the doctor, not the hospital.

After 1 April, those who run the establishment will be held responsible for the quality of the services provided. They will be required to have in place policies and procedures for clinical governance, and to have a formal complaints system. If patients are dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaints procedure, they may approach the National Care Standards Commission direct.

The right hon. Gentleman discussed in detail some of the harrowing cases that came to light as a result of the events surrounding Mr. Neale, which have certainly proved distressing. That is why it was also felt important to offer additional treatment and support to those former patients of Mr. Neale. The care programme for members of the support group for ex-patients of Richard Neale started at the end of April last year. The initial clinical assessment phase has involved in-depth consultations with more than 100 of the women concerned.

The process is ongoing, and I understand that more than 70 referrals have been made for further expert assessment and investigation, and, if appropriate, treatment. The majority of referrals have now been seen by Mr. Paul Hilton, urogynaecologist and clinical director for women's services at the Royal Victoria infirmary, Newcastle. The few remaining will be seen in the coming weeks.

I share the right hon. Gentleman's concern that the safety of patients in the NHS should be paramount. As I have said, we have already introduced since 1997 a series of practical and effective measures to try to improve the clinical governance system and the way in which the NHS responds to mistakes and problems, enabling it better to identify problems at an early stage, and in particular to learn lessons from them. We must recognise that sometimes, things will go wrong, but we must also ensure that lessons are learned at an early stage, rather than many years later, after too much further damage has been done.

It is important that the inquiry fully investigates the problems relating to Mr. Neale's treatment of patients, his employment in the NHS and the systems then in place. It must make recommendations about problems in the systems at that time, so that we can better improve existing systems.

The inquiry was set up after great consideration, with terms of reference and conditions that the Secretary of State believes will best provide us with a thorough investigation and speedy answers. They will enable the NHS to learn effectively from the tragic events, and I hope that we can ensure that the events and actions surrounding Mr. Neale do not happen again.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Seven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 1 February 2002

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Learning Disability White Paper

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

9.33 am

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): I welcome this opportunity to describe and debate progress made in implementing the proposals in "Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century", which was published in March last year.

We estimate that there are around 210,000 people with severe and profound learning disabilities. About 25 people per 1,000 of the population are thought to have mild to moderate learning disabilities. So the total learning-disabled population in England is about 1.2 million. Learning-disabled people can be among the most disadvantaged of an already disadvantaged group. Before we look at developments and the implementation of the proposals in "Valuing People", it is worth remembering why there was a need for a new strategy on learning disability services. What were the problems that people with learning disabilities faced?

The problems fall into three main categories. First, there is the category of social exclusion. As I have said, learning-disabled people can be among the most isolated and disadvantaged groups in our society. Too often, they have faced poor housing, difficulties in being able to work and in using transport and poor advocacy services, and they have had too little ability to make and exercise choices over the care and support that they receive.

Secondly, there has been too much inconsistency in service provision. People are receiving different services in different parts of the country, there are very great differences in the proportion of spending by both local authorities and health authorities throughout the country, and there has not been a sufficiently consistently high level of services, such as day services, for users.

Thirdly, the management of services has too often been dependent on administrative and bureaucratic boundaries, and too little focused on the users' needs. There has been too little co-ordination between social and health services, never mind other statutory authorities. There have been problems with the transition from children's services to those for adults; services have not properly been designed around individuals' needs; and there have been unqualified staff and poor training.

Often, learning-disabled people live isolated lives, knowing only their family and other people with learning disabilities. Research published in 1999 found that only 30 per cent. had a friend who was not learning-disabled, part of their family or paid to care for them. So, more than two thirds of people with learning disabilities have no outside friends—no ability in either their social or community life to enjoy the sorts of opportunities that many of us take for granted.

The Prime Minister made that point very clearly in his foreword to "Valuing People":

> "People with learning disabilities can lead full and rewarding lives, as many already do. But others find themselves pushed to the margins of our society. And almost all encounter prejudice, bullying, insensitive treatment and discrimination at some time in their lives. Such prejudice and discrimination—no less hurtful for often being unintentional—has a very damaging impact. It leads to your world becoming smaller, opportunities more limited, a withdrawal from wider society so time is spent only with family, carers, or other people with learning disabilities."

So those were the problems that we needed to tackle, and "Valuing People", the first White Paper on learning disability services for 30 years, sets out a programme to tackle them.

Published in March last year, the programme is based on four key principles—of rights, independence, choice and inclusion—and lays down a wide-ranging programme of action. The programme includes developing an integrated approach by health, education and social care to services for disabled children and their families; more choice and control through the development of advocacy; enabling more people to receive direct payments; a national information centre; plans to move the 1,500 people living in long-stay hospitals to more appropriate accommodation in the community by April 2004; access to a specialist health facilitator and a health action plan for every learning-disabled person; more choice in housing; a five-year programme for modernising day services; increased employment opportunities; the development of person-centred planning; and stronger partnership working locally.

I shall return to those things later, when I will describe progress in their delivery, but I shall now make some points about the way in which the development and implementation of the strategy has involved learning-disabled people themselves. If we are serious about putting learning-disabled people at the centre of services and designing services around them, it is right—in fact, it is essential—that they are involved in the policy discussions and debates that determine those services.

That theme was summed up in the title of one of the reports published with the White Paper. The report from the national service user group, which worked with us in developing "Valuing People" is called "Nothing about us without us". Work on "Valuing People" began in December 1999, and service users and carers were at the launch seminar; what they said directly affected the way in which we took the work forward. Service users and carers were also members of the learning disability advisory group, which oversaw the whole process. "Valuing People" is the first White Paper to be published both in conventional form and in more straightforward, accessible forms, including tape and CD, so that people with learning disabilities can see for themselves what the Government are proposing. Service user involvement continues as we develop and implement the policy, for example, in the selection of the director of learning disability implementation and members of the support team—candidates were interviewed by people with learning disabilities; the development of a national forum for people with learning disabilities; membership,

[Jacqui Smith]

including co-chairmanship, of the learning disability taskforce; and membership of local learning disability partnership boards.

I should like to turn to developments since March in implementing principles in the White Paper. "Valuing People" set out in broad terms our proposals for improving learning disability services. Guidance which we issued in August last year gives more detail, and stresses that "Valuing People" is for all children, young people, adults and older people with learning disabilities and their families; people with severe and profound learning disabilities, through to people with mild or moderate learning disabilities; and people with learning disabilities in the autistic spectrum. I know that concern has been expressed, by the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) among others, about the position of adults with Asperger's syndrome or higher-functioning autism. As we made clear in the guidance, and as I have previously made clear in the House, adults with Asperger's syndrome or higher-functioning autism are not precluded from using learning disability services.

I have already referred to the learning disability advisory group, which oversaw the development of "Valuing People"; we are grateful to its members for their contribution to that work. The advisory group was superseded by the learning disability taskforce, which has the role of monitoring and supporting the implementation of "Valuing People" nationally. It also advises the Government on the continuing development of learning disability policy. The taskforce met for the first time in December; its co-chairs are Chris Davies, director of social services of Somerset county council and Michelle Chinery from the self-advocacy group London People First, who is a user of learning disability services. I am delighted that Chris and Michelle agreed to take on that role. Four other learning-disabled people take it in turn, two at a time, to attend the taskforce.

If we are to involve users in our discussions, it is important that we consider the way in which we organise, facilitate and prepare for those discussions. The taskforce has discussed how to ensure that learning-disabled members can participate fully in its work. That is not easy; we shall have to learn to adjust and adopt new procedures. I should like to tell the House the rules that the taskforce has agreed. It has agreed that people should raise their hand if they want to speak; speak clearly and slowly; look at the person to whom they are speaking; and avoid long words. It has also agreed that only one person should speak at a time; there should be no jargon; and that mobile phones should be switched off—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I thought that would get a response. I have to admit that when I recently addressed a conference on the implementation of the learning disability White Paper, I was a bit embarrassed because I was not sure that our procedures in the Chamber were up to the high standards that have clearly been set by the learning disability taskforce. We may well learn from the model that it has provided.

The learning disability taskforce operates at a national level. At a local level, where policy has to be implemented and fit the experience of users of learning disability services, learning disability partnership boards are responsible for overseeing and advising on implementation of the adult aspects of "Valuing People". The boards are chaired by a senior local government officer or elected member, and the membership includes representatives of statutory sector interests, such as social services, housing, education, health bodies; people with learning disabilities and carers; independent providers; voluntary organisations; community groups; and local employers.

The boards were responsible for developing joint investment plans, which should have been returned to the Department of Health by yesterday, and will help to ensure that the £3 billion spent on learning disability makes the best and most appropriate impact; they will also target the extra £42.6 million available for development from this coming April. The taskforce operates nationally and the partnership boards have been set up locally. We must ensure that we provide support for implementation, which is why we have an implementation support team, reporting to the taskforce through its director Rob Greig.

The team is now largely in post and will be fully operational from this month. Its first priority is to establish links and contacts with partnership boards, looking particularly at the involvement of service users and families, offering advice and support as necessary; and to explore how far the boards have begun to include people from outside the traditional learning disability field. Its next priority is to work with boards on the implementation plans for person-centred planning, on which the Department has recently issued guidance. Another early priority is to establish contact with advocacy, and particularly self-advocacy, groups in each region. The support team will work with partnership boards whose joint investment plans, following the evaluation that will now begin, are found to be below an acceptable standard, to help them take remedial action and ensure that the transformation of local services is achieved. In terms of partnership with others, I am especially pleased that in December, we launched with Mencap a telephone helpline to overcome some of the issues identified in the White Paper in relation to the need for national information to be available to users, carers and those who work with people with learning disabilities. The line has responded to 674 inquiries in its first month.

Those are some of the structures that are already in place, but I also want to deal with two areas where independence, which is one of the key principles of "Valuing People", can be strengthened: advocacy and direct payments. Effective advocacy can make a real difference to the lives of people with learning disabilities. It allows them to express their wishes, make choices, put forward their own views and join in planning and designing their own services. With the right support, many people with learning disabilities can become effective self-advocates. Citizen advocacy can also make a vital contribution to ensuring that the voices of people with more complex disabilities are heard.

Some £1.3 million from the implementation support fund is being used this year to promote advocacy. That includes setting up a national citizen advocacy network. Furthermore, £900,000 of that money is for a scheme to support advocacy projects. I am very grateful for the work of two organisations that are working with us in that regard. The British Institute of Learning Disabilities and Values Into Action are helping to ensure that the money is distributed and support is given in a way that ensures that the most value is added in terms of the advocacy work. Bids have been coming in for funding, and decisions will be made within the next few weeks about how we can support those advocacy groups.

I know that concerns have been expressed about funding for self-advocacy groups. We have been considering very closely the funding arrangements for next year. I am pleased to confirm that we have already identified an additional £140,000 that will be available from the implementation support fund from this April. The learning disability taskforce will be discussing funding for advocacy services at its future meetings. I shall want to listen carefully to its concerns and recommendations about how to develop this work. Of course, advocacy groups do not need to look only to central Government for funding. Local government and the NHS at a local level are possible sources, as are European funds and the national lottery. There is an important role to be played in supporting and facilitating advocacy groups in accessing those other forms of funding. Effective advocacy helps people to gain control over their lives.

Direct payments are another effective and popular way of giving people greater control and helping them to make their own decisions about how their care is delivered. I am pleased to say that the number of people with learning disabilities who are receiving direct payments has increased by more than 60 per cent. in the past year. That is good news. It is an indication that progress is being made and that direct payments are increasingly a real option for people with learning disabilities.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Does the Minister agree that the absolute figures, which she may want to share with the House, are disturbingly and pitifully small? Is not a very rapid and extended increase needed, if that is what the individuals want?

Jacqui Smith: I do not disagree with the hon. Gentleman. While the figures are moving in the right direction, they are still too low. I shall outline what the Government have done and will do to ensure that we can increase that opportunity for people across a wide spectrum of care. In today's debate, that means people with learning disabilities.

The Department of Health has produced and distributed almost 20,000 copies of the "Easy Guide" to direct payments, to help to get across the message that such payments can offer people with learning disabilities real choices and opportunities in their lives. A small number of councils such as Durham, Essex and Hampshire have made substantial progress in making direct payments accessible for people with learning disabilities, but those pockets of good practice are too isolated. Overall, the numbers are still far too small; there are fewer than 400 throughout the whole of England. We want to see significant improvements in those figures. We want direct payments to become a mainstream option for a much wider variety of people. That is one of the reasons why we are taking powers in the Health and Social Care Act 2001 to help us expand the take-up of direct payments by requiring councils to offer them to people who request them. Access to direct payments will no longer be a question of where people live. Councils will have a duty to offer them as part of the standard menu of services.

We are currently working on producing the policy and practice guidance to coincide with those changes. We will use that opportunity to strengthen the message to councils about the need to make direct payments work for people with learning disabilities. A draft of the revised guidance will be issued shortly for consultation. The programme of work arising from "Valuing People" is also helping us to improve the situation for people with learning disabilities. Part of the role of the implementation team will be to promote the uptake of direct payments. Of course, advocacy services can provide significant help for people to access and manage direct payments.

I should like now to turn to some of the other ways in which we are improving and developing better services for people with learning disabilities. Most people with learning disabilities have greater health needs than the rest of the population. Although life expectancy is increasing, 50 per cent. of people with learning disabilities die before they reach 50, compared with only 17 per cent. of the population as a whole. People with learning disabilities are more likely to experience mental illness and are more prone to chronic health problems such as epilepsy and physical and sensory impairment. Poor oral health may lead to chronic dental disease. Although increasing life expectancy is welcome, it will also lead to more age-related diseases; strokes, heart disease, respiratory disease and cancer are all likely to be of concern. An increasing number of young people with severe and profound disabilities have complex health needs.

Mr. Boswell: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way again. Does she agree that it is a particular concern that, when people with learning disabilities are hospitalised, they should have access to adequate advocacy and explanation of their problems? They should also have access to medical staff who are very well trained and are aware that such patients may well not only have the specific medical problem for which they were admitted, but a series of related issues in respect of which they also need the most careful maintenance and support during their spell in hospital.

Jacqui Smith: Once again, the hon. Gentleman makes a very important point, which demonstrates why we need to develop our specialist learning disabilities services to ensure that those involved can work more closely with other professionals, become multi-skilled and recognise the complex range of health needs to which he refers. Furthermore, the changes being made by the Government in relation to advocacy—especially the development of patient advocacy liaison services for every trust—will also be a very important way of ensuring that people with learning disabilities, in contact with particular health trusts, can express their views and make complaints and be supported in doing so.

The NHS plan commitment to care for all was based on clinical need, shaping services around the needs of individual patients, families and carers and reducing health inequalities. Health improvement plans provide a means of addressing the health needs of people with learning disabilities so that they do not experience avoidable illness and premature death. To help us reduce the number of avoidable deaths we are exploring the feasibility of establishing a confidential inquiry into mortality among people with learning disabilities.

Other key actions on health will include ensuring that all people with a learning disability are registered with a GP by June 2004; getting the NHS to ensure that all mainstream hospital services are accessible to people with

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learning disabilities; developing local specialist services for people with severe challenging behaviour—this will be a priority for the capital element of the learning disability development fund; and a new role, as I suggested earlier, for specialist learning disability services, making the most effective use of their expertise.

The Government expect all learning disability partnership boards to have agreed a framework for the introduction of health action plans for people with learning disabilities by June 2005, and to have ensured that they all have clearly identified health facilitators by June 2003.

I have spoken mainly about adults, but it is important to remember that the "Valuing People" programme is for learning-disabled people of all ages, and that learning disability partnership boards are responsible for its adult elements. I shall now say something specifically about children.

We consciously and deliberately gave "Valuing People" a lifelong perspective on learning disability. The chapter on children focused on the needs of learning-disabled children and their families, but it did so in a framework that applies equally to all disabled children. Many disabled children have more than one impairment, and a majority have a learning disability.

Where necessary, the Government have put in place the legislative framework for change—for example, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. I have no doubt that the hon. Member for Daventry recognises what a fine piece of legislation that is, having spent some happy days in the Standing Committee that considered it last Session. The Act strengthens the right of children with special educational needs to be educated in mainstream schools, and from September 2002 protects them from discrimination on grounds of their disability in their access to education, including further and higher education.

The Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000 introduces direct payments, giving parents of disabled children and 16 and 17-year-old disabled young people greater choice and flexibility in the way in which they receive services. The Care Standards Act 2000 improves protection and raises standards through new regulations and inspection of care providers. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 ensures continuity of support for all looked-after disabled children.

Furthermore, there are four cross-Government programmes to help tackle the social exclusion of children: sure start for the under-fives; the children fund for older children; Connexions for teenagers; and the "quality protects" programme for the most vulnerable across the whole age range, those in care and children in need. All must give priority to disabled children. As part of the "quality protects" programme, the Government set new national objectives for children's services which for the first time set out clear outcomes for children, and in some instances give precise targets which local authorities are expected to achieve.

Last year's "quality protects" management action plans show that authorities are beginning to improve the services that they provide to disabled children. Many are developing proposals in collaboration with partners from other agencies and sectors, such as the NHS and the voluntary sector. More family support services were being provided, particularly home-based respite care and sitting services. Every management action plan included examples of services that increased the range and scale of provision of leisure, cultural and sporting activities.

That was supported by the last spending review, when the "quality protects" programme was extended from three years to five, with substantial additional funding being made available. Provision for disabled children has been made a priority in the programme. From 2001–02 to 2003–04, £60 million for the children's services special grant has been earmarked for services for disabled children and their families.

The new children's fund is also encouraging joint working between local authorities and the voluntary sector to benefit disabled children. We know, for example, that through the fund, new projects are under way in Birmingham, Bradford, Haringey, Greenwich, Bristol and many other places, where the fund is providing better after-school facilities for children with complex needs, providing sporting activities, addressing child care and transport issues, and working with special schools, mainstream schools, early-years and other settings.

As part of our programme to support children with special educational needs, the Government recently issued the revised SEN code of practice and a toolkit for key professionals with responsibility for implementation. That included sections for health professionals and social services staff. Developing an integrated approach to supporting disabled children is key to the development of the national service framework for children.

As I mentioned earlier, a particularly important issue for children with learning disabilities arises as they enter adulthood. Disabled young people and their families often find that transition stressful and difficult. There has too often been a lack of co-ordination between the relevant agencies. Some young people are not transferred from children's to adult services with adequate health and social care plans.

That is why we have asked all local partnership boards to have a member with responsibility for transition planning. It is also why we set a target by 2003 for local agencies to introduce person-centred planning for all disabled young people moving from children's to adult services. That will include not only council services such as social services and education, but a health action plan, setting out the services to be provided by the health service.

I said earlier that "Valuing People" involved several Government Departments. I have touched on work in education, but we are working across Government. For example, the Government's statutory advisers on transport-related disability matters—the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee—includes among its membership a person with a learning disability, and is working with transport operators to help them understand the importance of information and training to give people with learning disabilities the confidence to travel.

With the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, we are funding research leading to the publication of good practice advice on housing options and guidance on the range of housing options that should be provided for people with learning disabilities. We are working with the Department for Work and Pensions on a research project studying the links between day centres and supported employment, as well as the ongoing work being taken forward by the workstep programme to provide employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities.

In conclusion, "Valuing People" sets out a programme of action that will make a real difference to the lives of people with learning disabilities, their families and their carers. Old long-stay hospitals will be closed and residents found more appropriate accommodation. Employment opportunities will improve. The transition from children's to adult services will be better. Accommodation choices will be wider, and access to health services will improve. In conjunction with other Government initiatives, educational opportunities will be available for all children regardless of their disability. People's control over their own lives will improve through better advocacy services and greater use of direct payments. People with learning disabilities will continue to work with us to achieve those improvements.

One of the learning-disabled people who worked on the White Paper was recognised in last year's birthday honours—Carol Lee, from London People First, who was awarded an MBE. She is quoted in one of the reports published with "Valuing People" as saying:

> "I am proud to be in this group. It means a lot to work together with such a good team committed to supporting people with learning disabilities in their hard struggle to live independent lives."

I hope that, today, we can reassure Carol and other learning-disabled people that that work will continue so that we can provide them with the opportunities that they fully deserve.

10.11 am

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): I am honoured and delighted to participate in this debate on the implementation of the Government's strategy for learning disability, as set out in the White Paper "Valuing People". It reflects a long history of action taken in this House to tackle disability issues.

So often, the distinctions are not so much between the parties, as we usually speak with the same voice, as between those who turn up and participate in such debates, and those who do not get round to it, and are not as closely focused on some of the problems. Often, we vie with each other in our enthusiasm for the topic, and I am happy to initiate an arms race on that today. The Minister has made a good start in setting out her case. However, we must approach this matter in the spirit—and with the historic record—that change and betterment in such sensitive areas are often progressive between successive Governments of widely differing political views.

I still remember my first visit to the House when I was a schoolboy. I believe that it was in 1959, when I was lucky enough to be at the school that had been attended by the then Clerk of the House, Sir Edward Fellowes. I was somewhat disconcerted when I came here as a Member in 1987 and found that he had joined the staff of the Clerk's Department in 1924. There is therefore a long history.

I mention that anecdote because I remember that the subject for debate, which was not well attended and did not leap off the page as a matter of high controversy, was the Report stage of the Mental Health (Scotland) Bill. Two points arise from that. First, the constitutional one that that measure, or one like it, is unlikely to return here. Secondly, since 1959, we have drawn out and increasingly accommodated the important functional distinction, which was then much less well appreciated, between mental health and learning disability. There was a culture of institutionalisation that bridged both. Both relate to vulnerable people whose care requires careful and loving attention, but they are not the same people. From time to time, however, the frustrations of having difficulty with learning may spill over into mental health problems. If I were to make one criticism of the Minister's approach, it would be that she did not say much about the experience of being an adult with a learning difficulty, and the kinds of frustrations that arise.

At any event, the last major exercise, in the House, in overall provision for learning disability took place on a Conservative Government's watch, as a White Paper and legislation were introduced a generation ago in 1971. It is worth remarking that that White Paper was unashamedly called "Better Services for the Mentally Handicapped". Again, in the use of sensitivity and phraseology, we have collectively come a long way in a generation, in emphasising what people with learning difficulties can do, particularly if disabilities and difficulties can be relieved or released, rather than emphasising what they cannot do.

As the new White Paper, "Valuing People", acknowledges, apart from phraseology and terminology real progress has been made in the last generation in closing large institutions and developing services in the community. However, the new White Paper rightly adds that more needs to be done. We are considering the means of doing it, which is the tough part of government.

I am pleased to follow the Minister. As she mentioned, I have shadowed her for several years on educational matters, particularly in relation to special educational needs and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. Even if I am not as ecstatic in my praise of it as she was, I readily concede that it represents an important advance, and, of course, feeds directly into this debate. With the way in which responsibilities have fallen, our paths have diverged—she has gone to the Department of Health, and I am an Opposition spokesman for Work and Pensions. That is an interesting development, as ministerial responsibilities in this area can look like a Venn diagram, in which health, work and pensions, education and several other important Government and local government departments and interests are all rightly engaged.

I hope that the Minister and I can claim a common commitment and a degree of mutual respect. Certainly, she has made a constructive and encouraging opening speech. I was particularly pleased that she picked up the point that many hon. Members have made, perhaps fuelled by the excellent campaign in *The Times* at Christmas, about the autistic spectrum. We are all learning much more about it. Many people with Asperger's syndrome are highly intelligent individuals who have social needs. If they are not catered for, they spill over into educational difficulties. I am glad that she is at least encouraging local authorities not to take a literal-minded view of the scope of her White Paper.

I am also pleased that the Minister talked about direct payments, which is a matter that needs working up. As she acknowledged, the numbers are still small. However, when people have the budget in their own hands, with the

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support of their family or carers they can make their own choices. They are often better placed to do that than anyone making choices on their behalf.

In the general spirit of what I am sure will be a constructive debate, I should make it clear that the Opposition have no problems with the objectives of the White Paper. We support it and we want it to work. In particular, I like its title, "Valuing People". To use a modernism, it is a brilliant title. It is precisely the belief in the value of all people as ends in themselves and not as means that should drive us. None of us who has met a class or group of young individuals with various special educational needs, or seen an individual pupil properly and sensitively included in a mainstream setting, could have failed to notice the special buzz that can arise, the dedication of teachers, and the friendliness and interaction of the pupils. In this most cynical of places, that force can and should defy our cynicism.

Of course, in saying that, I do not wish to suggest that there are not problems with challenging behaviour from time to time. The Minister has already referred to them. People with learning difficulties can be very difficult, and it can be hard to deal with them and to get the appropriate administrative machinery together to do so. But there is something about them that we should remember and celebrate.

The Conservatives have no problems with the four cardinal principles set out in the White Paper: rights, independence, choice and inclusion. All that I would say, with some diffidence, to the hon. Lady is that they have not just arrived, freshly made, under new Labour. They are concepts that some of us have always thought important. Indeed, to my great personal pleasure, the previous Conservative Government laid the foundations with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995—not without difficulty, as I am sure that the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) will remind us—and we are glad to embrace its subsequent extension and the establishment of the Disability Rights Commission, with which I have regular and positive exchanges.

Those four principles are interactive and are about the worth of individuals. My only possible reservation, which I state for completeness only, is that inclusion can be interpreted to subvert the free choice of individuals—for example, in relation to whether they should be at a special school or educated in a mainstream setting. Inclusion should be interpreted to offer new opportunities for choice between different educational or lifestyle approaches, but we will not spoil this morning by quibbling over definitions.

The White Paper is frank about what it describes as problems and challenges. Those of us who had the privilege of going to the parliamentary palace of varieties last night saw a rehearsal of the first episode of "Yes, Minister", which was very well executed by some of our colleagues. The great, mythical—and, in terms of the actor involved, sadly deceased—Sir Humphrey Appleby appeared in it. He was always a great believer in describing any ministerial policy, particularly those that included a modicum of initiative, as "challenging". This is a very challenging White Paper, but it is frank, and it is right that we should start, as the White Paper does, by flatly acknowledging the difficulties.

The difficulties that I have picked out would be the stuff of any constituency MP's experience: poor co-ordination of services; poor planning for transition; inadequate support for carers; poor, often discriminatory, health care; poor employment opportunities; and a general lack of choice. I can only say amen to that list; any constituency MP could, no doubt, add to it. How many times have we heard in our surgeries the line of argument: "We can cope with the disability of a member of our family, but it is the bureaucracy that gets us in the end"?

Only this week, I have been occupied with the case of a young constituent with multiple disabilities—both physical disabilities and learning difficulties—who now has the benefit, after the family has fought its way through a tribunal hearing, of a placement in a residential school operated by the Royal National Institute for the Blind. The problem now lies between social services and the local education authority, and centres on responsibility for the weekly transport to and from the school. Having recently studied a report published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on work carried out at the Norah Fry research centre at the university of Bristol into placements at residential schools, I believe that my constituent's experience would make an admirable object case for the foundation to consider.

I am sure that, with good will, that particular difficulty will be resolved—indeed, we are on the way to resolving it—but is has caused distress for the family and engendered suspicion among the parents that the tribunal's finding is in some way being subverted. It has also required the intervention of a Member of Parliament. Sometimes, I feel as though we function here as the front line of joined-up government, the people who actually put the bits together when there is a problem. To return to the White Paper, it is that element of effective partnership between health, social care and education that desperately needs improvement.

Nowhere is that cast into sharper or more disturbing policy perspective than in the recent Mencap report, "No Ordinary Life", which deals with the support needs of families caring for children with profound or multiple learning difficulties. No decent person could read that report without grave unease. Similarly, no one who is familiar with human rights legislation, and who is involved in government or local administration, could read it without some apprehension of ending up in court because of its findings. It is terrifying that many people set out with good will to put their bit of the jigsaw in place for people with these complex difficulties, but only one piece needs to be missing for the picture to be incomplete, and for the service to be inadequate. Those of us who have interviewed parents know how they feel when nearly everything is in place, but something is missing.

Although the Minister has not referred specifically to that report today, I was delighted that, when she responded on 23 January to my parliamentary questions, which were keyed around the report, she clearly saw the Government's response in terms of the White Paper and the learning disability taskforce that is to lead its implementation. I am also genuinely pleased to have her assurance that Ministers have actively involved Mencap and other leading non-governmental and voluntary organisations in the process.

I have long been a passionate supporter of the voluntary sector, and I believe that such organisations can add great value in two ways: by using their hands-on, objective experience of what it all means; and by communicating an element of what I would describe as passionate dissatisfaction to puncture any official complacency. I am sure that it will be the understatement of this speech to say that life for those directly caught up in learning disability, including families and carers, is very tough. It behoves us all to remember that and to take this agenda forward.

Before I concentrate on implementation, I shall touch on the main requirements for service users. Perhaps my comments will be the other way round from the Minister's, but we all approach this matter from slightly different perspectives. I hope that what I have to say will be complementary rather than antagonistic. The provision of proper services for each critical stage of life must begin with early appraisal or diagnosis, and the ability to pick up problems at the paediatric stage. This must be coupled with continuing professional assessment and an eye to the possibilities of development for the individual. Nowhere is that more important than in the increasingly clear area of the autistic spectrum, where up to 1 per cent. of young people may be affected to some extent.

Each individual and their family should have a clear choice in the matter of transfer from home to a placement at school. The transition from primary to secondary school can be fraught, particularly if there is not an exact match of the type of setting. In the crucial transfer to further education, I suspect that many local education authorities still do not implement fully their long-standing obligations for transition planning. At the same time as—or shortly after—that life event, an individual may transfer from child to adult residential provision, in which suitable placements can often be hard to find.

Another area in which Mencap, United Response in Business and other agencies are involved is the creation and best use of employment opportunities, which are enormously enriching where they are feasible. While I acknowledge that many day-care services need restructuring—an institution that I know well in my constituency has restructured itself totally—we cannot wish away the role of day centres. They still have a valuable role to play but cannot be provided on the cheap. That is also true of carer support and meeting the health care needs of service users.

I welcome the Government's recent aid package to carers, but we still await implementation of their pledge to extend invalid care allowance to people aged 65 and over. That is particularly important given the changing demographics of those with learning disabilities. The numbers are rising by some 1 per cent. a year. As more people survive to adulthood and, in many examples, old age and retirement, carers are often older and perhaps reaching the end of what would have been their working lives. They, too, may need help with income and housing.

That brings me to housing issues, which the Minister perhaps only sketched. Although nobody wants a return to long-stay institutions, there is still an important role for residential care. Only two days ago, the Minister published guidance on the full suite of national minimum care standards, but, to my knowledge, she has not yet provided an accompanying statement of the regulatory impact on those providing that residential care. That is greatly exercising national charities as well as private sector care homes and it would be tragic if, in pursuit of a care standards ideal, we contrived a dearth in capacity and, perforce, drove people back to either health service-run institutions or other inappropriate care that inadequately supports community living.

Where, indeed, is the guidance on access to social housing promised in the White Paper? There are important questions to ask. How will we and local authorities know whether they are making adequate provision? How do those issues play into or out of joint investment plan budgets? Will the finance come from those budgets or from other resources? We do not yet have an adequate information base to ensure that needs are identified, let alone met. I am surprised that the Minister said less about that than she might have, because preparing a better database is important to driving the agenda forward.

There is a danger that aspirations may not meet reality and there may not be enough resources to fund the revenue costs of development without losing quality. Any general efforts to widen choice, which of course involve the possibility of direct payments where appropriate, are welcome. I defend direct payments, because they may represent a more cost-effective use of resources.

Implementation is central. I have read the 17 January debate on Bristol royal infirmary and remind the Minister that her ministerial colleague, the right hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), sensibly said:

> "reports do not implement themselves. They need to be monitored and implemented."—[*Official Report*, 17 January 2002; Vol. 378, c. 507.]

All the more so in respect of learning disabilities, because the hon. Lady is dealing not just with a national health service under relatively unified control, but with a partnership involving local authorities, voluntary organisations, patients, parents, carers and a wide range of support services. If any one piece of that jigsaw is lacking—even, for example, the bus home from residential school—the rest of the package might be invalidated.

I refer again to the university of Bristol research. On residential placements, for example, it says:

> "The existence of joint panels or joint policy statements did not necessarily lead to good working relations between frontline staff in day-to-day work with children and parents."

That is a warning that mere words and aspirations do not guarantee policy success.

This is not a day for partisanship and I do not intend to breach the mood, but I must say that I find three aspects of the Government's approach and culture relating to complex social issues trying and often rather implausible. First, we have the aspiration. Fine words such as "rights", "independence", "choice" and "inclusion" are spoken as if nobody has thought of them before. Then adjectives such as "new", "modern", "high quality", "world class" and even "joined up" are attached. Finally, the third leg of the stool: plans are announced, but they do not always happen. I hope that the Minister learns from the shortcomings and achieves a strategy that works.

Let me examine three aspects: partnership working and investment, advocacy and monitoring. The White Paper deploys an impressive array of concepts to explain how the intended partnership is to work, and the keystone is the local learning disability partnership board. The boards were to be established by October last, so perhaps the

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Minister will tell us whether they are all in place. A good test is how often they have met or, more basically, whether they have any members.

I am pleased that the boards have an incentive to get on with the job. Their first duty is to consider joint investment plans and tap into the learning disability development fund, which was to have involved £20 million of capital and up to £30 million in revenue. Due to the difficulty in making savings from long-term hospitals, that figure has been reduced to £22 million, which, as Mencap rather drily comments, "appears somewhat limited" in the context of an annual spend of more than £3 billion on adult learning disability services alone. That addition is welcome, but it is only a drop in the ocean.

Another aspect is the operation of implementation teams and their role in stimulating and supporting such local partnerships. The local disability partnerships are not to be statutory bodies, so their internal procedures and precise responsibilities remain hazy.

As regards the task ahead, we have already touched on issues such as housing. May I single out another, which impinges on employment prospects? The White Paper does not address the expansion of supported employment. The recent thrust of Department for Work and Pensions policies has aimed at progression to open employment through supported employment. That is not objectionable in principle, but there is a danger that it may displace chances for people with learning difficulties and, indeed, many people with physical disabilities. Our approach should involve finding out what is required across the pitch, whether in open employment that may be stimulated by the disability charities or in supported employment, and widening opportunities.

On the implementation target timetable, we have a precise and contemporary test. Joint investment programmes were supposed to be in place by April last year. Local action plans were to be developed to supplement the joint investment plans and submitted to the Department of Health's regional offices by 31 January—that is, yesterday. Therefore, the deadline expired 10 and a half hours ago. In these days of modest information technology capacity, it should not be beyond the wit of the Minister to tell the House how many such plans have been submitted, how many are outstanding, and what action she and her implementation team intend to take to chase up the laggards.

It is not just a matter of producing some words and calling that a plan. She should ask the implementation team to find out whether the local development plan and partnership boards have met and approved the joint investment plans that they have submitted. Is that a paper exercise, or do they really know what their priorities are?

I am pleased that the Minister stressed advocacy, because I have long been interested in that. It is an invaluable supporter for vulnerable people and harassed families. The national helpline is certainly valuable, as is the Department's £2 million extra for research, but I sense that the sums available from the strategy funds for advocacy are likely to be severely stretched. Can the Minister be sure that everyone who wants an advocate will get one in due course, and that that advocate will be qualified to support the circumstances of the particular case?

The hon. Lady may need to consider good practice in the workings of the system as delivered by the local partnerships. It may be necessary for someone in authority in the partnership—not advocating from outside—to field any individual case, to go on with that case and be the person in charge of it, and to knock official heads and budgets together to meet the needs of that individual.

On inspection and monitoring, the White Paper refers to the social services inspectorate and the Commission for Health Improvement. The Office for Standards in Education will chime in by inspecting schools and local education authority provision. I am not clear whether the implementation teams will also have a supervisory role, especially after the initial phase. Ministers need the ability to determine in a clear, joined-up way whether a partnership is working as intended. I have considerable sympathy with Mencap's suggestion of an annual report by Government to Parliament, ideally to be presented during learning disability week. It also suggests that, as well as an overview of achievements, that should include successful, person-centred outcomes and good practice.

That is the note on which I shall draw my remarks to a close. Today's debate is about setting up machinery to cajole an often cautious and defensive, but not malign, bureaucracy in the implementation of policy in an area in which every service user is uniquely different, and the range of services they require spreads broadly across national and local government. As the Minister said, there are more than 1 million people in England alone who have a claim on our attention.

There are genuinely shared objectives across the House, although perhaps—even in the minds of Ministers, dare I say—there are some tacit and even cynical reservations about the likelihood of success. Many service users and their families and carers have a direct interest in today's words being turned into reality, and an interest in seeing the frustrations and setbacks that they often encounter being alleviated or removed.

Conservative Members will press the Government to discharge their current responsibility to ensure that positive change happens. I am sure that all of us here approach this most sensitive of areas with a determination to avoid being accommodative or even patronising, but instead to be genuinely supportive and empowering.

10.44 am

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): The hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) initially welcomed the White Paper, and I welcome his welcome. He then made a number of criticisms, but in such a way that he stood on the shoulders of the report, because he had important points to make on partnership, advocacy and monitoring. We all want the admirable White Paper to be acted on and delivered. The principles contained in it will shape the future for people with learning disabilities.

At the start of his speech, the hon. Gentleman said that everyone in the Chamber spoke with one voice on this matter, and I agree. However, that has not always been the case, as he said in a point he made about me. Back in 1994, when the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill was introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry), following the Bill that had been introduced a few years earlier by Alf Morris, now Lord Morris, there was blood on the Floor of the House on a series of Fridays over how the rights of people with disabilities should be developed, including the rights of those with learning difficulties. That led to the resignation of Nicholas Scott and an apology in the House from Olga Maitland.

I welcome the change of attitude and approach that the Conservative party has displayed in opposition. The Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, which I picked up and ran with in 1995, contained a provision for a disability rights commission. Labour tried to amend the Disability Discrimination Bill that was going through the House at that time to include such a commission.

We argued that the most radical change we could get out of that Bill—we secured a number of changes to that legislation—was the establishment of a disability rights commission. When the Labour Government introduced that measure it was solidly supported by both sides of the House. The Conservatives had changed their position. At one time they blocked such a measure, but because of the criticisms in 1994 they rather reluctantly introduced the Disability Discrimination Bill in 1995. Their approach has been transformed, and I welcome that and the role that the hon. Gentleman has played in that transformation. It is healthy that we have this consensus, but that does not mean conformity in all areas. I may press the Government on various matters.

The hon. Gentleman made a distinction between mental health provisions and learning disability. Although it is right to make that distinction, there is not that absolute division in every area. The general description of people with learning disabilities includes people who suffer from mental health problems. There is an overlap, and we need to bear in mind the fact that some important considerations affect what is said about mental health legislation from the Department of Health and about this admirable White Paper.

I gathered from the hon. Gentleman's speech that he wanted to pursue a particular case. I am currently hoping to initiate an Adjournment debate about a vaccine damage case with which I have been dealing during the nearly 15 years for which I have been a Member of Parliament. There has been a great deal of correspondence between me and Government Departments, but now I want to make the case more public, and as soon as I can agree on a form of words with parents, helpers and others I shall be pressing strongly for the debate.

Discrimination takes many forms. When it involves race, ethnicity, nationality, faith and gender, it has moral aspects that call for legislation to educate society and also deal with the most obnoxious cases—although I accept that sin and laws do not always go together. Those considerations apply at least as strongly to discrimination on grounds of age and disability, but such discrimination is, moreover, logically peculiar. Discrimination plays on, indeed shamelessly exploits, differences. A white person is not a black person, a fact that some will emphasise to justify their prejudices. A man is not a woman; a Christian is not a Muslim, unless he or she converts; and in Northern Ireland people are very conscious that a Protestant is not a Catholic. Indeed, people are not allowed to forget that, because it is a tribal distinction made by extremists.

An able-bodied person, however, is potentially a disabled person. Nearly four years ago, I had a stroke in the Chamber. The current Speaker, then a Deputy Speaker, took me to St. Thomas' hospital and stayed for a couple of hours, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). I have recovered now, but for a time I was clearly a disabled person, and I am well aware that as I get older and develop arthritis and other problems, elements of disability creep up on me.

Similarly, a young person is getting older, and, if he or she survives, will become an elderly person. My late mother developed Alzheimer's, which put her in not just the aged but the disabled category. We are all potentially old people with many disabilities. Discrimination against disabled people is therefore very peculiar: it is, in a sense, discrimination against oneself. People do not normally discriminate against themselves. When people come to me with tax problems I try to deal with them straight away, whereas I deal with my own tax problems last, so I suppose I discriminate against myself in certain ways; but discrimination against oneself is not a normal characteristic of human behaviour. People are generally very partial in their own cause.

The discrimination with which we are trying to deal is, then, both wrong and very odd. It should be possible for us, and for disabled people, to explain its peculiarity and to explain why it is actually against the interests of those engaging in it.

Mr. Boswell: These are interesting points. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to borrow the old Latin tag "Everything that is unknown is inflated". One of the main difficulties with disability issues is the fact that there is ignorance in the population unless or until disabilities are encountered directly. That is why it is important for us to have had a lively and open debate in the Chamber and beyond, so that people understand the issues and how they should be handled.

Mr. Barnes: There is indeed a great lack of understanding, but avenues exist for the development of understanding. There are so many people with disabilities, including learning disabilities, that we all rub shoulders with them. Someone in most people's family networks will fall into one of those categories, which should enable us to sympathise and empathise.

In August, I led a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association delegation on a visit to Nigeria. There we met Professor Akinsete, leader of the national action committee on AIDS. I asked her whether the committee had made any mistakes. She said, "Yes. I am a professor of medicine, and we dealt with AIDS as a medical problem. But it is not just a medical problem; it is a wide social problem that encompasses a number of departments and interests. Now we tackle it by trying to bring together those departments and interests, and we are making much better progress." The committee is receiving good support from the Department for International Development's team in Nigeria.

When I saw that the White Paper had been produced by the Department of Health, I was a bit worried at first. What was happening here? Were the Government treating this as a purely medical problem? The White Paper, however, does not make that mistake. It does deal with health issues, but it also deals with housing, employment, family life, the problems of lifelong carers and the experiences of those with learning disabilities throughout their lives. It deals with special educational needs, pre-school provision and the transition that is involved when people leave school. Families begin to have fears at

[Mr. Barnes]

that stage. Parents think, "Things were fine when there was school and the day centre, but we are getting older. What will happen to the child who is now growing up?" They have helped that child to subsist. Provision is needed to give people the independence that they need in order to function in society. As those people get older, their difficulties are compounded.

On Monday, I visited a special needs consortium in Clay Cross, which wants me to deal with some particular problems. It is based at the Clay Cross pre-school playgroup, but three other groups are attached to it, two in the constituency of the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Paul Holmes), the Newbold parish church pre-school and the Walton village pre-school, and another in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover, the Stonebroom pre-school playgroup.

A lottery grant enables those playgroups to operate, but the funding for their special needs work goes up only to March 2003 and they do not know what will happen after that. They are exactly the type of group that needs assistance in line with the principles outlined in the White Paper.

While I admire the interdepartmental and interdisciplinary approach adopted in the White Paper, there is a worrying counter-trend in the Department of Health. It produced an earlier White Paper called "Reforming the Mental Health Act". I want to stress the links between the two concepts—the Venn diagram.

"Reforming the Mental Health Act" responded to popular fears about dangerous mental health patients. Obviously the public needs to be protected where there is a risk but there is a danger that the measure applying to mental health services is becoming a public protection measure and is taking away from some of the activities involved in community health provision. I am drawing on the experiences that the hon. Member for Chesterfield and I had when we visited the Hartington ward of the community health trust in north Derbyshire.

There are fears that the measure extends the criteria for detainment to those with drugs and alcohol-dependency problems, that there is no effective discharge procedure, and that patients lack rights prior to tribunals dealing with appeals. The measure may set back the campaign to reduce stigma, which we are anxious to do, deter patients from seeking help and break confidentiality. Professionals who share those feelings may want to detach themselves from that activity. Recruits may not want to work in that sector because of those pressures.

I hope that we will try to reconcile the two measures, although I recognise that we need to take public protection considerations into account. Whether the Department of Health should be leading on that is another matter, but in this White Paper the Department has been sensible enough to adopt the interdisciplinary approach. I want that approach to be taken to the mental health White Paper. I hope that, if there is a battle between the two White Papers, the one we are debating will be the victor.

The size of the problem in relation to learning disability has been outlined by the Minister. We need to deal with discrimination problems and to ensure that legislative, financial and support needs are met. I present the figures in a slightly different way from the Minister. In each constituency in the country, there are some 10,000 disabled people and 3,000 or so people with learning difficulties, of whom 500 are severely disabled people, so the problems are known to all MPs. It is a pity that more colleagues are not in the House today because we need to impress upon them the significance of the White Paper and the attention that needs to be given to it.

However, we are mistaken if we think that experts, advisers and politicians alone will solve the problems that have been highlighted in the White Paper. The Minister highlighted the significance of self-help provisions, and we must listen and give authority to organisations for disabled people. We are lucky in north Derbyshire because a number of organisations are doing exactly that. At Clay Cross in my constituency, the Derbyshire coalition for disabled people campaigns on behalf of disabled people in Derbyshire. At Ripley, outside my constituency, the Derbyshire centre for integrated living is the servicing, enabling body. Some of the same people are active in the two, but although their areas of responsibility cross, they wear different hats. Many areas have disabled access groups. In Dronfield, where I live, there is an active access group which is keen on the proposals in the White Paper.

Because of the impact of the Derbyshire coalition, North East Derbyshire district council has provided a breakthrough to work programme for disabled people, including those with learning difficulties. It has been able to place into work, sometimes in the district council itself, people with those difficulties.

The Minister mentioned London People First and Carol Lee. London People First is made up of people with learning disabilities. One of the proudest moments for me in my period in the House was when I introduced the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, and London People First produced it as a document for their members, in a form that was meaningful to people with learning disabilities. I will always remember my visit to that organisation when that document was produced. No doubt it will be working on the White Paper so that its members also have access to it.

We must listen to and empower such groups. We can do that through developing further the correct legislative framework and providing for self-advocacy, for example, which the Minister mentioned.

The Government have made a sound start. They have made full use of the Disability Discrimination Act. The scope of that legislation developed considerably, partly because it was in conflict with the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill which I was introducing at the time. Initially, the Disability Discrimination Bill was not intended to apply to Northern Ireland, so all the Northern Ireland parties signed up to the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. That led the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), who was the Minister responsible at the time, to announce that Northern Ireland was to be included in the disability Bill. There was some lack of provision in terms of transport and education, but this was rectified as the Bill went through the House. Some Conservative Members who were interested in extending civil rights were working behind the scenes to improve the legislation and some agreed to block my Bill so long as the Government's proposed legislation was changed in line with their requirements. That is all good politics and helped to improve the legislation which is now in force.

The Human Rights Act 1998 offers other avenues that can be pursued and developed. As I said earlier, the big achievement that resulted from the 1995 Act was the establishment of the Disability Rights Commission. It is only a pity that it was not set up a few years earlier.

The White Paper states on page 23 at paragraph 2.2:

> "The Government is committed to enforceable civil rights for disabled people in order to eradicate discrimination in society."

There has always been support in Government circles for the provision of full civil rights for disabled people and there have been encouraging indications that the Government have that objective in mind. The White Paper helps them to work towards that end.

In current legislation the problem is medically defined in terms of physical and learning disabilities. We need provisions that are directed against the discriminator. The primary factor is the perception in the mind of anyone who is crude enough to discriminate on the grounds of disability. The fact that a person is disabled is secondary; the hideous factor is the discrimination, although I agree that those whose problems are covered by the legislation to help chronically sick and disabled people need empowerment, assistance and the right to lead full and decent lives. That is required from future legislation.

The White Paper sets out the rights that people with learning disabilities should have, including the right to vote and ease of access to electoral provision. It proposes

> "providing comprehensive guidance to electoral administrators on helping disabled people, including those with learning disabilities, through the whole electoral process—from registering to vote until polling day itself."

I have always taken a considerable interest in electoral registration matters. The Minister who introduced the rolling register that is now in place was kind enough to describe me as the father of the rolling register. However, there is a great deal more to be done and we have various issues to pursue.

In 1994, when my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood introduced his Bill on civil rights, I introduced a Bill on electoral matters which included proposals concerning access to polling stations. Giving everyone, including disabled people, registration rights still does not cover the difficulties faced by disabled voters, who should have the same right as able-bodied people to exercise their franchise in person. They should not be pressurised to resort to proxy votes and postal votes. Obviously they should have the same access to those facilities as anyone else, but if they want to vote in person everything should be done to enable them to do so.

My Bill was not successful, but those provisions were included in the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill—a Bill I inherited from the disability movement and to which I added provisions to address that particular concern, which is shared by many disability organisations. I commend the publications by Scope, which produced three reports at consecutive elections about the continuing problem of access to polling stations. As votes are the building blocks of democracy, I hope that this matter will be further pursued and that the Home Office as the body responsible for such measures, will respond to the points that are raised in the White Paper.

The White Paper is an extremely valuable document. Along with the hon. Member for Daventry, I have climbed onto the shoulders of the report which has provided us with a commendable platform to present our argument.

11.18 am

Paul Holmes (Chesterfield): Liberal Democrats very much welcome the aspirations outlined in "Valuing People". As we have heard, it is a major and long overdue updating of its 30-year-old predecessor, the White Paper "Better Services for the Mentally Handicapped". Society has moved on a great deal since then, and in respect of attitudes towards all kinds of disability it has undoubtedly changed very much for the better.

As a teacher in mainstream secondary schools from 1979 to 2001, I certainly witnessed some of that change for the better. In recent years I taught mainstream classes of 30 and more pupils into which children with Down's syndrome and degrees of autism including fragile X syndrome have successfully been integrated, something that would have been very unlikely 30 years ago or even in 1979 when I started my teaching career. Regrettably, class sizes in secondary schools have got worse in recent years, otherwise the integration of children with all sorts of special needs would have been even more successful.

There can be little doubt that if the White Paper fulfils its promises to those with learning disabilities, and their carers, we will witness an even more dramatic change for the better. We very much welcome the inclusiveness agenda and many of the excellent proposals in the White Paper, but having willed the end are the Government prepared to will the means to the end and provide the financial resources that are necessary to fulfil the White Paper's promise of setting the four key principles of rights, independence, choice and inclusion at the core of provision of services for those with learning disabilities? As a former teacher, I know that those principles can work in a school setting if the money is there to provide the adaptations, support workers and the extra or adapted teaching materials. It cannot be done on the cheap or as a short-term project.

In the light of my own experience, I want to raise some concerns that are shared by Mencap, the Association of Directors of Social Services and the Royal College of General Practitioners. I welcome the establishment of a new learning disability development fund, and new money to fund the modernising of day centres and the development of supported living approaches. However, it is important to set the figures in context. In 1999–2000, for example, provisional expenditure on adult learning disability services was in excess of £3 billion, of which £1.4 billion was spent on health and £1.6 billion on social services. In addition, social services contributed about £308 million, and the Department of Health about £107 million, to supporting disabled children, not all of whom, however, had learning disabilities.

Set against that, the White Paper establishes a development fund of up to £30 million revenue and £20 million capital per year, for just two years. Such a figure is hardly significant compared with the overall sum. Obviously, much can be done by using existing funds more effectively, but the key point is that the White Paper's ambitious tones have been accompanied by distinctly unambitious funding. Indeed, it now appears that the initial revenue figure of up to £30 million has in practice been scaled down to an even more disappointing £22 million.

So, however much one might welcome the sentiments behind the White Paper, they are in danger of being made unrealistic by simple underfunding. Of course, we have

[Paul Holmes]

witnessed precisely the same elsewhere—for example, the excellent new national care standards for residential homes have already been undermined by gross underfunding. The relevant Government impact assessment was a massive 20 times lower than that of the Leonard Cheshire organisation. The Sue Ryder Foundation has already closed one home, NCH Action for Children has withdrawn provision in Wales altogether, and private care homes the length and breadth of the country are closing in record numbers. This excellent White Paper must not be undermined in the same way, yet a general vagueness about funding seems to beset the issue of housing for those with learning disabilities and, specifically, the impact of housing provision on the lives of those with learning disabilities.

As the White Paper correctly points out:

> "Department of Health research has shown that supported living is associated with people having greater overall choice and a wider range of community activities."

It makes the further obvious point that

> "small scale ordinary housing is likely to lead to better outcomes across a range of factors than large-scale housing or hostel provision."

That issue is all the more important because in England about 60 per cent. of adults with severe or profound learning disabilities—some 87,000 people—live with their parents. I welcome the White Paper's plans to resettle some 1,500 people who still live in long-stay hospitals, and to provide alternative living solutions for those who live with carers aged over 70. A cut-off age of 70 may be arbitrary and should surely be based on a needs assessment of individual families, rather than the nearest convenient round figure. However, I know from experience that it is better than no date at all. I have recently had to fight for many months to secure such an alternative living solution for an 85-year-old constituent of mine and her dependent adult son with learning disabilities. Her son himself is almost of pensionable age.

The Government have not yet clearly explained how the expansion of housing provision and the essential accompanying support will be funded. Because of more than 20 years of severe Government underfunding, local councils often provide housing and support only when there is a crisis in the family home. Independence and choice in one's living arrangements, where possible, are fundamental to the White Paper's four key principles of rights, independence, choice and inclusion. I would like the Government to make a full assessment of the full costs of providing housing for all people with learning disabilities.

Another of the White Paper's welcome aspirations is the stated objective of increasing the number of people with learning disabilities in work from the current lamentable figure of 10 per cent. to 30 per cent.—the same as for other disabled people. Although 30 per cent. is a poor enough figure, it would at least be a step forward. If the targets are to be achieved, the best way to do so is surely—as we have heard—through supported employment schemes. Can the Minister provide full assessments of the cost of such schemes, and a guarantee that funding will be ongoing? That would ensure that, once the targets are met, there can be no falling back in future.

Despite my general support for the White Paper, I am disappointed by its lack of attention to the needs of children with profound and multiple learning disabilities. Intellectual impairment is often accompanied by profound sensory impairment. Such people have the most profound needs, and any examination of the learning needs of this country's learning disabled must make them a priority. I call on the Minister to ensure that local agencies are obliged to target services toward that group, but she must also make a clear assessment of the cost of making such provision, set specific targets to meet their needs, and above all earmark the funding increase to ensure that those needs can be met.

On the proposed major changes to the provision of day services, we welcome the White Paper's requirement for local authorities to examine their dependence on day centres, and its moves to modernise day care centres, many of which are antiquated and inadequate. Change is essential if those centres are to provide the learning-impaired with meaningful experiences. The watchwords must be flexibility—with more activities provided outside the traditional hours of 9 to 5, Monday to Friday—and quality, with services tailored as well as possible to individual needs. The Minister must also note concerns that modernisation should not result in a reduction of services, and that the existing service is not removed before working alternatives are introduced.

On self-advocacy, I welcome the key actions listed in chapter 4 of the White Paper and agree with its assertion that the provision of advocacy services has been patchy and that those with learning disabilities have had little involvement in decision making until now. The £1.3 million that will be provided for self-advocacy and advocacy schemes across the country is to be welcomed, but I know from talking to representatives of disability associations that some uncertainty exists about how the cash will be split. Some fear that its provision may not extend much further than the initial three years.

The White Paper promises

> "£1.3 million per annum for the next three years to develop and expand advocacy services in partnership with the voluntary sector."

However, will funding dry up after that time, leaving stranded those who rely upon such services? Will the Minister give assurances that existing self-advocacy schemes that are funded by social services will receive ongoing funding, instead of the Government counting their existing money as part of the promised £1.3 million? Will she give assurances that, when new self-advocacy schemes are set up under the new fund in the White Paper, social services will not withdraw money from other existing self-advocacy services? Will she also give assurances that, when new self-advocacy schemes are set up under the White Paper, they will have a long-term and consistent stream of funding that will continue beyond the three-year commitment made in the White Paper?

Finally, on the question of practical and funding problems, I draw the Minister's attention to the resource implications for general practitioners of resettling into the community those who used to be concentrated in the old-style mental handicap hospitals. About 60,000 former residents have already been resettled and registered with their local GP. However, the Royal College of General Practitioners calculates that that often represents a fourfold increase per patient in the GP's drugs bill and work load. Dr. Graham Martin, the chairman of the RCGP's learning disabilities working group, points out:

> "GPs and Primary Care Trusts need extra resources if they are to provide the level of care that is appropriate for patients with learning disabilities and which they deserve."

My concluding point, which shows that money and other resources are not the only issues, concerns educational principle. The Minister has mentioned protecting the rights of those with learning disabilities in terms of access to mainstream education, and I have already referred to my experience of working with children with learning disabilities in mainstream education. However, the Government are undertaking a disastrous lurch in the direction of creating an irrevocable two-tier system of education in England, as we will discover in next week's debate on the Education Bill. Specialist schools of various kinds will select by aptitude, ability and aspiration, while "bog-standard" comprehensive schools will take the rest, along with £500,000 less per school.

The Government's own figures, such as those published by the Department for Education and Skills for 2000–01, make it clear that across the country as a whole—not just with individual schools, but right across the spectrum—specialist schools, faith schools, grammar schools and technology colleges take less than the national average of pupils who qualify for free school meals or have special educational needs. The latter category includes children with learning difficulties, who will not be good for schools' league table positions.

Can the Minister reassure us that by some miraculous amendment next week, safeguards will be put into the Education Bill to protect the rights of children with learning disabilities, which the White Paper sets out to enhance, but which the increasing development of a two-tier education system is undermining?

In his foreword to the White Paper, the Prime Minister says:

> "I know the publication of a White Paper, however good its proposals, does not itself solve problems. The challenge for us all is to deliver the vision set out in this document so the lives of many thousands of people with learning disabilities will be brighter and more fulfilling."

I hope that the undoubted good intentions in the White Paper really will be implemented and funded, and will also be protected from the impact of other less worthy Government initiatives such as the Education Bill.

11.31 am

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate, even though it draws us away from our constituency engagements on a Friday. For me that is unusual, but this is such an important debate that it is a privilege to take part in it, especially given the tone of the discussion so far. Hon. Members may put different emphasis on different policies, but everybody in the House wants to see the same outcomes, and we have already heard some thoughtful speeches.

As the Minister would expect, I want to talk about special educational needs in the overall context of what we have to do to prevent people from being excluded from society. The White Paper, like the debate so far, acknowledges that many people are excluded from society through no fault of their own.

Before I entered the House, my main occupation was in the textile industry and in manufacturing, but for four or five years immediately before I came here I did a lot of charity work and fundraising, some of it on a professional basis. One of my roles immediately before I was elected was working with homeless women in London.

That was an eye-opener, and also in some ways a useful introduction to the House of Commons, because the people with whom we were dealing had severe problems and were excluded from society. It is interesting to note that the people who wanted to help them came from what could be described as the elite, and the job stretched my abilities—and, I should add, my education—in every direction. That was a useful preparation for coming to the House, because when we deal with our constituents we often get stretched in many directions.

What struck me particularly at that time was the prevalence of mental illness, and the way in which it affected people. My role was to raise money to create a hostel for homeless women in London, and that was successfully done. The home took in homeless people and resettled them, but it was not simply a matter of putting someone in a home and then finding them a flat. We had to get people to try to understand why they had become homeless in the first place, and to deal with the problems that had caused that. When we got them into their own home again, we had to continue to work with them to ensure that they did not have further problems.

Many of those people had mental illnesses. They were not necessarily young people; some were older, and some were refugees. They came from all walks of life.

One of the common factors was that those people had never been rich; they were obviously quite poor. That does not mean that rich people do not have mental illnesses or become homeless. They certainly do. I became aware of many quite well-off people who had mental illnesses and had become homeless, but they were shielded from the glare of publicity, and did not become obvious to us or to the rest of society because they had friends who could look after them.

Many people with learning disabilities and mental illnesses do not have such friends, and they end up in hostels or on the streets, with severe problems. That taught me a thing or two about what is going on in society—both what we see and what we do not see. My work had a profound effect on me.

When I entered the House I, like many other Members, was asked to make one or two speeches on crime, and I began to think about the massive changes that had taken place in the 20th century. The rise in crime was pretty constant during that century and, on the face of it, it is difficult to correlate social factors with that rise in crime. The provision of health care, education and housing was far better at the end of the 20th century than at the beginning, and there was far more prosperity, so I began to ask myself why, if all those social factors had improved, had crime increased so tremendously during that century?

I came to two conclusions. One was that attitudes had changed. The world had changed, and people were not taught to tell right from wrong as they once were. However, to say that is to oversimplify. It also became clear that there was a group of people who probably had not shared in the great improvements and advances of the century—people who had not got much better health care or education and were not much better off.

Mr. Boswell: I shall not go into all the interesting points that my hon. Friend is beginning to touch on, such as the relationship of social developments with criminality, and I would not want to identify deficiencies

[Mr. Boswell]

in basic skills too closely with learning difficulties, although there is some correlation between them—but does my hon. Friend not find it remarkable and disturbing, as I do, that about 60 per cent. of the population of our prisons now have severe functional difficulties with basic skills, which may by definition make them unfit for economic participation in the labour force?

Mr. Robertson: My hon. Friend is right, and has picked up a point that I was going to make.

If we think about the people who have not shared in the great advances of the 20th century, we begin to understand why things have gone wrong for some people. I do not, of course, mean to suggest that everybody in that category ends up as a criminal. That is obviously not true, and I do not think that anybody in the House would assume that that is what I am saying.

As I continued to study crime and the prison population, I found that, as my hon. Friend says, about 60 per cent. of the prison population are either illiterate or semi-illiterate. Again, I am not saying that anyone who is illiterate will automatically commit a crime, but there is a reason to look more deeply for the causes of crime.

I am not saying that all prison sentences are strong enough; indeed, I think that many of them should be stronger. None the less, we need to understand why the crimes are committed in the first place. There is an obvious correlation between the crime figures and a lack of education and basic skills. I was astounded when I checked up on this, because I could not believe the figures, but I found that more than 90 per cent. of prisoners have some form of mental illness or other mental problem.

Those problems fall into five different categories, but most prisoners—indeed, almost all prisoners—have some form of what used to be called mental deficiency. I hesitate to use that term, but do so in the absence of a better one. There is a great problem. Yes, we must address sentencing policy, but that is a matter for another debate; in this debate, we must examine why people end up in that position when we allegedly have an education system that prevents that.

Many people leave school either illiterate or semi-literate. That is a factor in crime and social exclusion. Today's world is extremely competitive. In that respect, the world has changed more in the past 20 years than in the preceding 80 years. I have the pleasure of being a member of the Standing Committee on the Office of Communications Bill, in which we are discussing the massive changes that have taken place not only in television programmes, but through the emergence of the internet.

The changes in the world and the pace with which they have taken place are incredible. Now, only the strong survive—but in a civilised society we must do better than that. People who are not properly educated will be disadvantaged and excluded from society to some extent. We have to ensure not only that they have some way of making up ground, but—more important—that they do not fall by the wayside and become involved in crime or drugs. That is a big challenge.

There is a problem of acceptance. I hope that I will be allowed to take a gentle swipe at politicians, perhaps even those of my own party. There has been a reluctance to accept that people who are not well educated and who therefore have no job or are caught up in the dependency culture are more likely to fall by the wayside and to turn to crime. The problem is that that is regarded as an excuse for crime. It is not an excuse: many people in the same circumstances do not turn to crime. However, it sometimes serves as an explanation, and as a reason to look deeper.

I am glad that the shadow Home Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), has recently opened up that debate, and I applaud him for doing so. He made it quite clear—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. The hon. Gentleman must relate his interesting remarks to the White Paper on people with learning disabilities.

Mr. Robertson: I certainly shall, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I apologise for straying.

My point is that learning disabilities or mental illness are often not recognised. Physical illness is much more easily recognised than mental illness. That failure to recognise and address the issues might be because of the stigma that attached to mental illness in the past, or because we find it frightening to talk about, or because we find the people who suffer mental illness rather challenging.

Some of the problems that children have, such as autism, dyslexia and dyspraxia—an illness I came across only recently—are not recognised and identified quickly enough, and not dealt with properly. The result is that many children, through no fault of their own but because of their learning disabilities, do not receive the education that they deserve.

The need to provide education to such children brings me to the issue of special educational needs. With my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) and the Minister, who was then at the Department for Education and Skills, I had the pleasure to serve on the Committee that considered the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. Although we welcomed much of its content, certain aspects of that legislation caused me concern.

The legislation emphasised inclusion, which in theory I applaud, but when that inclusion in education does not provide for the child, that child becomes excluded from society later. The legislation was rather prescriptive, stating that the child had to be educated in a mainstream school unless there was an appropriate statement; and even if there was a statement, the child had to be educated in the mainstream unless that was

> "incompatible with the wishes of his parent, or . . . the provision of efficient education for other children."

The emphasis was on inclusion.

Many children, especially those with moderate learning difficulties, are included and do very well in mainstream schools. However, in my opinion, many children with moderate or more severe learning difficulties—perhaps with emotional and behavioural difficulties—need special provision. The 2001 Act was not helpful in that respect—in fact, it was rather destructive.

My remarks are founded on my experience in Gloucestershire, which, for the avoidance of doubt, is run these days by an unholy Lib-Lab alliance, or pact as it used to be called. I make that point lest people think that Gloucestershire is run by the Conservatives; it has not been for a long time. I am greatly concerned about education policy in Gloucestershire. I am not the only one concerned about special educational needs provision; a damning Ofsted report was published in January.

Inappropriate education can lead to exclusion, even though the intention is to include. Although it might be regarded as inclusive to educate all children in one school, if some children fall behind because they cannot cope with that education, they will end up excluded from society. The theory will not work in practice. Many pupils and parents in Gloucestershire are concerned about the removal of the special schools.

The Minister, dealing with the 2001 Act, said repeatedly that the Act and Government policy at that time should not lead to the wholesale closure of special schools, but Gloucestershire county council decided otherwise and that it should close the special schools. Bownham Park school in Stroud was earmarked for closure. Parents, pupils and everyone else connected with the school ran a tremendous campaign to keep it open; unfortunately, the adjudicator decided that the school should close, with the decision being announced the day after the general election. That is not a political point; it is a fact.

That was extremely sad, not only for those involved in that school, but for many other teachers and head teachers throughout the mainstream sector. They recognise that, regardless of the good intentions of any Government, historically resources have never followed pupils. Mainstream schools have never had adequate resources to provide the support required by children with special needs.

The council has not learned the lesson. This morning, I received an e-mail telling me that Gloucestershire's cabinet has now raised closure notices on Dean Hall school and Oakdene school in Forest of Dean. Oakdene provides for children with severe learning difficulties. The hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Diana Organ) is to present to the cabinet a petition carrying 5,000 signatures, protesting against the closures. Although we hear from the Government that their policies are not intended to lead to the wholesale closure of special schools, in Gloucestershire—the area that I am paid to represent—there is a programme of wholesale closure of special schools.

The one special school that falls in my constituency, Alderman Knight school, has sent a delegation to the House of Commons and run a tremendous campaign to try to protect itself. Not only do pupils at that school have learning disabilities as described in the White Paper, but they have physical disabilities as well. It is extremely difficult for those children to be educated in mainstream schools. The Minister will be tired of hearing me make this plea, but I urge the Government to re-examine their policy of inclusion.

I do not want the House to think that it is only my opinion that provision for special educational needs is not working well in Gloucestershire. Paragraph 5 of the Ofsted report describes the background in Gloucestershire, and states:

> "Against this generally favourable background, the LEA has serious weaknesses."

One of the serious weaknesses listed is the strategy for special educational needs. The process that I have been describing is one such reason for the Ofsted report's criticism.

Looking in more detail at the section in the Ofsted report on special educational needs, one paragraph says:

> "The strategy is to promote inclusion by educating pupils with moderate learning difficulties in mainstream schools, and as a consequence, closing the area special schools providing for these pupils."

Again we find that the policy is leading to the wholesale closure of such schools. The report continues:

> "The closure of the special school in the first area to be tackled was only achieved after the intervention of the office of the schools adjudicator. In the remaining three areas, there is confusion in the schools and among parents as to whether the closure of special schools or a change of status is being considered . . . As a result of the slow process, the special schools towards the end of the cycle of the review fear that it will become increasingly difficult to recruit staff, maintain pupil numbers and ensure that the pupils' curricula needs are met."

Scare stories lead to staff disappearing, which then leads to falling roll numbers. Then people can turn round and say that there is no demand for the services of such schools—but we all know that there is.

The report goes on to say:

> "Despite the existence of the development plan, most of the schools visited had no confidence that the members of the council have a strategy for the future of special educational needs provision in the LEA."

That means that because the schools are earmarked for closure, but there is not an adequate replacement policy, the resources will not follow the pupils into mainstream schools. The report goes on to make another point:

> "Most serious of all, although the documentation makes constant references to inclusion and facilitating access, it fails to show how its proposed changes will raise the standards of achievement of pupils with special educational needs."

That is the crucial point. In other words, we are talking about theories and not setting out how the standards of achievement of pupils with special educational needs will be attained.

Highlighting the problem further, the report goes on to say:

> "In addition to the extensive special educational needs provision within the county"—

of which I am proud—

> "the LEA maintains a number of pupils in out-of-county placements. The total number has reduced . . . but the number of pupils whose placements are joint funded with the social services department has doubled. Very few of these pupils need to go to schools out-of-county for educational reasons. Rather"—

this is the crucial point—

> "they are placed outside because of inadequate respite, fostering or residential arrangements within the county."

The report recommends that the LEA needs to

> "work with health authorities and the county's social services department, to reduce the number of cases where exceptional needs prevent the completion of special educational needs statements within 18 weeks".

The statementing situation is obviously of great concern. I fear that you will call me to order if I go down that road, Madam Deputy Speaker, so suffice it to say that the approach is rather "one size fits all", which we want to try to avoid.

[Mr. Robertson]

In general, I welcome the fact that the White Paper addresses the difficulties caused to many people by the fact that they have learning disabilities, whatever that means—the definition is quite wide. I have tried to highlight one or two areas where people can fall by the wayside, end up homeless or perhaps committing crime, or are excluded from society even if they are not homeless or criminals. I hope that the White Paper will address those issues. I hope that it is also able to identify ways in which we can put things right.

I did not go to a grammar school, because, as I have said before in the House, I failed to negotiate the 11-plus successfully. I went to a secondary modern school. I make that point only because I went to the school appropriate for me; it provided me with the appropriate education. So I would not want people for the sake of the theory of inclusivity to be excluded from society. That is the plea that I yet again make to the Minister, with whom I have some sympathy because, even though she has changed Departments, she still has to suffer my pleas.

11.55 am

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): I am very pleased to take part in this debate. I am afraid that I will speak not as magniloquently as some of the previous speakers, but briefly.

The only charity in which I have any involvement is a charity for Down's syndrome children. I have recently been to see it in action, not in Britain but in Moscow. I hope that the House will forgive me if I begin by giving everybody in Britain a pat on the back for the way we treat people with severe learning disabilities. The objective of the charity—it is called Downside Up, and I have absolutely no inhibition about plugging it in the House—is to export to Russia our ideas about what constitutes disability and how parents should cope with having a disabled child.

It is no exaggeration to say that during the communist epoch—and, indeed, it continues to be so to this day—the Russian approach to Down's syndrome children has been barbaric. In many Russian hospitals, as soon as Down's is diagnosed in a new-born child—from the epicanthal fold, the disposition of the thumb and so on—parents are told that it would be best if their infant were left to die and if nature were allowed to take its course as soon as possible.

I met a man called Alexander who received just such a verdict seven years ago on the birth of his daughter. He told me of his fury at that verdict and of his joy at what his daughter had since achieved. One could see that she could read fluently, sing, dance and all the rest of it. She patently enjoyed life to the full.

I felt that the charity was doing something wonderful and remarkable in exporting a particularly British concept of the value of the individual, not as a unit that might be deemed valueless to communist collectivity, but as a person with rights and potential. That is of course the theme of the White Paper "Valuing People". You might be surprised to discover, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I have read it very carefully. I think that it is rather good; on the whole, I find it hard to dissent from anything that it says, although I am not quite sure that the Minister is entitled to crow in such extravagant terms about the absence of jargon in it.

I listened with great interest to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson), in which he dwelt so eloquently on the themes of social inclusion and exclusion. We now use those bits of jargon repeatedly in the course of our daily lives, but I have to confess to the House that I do not know what they mean. What is social inclusion and what is social exclusion? I know that the Minister has other things on her mind, but I should be grateful if, when she replies to our debate, she could supply a snappy definition of social inclusion, as well as social exclusion; is it not being invited to top parties? The Deputy Prime Minister, I believe, runs the social exclusion unit; doubtless, such a definition would help him to explicate its function to the wider world.

The White Paper is admirable in its aims. However, Members will not be surprised that I wish that it had more bearing on the situation on the ground as I see it week in, week out in south Oxfordshire. My experience is of parents at the end of their tether, trying to cope with children with severe learning disabilities, and who are now finding that central props in their lives have been, or are about to be, kicked away. Because of its great affluence, Oxfordshire has had a poor per capita settlement in social services, and there is currently a shortfall of at least £5 million. As Members will know, housing in Oxfordshire is expensive and it is hard to recruit and retain staff, which is why valuable day care centres are under threat. Families in the Henley area in particular are greatly concerned about the future of the Chiltern respite centre, where overnight stays have just been curtailed. I am currently in lengthy correspondence with the parents of a severely disabled young man who faces eviction from his care home and has nowhere else to go because of shortages and difficulties in social services in south Oxfordshire.

In conclusion, for all the White Paper's fine words and good intentions, it envisages only £50 million of new money. How much of that will go to help the most vulnerable people in Henley and south Oxfordshire? One cannot but admire the White Paper's intentions, but it is legitimate to wonder how many parsnips its fine words will butter in the day care centres of south Oxfordshire. I hope that the Minister can give some comfort to the most vulnerable people in my constituency and society at large.

12.2 pm

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): If there is one thing that we, as Members of Parliament, must do for our constituents, it is to value the people whom we are elected to represent. I therefore welcome the White Paper and all the contributions to our debate.

We rightly approach the issue largely through consensus, as we all encounter it every week in our constituencies. People who are disadvantaged for whatever reason deserve our support and the backing of Members of Parliament on both sides of the House. I therefore thank the Minister for presenting the White Paper. As was made clear by my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), Opposition Members endorse an overwhelming majority of the points that it raises and we shall certainly work alongside Government Members to achieve many of its objectives. As the House knows, I am a new Member, elected for the first time last year. I had not encountered the issue before, and it is yet another area in which I am getting an education. Most citizens do not often come across people with learning disabilities who are disadvantaged in the ways that we have discussed today.

As a Member holding regular weekly surgeries, it is my experience that parents of people with learning disabilities come to see their parliamentary representative to ask me to raise issues in Parliament or with the local council; I am a councillor and will remain one until the local elections. I feel responsible; it is my duty as an MP to do everything that I can and use every possible opportunity to raise issues of concern to parents who have to live with their children's disabilities day in, day out, and to the voluntary sector. I shall therefore raise those issues, as is my duty, in the London borough of Havering, of which my constituency is part, and the United Kingdom Parliament.

We must do everything in our power to support the voluntary sector. Government schemes are not necessarily the way forward. If we can use as many of the available resources as possible to assist local voluntary groups to provide a service to the community, that is often a far better way of providing for those with learning disabilities. There are many such local organisations and voluntary groups in my constituency and in the London borough of Havering.

Mr. Boswell: Does my hon. Friend agree that the system of direct payments to service users and their carers is almost tailor-made for accessing the range of opportunities that the voluntary sector can offer?

Mr. Rosindell: I endorse my hon. Friend's point. In all areas of Government policy, we should ensure as far as possible that money is given directly to those providing the service. That is a more efficient system that reduces red tape and bureaucracy and means fewer bureaucrats and civil servants spending taxpayers' money, which can instead be spent directly where it is most needed, by those at the grass roots who understand the priorities and how the money can be used to best effect for the people whom we wish to help.

In my constituency and in the London borough of Havering, we are fortunate to have so many organisations dedicated to the care of those who suffer from learning disabilities and to assisting the parents and relatives who live with the problem day in, day out. Last Friday, I visited St. Bernard's day centre in the constituency of the hon. Member for Hornchurch (John Cryer) with my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson). The centre serves all three of the borough's constituencies—Romford, Hornchurch and Upminster. I met the parents and afterwards the people who attend the day centre and who need vital care.

Parents raised several issues that I hope the Minister will consider. There seems to be an immense shortage of respite care. I hope that the Government will find ways of enhancing the opportunities for respite care, which is so badly needed, particularly when the parents are elderly. It is incredibly difficult for people reaching their later years—people in their 60s or 70s or even older—to cope with a child who is growing older and who has huge problems and learning disabilities. Respite care would go a long way to assist them. That was the main issue that parents raised.

I have not heard mention today of speech therapy, which is another matter regularly raised by parents. Recently, the parents of a young boy called Patrick who lives in my constituency came to see me. They are distraught. He attends a local special needs school, Dycourts, which is in the Upminster constituency but serves the entire borough of Havering. He desperately needs more speech therapy, but there is a chronic shortage of teachers who can provide that service. It is difficult to find people willing to take on the task.

Patrick's parents, who are not necessarily well off, are told that they can pay £50 an hour for that service through the private sector, but the local authority cannot provide the service because of the shortage of speech therapists. I hope that the Minister will look into that matter, too. The problem is growing. The ability to communicate is the most important tool that any human being can have. People with learning disabilities who cannot speak or communicate with their family or those around them are hugely disadvantaged. I hope that the Government will consider further the role of speech therapy. I wrote to the Secretary of State for Health on 21 November about the specific case to which I referred—I have the letter here—but I am sorry to say that I have not yet received a reply. I hope that the Minister will look into the matter.

I welcome the White Paper and practically everything that it contains. I should like to highlight one or two points. The Prime Minister speaks in the foreword about a brighter and more fulfilling life for people with learning disabilities. He says:

> "It is a challenge that I am determined this Government will meet."

I applaud that commitment and I hope that he intends to follow it through, but without adequate funding, such words can mean nothing. I hope that the Minister will ensure that, whatever proposals are made, the Government will make certain that adequate funding is made available for the aims that we all want to be achieved. I applaud everything that has been said, but believe that we must not give false hope to people who are in great need of help. We must be careful not to promise the earth and propose services that cannot be provided simply because the resources are not made available. I urge caution on the Minister with regard to making promises that we might not be able to keep. We must be careful about the words that we use. Maximising opportunities for disabled children must be our first priority. Disabled children in Britain need and deserve better support and protection and greater opportunities. I hope that we will all work to ensure that that is what they get.

I mentioned respite care and the need to support those who dedicate their lives to looking after disadvantaged people. I refer especially to the parents of such children. I urge the Government to do more for those carers—people who could probably do so many other things with their lives, but who devote themselves to their children and others who need their support. Respite care is one means of giving such people greater opportunities to take the rest that they need from having to cope with the daily life of caring for somebody who has severe learning disabilities.

I am pleased that housing is highlighted in the White Paper. We must ensure that the institutional development and buildings that we have had for many years are phased out. We should give people the opportunity to live in places where they feel comfortable. Residential care is so much better for everybody. We should work towards purpose-built modern buildings, so I am glad that that is highlighted. Such work is being done in my borough, and I applaud it.

[Mr. Rosindell]

The White Paper also talks about giving people a fulfilled life—something that we all endorse. That includes modernising day services, giving people equal access to education and lifelong learning and opposing any form of discrimination. Yes, discrimination does exist. I endorse the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) about the puzzling nature of some of the expressions that are used. There is uncertainty about what terms such as "inclusiveness" mean. When such expressions are used, it is most important that we see action that improves people's lives. Words often mean little to people. I think that they mean little to the vast majority of our constituents, who want positive changes and action that will allow people to lead happier, better and more fulfilled lives. Words are not as important as real action, which will provide a better future for people who deserve a better life. As Members of Parliament, or, in the case of the Minister, as members of the Government, we can use our power to achieve those things for the people whom we represent.

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): My hon. Friend mentioned lifelong learning, which is of great interest to me. It is a tragedy for many people who want to engage in lifelong learning that the Government took such a strange attitude to the quality of individual learning account training providers, as a result of which they were forced to close down the scheme having overspent on it by £63 million—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not see how that relates to the debate.

Mr. Rosindell: I am sure that my hon. Friend's point is valid, but perhaps a question could be put to the Minister on another occasion when we are debating that subject.

"Discrimination" is a word that is used frequently; I hear it regularly in this place, particularly from Labour Members. I am concerned that we should not use words that inflame the situation. Sadly, it is a fact of life that people are different. We will not change that through legislation. The word "discrimination" is used so often, and it is not necessarily an appropriate word in every instance. No one denies that discrimination exists, but it is important to get to the root of problems rather than use words as a cover for political correctness.

I want to refer to an article published in *Community Care* last June. It states:

> "Research published this week by Mencap to coincide with National Learning Disability Week reveals that despite positive attitudes to people with a disability, many people with a learning difficulty still face discrimination in everyday life and exclusion from mainstream society. Nine out of 10 people with a learning difficulty experienced bullying in the last year."

None of us would condone that. All of us want those problems to be eradicated. We must bring people together without trying to pretend that differences do not exist; they do. We must be careful that we do not give the false impression that everyone in society, whatever their educational background, and whatever disabilities they may have, can suddenly be lifted up to exactly the same level. Of course, we would all love that to happen, but we must be realistic. We must do everything we can, but we should not use words that can give an impression that can ultimately lead to disappointment.

I want to refer to one or two cases from constituency, and my borough, Havering. In Havering, many aspects of the White Paper are applauded by councillors from all parties, and, indeed, by borough officers. Only yesterday evening, I received details of some of the progress being made in my borough in relation to the points raised in the White Paper, even at this early stage. Havering continues to fund the excellent London People First organisation, which operates in my constituency. It has helped to establish the second service user parliament in the United Kingdom. Assisting more people with learning disabilities and their carers to access direct payments has provided a great advantage. Havering provides cash payments to help people with learning disabilities to organise their own care. If people can do that without being guided all the time by those who work in council offices, that is a good thing. Let us give people more opportunities to be independent and to make their own decisions. It must be a good thing to work towards promoting independence and reducing reliance on local social services departments.

Developing a person-centred approach is vital, and in Havering, we have excellent services such as the Jackson's Cafe. We have initiated or funded a number of other new developments, such as the new supported housing schemes, which residents are incredibly excited about. Those schemes give them the opportunity to lead more independent lives. A new joint community learning disability team is a model for people in many other services who have come to see it as a service that integrates all health and social services provision.

A new worker is also being employed, funded by a local bank and employed by Havecare, a local voluntary organisation dedicated to looking after the interests of carers and those with learning disabilities, and helping them through difficult periods. The new person is being employed for that purpose in a public-private partnership in this instance, and I hope that that will be a success.

The last long-stay hospital in Havering—Little Highwood—will close in 2003, and the residents will all be housed in purpose-built quality homes. That must be the way forward for all those with learning disabilities who need care outside the family home. Havering has also established a local partnership board, consisting of representatives from all the key local sectors, including voluntary groups and other organisations involved in the care of people with learning disabilities. We are establishing a pooled budget under the Health Act 1999, under which budgets between health and social care are to be pooled to avoid divisions and complications between services. That is another positive step forward.

My borough supports a range of activities, such as theatre productions and sports for the disabled. These are leisure activities that we should encourage and support, as they give people the opportunity to get out and take part in the activities that the vast majority of people take for granted—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I must ask the hon. Gentleman to relate his remarks to the White Paper.

Mr. Rosindell: I am about to come to that, Madam Deputy Speaker. If there is a criticism of the White Paper, it is that it does not address the funding issues, especially the need for more revenue to support the large number of children surviving into adulthood who would previously not have survived, and the number of older people with learning disabilities whose life expectancy has increased to the point at which many outlive their families, particularly their elderly parents.

More children are being diagnosed with disorders such as autism and attention deficit disorder, yet few specialist services exist to support the parents of those children. The same can be said of primary health care. Although it is slowly improving, people with learning disabilities are, sadly, not particularly well cared for by their general practitioners. They need specialist primary care services. To some extent, the White Paper is Government policy without guaranteed Government funding. A thorough review of the needs of people with learning disabilities and their carers in the next comprehensive spending review later this year would make that point, and I hope that the Minister will take that on board.

Mr. Boswell: Is my hon. Friend aware that a thoroughly desirable practice is growing up in primary care trusts, in which one of the partners specialises in a particular area of practice? It might be possible for a named individual in each trust to take the lead on learning disability issues, to set an example and to provide a focus of interest in the trust.

Mr. Rosindell: I support that view. Making an arrangement whereby someone specialises in an area is the most efficient way to deal with a policy or need. My hon. Friend makes a valid point and I hope that the Minister takes it on board.

The additional costs to local government need to be addressed as councils will be held responsible for the loss of such services. Councils need to show community leadership in speaking out for people with learning disabilities, who are frequently misunderstood and discriminated against. They are also disproportionately the victims of crime that is often repeated and targeted. I am sure that we all agree that that is shameful.

Local government has a role in promoting the needs of people with learning disabilities and their integration in society. That campaign has been running for at least a century and I hope that it does not run for yet another century. We must address these issues and I hope that the Government and the Minister take those points on board. We must all work together on the objectives set out in the White Paper and Conservative Members will do all that we can to play our part in achieving their success.

12.26 pm

Jacqui Smith: This has been a well-informed and constructive debate. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have made good use of their constituency experience to contribute to achieving an objective in which, as the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) made clear, we all share: turning the aspirations of "Valuing People" into reality for people with learning disabilities and improving their opportunities.

The hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) has a long history of involvement in this area, before and since being elected to the House, and he raised a number of important issues, which I hope to cover. One relates to the challenge for providers of learning disability services. Some people have particular needs and display particularly challenging behaviour, so recognising those needs and enabling local providers to develop specialist services for people with severely challenging behaviour is a priority for the £20 million capital element of the learning disability development fund.

The hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members also emphasised the need for national and local partnership to deliver the improvements that we want to achieve and suggested that levers are required to ensure its existence. I concur, which is why I am pleased that the flexibilities made available by the Health Act 1999 are being used to achieve better joint working between health and social services departments. The hon. Member for Romford referred to that. In fact, 23 of the 65 areas in which Health Act flexibilities are in place cover learning disability matters.

I strongly agree that that partnership must involve the voluntary sector and the hon. Member for Daventry is right that direct payments provide a way to ensure that. I referred to the Department's important partnership with Mencap to provide a telephone helpline, but partnership does not always come easy, which is why the Department's website already contains advice to partnership boards on developing partnership working. We shall issue further guidance after consulting.

The hon. Member for Daventry also made an important point about transitions. They do necessarily happen at a particular age or time. Everyone—even adults, but especially disabled children and young people—goes through a range of transitions, whether from home to school, from school to school, or from living at home to living independently. It is precisely because of those different transitions that we need to develop a person-centred approach to designing services, and to back that up the Department has published further guidance on person-centred planning to ensure that partnership boards have the understanding and expertise to make that a reality.

Several hon. Members rightly referred to carers. I am sure that all hon. Members would want to put on record their admiration for the work of carers. They ensure that the people in their care, especially learning-disabled people, have the opportunities that we would want them to have, so we have a responsibility to support carers. The Government's strategy on carers is taking that forward in a range of ways.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) and the hon. Members for Romford and for Daventry raised the issue of older carers who are concerned about their responsibilities for their sons and daughters with learning disabilities. In the revenue and capital expenditure of the development fund we give priority to supported living approaches, especially for people with learning disabilities whose carers are becoming elderly, because we recognise that that is a particular need.

The hon. Member for Daventry made a particular point about the regulatory impact assessment for care standards for younger adults. I understand that that has been placed in the Library. In wider terms, the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000 on common national standards and improved quality of residential and domiciliary care will

[Jacqui Smith]

help learning-disabled people by ensuring that care is of a high standard and that users can feel confident that those standards put their interests at the very centre.

Several hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Paul Holmes), raised the issue of housing. As I have already said, there is priority in capital spending for housing. Along with the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, we are developing the joint circular and guidance on commissioning the housing care and support services required to support housing choice. That has been delayed, but it was partly so that it could coincide with the important work on supporting people. It is vital that those policies are developed in tandem. The guidance will include a discussion of how local strategies should be developed to shift provision and offer more choice, how people with learning disabilities and carers can be involved in the planning and commissioning process, information about the costs of schemes and how capital and revenue funding can be secured, the differences between the options and practical examples that can be drawn on, and performance indicators to monitor progress.

Some of the resources for housing choice will come from the development fund, but there are other important sources. The majority of capital funding for new housing provision is through the Housing Corporation's approved development programme. It allocates resources to registered social landlords in line with the priorities identified by local authorities in their housing strategies and within the framework of Government legislation and housing policies. That is why it is important that the role we have given learning disability partnership boards, particularly to develop their housing strategies by 2003, feeds into the establishment of needs and priorities within the local authority housing strategy. We want them to benefit from other forms of housing support as well. We also want local authorities to map both current housing provision options and—because we want to promote choice and broaden scope—their future development.

I assure the hon. Member for Daventry that the local learning disability partnerships are all operating. As he said, the joint investment plans were due to arrive in social care regions yesterday, but in the circumstances I am afraid I cannot tell him precisely how many have been received. I can, however, assure him that the information will be passed to the Department as a matter of urgency, and that the plans will then be evaluated so that we can ensure that they cover many of the priorities raised today.

Another important lever for the securing of partnerships is the allocation of the development fund through pooled budgets, although health authorities will provide the route. The Local Government Association is currently conducting a survey of the partnerships, and I understand that the results so far are encouraging, but if the survey prompts any concern we will act to ensure that the partnerships work effectively. They are, after all, crucial to our ability to make a difference at local level.

Many Members mentioned advocacy, and in particular self-advocacy. In response to representations by the taskforce, we have provided additional funds for self-advocacy.

The hon. Member for Daventry raised the important question of how we would monitor and evaluate the difference that our policies would make. As I have said, we are developing and we will consult on performance indicators and statistics, and will take account of feedback and data from the helpline and the implementation support team. As the hon. Gentleman suggested, the social services inspectorate will make an assessment, and we will evaluate the joint investment plans. The £2 million research programme that the hon. Gentleman mentioned will enable us to focus on success in particular areas, and the Social Care Institute for Excellence, with its remit for identifying and sharing best practice, will play an important part. We will also carry out a national users survey.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the Government's plans to report to Parliament. I assure him that we will report. We are currently considering how we can ensure that our report includes the perspectives of users and carers.

Mr. Boswell: I am grateful for that assurance and I am glad that the Minister is focusing on the issue, but she has said nothing about the frequency of reports. Will she reflect on the need not just to report once on the implementation phase, but to set up machinery for reports at convenient points—annually, or perhaps a little less often—so that the House can keep in focus the success of the policies as they develop? We realise that that will take time.

Jacqui Smith: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we will ensure that it is an ongoing report.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire rightly outlined the struggle for disability rights. It is easy to forget when we talk about progress that those rights were not won easily. I pay tribute to him and to other hon. Members who have fought valiantly on behalf of disabled people to ensure that those rights are clearly represented both in policies and in legislation.

My hon. Friend raised points about the relationship between mental health and learning disabilities, and about the mental health White Paper. Most psychiatric disorders are more common among people with learning disabilities than in the general population. A person with a learning disability who has a mental illness should expect to access services and to be treated in the same way as anyone else.

That will require mainstream mental health services to become more responsive, and specialist learning disability services to provide facilitation and support. Clear local protocols should be in place to promote collaboration between specialist learning disability services and specialist mental health services. That work will be facilitated not only by the extra investment that the Government are making available for mental health provision, but by the standards and reforms laid down in the national service framework for mental health.

My hon. Friend strayed a little into mental health legislation. I assure him that, while the Government's proposals in relation to mental health legislation widen the definition of mental disorders, those will be balanced by very tight criteria on detention and compulsory treatment.

The legislation is currently in preparation. We have taken the opportunity to continue discussions with stakeholders and to ensure that in both the Department of Health and the Home Office, the views of stakeholders—the sort of people whom my hon. Friend talked about—are taken on board.

My hon. Friend made a very important point about tackling disability discrimination. It is right to do so not only on moral grounds but because it leads to better services for all of us. Services that discriminate are not good services for anyone. That is an important reason why we need to tackle that discrimination.

My hon. Friend rightly pushed for further progress on delivering enforceable rights for people with disabilities. I know that the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle), is looking in detail at the disability rights taskforce recommendations which still need to be implemented to [illegible]ermine how to take those forward.

I was pleased that my hon. Friend for North-East Derbyshire mentioned the special educational needs and early years project in his constituency, although I noted his concern that the money was limited to 2003. The significant extra resources that the Government have invested in developing early years provision demonstrate their commitment both to identifying and to dealing with children with special educational needs. I assure my hon. Friend that across government consideration is being given to the means to continue that support as we go into the next spending review period.

My hon. Friend made the important point that being included in a community is partly about having access both to the vote and to democracy. I share his respect for Scope's work to raise that important issue.

The hon. Member for Chesterfield spoke from his background as a teacher—which is my background too—about the progress that has been made on the inclusion of children with disabilities and learning disabilities into mainstream schools. I do not want to introduce an element of discord, but I should point out that the hon. Gentleman is wrong about class sizes. Average class sizes have fallen under Labour.

Paul Holmes: Is the Minister saying that the Government's own figures are incorrect? For children under seven, class sizes have fallen, but for children aged seven to 11 and 11 to 16 class sizes have risen in the past five years.

Jacqui Smith: I do not think that that is right. Average class sizes in all age groups have fallen under Labour.

The hon. Gentleman is right that we need to provide support to enable disabled children to be included in mainstream schools, and the £220 million schools access initiative and other investment in special educational needs is important in that respect. I do not share the hon. Gentleman's negative view about the effect of inclusion on standards in schools. In fact there is quite significant work, much of it sponsored by the Department for Education and Skills and previously the Department for Education and Employment, that demonstrates links between achieving high standards and adopting an inclusive ethos.

On behalf of his constituents, once again the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) referred to the reorganisation of special educational needs provision in Gloucestershire. As he said, we have engaged in this debate on many occasions and I repeat that the Government's plans, policies and investment in special educational needs are certainly not directed at closing special schools, which have received increased investment under Labour. The hon. Gentleman rightly referred to local decisions on reconfiguration and drew strongly from the Ofsted report into Gloucestershire. That report is available only because the Government considered it important to monitor the activities of local education authorities. I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman will continue rightly to raise that local issue.

Several hon. Members were concerned about resources. We make no apology for providing an extra £42 million in addition to the £3 billion that is currently spent on learning disability services. Much of the work that is carried out locally by the learning disability partnerships and at a national level by the taskforce and the Government relates to looking at the objectives that we have set ourselves and ensuring that the £3 billion is spent in a way that meets the aspirations of people with learning disabilities—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Daventry twitched so I thought that he wanted to intervene.

Mr. Boswell: For the avoidance of doubt, it was a twitch of assent.

Jacqui Smith: Good. I am glad that we are back to consensus.

The hon. Member for Chesterfield referred to employment. I can assure him that the Government aim to enable more people with learning disabilities to participate in all forms of employment, to undertake paid work whenever possible and to make a valued contribution to the world of work.

We recognise the importance of supported employment as an option for people who are unable to work without support. Last year, we modernised the former supported employment programme which is now workstep. Workstep enables providers to offer tailored support to individuals and their employers and to encourage development in work with progression to working without support where this is right for an individual. We have backed our commitment to this initiative with a further £37.2 million which will be used to help providers modernise their support approaches, encourage more effective use of information and communication technology and increase provision by around 2,000 places.

I touched on the issue of children and adults with profound and multiple learning disabilities in my opening remarks, but I should like to reassure the House that the proposals in "Valuing People" apply not just to the more able but equally to people with learning disabilities. Such people require long-term intensive health care because of their complex disabilities, and they place significant challenges on services. That point is also made in last August's implementation guidance.

When the revised joint investment plans are evaluated, we will ensure that the objectives deliver on the need to ensure that improvements apply equally to all learning-disabled people. I have already mentioned the capital fund's focus on providing additional facilities for those with challenging behaviour. Of course, integrated services for children will be supported in particular by the £60 million that will be made available through the "quality protects" programme, which focuses on developing much better integrated services for disabled children.

Mr. Boswell: On children with profound and multiple learning difficulties in particular, will the Minister

[Mr. Boswell]

consider and take very seriously the message in the Mencap report, "No Ordinary Life", some of the content of which I found genuinely disturbing? The report perhaps reflects the existence of an even greater problem than constituency experience has led us to believe.

Jacqui Smith: I certainly undertake that, as in the past, we will listen to what Mencap has to say, because it has great expertise in terms of where the problems lie and where developments are needed.

The hon. Member for Chesterfield also mentioned day services. I can assure him that we believe that action on modernising day services and the provision of extra resources must be a priority. According to last August's guidance, the learning disability partnership boards should prepare modernisation programmes by 31 January 2003, which should show the steps needed to achieve modernised services by 2006, with particular reference to existing large day centres. However, it is precisely because we understand the need for bridging finance—for conversions, for example, to ensure that facilities remain available as alternatives are developed—that we have made it available, through the learning disability development fund, to support the modernisation programme.

The hon. Member for Chesterfield also made an important point about the role of primary care and GPs. I can assure him that the taskforce will include a GP, whose presence will enable us to consider many of those issues. It is of course right that significant extra funding for health authorities should also benefit those with learning disabilities, in terms of their primary care needs.

The hon. Member for Tewkesbury made a wide-ranging contribution, part of which I have already dealt with. I agree with him that a disability that is not visible is no less important; in fact, people with such disabilities are in some ways more open to discrimination. We should therefore be aware of the need to listen to the views of users and of those with learning disabilities on how such discrimination impacts on them, so that we can counteract it. Given the concerns that the hon. Gentleman expressed about mental health problems in prisons, he will doubtless welcome the extra Government investment in mental health care in prisons, which will ensure an additional 300 in-reach workers by 2003–04.

The hon. Member for Romford, some of whose comments I have already referred to, mentioned speech and language therapy in particular. I can assure him that some of the extra funding being made available through education budgets, particularly for special educational needs, is specifically targeted at speech and language therapy. The employment of more speech and language therapists is an important part of the NHS plan, and the use of Health Act flexibilities will enable us to bring together the therapy provided in the health service and the needs in the education service as we have not managed to do before.

I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has not had a response to his letter, and I shall certainly chase that up vigorously when I return to the Department. I welcome the developments in Havering that he outlined, which are designed to make a reality of our proposals.

The hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson)—who we are all disappointed to see has now left the Chamber—made some important points. I especially support and commend the work of the Downside Up organisation in exporting good practice from this country to other countries. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we have many social and health care services in this country that do excellent work—and that includes the voluntary sector. Sometimes, when we talk about the challenges and the ways in which we need to improve, we also need to take stock of what we can be proud of, and we should commend the people who do that work.

The hon. Gentleman chided the Government on the use of the term "social exclusion", and perhaps this would be a useful note for me to end on. He challenged me to say what social exclusion meant in the context of people with learning disabilities.

To define social exclusion we need to explain the effects that it has on people, and what we need to do to counter them. For me, social exclusion for people with learning disabilities is when they cannot get access to a proper job, and cannot get on a bus or choose where they want to live. It is when they cannot meet people apart from their families and their carers, and cannot take part in sporting or other leisure activities or make decisions for themselves.

It is in order to tackle those issues and improve the opportunities that we have set out the programme in "Valuing People", and I welcome the commitment that we have heard today from both sides of the House to work to ensure that we make that a reality.

Mr. Phil Woolas (Oldham, East and Saddleworth): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

Long-Term Unemployment (Glasgow)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

12.57 pm

Ann McKechin (Glasgow, Maryhill): I welcome the opportunity to speak on a subject of great importance to my home city and my constituency. Only this week my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) secured a debate on inner-city policy that considered the same problem. That is a measure of the depth of feeling and commitment of Glasgow Members on this matter, and their desire to find solutions to remove this scar from our communities.

Glasgow, like many other urban areas dependent on heavy industry in the United Kingdom, suffered dreadfully during the economic recession of the 1920s and the 1930s, and our older generation still live with memories of applying to the parish for money, going without meals and the threat of eviction.

Although the post-war years until the mid-1970s were tough for many, at least we enjoyed relatively full employment, and social progress was achieved for the vast majority. Undoubtedly the economic transition away from traditional industries that characterised the next 20 to 25 years would have been difficult in any circumstances—but it was the utter complacency of the Conservative Government in tackling its consequences, and their failure to provide new opportunities, that permanently marred the lives of so many in our communities and led directly to so many of the problems that Glasgow faces today.

Glasgow has the highest concentration of heroin injectors in Europe, and the Greater Glasgow health board estimates that we have 15,000 drug users—four times the national average. It also has rising suicide rates among the young, continuing alcohol misuse and chronic health statistics that are among the worst in Europe. According to the latest statistics, seven of Glasgow's constituencies are in the top 100 UK employment black spots.

Problems of that nature are not unique to my city, but the sheer scale and concentration of deprivation mark Glasgow out as a place that deserves special treatment. I commend the Government on the programme introduced in the past five years which has already made a significant contribution towards Glasgow's renewal. In the last year alone in my constituency the number of unemployed claimants fell by more than 17 per cent., and in the past five years the total unemployed count in Glasgow has fallen by more than 15,000.

Many of the measures introduced have been specifically targeted at the lowest income groups. Steps such as the introduction of the minimum wage, the tax credit system for working families and increases in child benefit, together with our success in providing a stable economy and increasing investment in public services, have obviously borne fruit, but I am sure that the Minister agrees that now is not a time for complacency. I trust that he shares my goal of achieving full employment throughout the UK for all our citizens. That is not an easy task, but we in Glasgow have a unique opportunity in the next few years to rid the city of the problem of long-term unemployment.

Glasgow is enjoying substantial expansion in its commercial centre, and the Scottish financial services sector anticipates further growth with upwards of 10,000 jobs in the next few years. The consequent new build of office space in the city centre, together with substantial capital investment in our schools, housing and hospitals, has led to many additional jobs in the construction industry—although there are already skills shortages in that sector.

The proposed transfer of the city council's rented housing stock—the largest in western Europe—to the new Glasgow housing association will offer the basis for substantial new capital investment in rebuilding and repairs, which will create even further demand in the construction sector. In addition, our commitment to quality public services in schools, child care, community care and hospitals will inevitably lead to further job opportunities.

The challenge we face is to harness those opportunities for the benefit of Glasgow's own citizens and to tackle the social problems that afflict so many of them. In substantial areas of the city, the majority of the adult population is not in work: either they are on the unemployed register, or they are on some other form of benefit. In some areas, that group comprises as much as 70 per cent. of the total population. I warmly welcome the Government's proposals to merge the Employment Service and the Benefits Agency into Jobcentre Plus, to offer an increasingly personalised service and to target the hidden unemployed in such areas.

I am also pleased to note the Government's recent announcement of a new start-up initiative aimed at the hardest-to-help applicants. There is no such project yet in Glasgow, but perhaps the Minister might offer some help with that today. I am aware that Glasgow city council is considering applying for funding for a similar initiative based on specific geographical areas, but covering a longer, three-year period. We need to be imaginative and bold in our approach to the problems. I hope that if the models prove successful, they will be spread throughout the country.

More public funding will be required if we are to assist applicants back into the world of work. Many suffer from chaotic lifestyles and drugs or alcohol abuse. Many have no direct family experience of a work routine. Most suffer from low competence, poor communication skills and low education standards. There is no easy fix, but the alternative of continuing with a permanent underclass living outwith normal society is much more expensive to our communities. We have to ensure that all appropriate agencies, whether private, public or voluntary sector, work together and effectively to focus on the issues. There are still too many gaps into which people can disappear.

Glasgow's black economy must be tackled if legitimate work is to be rewarded. There has been too little quality training—especially in the construction sector, which has for too long relied on "the lump", artificial self-employment and shoddy standards—and too little support for small and medium-sized enterprises, which provide the vast majority of employment opportunities for our work force. Both should be integral to all our development plans.

People need to see work going on around them if our city is to beat the spectre of depressed, soulless housing schemes. Even in my own constituency, which suffers

[Ann McKechin]

from the eighth highest unemployment total in Scotland, there is a shortage of small industrial units for private firms or traders, and of space for community-run industries. We need to focus on spreading job opportunities throughout every part of the city and not just in the centre. It does not suit every worker to travel to work, especially those who have dependants, either young or old, who require the convenience of living near their place of work.

We also need to ensure that our public transport system supports our workers. There need to be more services across the city rather than routes revolving around the city centre. I am aware that the local authority has little control over bus routes following the deregulation of services—I certainly appreciate the services offered on London buses in comparison—and I have every sympathy with the council's frustration over that, but surely we need the Government to consider every hindrance to the opportunity of work and to take appropriate action where possible.

I should also like to take this opportunity to raise the problem with making work pay in Glasgow, which specifically afflicts those in the city, particularly our lowest earners. A study carried out by the development and regeneration services department at Glasgow city council in January 2000 demonstrated the steep withdrawal of housing and council tax benefit that occurs when households move from unemployment to work, and how that acts as a significant barrier to residents in the city who have historically paid higher rents and council tax than those elsewhere in the country. I should like to give the Minister a specific example of that.

When one partner in a couple with two children under the age of 16 takes a job at £170 a week, total weekly income, taking into account the working families tax credit and child benefit, is about £276. In comparison with benefits received while out of work, the family appears to be about £115 better off. However, when revised rent and council tax are taken into account, the net benefit per week of working is less than £14—about £2 a day. The situation is even worse for a couple with no children. In addition, the example disregards any additional costs for travel or food that might be incurred while working.

Obviously, the figures will change to some extent once the new tax credit system is introduced next year, but the so-called work-poverty trap will largely remain and hit hardest those very people in our city who need the most help and support. In particular, as the rules stand, such a low net benefit is further reduced if there is any increase in rent or council tax, as that needs to be met in full by the individual households.

I am aware that the Government rejected the council's original proposals in 2000 to carry out a pilot scheme that would have allowed the working families tax credit to be disregarded as income for the purposes of assessing entitlement to housing and council tax benefit. I appreciate the Government's concerns about marginal deduction rates that may act as a disincentive to work. I also realise that the issue raises a number of technical problems for the Department. But I urge it to initiate dialogue with the council and other public bodies in order to identify mechanisms to remove that barrier to employment as far as possible.

In July last year, the council proposed to increase the earnings disregard to £92.90, which is in line with the working families tax credit income threshold, and to reduce the tapers of 65 per cent. for housing benefit and 20 per cent. for council tax benefit to 55 per cent. and 10 per cent. respectively. That would result in households being on average £75 better off, as opposed to about £12 to £14 better off under the current system. Although that appears to involve an initial loss to the Exchequer, all our statistics point to the fact that people obtain better paid work if they are already in a job. The change would also act as an incentive, to encourage people back into work, which in turn provides significant savings in benefits paid out by the Department. I appreciate that the Minister may have different solutions to the problem, but dialogue is essential if we are to make progress.

I urge the Government to give Glasgow the resources that it needs to tackle this running sore and to engage in a constructive dialogue with the city council and the Scottish Executive. The opportunities have never been better and the rewards to our society for overcoming long-term unemployment are enormous. I ask the Department to be bold and have the courage to take risks. The people of Glasgow have put their faith in this Government and they are entitled to social justice. They deserve nothing less.

1.9 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Ann McKechin) on securing this debate on a crucial subject. I have listened carefully to the points that she made. She acknowledged progress but, perfectly properly, dwelt on the social and economic ills that continue to affect Glasgow and, indeed, a large part of our country. She talked with great authority and feeling about structural and social changes that have affected her constituents.

Our approach is to put work first. For people who can work, the job represents the best social security policy of all. For both individuals and families, paid work is the best form of welfare, and the most secure means of lifting them out of poverty and dependency. It is also the best way to give people back a sense of dignity and self-esteem. Instead of just passively paying out benefits—the welfare state could be accused of that in the past—our task is to deliver a system that works in partnership with individuals, employers and communities to get people back into the labour market.

My hon. Friend rightly noted the importance of making sure that work pays. While much of our policy is about making work possible, it is essential to make it pay. The measures that we are taking are not only helping break down the barriers to work, but ensuring that work pays when people take it up. The working families tax credit is part of the first stage of our modernisation of the tax and benefit system to make work pay and tackle child poverty. By August last year, the WFTC was helping more than 120,000 families in Scotland. The national minimum wage has benefited about 110,000 workers in Scotland. The combination of the national minimum wage and the WFTC guarantees that a family with one person in full-time work has a minimum income of £225 a week or almost £12,000 a year.

We recognise that much more needs to be done. I share my hon. Friend's belief that there is no room for complacency. We have made clear our commitment to increase and improve the support available to families; to make work pay; and to tackle poverty. The WFTC is a decisive step towards achieving those goals. The introduction of the new tax credits in 2003 is the next stage of reform, and will allow the Government to make further progress in delivering our objectives. The new credits will integrate child support into one payment, delivering a simpler, seamless system for all families, both in and out of work. They will also extend the principle of in-work support to people without children.

I recognise the wider proposals put forward by Glasgow city council to reduce unemployment, poverty and social exclusion in the city; we fully share those objectives. Indeed, in responding to a debate earlier this week on inner-city poverty, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Pensions assured my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Anniesland (John Robertson) that we will arrange for officials from the council and the Scottish Executive to meet officials from my Department to explore those proposals further. I repeat that commitment to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill.

I am sympathetic to the objectives of the council's proposals for housing benefit, which my hon. Friend noted. We must tackle unemployment and poverty traps in our systems. She talked about savings in benefit expenditure that would result from the council's proposals, but it would not be appropriate to go into the detail of those proposals now, as much of their content is complex and technical; I do not wish to strain the patience of the House by dealing with technical matters. This is difficult territory, and in seeking remedies, we must not accidentally create new problems. We have a technical quarrel with the council's proposals on that score.

We agree that it is vital to tackle the barriers to work caused by housing benefit. However, the best way of doing so is not to impose more complexity on the scheme, but to improve standards of administration, so that people can have confidence that they will get the money that they are entitled to, on time. Although housing benefit administration varies greatly across our countries, I am determined, as the Minister responsible for housing benefit, that a decent housing benefit system becomes part of the solution in enabling people to get to work and not, as is sadly sometimes the case in some areas, part of the problem.

We have built and are still building a strong, stable economy. There are problems and uncertainties in the world economy, but the United Kingdom economy as a whole is coping well. The economy is growing, and although the labour market has weakened a little since the summer, activity continues at high levels. Employment in Scotland is certainly high. The employment rate is 73.4 per cent., with 2.38 million people in work—an increase of more than 100,000 in the past four years. We have the right policies in place to deal with change so that those who lose their jobs can return to work quickly, and those who have been out of work for some time are given the chance to reconnect with the world of work.

With the support of the new deals, nearly 70,000 people in Scotland have been helped into work. In Glasgow, nearly 6,500 young people have found work through the new deal. Another 1,000 long-term unemployed people have moved into work through the new deal 25-plus. Because we have built a strong economy and introduced measures such as the new deals, unemployment in Glasgow has fallen by more than a third, and long-term youth unemployment by more than three quarters in the past four years. That represents a major victory for those young people, their families and their communities. We all agree that there is nothing worse than starting one's adult life workless, rather than in work.

We are constantly improving the new deals to help people match their current skills to vacancies in the labour market. The new deals also help clients to gain new skills through education and training to meet the needs of local employers. The Government's skills, education and training agenda is crucial to reducing unemployment. We want people in work and we want work that pays, but in the knowledge economy of the 21st century, we want work that is skilled.

As we announced in November, we will soon be launching pilots for our new StepUp programme. In April, a pilot will start in East Ayrshire and another will begin later in Dundee. I noted my hon. Friend's suggestion that one should be in her constituency. The pilots will test the provision of transitional jobs to act as a stepping stone for long-term unemployed people moving from benefits into work.

As part of our wider approach to helping those facing greatest disadvantage in the labour market, we are investing some £40 million over three years to help people who are facing problems of drug misuse into work. My hon. Friend spoke with great force about the appalling scourge of drug—often hard drug—misuse in Glasgow. Although that has echoes across the countries and in my constituency as well, we are aware of the problems that there have been in her city.

That investment will fund the "progress2work" project which will provide targeted, specialist support and provision for those people. Pathfinders for the project will begin operation in early April and include the Glasgow north and Glasgow south areas.

We have introduced employment zones to help long-term unemployed people in some of the most economically deprived areas of the country. Employment zones are looking at innovative ways to find local solutions to local problems. That represents the Employment Service at its most local, speaking face to face with local communities to find solutions. The employment zone in Glasgow works with local organisations such as the Wise Group, and has already helped nearly 2,000 people find work.

We are determined to ensure that everyone who can work has the opportunity to do so, and not only those who get jobseeker's allowance. We all know that there is too much economic inactivity in our community that JSA statistics do not illustrate. The majority of lone parents say that they would like to work with the right sort of support. The Disability Rights Commission cites the labour force survey, which shows that 1 million people with disabilities are not in work but would like to be. I heard some of the earlier debate about people with learning disabilities and difficulties. I know from personal experience that many such people would dearly like the opportunity that the rest of us expect of being able to join the labour market. They are right to have that expectation and we are right to support them.

[Malcolm Wicks]

Our job is to ensure that aspirations become reality. That is why we need a clear work-first approach. Our new Jobcentre Plus service, which my hon. Friend noted, is operating in 56 pathfinder offices and will give all benefit claimants the opportunity to find out about the help and support that is available to allow them to move into work through a work-focused interview. In such an interview, the individual can sit down with one of our personal advisers and talk about all the issues and problems that he or she has in terms of getting into work, whether they relate to child care or anything else. The pathfinder offices include sites in Aberdeen, Livingston, Greenock and Port Glasgow. A few months ago, while visiting Scotland, I had the opportunity to visit the Livingston pathfinder office—a modern, bright 21st century approach to these issues. It is situated in the middle of a shopping centre. Nothing could be more accessible. I should like to pay tribute to the manager of that office, Barbara McManus, and her colleagues, for their excellent work for the local community.

Lone parents with a youngest child of school age already benefit from having a work-focused interview at the start of their claim to income support. From April, the interviews will be extended nationally to lone parents with a youngest child of three years or older. All lone parents who are out of work can benefit from our new deal for lone parents, which offers specialist help and advice to enable the lone mother—or sometimes lone father—to take up work. By the end of last October, the scheme had already helped more than 2,200 lone parents in Glasgow to get a job, including 199 in Maryhill.

Specialist help is also available for people on incapacity benefits through our new deal for disabled people. During the pilot phase, more than 8,200 people were helped into work. In the summer, we began to launch a national network of job brokers who work with people on incapacity benefit to help them access the labour market. These national programmes are complemented by our action teams for jobs, which work with local organisations to find innovative solutions to the problems faced by people who often come from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, including those suffering from disability, as well as lone parents, homeless people and people with drug or alcohol problems.

Action teams take their services to the heart of their local communities and work closely with employers. They also work closely with other agencies such as social inclusion partnerships in Scotland to ensure that regeneration of the physical environment is underpinned by social regeneration. The action team in Glasgow has been so successful that, at the start of this year, it was split into four. Its collective budget has been increased by more than 700 per cent. When I visited the action team working in Clydebank—the West Dunbartonshire action team—I saw again at first hand the excellent way in which my colleagues in the Employment Service are working with others to help people to find work, sometimes when they have not been in work for many years.

Our objective is to ensure that everyone who can and wants to work has the opportunity to do so. Not enough was done in the past, and too many people have found themselves written off.

We are offering more support through Jobcentre Plus and the new deals. We have introduced tax and benefit changes to make work pay, and we are providing more help with preparation and training to make work skilled.

Our new approach, backed by Jobcentre Plus, will make a major contribution to tackling exclusion, combating poverty, and providing more opportunity and choice for all.

Again, I congratulate my hon. Friend, who works energetically for her constituents, on raising an important matter that affects her constituents in Glasgow and too many people throughout our land. We shall meet colleagues from Glasgow city council and consider some of their proposals.

The debate has been a useful opportunity to raise important issues. We have made progress, but none of us is complacent. I am sorry to say that there is much to do, and we shall get on with that in the years to come.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-five minutes past One o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 4 February 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Closed Circuit Television

1. **Mr. Lindsay Hoyle** (Chorley): What plans he has to increase the funding of grants for the extension of CCTV schemes. [29846]

The Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs (Mr. John Denham): Six hundred and seventy-one CCTV schemes have been funded at a cost of about £170 million under the crime reduction programme. Opportunities for funding CCTV schemes exist under the communities against drugs and the small retailers in deprived areas initiatives.

Mr. Hoyle: I thank my right hon. Friend for that information. Will he find extra funding for the successful schemes in Chorley in the town's fight against crime? Will he also ensure that grants will be available for community wardens in the Chorley scheme?

Mr. Denham: I am well aware of my hon. Friend's strong support for crime reduction measures in Chorley. Funds are available—including communities against drugs money—that could be used on a variety of means to tackle crime and disorder. We shall announce further arrangements for funding crime reduction in the near future.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): The death of a fine young man, Tim Robinson, in a stabbing incident while he was parking his car in London has caused great grief in the village of Beaulieu in my constituency, where he was brought up and where his parents still live. It seems likely that CCTV will play a vital role in the apprehension of his killers, but does the Minister agree that, were it not for the stop and search restrictions that have resulted from the constant accusations of racism against the police, it would be possible to deter a considerable number of would-be criminals from casually carrying knives when they go about their evil work?

Mr. Denham: All hon. Members will agree that the crime to which the hon. Gentleman referred was appalling and that it is essential that we take the firmest possible action to stamp out such crime. The House will be aware of the moves announced by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, which, from today, will lead to about 475 extra officers being deployed in London to tackle street robbery. It is essential that that be done.

However, I do not agree that restrictions have been placed on stop and search. Powers to stop and to search are an essential part of effective policing and we are determined to ensure that that can continue, but in ways that maintain the confidence of all the communities that are being policed.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): A few years ago in my constituency, a taxi driver died as a result of a fracas in a private-hire taxi. Bolton is the first local authority to install miniature CCTV cameras on the windscreens of black cabs and private-hire vehicles. That successful experiment has been made permanent. The scheme is self-financing in that taxi drivers have to lease the cameras, but the cost is offset by their reduced insurance premiums. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that brave experiment should be spread throughout the country?

Mr. Denham: I am fascinated to learn of that initiative in Bolton, of which I was not aware. Much extraordinarily good innovative work is going on throughout the country to reduce and fight crime, and we are working as hard as we can to spread best practice. If my hon. Friend will give me further details, I shall make sure that they are posted on the Home Office website, so that people in all parts of the country can study them and learn from that success.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): More cameras are welcome, but does the Minister agree that they should be a complement to, not a substitute for, more police resources in front-line area policing and more regular patrolling?

Mr. Denham: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Wherever I have been, the police welcome CCTV as a tool to help them in the fight against crime, but of course we need more police officers. That is why, this spring, we shall have a record number of police officers in England and Wales, and in spring 2003 there will be more than 130,000. It is not only a matter of having more officers, but of making the best use of their time. That is why we set up a taskforce, headed by the former chief inspector of police, Sir David O'Dowd, to find ways of cutting red tape and bureaucracy and freeing up police officer time so that officers can be out in the community where the public want to see them.

Language and Citizenship Education

2. **Tony Cunningham** (Workington): If he will make a statement on his plans to offer language and citizenship education to those settling long term in the UK. [29847]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): In a few days, I will be publishing a comprehensive and holistic policy paper on nationality, managed migration and asylum. As part of the programme for integration with diversity and building social cohesion I shall expand on our proposals for English, Welsh or

Scottish Gaelic to be understood by those seeking citizenship, together with an understanding of society and its institutions.

Tony Cunningham: Does the Secretary of State agree that it is fairly self-evident that new citizens who are fluent in English will have a much greater chance of successfully integrating into the community and of getting jobs, and that an understanding of citizenship will lead to new citizens taking a fuller part in the democratic process? But does he further agree that not just new citizens need to have a greater understanding of the responsibilities of citizenship; everyone has a part to play in combating bigotry and prejudice?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. That is why I am proud to have piloted, as the then Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the citizenship programme in our schools, which becomes mandatory from September this year, and to have instilled an understanding that, in post-16 and adult education, we need to produce throughout the country not simply an understanding of equality so that we reach out to those who come into our community—important though that is—but an understanding of our institutions so that people can use democracy to bring about peaceful change. If we can achieve that and ensure that that programme is available for those who seek our citizenship, Britain will have a more stable backcloth and foundation to ensure that we overcome racism and bigotry, which are unacceptable in any guise.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): Cultural and linguistic diversity are to be greatly valued, so I welcome the Secretary of State's comments on the Welsh language, but may I press him to ensure that opportunities to learn Welsh are available not only in the so-called Welsh-speaking areas, but throughout the country?

Mr. Blunkett: The Assembly is keen to ensure that such opportunities are available in Wales, and I shall certainly talk to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about Welsh being available in England. That would ensure that people could gain access to jobs more readily if they moved to Wales, which, of course, underlines the reason why it is so important in education, training and employment to have a grasp of the language that is regularly used.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, before we move towards a stronger requirement for a knowledge of English to obtain citizenship, we must ensure that there is adequate teaching of English as a second language in every area where there is a large ethnic community? I visited an English class for mainly Asian women in Bradford a few weeks ago and sat in on interviews with those Asian women. They were all told that they would have to wait 12 months before they could join the class. That is not the case in Keighley, but it certainly is in Bradford.

Mr. Blunkett: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. Such teaching is part of the basic skills agenda. The Secretary of State has asked the Learning and Skills Council to map where facilities are available throughout the country. When I publish the White Paper, we shall make it clear that it is no longer acceptable to provide free facilities for the head of the family, but not for the spouse who has come into the country, and we will put that right.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I in no way wish to challenge the Home Secretary's enthusiasm for the Welsh language, or even for Scottish Gaelic, but does he accept that it is of paramount importance that every British subject should be fluent in the English language and that, following on the question asked by the hon. Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer), everything should be done to expedite classes and ensure that he sets himself a target so that, by the end of this decade, all British subjects are fluent in the English language?

Mr. Blunkett: I should like to set myself a target, but I shall draw breath after the mapping of the facilities. It would be nice to ensure that the indigenous population, as well as those who come into the country, spoke fluent English before the end of the decade. I have been reprimanded, sotto voce, by one of my hon. Friends on the Front Bench for mispronouncing "Gaelic", for which I apologise.

Mr. David Lammy (Tottenham): I am grateful to the Government for introducing better citizenship classes for people who are newly arrived in Britain, but does my right hon. Friend agree that the majority of ethnic minority people in this country were born in Britain? What steps is his Department taking, working with the Commission for Racial Equality and the race equality unit, to ensure that younger ethnic minority people in particular can better participate in life in Britain?

Mr. Blunkett: I believe that that is part of the social cohesion agenda being taken forward by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs. That point should be integrated with my hon. Friend's wider point. He is right that most second and third generation migrants speak English as well as anyone else, but the difficulty is that their parents and grandparents often do not have that ability. There is therefore a tension between what happens at home and what happens at school or on the street. That point came out in the Cantle report, which said that people were torn between two different countries, cultures and societies. We need to address that point and not destroy the cultural heritage or diversity that are the ingredients of our country, but help people through those tensions.

Community Support Officers

3. **Mr. Hilton Dawson** (Lancaster and Wyre): If he will make a statement on the role of community support officers in reducing the fear of crime. [29848]

6. **Mr. Colin Pickthall** (West Lancashire): What further resources he plans to allocate to local authorities and community safety partnerships to extend the provision of community wardens. [29852]

The Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs (Mr. John Denham): Community support officers will be under the command and control of the chief officer and will have limited powers conferred on them. They will be deployed in the community, providing a visible policing presence, and will have a vital role to play in support of the police in reducing the fear of crime, increasing public safety and tackling antisocial behaviour.

More than 450 neighbourhood warden posts have so far been funded by the Government, with a further 700 street warden posts due to come on stream in April this year.

Mr. Dawson: Will my right hon. Friend enlarge on that helpful answer? First, will he commit himself to visiting the fine city of Lancaster to witness the pilot project that is in place there? Traffic wardens have been converted by the constabulary into a potent force to develop community policing and support in the Ridge and Freehold area. Does my right hon. Friend have thoughts on the way in which community support officers can be combined with regeneration opportunities, the Government's employment policies and investment in learning, skills and sporting facilities to provide an integrated package of support for communities to reduce crime and the fear of crime?

Mr. Denham: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support for the initiative in his local area. It enables me to emphasise once again that the Government's plans for community support officers have been drawn up in close consultation with sections of the police service, and many parts of the police service already want to move ahead on those lines. Clearly, in areas of deprivation, and in areas in need of regeneration, the presence of extra people in the community to tackle low-level antisocial behaviour and to help to deal with issues such as abandoned vehicles and graffiti can help to build the confidence of the community and enable regeneration to take place successfully.

Mr. Pickthall: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the exemplary community warden scheme in West Lancashire, which has been made possible by the total commitment of West Lancashire district council, by the enthusiastic co-operation of the police and the Home Office, and by public approval? The only complaint about community wardens is that there are not enough of them. Will he encourage such successful schemes by providing extra resources in the near future so as to add to their numbers?

Mr. Denham: As I said, the number of posts supported by the Government continues to increase, and a further 700 street warden posts are due to be filled in the next few months. Clearly, we shall want to consider the issue in the next spending review. It is also worth stressing that a significant number of street warden posts are being created at a purely local level by registered social landlords and local authorities, who recognise that it is an extraordinarily cost-effective way of dealing with problems in the community that often cost a great deal more if there is an absence of an authority figure in the area.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Is the Minister aware that Liberal Democrats welcome the idea of community support officers with properly defined responsibilities? Will he and the Home Secretary use every opportunity—as the Government are keen to do—to get two messages across? People should know that the result of having additional people to help the police will be more fully qualified police on the streets to prevent crimes and catch those who participate in serious crimes against the person. We have seen examples of such crimes in recent weeks, whether robberies of mobile phones, an offence of violence against the person, or car-jacking, an offence of serious threat of violence against the person. Detection rates will increase because we shall catch more people and it will be possible to punish people appropriately. Such people should know that offences against the person are in a different league from offences against property and that they can expect the punishment to be in a different league accordingly.

Mr. Denham: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's support. He is right that the role of community support officers will complement that of the professional police officer. The roles are not to be confused, and one operates in support of the other. One of the main reasons for that is to enable the police to concentrate their time and efforts on the serious crimes that rightly worry the public and on which they wish the bulk of police energy to be directed. It is critical, at the moment, that every effort is made to concentrate resources on persistent offenders who cause the majority of crime so that they are identified, caught, convicted and punished.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): While agreeing that anything that can be done to reduce the fear of crime is important in our society, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that what really matters is dealing with violent crime, on which the Government have a dismal record? Is he aware of the serious offences committed in the past few days in central London? What is he going to do to make the lives of people who are under the constant threat of violent street crime easier and more secure?

Mr. Denham: The public are rightly concerned about the sort of crimes to which the hon. Gentleman refers, but it is worth remembering that the British crime survey published last autumn showed a significant fall in the public experience of violent crime last year. I am in no way complacent because street robbery is a real concern that has to be tackled. We will do what the previous Government failed to do: we will have more police officers and ensure that those convicted of carrying out such serious crimes receive serious punishment. I welcome, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman does, the decision by the commissioner of the Metropolitan police to deploy from today another 475 officers specifically to tackle street robbery.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Does my right hon. Friend accept that excellent community safety partnership schemes can be set back if the local government settlement is not appropriate? That has happened to neighbourhood partnerships in my area because of the effect of negative subsidy on the settlement. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that he will make it clear to his colleague with responsibility for local government that it is important for every area to have real growth and that we do not lose such valuable schemes because of the small print on local government settlements?

Mr. Denham: I shall draw my hon. Friend's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of

State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. However, I must stress two things. The first is that the Government have provided significant funding for neighbourhood warden and street warden schemes. The second is that many local authorities believe that investment in the schemes is cost effective in terms of the use of their resources. The schemes do not have to dissuade much graffiti or environmental damage for the local authorities to be net gainers from their investments.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): Is it not sadly the reality in many parts of our country that the fear of crime and the crime profile are rising sharply? For example, the tragic incident was mentioned earlier of an innocent person who was murdered on getting out of their car. Is it not also the case that robbery in some London boroughs has doubled in a year? Surely the highest priority should be given to providing a first-rate service of policing our streets, in terms of both numbers and professionalism. Is the right hon. Gentleman not aware of people's grave concern that that cannot be delivered by using partly trained people with different powers that might vary force by force or even borough to borough? Is it not clear that as our streets become, or at least appear to become, ever more rather than less dangerous—

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Not true.

Mr. Paice: In those circumstances, policing needs to be met by fully trained officers with full powers.

Anyone who suggests that that is not true should walk down the streets in some London boroughs and find out for themselves. They could even look at the Government's figures that show that street robbery doubled in the past 12 months in four London boroughs.

Mr. Denham: The hon. Gentleman would do better to have a conversation with the Metropolitan police, as it has pioneered, pressed for and indeed persuaded us that the creation of community support officers is a key part of its strategy to police the streets of London effectively. I suggest that before he rubbishes the idea, and if he is concerned about street robbery in London, he should talk to the Metropolitan police.

As I said, the Metropolitan police is deploying extra officers dedicated to tackling street robbery. Lord Justice Woolf has made clear the importance that should be attached to sentencing those who commit such vicious robbery. We will ensure that they are properly punished and that measures are in place to put those who are detected and caught under proper and effective supervision, because we are determined not to swap party political chitchat across the Chamber but to get a grip on the problem.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): The Minister will agree that we need the confidence of local groups and communities if we are to tackle crime effectively. Too many of them rightly feel that there are insufficient police on the streets. Will my right hon. Friend therefore take the opportunity of the forthcoming Police Reform Bill to ensure that those who wish to serve their communities for many years as sergeants and constables are rewarded and peripheral areas are cut, so that more money is put on the street, where it deserves to be?

Mr. Denham: Yes, by tackling red tape and bureaucracy in the police service we shall free up police time. One key aim behind the policing priority posts, which are part of the heads of agreement with the Police Federation, is to enable people who do the most difficult and demanding policing jobs to be properly rewarded and to be given an incentive to stay in those difficult front-line jobs.

Asylum

4. **Mr. Gary Streeter** (South-West Devon): What steps he is taking to reform the asylum system. [29850]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): As referred to a moment or two ago, in the White Paper that I am about to publish I shall build on the statement that I made on 29 October. I want a radical improvement in the way that we operate our asylum system, including in the immigration and nationality directorate and the national asylum support service, and to set that in the context of a managed migration programme. It is time to see asylum not in isolation but as part of dealing with worldwide movements of people, all of whom are either seeking a better life or fleeing persecution.

Mr. Streeter: How does the Home Secretary explain his spectacular failure to prevent asylum seekers who are already safe in France from stampeding through the channel tunnel and ferry ports to seek asylum in this country? Is it not obvious to everyone that the Dublin convention is not working? What does he intend to do about it?

Mr. Blunkett: As we shall debate in a few moments, the very fact that people are seen scrabbling to get over the barbed-wire shows that they are not flooding into Britain in the way just described. In fact, the number of people who managed to get through the French end of the channel tunnel fell from 808 in July to 32 in December. I do not think that that is a sign of failure; I think that it is a sign of success. If the hon. Gentleman had anything about him, he would stand up and congratulate us on making a difference.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Does the Home Secretary agree that although it is desirable that the number of failed asylum seekers to be deported should be increased, that must be done humanely? Does he particularly agree that we should be taking steps to ensure that some facilities await young children on their arrival back home, and that they are not simply flown to the other side of the world and dumped, with their families, at an airport and wished good luck?

Mr. Blunkett: A sensible debate would acknowledge that the longer a family has been here and the longer children have been integrated and have been receiving an education, the more difficult it is both to remove and to resettle them. It is important that we have a policy for returners that is sensitive to their needs, that is effective and determined, but that reflects the points that my hon. Friend makes. I promise him that in publishing the White Paper and taking it forward, we will of necessity take that into account.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I share the Home Secretary's desire for a sensitive policy. He and I have shared many views on the return of asylum seekers. Can he tell the House today how many asylum seekers entering this country from France have been returned to France under the Dublin convention since 1997?

Mr. Blunkett: What I can tell the hon. Gentleman is that last year 6,828 people were returned automatically to France under a process similar to the gentlemen's agreement mentioned in the Opposition motion to be debated shortly. That was 1,000 more than the previous year. I do not have the number returned under the Dublin convention, for the very reason that I have stated publicly on several occasions, which is that the Dublin convention—to which the Conservative Government agreed and were a party in 1990—has not worked. That is why we are attempting not only to renegotiate under what is now called Dublin mark 2, but to take steps of our own, because waiting for Godot will not get us very far.

Mr. Letwin: I welcome the Home Secretary's conversion to the view that the Dublin convention does not work. Does he agree that its failure to work probably partly explains the fact that the Home Office's expenditure on asylum support is likely to be £600 million more than was forecast?

Mr. Blunkett: No, it does not.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): Will my right hon. Friend re-examine the question of the number of people who are refused asylum on the grounds of non-compliance? Generally, it is because they failed to return the statement of evidence form within an extremely brief period. Many people claim that they never had the form, or that they sent it back and the Home Office then lost it. It might appear efficient to make decisions in such a way, but in fact it leads to many unnecessary appeals and contributes to the inefficiency of the system. Will he consider extending the period in which people have to return those forms?

Mr. Blunkett: I should like to ensure the availability of adequate and appropriate advice for fulfilling the obligation, and that induction centres—the first of which opened in Dover on 22 January, as I said in my statement on 29 October—are able to support and help those who seek asylum to complete the form more effectively. I agree with my hon. Friend that there is no point in having masses of appeals that could have been resolved earlier and more effectively if the system had been right.

Sex Offences

5. **Paul Holmes** (Chesterfield): When he intends to bring forward proposals following the report on the reform of sex offence laws "Setting the Boundaries"; and if he will make a statement. [29851]

The Minister for Criminal Justice, Sentencing and Law Reform (Mr. Keith Bradley): Tackling sexual offending is a top priority for the Government. We intend to ensure that the legislative framework enables firm action to be taken against those who abuse others. We are actively considering the recommendations of the sex offences review to Government in the light of more than 700 responses received during the consultation period. We intend to legislate as soon as parliamentary time allows, and I will place a short summary of our proposals in the Libraries of both Houses as soon as possible.

Paul Holmes: Is the Minister aware of the case in January in which the Crown Prosecution Service could not prosecute a man who had persuaded two 11-year-old girls to undress in front of him because he had not physically touched them? Do the Government intend to close that loophole in the law, and, if so, how urgently do they intend to introduce the necessary legislation?

Mr. Bradley: I was as surprised as many Members about that loophole in the law. We want to ensure that the offences that we introduce are coherent and that they protect vulnerable people, particularly children. I am examining the loophole to ensure that the changes that we propose are coherent. We wish to tackle all possible attempts to abuse children.

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): Will my right hon. Friend examine a letter that I wrote today to the Secretary of State—I suspect that it will end up on my right hon. Friend's desk—about the difficult and serious case of an assault on a child which has gone unpunished? I suspect that the offence will slip through the net because of proposals to reform sex offences legislation. When my right hon. Friend has read my letter, perhaps he will consider the possibility of linking the issue to the concept of dangerousness, which I know the Department is examining. There are a few abusers who will not otherwise fall easily into the categories that my right hon. Friend is considering.

Mr. Bradley: I shall examine the case about which my hon. Friend has written. It is taking some time to come forward with our proposals because we received more than 700 detailed responses to the review. We are dealing with a complex area and we want to ensure, as far as we can, that all dangerous and violent sex offenders are covered by legislation, and that the sentencing policy that we bring forward, as a result of the Halliday review, is severe on the perpetrators of offences that we all abhor.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): I am sure that the Minister is aware of the growing scare about child sex slavery in the United Kingdom, which has been more evident recently. It shames us all that the trade should take place in Britain. The Minister will be aware also that the police tell us that the trade is due to insufficient powers to deal with the merchants of this wicked activity. Given the urgency of the problem, would the Department consider kindly a private Member's Bill that sought exclusively to deal with the issue? If help could be given with drafting and the Department gave it a fair wind to ensure that it passed speedily through the House, it would deal with a dreadful nuisance that must be tackled.

Mr. Bradley: Most important is that the proposals made in legislation are coherent and clear. We must bring forward a package of measures that are designed to tackle a range of issues, one of which the hon. Lady has mentioned. The awful issue to which she referred must be addressed. I want to ensure that the public understand and have confidence in the legislative framework. We must introduce the correct punishment to meet the crimes that are perpetrated. I shall always consider the appropriate vehicles through which to introduce legislation. If possible, it will be best to have a Government package of plans, which we can debate in the House. There has been an opportunity for all parties to contribute to the review, and I shall consider the hon. Lady's contribution.

Drug Abuse

7. **Helen Jones** (Warrington, North): What support he is giving to parents whose children are addicted to drugs. [29853]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): Support for the parents, carers and families of young people with drug problems is a crucial part of the national drug strategy. Information about the dangers of drugs and where to get help is routinely distributed to schools, GPs' surgeries and police stations. On 27 December 2001, we launched a campaign to raise awareness of the risks of drugs and to encourage parents and carers to use the national drugs helpline on 0800 776600 for reliable and credible information on the harm that drugs cause and the support that is available. Only three weeks into the campaign, the helpline has seen a significant increase in calls of over 20 per cent.

Helen Jones: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply. Will he accept that despite the progress that has been made, many parents find that their children are taking drugs? Those parents find it difficult to access support and treatment for their children. Even if they get them into treatment, they are put back into their communities to mix with those who got them on to drugs in the first place, without any further support being available.

I urge my hon. Friend to examine closely representations made by the Footsteps project, which serves my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Watts), which set out the horror stories of some parents. Will he find time in his schedule to talk to parents and groups who represent children at risk, to learn what is happening at the sharp end from the users of services, rather than from those who set up the services?

Mr. Ainsworth: My hon. Friend is right; parents have severe problems dealing with those issues, and many lack the confidence to engage with their children about drugs. Studies show that there is a significant reduction in the taking of dangerous drugs by children of parents who have had the confidence to have such conversations. I am aware of the work of Footsteps in Warrington, which is funded by the communities against drugs fund. I do not know whether my hon. Friend is aware, but Warrington is due to get another three posts, funded from a variety of sources, to provide information and support to parents and carers of young people in the near future. I should be happy to receive further information from her about the problems in the area, but I wish to make her aware of that additional funding coming on stream in Warrington.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): Does the Minister agree that former addicts are often the best people to explain the dangers of drug abuse to children? He will not be aware of it, but I was in Wood Green school in my constituency this morning, sitting at the back of the class while Energy and Vision, a group of former addicts, explained the dangers of drug abuse; they were explaining, rather than preaching. Does the Minister agree that that is the right message and the right way to communicate it? What steps will he take to encourage such voluntary bodies?

Mr. Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman's premise is right; explaining is far more effective than preaching. We will try to engage any available talent to do that. People who have managed to rehabilitate themselves after serious drug offending and drug problems are often prepared to get involved in such campaigns and offer their time. We must try to make sure that we have in place facilities to enable people to make use of that volunteering.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): Does my hon. Friend accept that many voluntary organisations that are providing a wonderful counselling service for parents find themselves strapped for cash, with little money to deliver the service required? Will he ensure that adequate financial support is given to voluntary organisations that provide a worthwhile service?

Mr. Ainsworth: My hon. Friend is right; there is a problem, but there have been significant increases in the amount of money available. It takes time for services to come on stream. The Department of Health allocated an extra £5 million in 2001–02, and another £11 million in the next financial year, to provide treatment for young people with serious drug problems and support for their parents. Money is therefore becoming available but, as ever, there is much more that we could do.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Despite what the Minister said about funding, how does he explain the fact that I have a letter from the deputy chief constable of Surrey, who says that in his role in the Surrey drug action team, he found that all the promises of new money made by the Government in 2000 have subsequently been undermined? First, a totally unexpected top-slicing meant that the team immediately had to cut £80,000 from the programmes that it funded. Then, last October, the team was told that year 2 and year 3 funding was under threat. It had been promised a 70 per cent. uplift, but was told that it was likely to be no more than 20 per cent. Senior police officers trying to lead the fight against drugs for the benefit of our children are finding that there is a huge difference between the Government's rhetoric and the reality on the ground, which is cut, cut, cut.

Mr. Ainsworth: Sadly, in the short time in which I have been dealing with the hon. Gentleman, I have learned not to take at face value anything he says. I shall happily check what allegations have been made by his local police officer, and what allegations the hon. Gentleman has added to them, and I shall come back to him with a detailed reply. Over time, I have learned to do that.

Race Relations

8. **Mr. Iain Luke** (Dundee, East): What measures he proposes to improve race relations and community cohesion. [29855]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Angela Eagle): The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 will be the biggest strengthening of the protections against racial discrimination in 30 years. The Government are working with the public sector to make it effective. On social cohesion, the Government are responding to the reports following last summer's disturbances to develop an active and inclusive vision of Britain, at both local and national level.

Mr. Luke: I welcome my hon. Friend's reply. I am sure that she welcomed, as I did, the 27 per cent. reduction in racially motivated incidents between 1995 and 1999 recorded in the British crime survey last year. Does she agree that the figure of 280,000 incidents recorded in 1999 is still too high? We should be doing all we can to encourage a multi-agency approach to ensure that this pernicious blight is banished from British society.

Angela Eagle: I agree with my hon. Friend that racially motivated attacks are absolutely unacceptable. I know that the addition of the racially aggravated element in sentencing has been one of the success stories since the Lawrence report. I hope that the recent addition of religious motives for aggravated attacks will also help to tackle that pernicious problem.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): How do the Government propose to deal with discrimination based on religion? Is the Minister aware that a Muslim sheikh has been touring the country urging followers to kill Jews, for instance?

Angela Eagle: I do not know where the hon. Gentleman was during our debates on the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, but we tried to do something about that. The House disagreed, as did the Lords. If he is now saying that he disagrees with that, and that all those on the Opposition Front Bench and in the Conservative party are having a rethink, perhaps we can consider bringing the legislation back to the House.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is it not a matter of deep regret that there is an allegedly Muslim priest touring Britain and promoting Nazi-type race hatred, calling for the killing of Jews and all infidels? Is not that a breach of the law on incitement to race hatred? Why are not the police taking any action? If that person has asked to live in Britain—apparently, he has applied to the Home Office—should not the response this week be, "No. Get out of the country as quickly as possible"?

Angela Eagle: I can assure my hon. Friend that the police are taking a very close look at the activities of that person. I ask my hon. Friend simply to watch this space.

Metropolitan Police (Funding)

9. **John Cryer** (Hornchurch): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the resource allocation formula for the funding of the Metropolitan police. [29856]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced the final proposals for police grant 2002–03 on 30 January. The resource allocation formula is an internal distribution mechanism for the Metropolitan police and as such is a matter for the Commissioner and the Metropolitan police authority. My hon. Friend has been involved in the consultation and will know that a revision of the original formula is still being discussed by the Metropolitan police authority.

John Cryer: Although the resource allocation formula has given a small increase in my borough, Havering, in east London, and my hon. Friend is right to say that the review is continuing, the tiny increase is not nearly enough. Havering is affected by two factors. First, the town centre of Romford has the second biggest nightclub capacity in the entire south-east of England, outside the west end. Secondly, Havering is the second biggest borough in London and has the most green belt, which brings its own problems. Those two factors bring enormous pressures to bear on the uniformed force. In my hon. Friend's discussions with the Metropolitan police authority and with the Mayor, will he draw those factors to their attention and bring pressure on them to increase the uniformed presence in Havering?

Mr. Ainsworth: My hon. Friend knows that there has been a substantial increase in recruitment to the Met. By the end of March 2003, the Metropolitan police service will have been allocated a total of 2,044 recruits from the resources of the crime fighting fund. I ask him to accept that it is very difficult for us to become involved in an internal review. It is right that there should be full consultation and that all genuine views and concerns are taken on board in deciding how exactly to place those police resources in the metropolitan area. As I said, I know that he has been involved and has represented his constituents, but I am not sure about the degree to which we should get involved from outside in the review or in the decision about where in the service those police resources need to be placed.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Does the Minister agree that there is a trend, which is particularly evident in this year's allocation, in which funding of the police is being significantly shifted on to the council tax payer? For example, is he aware that in the Metropolitan police area, the precept per head falling on the council tax payer has increased by 141 per cent. since 1997?

Mr. Ainsworth: I am not sure that I do accept that. The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the significant increases that have gone into the Metropolitan police service and others through the crime fighting fund. Obviously, matters such as the setting of the precept and the total council tax impact of any decisions are for the authority and others to decide, and not for the Government.

Child Murders

10. **Bob Russell** (Colchester): If he will publish the findings of monitoring by his Department of the number of child murders. [29857]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Beverley Hughes): Although violent crime generally, as measured by the British crime survey, has shown a reduction in recent years, the appalling crime of killing a child fluctuated between 96 and 143 cases a year in the five years up to 2000–01. I think that the hon. Gentleman knows that statistics on such killings are published each year. Obviously, the Government are determined to try to bring about a permanent reduction in the number of such cases through a range of measures across government.

Bob Russell: I am grateful to the Minister for that broad reply, but surely she and the Government must be aware that the number of child murders perpetrated by family members has increased by 50 per cent. in the past year or so. Does she agree that a possible cause of that rapid increase is the cuts in the amounts made available to social services and the criticism and undermining of social workers? Will she have words with her ministerial colleagues to ensure that social services are properly funded and that social workers are given all the encouragement that they need?

Beverley Hughes: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that there has been an overall increase in child murders this year and that most of that rise is accounted for by perpetrators who are family members or who are known to the child. However, this is a single year, and as I said, the numbers fluctuate considerably, so it is far too early to conclude that this is not a temporary rise and that the level will not fall back again as it has in previous years.

Certainly, the Government have done a great deal since 1997 to strengthen child protection procedures in the guidance "Working Together to Safeguard Children", and through the introduction of a new, robust and more consistent framework for assessment to try to identify circumstances in which children might be at risk within their family. I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's premise that the funding situation is directly related to the rise in numbers. All local authorities prioritise this area of work, notwithstanding the many calls on their budgets. None the less, following this year's rise, we will be watching the situation very closely.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

11. **Judy Mallaber** (Amber Valley): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of antisocial behaviour orders and how to extend their use. [29859]

The Minister for Criminal Justice, Sentencing and Law Reform (Mr. Keith Bradley): Last Tuesday, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced important proposals to increase the effectiveness of antisocial behaviour orders. They include extending the power to apply for ASBOs to the British Transport police and registered social landlords, introducing an interim ASBO that can be issued prior to a full hearing, extending the power to make ASBOs to county courts and allowing ASBOs to "travel" with the person when the behaviour is likely to be repeated elsewhere.

We have also commissioned a review of ASBOs. Furthermore, every crime and disorder reduction partnership will have a co-ordinator to ensure that an effective strategy is in place to tackle antisocial behaviour.

Judy Mallaber: I welcome the proposals to improve the effectiveness of antisocial behaviour orders. In Amber Valley so far, one order has been taken out as apparently the only mechanism for tackling a long-standing case of antisocial behaviour, about which correspondence going back 10 years was passed on to me by my predecessor.

Will my right hon. Friend also conduct a survey and review of the availability and training of the solicitors whom the responsible agencies can use to pursue ASBOs? It has been put to me that the agencies are inhibited by the fact that the police have only one solicitor who deals with civil litigation, and that a non-unitary district council has similarly limited legal resources.

Mr. Bradley: Obviously, I am pleased that my hon. Friend welcomes the use of ASBOs. Hon. Members throughout the country have experienced cases of ASBOs tackling antisocial behaviour effectively. I am also pleased that she welcomes the review.

My hon. Friend made an important point about legal resources. Although a separate survey will not be conducted on that, the review covers the legal resources of partner agencies to deal effectively with applications for ASBOs and the legal costs of those applications. It is important to consider the matter carefully. When the review is published, I hope that my hon. Friend will find some comfort in the responses that we received.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): We welcome the Home Secretary's announcement last week about the improvement of ASBOs. However, will not the Minister admit that it is too little, too late? The Government stated that they wanted 5,000 ASBOs a year to be used. In the past three years, only 486 orders have been taken out. The community policeman of the year, PC Anthony Sweeney of West Yorkshire police, said that they are unworkable. Are not the Government worried that even after the Home Secretary's announcement, ASBOs will simply be a bureaucratic waste of time and money?

Mr. Bradley: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman believes that ASBOs are a waste of time. I believe that they are welcome in our communities throughout the country as a new and effective tool for dealing with antisocial behaviour. The purpose of the proposals announced by the Home Secretary is to ensure that they become more comprehensive. We are looking at their operation to ensure that they are as effective and efficient as possible. I believe that the Government's general plans, for tackling antisocial behaviour, in which ASBOs play an important part, will continue to be welcomed. I have listened carefully to the Opposition's denigration of them.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): I am pleased to say that in Doncaster the council has taken steps to establish an antisocial behaviour unit in conjunction with partners. The use of ASBOs is beginning to speed up through greater training. However, local magistrates and the youth offending team have told me that they could well use a secure unit in the Doncaster area for those 15 to 17-year-olds who are hard-core, persistent offenders. Will my right hon. Friend consider setting up secure units in places that would be better served by such provision locally? I suggest that Doncaster is one of those areas.

Mr. Bradley: My hon. Friend is right that partnership working is the most effective and efficient use of ASBOs. A good relationship between local authorities, the police and the extra agencies that have been included in the proposals is the best way to promulgate good practice. In my constituency, the relationship between the local authority and the police has been effective in tackling some of the most persistent offenders.

I shall consider further measures for tackling antisocial behaviour; we shall also examine sentencing policy in light of the Halliday review, and perhaps the extension of provisions such as intensive supervision and surveillance programme orders through the youth courts. I shall consider my hon. Friend's proposal for Doncaster carefully. We need firm, effective action to ensure that our communities live in peace and harmony.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): Is it altogether surprising that there should be such a low take-up of ASBOs when the evidence appears to be that the Government are very slow in making use of other powers that they have to deal with antisocial behaviour? Is it correct, for instance, that the Government have failed to implement section 53 of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000? There are 100,000 people who are in breach of their probation, who could be prosecuted for committing two breaches of probation, often of an antisocial kind, and could be sent to prison.

Mr. Bradley: Once again, we have an Opposition trying to undermine the measures that we have introduced to tackle antisocial behaviour and crime in our communities. Effective measures that have public support are constantly undermined by the Opposition. The provisions in the legislation that we have introduced will be rolled out to ensure the most effective use of the orders. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman listen more carefully to the Leader of the Opposition, who always urges a spirit of co-operation to try to tackle the problems in our communities. Once again, words and practice are completely at odds.

Opposition Day

[10TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.31 pm

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I beg to move,

That this House deplores the failure of the Government over the past four years to negotiate with the Government of France on the re-application of the bilateral agreement on immigration to the case of asylum seekers; and calls on the Government to ensure a more equitable distribution within the EU of the responsibility for assessing and meeting the claims of potential refugees.

I hope that the House will bear with us if we try a minor experiment. Opposition day debates have almost always been used for bringing the Government to account by criticising an aspect of the Government's record and seeking some defence and explanation. That is a useful part of the work of the House, but on this occasion we want to follow a different pattern. It is not our intention to point to Government failure, although there is some in this area, but to seek to explain the cause of the difficulties that the Government have encountered, and try to suggest, in a constructive spirit, how those might be remedied.

This is an opportune moment to do that because the Home Secretary is about to publish, perhaps in the next few days, a White Paper on asylum and related matters, and it is our belief that, although some of the measures that he proposes are likely to prove effective and all are likely to be well intentioned, the package as a whole is very unlikely to achieve its aims, because it fails to address a huge lacuna in the current arrangements.

These issues were brought before Parliament by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) and my hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) in a notable debate in Westminster Hall on 29 January 2002, and have been discussed on and off in the back corridors of Whitehall for some years, so I pretend to no originality, but it is also the case that most of the country has not been aware of the cause of the greater part of the problem with which the Home Secretary is wrestling on asylum.

Why was it only under this Government, who are perfectly well intentioned on asylum, that the issue suddenly attained such prominence? It was not the case that for the first time in recorded history there were many refugees and many people claiming refugee status. It is probably true that there has been something of an increase in the number of displaced persons during this Government's tenure, especially in Europe, owing to many causes of which the House is aware. However, that is by no means the largest part, or even a very significant part, of the explanation for the great rise in the number of those seeking asylum specifically in the UK.

I do not think that there is any dispute between the Government and ourselves—indeed, the answers that the Home Secretary just gave me in Question Time reinforced that point, and it is evident to both sides of the House—that towards the end of 1997 the bilateral agreement between the UK and France, which had governed both immigration and asylum, fell away, or at least those parts of it that related to asylum fell away.

I do not in the least seek to blame the Government for what happened. No doubt the Home Secretary will, rightly, point out that in the original bilateral agreement it was provided that at the inception of the Dublin convention those parts of the agreement would fall away. That was arranged by a Conservative Government, so no blame attaches to the present Government for the fact that shortly after they came to power, the bilateral agreement fell away.

However, the Government have now been in power not for a few weeks or a few months, but for almost five years. In any event, we now need to look forward rather than back. The cause of the vast increase in the number of people seeking asylum in this country is almost undoubtedly the falling away of the bilateral agreement and its supersession by the Dublin convention.

A moment or two ago, the Home Secretary answered my very specific question—about how many people coming from France and seeking asylum in the UK had been returned to France under the Dublin convention—by saying two things. I fully subscribe to one of them, namely that the Dublin convention is not working and he therefore does not know the answer to my question.

Secondly, he said that a considerable number of people—rather more than 6,000—who had sought entry to the UK had been automatically returned to France. I do not doubt it, but what the Home Secretary was not at pains to point out is that those people were not seeking asylum but were other sorts of immigrants. Of course, the bilateral agreement with the French authorities, which was signed by a Conservative Government, continues to operate with regard to those who are not seeking asylum. The problem relates to those who are seeking asylum.

Let me illustrate, in very broad orders of magnitude, the scale of the problem with which we are collectively dealing. The official statistics suggest that just over 90,000 people seek asylum in the UK annually. There are rather more than 30,000 people—about 5,000 more, I think—in a similar position in France, which is just over a third of the number here.

The astonishing fact is that nobody knows how many of the people who seek asylum in the UK come directly or proximately from France. I do not believe that the Home Secretary is concealing any information; there is no published information that allows one to establish the figure exactly. However, estimates have been made, and I believe that there are figures for specific ports. So far as one can make out, about 30,000 people probably come into this country from France seeking asylum every year.

If we subtract that figure of just over 30,000 from the just over 90,000 people who seek asylum in the UK, and add it to the 30,000 or so people who seek asylum in France, we come up with a surprising and illuminating result: by reinstating the effect of the bilateral agreement between the UK and France in respect of asylum, one could achieve a rough equalisation. I am not speaking in exact figures; I do not think that anybody knows those—I certainly do not. However, there would be a rough equalisation of the burden of dealing with asylum applications in France and the UK.

In other words, roughly speaking, 60,000 people would be seeking asylum in each of the two countries, rather than the present figures of about 30,000 and about 90,000 respectively.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the fact that English is now a predominant language, especially in the countries from which those people originate, plays an important part? Is he not presenting a rather simplistic argument?

Mr. Letwin: The strange fact is that the position that the hon. Gentleman correctly alludes to was already undoubtedly true before 1997. None of us can calculate the numbers exactly. There is no doubt that most of those who were seeking asylum before 1997 would have preferred to enter this country, partly on linguistic grounds. However, until about September 1997, if someone travelled from France, for example, to seek asylum in this country on linguistic or any other ground, under the bilateral agreement they were automatically returned—to use the Home Secretary's phrase—to France. That no longer obtains, however. There has been a significant shift in the way the system works and has worked since late 1997.

The Home Secretary rightly said that the Dublin convention is not an adequate substitute. It does not work because, as the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), accepted in an Adjournment debate in Westminster Hall on 29 January, it has proved quite impossible to establish that the first place in the EU that such people entered was France. The Dublin convention, which relies on the notion of the first place of entry, has not proved an adequate substitute for the bilateral agreement, and numbers have shot up.

Barring some slight quibble about exact numbers, nothing that I have said so far is a major cause of dissension between ourselves and the Government. I suspect that the position that I have outlined is one with which the Home Secretary himself has wrestled, and that like me he would prefer the creation of something resembling the bilateral agreement. Indeed, in replying to the Westminster Hall debate, the Under-Secretary eloquently sketched those very problems, and was at pains to point out how far the Government have gone in negotiating with the French. She referred to negotiations about Sangatte and many other matters, and I have no doubt that the Government are worthily engaged in repeated discussions with the French.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman is adopting a constructive tone, which has not always been struck in past debates on this subject, but does he really believe that we can deal with the problems associated with movements of people within Europe purely through bilateral agreements with France, or any other country? To make progress on this issue, we need to develop common systems that involve not just the UK and France, but other European countries. Such systems are already being discussed in the EU.

Mr. Letwin: The honest answer to the hon. Gentleman's reasonable question is no—I suffer from no such illusion. I am sure that a bilateral agreement with France is not a complete solution and many of our recommendations, and many of the proposals in the Home Secretary's White Paper, go beyond that. Moreover, there is undoubtedly a place for multilateral negotiation. However, unlike under the bilateral agreement, France now bears about one third of the burden borne by the UK. France is also totally out of kilter not just with the UK but with Germany, Italy and other EU countries. It is therefore reasonable to propose—as I said, I suspect the Home Secretary and I could agree on such a proposition—that the problems with which the Home Secretary and the country are wrestling would be vastly ameliorated if the bilateral agreement were reinstated.

Mr. Gerrard: Does not the history of dealing with asylum issues and illegal entry by trying to plug a perceived loophole show that another route will be found? Unless we achieve multilateral agreements, no solutions will be found and people will simply move from place to place.

Mr. Letwin: There are facts of geography about which the hon. Gentleman and I can agree. France is rather near and rather large, and large numbers of people have always found their way there. A stubborn fact, difficult to ignore, is that when the bilateral agreement was in place, a significantly smaller number of people found their way into the United Kingdom seeking asylum and a rather larger number remained in, or returned to, France. The precise nature of those facts is difficult to pin down because the whole matter is shrouded in statistical obscurity, but the general outline is clear. I am not seeking to solve all problems in a trice by these means, but simply to solve a major part of the problem. That would be a constructive effort in itself.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that even if there were to be a bilateral agreement, and there is an argument for that, it would be a small contribution to the wider issue? According to the migrant helpline in Dover, the numbers coming through the channel tunnel are going down. According to the figures that I was given when I was in Sangatte last Friday, 98 per cent. of those attempting to come from France to England in the Calais area are stopped in France, and only 2 per cent. are found as illegal asylum seekers here. Therefore, the reality is that about 2 per cent. of people might be sent back. Of those, many keep attempting to come here, so sending them back is not a solution.

Mr. Letwin: The hon. Gentleman is right: it is not a solution in that it is not a complete solution. I do not think that he is right to speak purely of illegal efforts to enter this country. In many cases, we are talking about people residing in France who make an effort to enter this country, which may not, in itself, be illegal. None of us knows the exact numbers. As I said, the whole matter is shrouded in statistical obscurity. However, my suggestion could form a significant part of a solution. The hon. Gentleman is right to describe it as an advance and say that there is a case for it. As for whether, on reinstating the bilateral agreement, so much of the problem goes away that the rest of the Home Secretary's measures are enough to cure the problem, I do not speculate. However, it would be an advance if we could at least cure this part of the problem.

[Mr. Letwin]

I wish to address two points that have been raised by people who reject the idea of reinstating a bilateral agreement. Interestingly, neither was raised by the Under-Secretary in her response to the debate on 29 January, which suggests that, quite rightly, the Government do not place any emphasis on these arguments. However, I want to dispel them before they are raised in this debate.

It has been argued that we cannot have a bilateral agreement because of the Dublin convention. The Under-Secretary was right to say on 29 January that that is a false argument. It is possible to have a bilateral agreement, notwithstanding the Dublin convention. It is possible not only in theory but in practice, as has been shown by Germany and Denmark, which have such an agreement in place. I accept that there are disanalogies as well as analogies between the Danish-German case and our own vis-à-vis France. However, the continued existence of the German-Danish bilateral agreement, never challenged, shows that it is possible to have such an agreement notwithstanding the Dublin convention. I think that we are agreed with Ministers on that point.

The second argument is that it is not possible to renegotiate a bilateral agreement when it would be so advantageous for the UK and so disadvantageous for France, which seems to bear out the strength of my previous argument. This is where I take issue with the doomsayers. I accept that we cannot expect the Home Secretary to find himself one sunny morning in Paris, alongside his opposite number in the French Government, and, over a croissant and cup of coffee, emerge, without cost to the UK, with a new, glistening bilateral agreement that resolves the problem.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): Or a bottle of burgundy.

Mr. Letwin: Even a bottle of burgundy, as the Home Secretary says from a sedentary position, would not be sufficient to achieve this admirable result. I accept that the process of negotiation is difficult. What I do not accept is the proposition that because it is difficult, we should give up.

If I believed that, I should have to disbelieve the entirety of the Government's rhetoric about their relationship with our European Union partners. I have heard it said repeatedly over the past few years that the point of the Government's strategy vis-à-vis our EU partners was that it had put the Government in a position to achieve successful outcomes to difficult negotiations because it would be in our partners' interests to do diplomatic deals with us in the knowledge that we would do deals with them. In short, we would be part of the club, obey the rules and be good citizens so that we could achieve things of use to our country.

If ever an item would clearly be of use to our country, the bilateral agreement is one. If, therefore, there were ever a case, vis-à-vis a major European partner, for implementing the strategy on which the Government pride themselves, this is it. If the Foreign Office knew how to engage effectively in diplomacy, it would know what to trade and how to trade in order to achieve the desired result. It has, uncharitably, sometimes been alleged that just as the Department of Trade and Industry sponsors industry under the present Administration, and the Department for Education and Skills sponsors teachers, so the Foreign and Commonwealth Office sponsors foreigners. I do not for one moment believe that lamentable accusation. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why not?"] In contrast to some of my hon. Friends, I am persuaded that the officials of the FCO and the Foreign Secretary—not least because he was a distinguished occupant not long ago of the Home Secretary's current office—are fully conversant with the fact that it is in our interest to achieve a renegotiated bilateral agreement. I imagine that they have all the skills necessary to identify the items—minor items, but significant to the Quai d'Orsay—that could be traded off for that desirable result.

It is not necessary for the French Government to accept a new agreement. As the Home Secretary pointed out during Question Time, the bilateral agreement still exists and applies to cases that are not related to asylum. All that is necessary is the adjustment, by reinstatement of one sub-paragraph, of an existing bilateral agreement. That should not be beyond the ingenuity of the Foreign Office.

My point is that if that action is not taken, the Home Secretary will produce his White Paper in good faith, we shall consider its proposals constructively and the country will hope that it will succeed. It is very likely, however, that it will turn out to be a car without an engine. A system that is under the greatest strain will not be able to implement its third system in just a few years—even the first of those systems has not yet been fully implemented—while the sheer number of applications continues at its present rate, largely because of the absence of the bilateral agreement. I am trying to provide the Home Secretary with a means to reduce the flow into the bathtub so that he may succeed in dealing with the water in the bath. That is a piece of constructive opposition, and I hope that the Home Secretary will take advantage of it.

Dr. Iddon: How would the hon. Gentleman answer the criticism made of the original bilateral agreement, that those who had knowledge of English procedures and the language were able to stay here long enough to implement judicial processes that meant that they spent longer on British soil than on French, making the French reluctant to accept them back in a transfer?

Mr. Letwin: I answer that point in the words of the bilateral agreement. Incidentally, the agreement has sometimes been misrepresented as being a gentleman's agreement. It was nothing of the kind. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh?"] I intend no adverse comment on either of the signatories. It was signed by officials of the two states on 20 April 1995, and it spoke of:

> "Refusal of admission and removal within 24 hours of departure".

That had exactly the automaticity of which the Home Secretary spoke so powerfully in the—irrelevant—case of those who are not seeking asylum. The very fact that the agreement works so well for those not seeking asylum—as the Home Secretary pointed out during Question Time—gives hope that it will again, as it did in the past, work well for those who are seeking asylum, precisely because of that speed.

My closing comments also relate to a point that was made during Question Time. The Home Secretary has not so far tried to deny the assertion—I shall be the first to withdraw if he does deny it—founded on a document in my possession that appears to be leaked, that the initial estimate for expenditures on the asylum support system in the UK for 2001–02 will be about £1.09 billion. The document notes that

> "figures are estimates in advance of grant claims from local authorities. The allocation at the start of the year was £403 million, which was understood to be a provisional estimate."

I quite understand that provisional estimates are never accurate. I accept that a variation of 10 per cent., or even 20 per cent., especially in a demand-led service of this kind, would be normal. My right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis), in his former role as the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, might have been willing to grant that a 30 or 40 per cent. increase was tolerable in such circumstances. When we are dealing with an increase of 150 per cent. compared with the provisional figure, however, it looks as though some accident has occurred: it looks as though some carelessness has crept into the system.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): Does the hon. Gentleman think that that accident or carelessness is comparable with the accident or carelessness that occurred under the previous Government, when towns such as Slough were expected—with no prior warning—to maintain asylum seekers with no support at all from the Government? That decision put a £2 million hole in the budget of the council in the town that I represent.

Mr. Letwin: The figure seems large. However, I am more than prepared to accept that the asylum system has for a long time imposed serious strains on all Governments. I began the debate by saying that I did not seek, on this occasion, to use the Opposition day to prove a failure by the Government, but rather to suggest a way forward. I am willing to accept that the strains under which the present system of asylum, the lack of the bilateral agreement and the other deficiencies of structure have put the Home Office have made it well-nigh impossible for the Home Office to constrain the sums it spends—or even remotely accurately to predict them.

During Question Time, the Home Secretary said that the lack of the bilateral agreement and the numbers coming to us from France were no part of the explanation of the under-prediction. It will be interesting to learn whether that is because he does not believe that the under-prediction actually occurred. Perhaps he will tell us that there is some other cause.

My claim is simple. At present, neither the Home Secretary, for all the good will that he has displayed in this matter, nor his officials, for all the ingenuity that they are displaying and will display when the White Paper is implemented, are able to deal with the problems that we face as a nation, because the weight of the numbers and the speed of the arrival and the disproportion—*[Interruption.]* Does my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) want to intervene?

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): My hon. Friend refers to the weight of numbers. I was observing that it was not a description that would apply to the number of Labour MPs attending the debate.

Mr. Letwin: That is not a point that I would have made—although it is nevertheless strangely true.

The disproportion between the burden being borne by this country and by our nearest and closest neighbour is so great that no group of men and women—however mightily they strive—is likely to conquer the problem. I hope, therefore, that rather than refuting and retorting, the Home Secretary will adopt what I believe to be the right posture in the face of such suggestions. I hope that he will entertain the possibility that he can persuade his right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to get to work, with all the wiles for which our Foreign Office has long been known, to try to reinstate a bilateral agreement that, although it will not be a complete solution—I accept the points made by hon. Members on both sides of the House—will none the less make a constructive effort to help us bear and solve a problem whose solution has for so long eluded us.

4 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

> 'notes that co-operation with France on immigration and asylum issues is greater now than it has ever been; recognises that there has been an overall drop from 13,527 in 2000 to 10,927 in 2001, a drop of almost 20 per cent., in the number of people crossing illegally to the UK from France; further notes that bilateral co-operation continues to address the problem of asylum seekers in Northern France, that the French have made significant investment in police reinforcements in the region and judicial action has been taken against human traffickers and that, as a result of the imposition of the civil penalty, the number of clandestine entrants was reduced by 27 per cent. in 2001; and further notes that the previous Conservative Government left the asylum system in complete disarray, with local authorities left to pick up the pieces.'.

I take it from the manner and tone of the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) in this afternoon's presentation that he—rather than his chief of staff, whom I have read about this weekend—wrote his speech. I understand that the Leader of the Opposition entered the Chamber a minute or two ago, so I also take it that the hon. Gentleman's speech is a follow-through from his leader's speech last week, but presented in a different tone. I now understand the hon. Gentleman's tone, and I like it. In fact, on Friday at Cardiff, I said, "You are awful, but I like you." Dick Emery used to say that, and the phrase seemed to fit very well.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): He used to get dressed up.

Mr. Blunkett: I am not going to do that even for my friend, the Leader of the Opposition—even though *The Mirror* reported that we dined together. We dined during the general election campaign at a secret meeting in North Yorkshire. We met, had a buffet supper and then debated on Radio 4's "Any Questions", and we both enjoyed it very much. At that moment, I thought that if one lad from North Yorkshire fails, this lad will succeed in leading the Tory party, but we have got nothing to worry about. That is what I thought at the time, and nothing has disabused me of it since.

We are debating an interesting issue: putting Britain first. I think that that was the thrust of the Leader of the Opposition's speech last week, so this debate is a follow-through. I am pleased that we are debating the issue this afternoon because this happens to be the day that the

[Mr. Blunkett]

French Government have implemented legislation, which they had to push through their Parliament, known as the implementation of domestic juxtaposed controls at Paris. We already have juxtaposed checks in London and Paris because they were imposed when the channel tunnel opened, but those using the domestic rail route from Paris to Calais did not have to be checked by British immigration officials. As a consequence, people with domestic tickets used that loophole to stay on the train and travel through the tunnel. The British Government pressed the French to legislate; they had to change their law.

I want the House to consider what would have happened if the French Government had requested us to alter our internal ticketing and travel arrangements so that people travelling from London to Dover had to go through French passport and immigration controls just to be able to get to Dover, not France. The mirror image of that has been imposed by the French today, having legislated during the autumn. We should get into perspective what the French are prepared, or not prepared, to do.

Given the tone of the hon. Gentleman's introduction, I shall be honest with him. Who believes that we will achieve a major change in French immigration policy in the immediate run-up to the presidential and Assembly elections in April and June? I am prepared to have a go and ask—I am sure that the Leader of the Opposition will join me—President Chirac not to make immigration an issue in the French presidential elections. If he is prepared to do that, we can stand four-square together, and we can get somewhere. The French Prime Minister, the Minister of the Interior and Madame Guigou, the Minister with responsibility for the encampments and the accommodation, would be in a much better position—would they not?—to respond to our approaches.

I would obviously also have to take into account the very different situation that has existed in France over the years and that the hon. Gentleman undoubtedly knows about: the tolerated illegal presence. Part of renegotiating the Dublin agreement involves ensuring that that state of affairs does not exist. For those who are not totally familiar with the issue, the problem is that the position in France is unlike that in Britain. If the people at an encampment such as Sangatte seek to move on to claim asylum elsewhere and do not claim asylum in France, they are not arrested or removed. That policy goes back a long way in France and, as the hon. Gentleman said about another front, the position is not the same in Germany, Italy or most other European countries. Tolerated illegal presence means that people are not claiming asylum in France.

That point is relevant because of the agreement that Germany and Denmark reached in Dublin. It relates to those people who tried to claim asylum in Germany but failed and who then tried to move across the border to Denmark to claim asylum there. However, we are faced with a very different situation. We cannot persuade people to claim asylum in France for love or money. We have promised them free Burgundy, sunshine and all sorts of other things, but they will not do so.

With the best will in the world, I cannot compel the French Government to force potential asylum seekers to claim asylum in France. However, I can make it clear to the French Government that if asylum seekers refuse to claim asylum in France, they are tolerating an illegal presence. Under Dublin II, as it has become known, we need to be able to enforce the same approach across Europe, so that those who refuse to seek asylum in the country in which they are illegally present are removed to the place from where they came.

Holding this debate today is interesting, not least because I have had to do my homework on it. I always welcome that, as I did when I was the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. Doing our homework is good for us, and it enables us to enlighten others, such as the avid readers of *Hansard* across the country waiting for our every word to dribble out on the web.

Simon Hughes: I too welcome this debate, as I did last Tuesday's debate with the Under-Secretary. That too was a good-natured event that sought the truth.

Will the Home Secretary answer two questions to which I do not know the answers? First, apart from the agreement between Germany and Denmark—we know about that—is he aware of any other bilateral conventions between European Union countries that deal with people who have sought asylum and moved, or not moved, on? Secondly, how far have the discussions that the EU Commission initiated in September proceeded? They were an attempt to reach a more universal EU-wide agreement that would not rely on bilateral arrangements. Answers to those questions would provide relevant background information.

Mr. Blunkett: First, I am aware of no other countries that have such an agreement—and probably for the reasons that I have just enunciated. Secondly, the Commission set up a working party that continues to meet. We hope that, under the Spanish presidency, the process will be accelerated because Spain, like us, has a particular interest in this issue. Many people enter Spain from Morocco and north Africa, and Spain also wants a more rational and sensible Europe-wide agreement. Whatever the differences between me and Conservative Members, we all know and believe in our hearts that that is a sensible way forward. I hope that in future some sense will emerge.

I shall return to the well presented questions that arose after the Dublin agreement of 1990. There was a so-called gentleman's agreement between 1995 and 1997, but the difficulty was not that there was not reasonable intent, but that the time scales, as enunciated by the hon. Member for West Dorset, were very tight. People had to be turned back literally overnight. A difficulty arose before the gentleman's agreement because of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 and the wonderful terms in it, such as "statutory suspensive appeal", that related to whether people could exercise their right of appeal.

The Home Secretary tried to change the law in 1996, but as experts in this field will recall, he had difficulties with judges over withdrawal of benefits. The courts ruled that the National Assistance Act 1948 requires support to be given. As local authorities had become the conduit for that support, we decided to provide a more rational way of providing it by establishing the National Asylum Support Service. Incidentally, the local authority grant has grown over the years and is now £500 million, which is a tremendous amount of money.

The Government not only ran into problems with the courts in 1996 but had problems with my favourite legal ruse, judicial review. Having agreed to set aside the 1993 Act, they decided to have a judicial review of the removal of asylum seekers, thereby delaying deportation, a point to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) alluded. People were therefore able to stay in this country longer than they had in France and were entitled to claim asylum here.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Surely the Home Secretary accepts that the legal difficulties to which he refers occurred at the very end of the last Conservative Government. His party has been in power for five years. Surely he and his predecessor should have found a way to address that gap in the law which, as he rightly says, was generated by judges perhaps over-reaching their authority.

Mr. Blunkett: That is an interesting observation. When we debated the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, I suggested that judicial review was used inappropriately, and we had an interesting discussion on whether the Special Immigration Appeals Commission should become a court of superior record. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House were deeply exercised by my concerns about judicial review. I suspect that we will return to that subject in the months and years to come because judicial review has been used over the past 20 years to thwart Parliament's decisions. There is no question about that. I look forward to receiving support from all quarters of the House if we think it necessary to introduce measures to clarify the situation and make the will of Parliament clear. The important consideration is whether the system in operation is fair and reasonable. It cannot be used simply to build in delays that frustrate the will of Parliament and therefore the democratic will of the country. That is an interesting test of what we need to do.

Of course there are problems, such as whether people are claiming asylum in France. If they are trying to get into this country, however, we have the problem of turning them around fast enough when they make a claim. As I said at Question Time, last year we sent back to France more than 6,800 people who, for a variety of reasons, either did not immediately claim asylum or did not have a substantive claim. The moment that someone claims asylum, they become part of the process.

It is interesting to consider how many people are coming through the tunnel or crossing the channel, and whether the number poses a serious problem. It is a worry, not least to a Home Secretary returning from his summer holiday. For example, the *Daily Express*—I do not want to pick on it; after all, it has only picked on me every other day since 10 June—highlights day after day the hordes of people who are supposed to be entering our country through the tunnel. What is actually happening is that they are not getting through, as the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) made clear. The visual signs in August and September, whether by photograph or television, vividly demonstrated the difficulty. At Christmas, 500 people stormed the barbed wire trying to get through, but they did not get through. Measures have been taken to help with that, and to help cross-channel carriers on the ferries.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, as Eurotunnel's attempts to reopen the route have failed on each occasion, the lives of many asylum seekers have been put at risk, and that freight carriers in the Vale of York and elsewhere in the country are being hugely disadvantaged because trains are to be checked only between 9 pm and 3 am? The escalation of the asylum seeker problem has ramifications for the transport industry as well as for his Department.

Mr. Blunkett: I am painfully aware of that. The measures that I announced on 19 September involved co-operation with those operating on the French side of the tunnel and the ports—working not only with Eurotunnel, for instance, but with SNCF and English, Welsh and Scottish Railways—to see whether we can assist in advance security measures and agree the steps that need to be taken.

I am grateful to the hon. Lady for bringing me to this point in my speech more speedily than I otherwise would have reached it. I am pleased to say that, after more than four months since a civil penalty was imposed on Eurotunnel, and owing to the measures that it has implemented and the dramatic fall in the number of people getting through illegally, we are lifting the civil penalty as from this afternoon. We will do so for SNCF for similar reasons, and we have withdrawn any claim concerning EWS, which we accept is not legally liable for its efforts.

That has been achieved because enormous strides have been taken. We want Eurotunnel and others to be able concentrate their time and resources on ensuring that they can operate commercially and effectively and on continuing to take with us the rigorous steps that have been taken. That illustrates that, as with SNCF and the French, we will reciprocate where there is co-operation, as with the juxtaposed checks at Paris that will operate from today.

A number of things are moving and there is improvement, but as I said to Elisabeth Guigou, there will be no progress until Sangatte is closed and no alternative is opened along the coast. She accepts, and indicated publicly that she had not advocated, and will not advocate, a further Sangatte in the Pas-de-Calais area, and that the long-term objective must be to close Sangatte. I believe that the short-term objective must be to close it, and we need to consider how we can do that, now or following the presidential and assembly elections, in a meaningful way.

All that leads me to believe that the problem is Europe-wide and international and that it needs to be set in the context of more widely managed migration and nationality policy and not simply asylum. We need a reasonable and rational debate. I therefore welcome the tone adopted by the shadow Home Secretary. In response to my statement on 29 October, he put his position in the form of questions. I failed to acknowledge all 15 of them, but I acknowledge now that he is entirely right to believe that I would accept that he is an honourable man and that the answers to most of the questions were yes. I believe that when we debate the White Paper the response will be similarly balanced.

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): Does the Home Secretary accept that asylum seekers will keep on coming until the chaos of their processing is sorted out? Last month, two young Afghan lads came to see me at my surgery in Battle to say that they had arrived

[Mr. Gregory Barker]

separately and applied for asylum in November 1999—one had paid $10,000 to be smuggled into the country on a lorry—but that more than two years later, they had yet to receive their first Home Office interview. For more than two years, they have been left in limbo, the sword of Damocles hanging over their heads, unable to work, and a burden on the taxpayer. Whether they stay or go, it is in no one's interest—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order.

Mr. Blunkett: That sounds like an Adjournment debate to me, but one that I would rather not inflict on my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary. I suggest that we take up the problem and do something about it. All hon. Members must recognise that I would have to be out of my mind not to want to change the administration and improve the effectiveness and operations of my Department's immigration and nationality directorate. I am determined to do so because, as I said last week, the Home Secretary is responsible and accountable for the actions of the thousands of people whom we employ. I am determined to get the matter sorted, and the system that we are to establish will help those people to do that.

That in no way undermines any of the points that have been made. We face a major challenge and we need to get Europe-wide agreement. In the meantime, we have to adopt rigorous measures ourselves to build trust and confidence in this country, and we need to ensure that our response is reasonable.

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South): Will my hon. Friend give us some idea of what progress is being made with our European partners other than France?

Mr. Blunkett: I believe that there is a new spirit in the European Union's perception of immigration and asylum issues. In part, the desire to co-operate to deal with the threat of international terrorism has accelerated people's understanding of the need to co-operate on these issues. In part, global changes are having a major impact. The ramifications of the Taliban's fall have started a chain reaction that affects us all and that none can escape. The boat people trying to get to Australia and the changes in immigration law in that country and others illustrate that impact. We have a common purpose of trying to ensure that we get our systems right.

There are no more countries to which we can pass people on; it is therefore inevitable that we will have to have robust border controls. We need to recognise the implications of that. I hope that we will have got the balance right when the White Paper is published. However, if the spirit of the shadow Home Secretary's approach at the end of October and again today is indicative of future debates, although the issue—not least the effectiveness of the policies that I introduce—will never be taken out of politics, we might be able to have a rational debate. Although his history is inaccurate and the solution that he seeks is therefore not immediately attainable, at least we have had a rational debate today.

4.23 pm

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I welcome the debate and its constructive and rational tone, which I intend to do nothing to disrupt. I welcomed equally the similar debate initiated by the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) in Westminster Hall last Tuesday. I hope that the Home Secretary agrees that that was a constructive and interesting aperitif to today's debate as well.

The hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) is aware of my respect for him, but I am amused by the way in which renegotiation of the bilateral agreement between Britain and France, which appeared to be a Back-Bench policy last Tuesday, moved quickly on Wednesday and Thursday to become a Front-Bench policy that has now been aired in debate today. I congratulate the Conservatives on the speed of their response to their right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden. Although entirely proper, the argument is not one that I had heard before last Tuesday in Westminster Hall.

Mr. Letwin: The hon. Gentleman tempts me to engage in a piece of honesty, which I shall perhaps regret later. The argument has been recent because we only recently asked ourselves, "Why did all this start going so terribly wrong shortly after the disappearance of the Conservative Government?" We came to the conclusion that it was not likely to be that fact which brought about the consequences, so we looked for other facts. My hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) must take the credit for raising the issue in the first place.

Simon Hughes: Let me continue to be honest, and, I hope, courteous to the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins), who is much respected for his expertise and knowledge. We greatly appreciate his contributions. There is nothing wrong. We are trying, too, to find factual explanations and to be constructive. I hope that now, when we get the White Paper and during the debates between then and the Bill, there can be the best possible answers to these difficult international questions.

I have some other introductory words for the Home Secretary. I welcome, but I am sure not nearly as much as Eurotunnel or the other operators, the announcement made by the right hon. Gentleman a short while ago of the withdrawal of the civil penalty. If I may say so, that is a proper reward and a proper response. Having expended quite a lot of effort over the past six months informing myself of the facts, I believe that considerable efforts have been made and millions of pounds invested, not least by Eurotunnel, to try to help the authorities on both sides, as well Eurotunnel itself, to deal with the clear difficulty of trying to prevent people moving illegally from France to the United Kingdom.

I do not want to repeat verbatim or in general the speech that I made in Westminster Hall on Tuesday. I shall however say a few words about the background before I turn to the foreground.

I was extremely helped by the time that I spent on Friday morning and Friday afternoon, only three days ago, in Sangatte and Calais, with the Red Cross, with its camp director and with staff. I had the opportunity to talk to asylum seekers, or would-be asylum seekers, or migrants in the camp, of whom there were many.

Secondly, I had the opportunity to talk to representatives of Eurotunnel on their site. I have talked to them in this place, but I was able to talk to them on site and to see the site itself. I spent some time with the company's officials and employees as vehicles were being checked. Like every other day, the checks revealed that people were trying illegally to get through. That happened last Friday morning, and those involved were intercepted by the twin efforts of Eurotunnel staff, who first engaged in electronic video imaging of vehicles and then a carbon dioxide test to determine whether humans were in the vehicles in question. In other words, there is a double check. That resulted in a number of people being found, even in the earlier hours of Friday morning before I had arrived. They were handed over to the authorities and made no further progress.

We must see the issue in the context of the pattern of refugees and asylum seekers and their movements throughout the world. For those who follow these debates—mercifully, there are quite a few—the most useful compendium that I have found is a large volume, which I often carry with me on these occasions, which is published by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Oxford University Press. It sets out the state of the world's refugees and provides all the figures from 1950 to 2000. It shows that patterns of migration change; the countries from which people come change too.

The publication makes the telling point that, of about 12 million people who are refugees, most of them are near where they fled from. Most of them are refugees not in the rich north-west of Europe but in poor parts of the world—Pakistan, if they fled from Afghanistan, or central Africa if they fled from other countries in central Africa. When we confront these issues, we must remember how relatively few people make their way to the shores of Britain, or seek to come to Britain at all.

If we compare the number of people who apply for entry with the wealth of the country concerned, we are about 77th in the league table. If we take the number of people who seek to come to a country relative to its population, in terms of the European Union, we are about seventh, eighth or ninth. It is true that in recent years the numbers of people who have sought to come to the United Kingdom have increased. However, they have not grown without interruption over the past decade. They grew in the first part of the 1990s and then the numbers fell. They grew again and then again they declined, and they have now grown significantly in the past few years.

Although we have not seen a final version of last year's figures, in each of the last couple of years, about 90,000 people have sought to come to this country. The obvious next question is: how many have had their applications granted? The figures are not insignificant. Whatever the arguments about the many people who are not asylum seekers but economic migrants—the Home Secretary was right to say that, to be honest, almost everybody falls into one category or the other—if they are not asylum seekers, they are still seeking to better themselves, so it is right that the Government should think of ways of giving them a proper channel to apply to go through on the basis of economic opportunity. But in 2000, the last full year for which figures are available, 31 per cent. of asylum seekers had their applications granted and a further 18 per cent. had applications granted on appeal. So of those who arrived and put a case, just short of 50 per cent. of them, although the figure has been lower and occasionally higher, have had their case accepted by authorities.

I therefore hope that our debate will acknowledge that many of those people make a good case to come here and are fleeing awful circumstances. As a constituency MP, I have heard about enough awful circumstances from people from Sierra Leone whose families have been brutally murdered, as well as from people from Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Afghanistan and the middle east. Unless someone does our sort of job, or works with those people regularly, they would not understand that, unless we come to the debate with compassion and humanity, we are not doing our job properly as parliamentarians. I hope that people outside, including some of those who write for national daily papers, have as much interest in presenting that side of the story as they do in presenting the somewhat distorted picture of people trying to break through and come illegally to the United Kingdom.

One other preliminary point—*[Interruption.]* I heard the Home Secretary. I beg his pardon; one other linked point is that it is imperative that we seek—and I hope that the Bill to be introduced after the White Paper will do so—first, to provide a way for people who want to come here as economic migrants to put a case; and secondly, to provide a route for asylum seekers who reach the European Union to put their case when they get here. I agree that the Dublin convention, which may have been conceived with the best intentions, has failed, for obvious reasons. If somebody first comes to the attention of the authorities in, for example, northern France, it is unlikely that they will know exactly where they entered the EU and which was the first country in which they arrived. Even if they knew, they might not tell the authorities; and if they did tell them, they would probably not have any papers to confirm it. The theory that they could be sent back to the country in which they first arrived is unlikely ever to work in practice.

The arrangements are also nonsense because, by definition, most people arrive across the landmass from the east and the south; enforcing them would put all the burden on Greece, Austria and Germany, and very little on other countries to the west. That international issue is sometimes created by European migration—for example, owing to civil war in the former Yugoslavia—and sometimes by events like the terrible troubles in Afghanistan; but we need to address it collectively so that we share the burden responsibly. We therefore endorse the reference to that aim in the Conservative motion; indeed, we adopted it in our amendment, and it is a shared European objective. Generally, the number of people applying in France appears to be going up; the number applying in Britain may be going up too. In any event, we must realise that we are in this together.

The Home Secretary is of course right that it is probably more likely that agreements with the French, or agreements to which the French will be party, will be made after the two sets of elections than before. We are political realists. Immigration issues register quite high in domestic politics, for obvious reasons, so we will probably have to wait until after the presidential and parliamentary assembly elections in the spring and early summer, and until the new Administration have the confidence to answer such questions anew.

In the light of my experience last Friday, I have five practical suggestions. My experience at Sangatte confirmed that it is not a holiday camp: it is not luxurious. It is a completely unheated hangar, in which there are twice as many people as there are beds, and in which there

[Simon Hughes]

are mainly men aged between 16 and 30, but a considerable number of women, teenagers and children also. They queue for hours for a shower. The hot water is on for about four hours a day—two hours in the morning and two in the evening. The people queue for many hours for their two meals a day. There is one small television, which broadcasts in French. I did not see a single newspaper, magazine or piece of educative material.

I had conversations with some of the people there—all of whom, as it happens, come from Afghanistan—who spoke English; the majority do not. They made it clear to me, first, that they left Afghanistan because at the time the country was extremely disrupted and had a history of almost 25 years of war; secondly, that they left with the support of their families, because their families wanted them to escape and to better themselves; and thirdly, that although they understood that things had settled in Afghanistan, they were unlikely to believe, about a month after the interim Government took office, that there was in place the stable peace that they hoped for, given that all the other stable peaces for which they had hoped over the past 25 years had been false dawns.

We cannot persuade people to go back the minute peace comes to a country or part of a country. It is just not a credible argument that things will not be as bad again if they go home. A belief that we can immediately say, "If you come from Afghanistan, you will all now feel comfortable about going back", struck me as an unrealistic option. It might be much more realistic in the medium or long term, but as of today, this month and next month, very little in the world will persuade those people that they ought to go home.

Secondly—the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Barker) made a similar point—when I asked the people how they had come to Europe, most said that they had paid about $10,000. Most had put themselves in the hands of the traffickers. Most of them chose to say that they wanted to go to the UK, either because, from their own information back in Afghanistan or wherever else they believed that that would be the best place—with the highest principles, respect for human rights, opportunities to work and decent treatment—or because, having listened to the World Service and so on, they spoke English and felt more comfortable with the language than with any other.

Those were practical reasons, but I asked people whether, if Denmark, Germany, France or another country offered them the same prospects, they would consider going there, and many said yes. I suggest to the Home Secretary, and I will suggest to the French ambassador when I see him next—I hope to see him again soon—that the most immediately useful step would be to establish an education and information programme at Sangatte, to give people the facts about what is happening in the countries from which they come, about the options for them now, and about what would happen to their case if they came to the UK. Many of them ought to know that even if they came, their case might be unlikely to succeed.

If, in the two hours I spent speaking to people at Sangatte, I was able to begin a dialogue which, I think, was effective in sharing some information, surely such an information flow could be provided on a regular basis. Certainly, the French Government have principal responsibility. The Red Cross is happy to facilitate it, and I would hope that other EU Governments will be able to help.

Thirdly, no one has apparently done objective research—so the director told me—into the routes, the motivation of the people coming and so on. A few journalists have asked a few questions, but nobody has checked the facts which, as the hon. Member for West Dorset reminded us, often are not known. There ought to be some scientific random sampling of the people at Sangatte now, so that we can find out where they are coming from and who is bringing them, and so that we can deal with some of the causes of their being there.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it may be a good idea to ask asylum seekers precisely those questions? Should we not ask them who brought them here and try to find out who the traffickers are? Perhaps we could persuade them by saying, "Look, if you tell us, you may have a better chance of getting here." I know that that approach is a bit hard, but it is so important to find out who is making all the money that we should perhaps tie consent to the giving of information.

Simon Hughes: The hon. Lady raises a perfectly proper question. Indeed, I asked such questions myself. My understanding is that many of the traffickers come from eastern Europe. They are around and about in northern France and shuttle between there and elsewhere regularly. Certainly, they should be picked up by the authorities on the basis of such information, where that is possible.

One of the things that came across very clearly is that the showing of a video to try to dissuade people from attempting illegally to cross the channel was a complete disaster. It failed for two obvious reasons. First, I understand it included images of the white cliffs of Dover, which made coming here even more appealing instead of putting people off. Secondly, it showed people trying to break into vehicles, which gave ideas about how to do so. No wonder it did not succeed in putting anybody off, but had the reverse effect. Everybody told me that the last thing we should do is go down that road again. People with authority and experience are needed to talk to those who are waiting individually in order to persuade them and offer options for the way forward.

My judgment is that Sangatte will probably not close in the very near future, for reasons that have been tested in the French courts. The camp probably should not be located where it is; it is within sight of the channel and the ferries are visible from it. I understand that that is an incentive for people to leave. However, there is no way on earth that the safeguards that Eurotunnel and others have introduced—they now pick up and stop 98 per cent. of people who are trying illegally to come through the tunnel—can be perfect. I spoke to people and I know that the evidence shows that, if a fence is built 2 km from the coast, people will come in 2.5 km from the coast, and the problem will merely be pushed back.

Some 70 per cent. of all freight coming through the tunnel is not container freight, but is open-sided, so people can get in at some stage. It will probably happen at an overnight stop. Most lorry drivers do not know what has happened. Most people are picked up and dealt with, but they will try again, as in their heads is the intention to try to come to Britain. We know the consequences. Most of them do not succeed and terrible injury and occasional death occur in the process. If and when Sangatte closes, we need instead several accommodation centres in and around Europe of the sort that the Government are proposing for this country to deal with the flows of people. The Home Secretary is absolutely right that that there is such a need on the southern Spanish coast, where hordes of people come into the country from the straits of Tangier and north Africa. The Spanish authorities cannot handle those people. Frankly, they process them and turn them out on to the streets of Spain the following day.

Finally—I have just asked the Home Secretary to take advice and I am very happy to contribute further—I come to a very effective point that was put to me by the director of the Red Cross centre at Sangatte. None of these people has any status at all in the world. If somebody is a refugee, they will have a passport saying that that is their status, but people who are seekers of asylum have no status. If we were to expect them to have some obligations in return for our giving them a status and papers, we would at a stroke take them out of the hands of the traffickers—the only people with whom they currently have a status—and put them into the hands of a system that could deal with them. I do not claim that that is my idea, but it struck me as an extremely telling point. If we could recognise people as wanting to be either asylum seekers or economic migrants—and if they could put the case for being either—we would have a chance of getting them into the system and processing them. Yes, in some cases, when peace has returned after a decent interval, whether in Afghanistan, Sierra Leone or—let us pray—Sri Lanka, they would have to go back, but a proper interval has to be allowed to ensure that that peace has been tested.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): The hon. Gentleman has made a number of interesting points, but will he address the one central point before he concludes his speech? Is his position and that of the Liberal Democrats that we should use some of our negotiating capital in Europe to get a bilateral agreement with France for the return of asylum seekers?

Simon Hughes: That is a perfectly proper question, and I shall end with a reply to it. I have nothing against trying a bilateral agreement. However, as I said in the recent debate in Westminster Hall, I do not believe that it is the way forward, not for any great theological reasons but because it simply passes the problem down the line or returns to France people who will try to come back again for the reasons that I gave earlier.

In northern Europe, the Schengen agreement means that there are no border controls and people do not therefore wait at other frontiers. They wait near the channel because we have border controls; Liberal Democrats, like the Conservatives, are in favour of retaining them. However, it means that the problem appears locally, at our frontiers, and nowhere else. Sending people back to France will simply lead to recycling, because they will not disappear. Even if the French could find out whence they entered France, we would simply pass the problem to somewhere else, such as Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium or Luxembourg.

I understand the argument that a bilateral agreement may not do any harm in the short term, but we need a Europe-wide solution as soon as possible. I have tried to offer some practical suggestions about what to do now, such as starting to educate people who get to the edge of the frontiers around the United Kingdom so that they understand the options. We should then deal with them humanely and fairly and help all those who have spent millions of pounds building their fences to realise that all the fences in the world do not change the aspirations of people who have paid $10,000 and travelled from Afghanistan to Calais. Telling such people that they cannot go any further will not persuade them that their journey should end and that they should return home.

4.46 pm

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): I apologise to the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) for missing some of his opening remarks. I welcome the measured and reasonable tone of the debate. I am sorry to say that the race card was played in the general election campaign, so it is gratifying that pejorative terms such as "bogus asylum seekers" have not been used in today's debate. When people use such terms, and make asylum deeply party political, the only beneficiary is the British National party. There was evidence of that in my constituency in the general election campaign, when race and immigration were raised. I therefore welcome the change in the tone of our debates since the hon. Gentleman took over as shadow Home Secretary.

The system has difficulties, many of which were acknowledged in the opening speeches and many of which occur in and around Calais because of Sangatte. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said that his ultimate goal is the centre's closure, because its existence means that people congregate at the closest crossing point to the United Kingdom.

I represent a port area. We often talk about Dover and Calais, but I represent Immingham, one of the busiest container ports in Britain. Grimsby is nearby, and Hull is across the river. A huge amount of container traffic comes to Britain via the Netherlands and other countries. We often overlook the problems that are perpetuated at all the gateways to the United Kingdom, not only at Calais. I therefore believe that the debate should move beyond France, as the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) said. It is too easy to point the finger at our nearest neighbour, and it is not fair. The Government have been doing their best in difficult circumstances.

Our close relations with the French have paid off in some respects. We should examine the figures and get away from the screaming headlines about floods of immigrants and the pictures of 500 people storming the tunnel. Between 2000 and 2001, the figures show about a 20 per cent. drop in the number of people crossing illegally to the United Kingdom from France. They also show that about 6,000 people were refused entry and returned to France. It is unfair to cite France as the key to all the problems. There are problems with Sangatte, but France is trying to provide solutions.

We need tighter controls at Eurostar stations and more UK immigration officers in France, and we must pursue the facilitators and racketeers, mainly from eastern Europe, who congregate in Sangatte and use that route to facilitate the prostitution of very young girls from eastern Europe in the UK and elsewhere in Europe.

Mrs. Ann Cryer: Trafficking in young women for the purpose of prostitution was debated at length in the

[Mrs. Ann Cryer]

Council of Europe two weeks ago. Many of the people who enter the country in the backs of lorries and never seek to legitimise their position are women. Some drift into prostitution, while for many that is part of the deal, although they are not told that beforehand. Many others go and work effectively as slave labour, thereby putting employers who pay at least the minimum wage—I am talking here not about prostitution but about legitimate businesses—out of business. Often, those women owe the traffickers a great deal of money and are forced to repay it by working in slave workshops.

Shona McIsaac: My hon. Friend makes a pertinent point. Many of the women who end up working as prostitutes for many years are not aware that that is the fate that awaits them when they agree to pay the traffickers many thousands of pounds to take them to western Europe. That is all the more horrific when we consider the age of some of those involved—girls of 13 and 14.

Simon Hughes: To reinforce what the hon. Lady said about numbers, figures released on Friday show that in January 93 people got through to the UK, but 3,985 people were arrested on the site in northern France and a further 592 were uncovered by the carbon dioxide method of detection. Very many people are stopped, and very few manage to get through the system.

Shona McIsaac: I am grateful for those up-to-date figures. We must maintain a balance. The measures that the French have taken are not perfect and more needs to be done, especially in Sangatte, but they have prevented many clandestines from entering the UK.

The figures for clandestine entrants arriving in the freight shuttle wagons reveal a steady decline. In July 2001, 808 people entered in that way; in October, 133 did so, but by November the figure had fallen to only 40. We have worked with the French authorities, and the action that the French have taken has led to some reduction.

Legislation ensures that all passengers on Eurostar trains, whatever their destination, have to pass through UK immigration controls before boarding. That is another vital aspect of the debate.

As I have been trying to demonstrate, I disagree with the comments of the hon. Member for West Dorset that appeared in the paper about France being the key, and the core of all our asylum problems. France is a link in an international chain, and the problems are more complex than some people think.

We have already mentioned the people traffickers, who also often deal in prostitution. One reason why they entered that business is that there is big money to be made from it, and the penalties for people trafficking are far lower than those for other types of smuggling, such as smuggling drugs or guns.

We must do something about the organised gangs involved in people trafficking. I do not know whether we would have to do that via Europol, or what methods we would have to use, because few of the gangs that operate in Europe and prey on people at Sangatte seem to be based in the UK.

We must look at the pattern of people arriving in France and trying to get to the UK. As the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey said, when people are locked up in a truck, they often do not know where they are heading. They pay their money and are merely dumped somewhere, which creates a lot of problems when we have to decide where to return them. For example, there is a big trade based in the former Yugoslavia, where people pay vast amounts to cross to Italy in a rickety boat and are then taken on in trucks.

That must be considered in the context of the debate, but we must bear in mind that although only a small number of people get through to the UK, there are 12 million or 13 million refugees in the world, most of whom are in countries neighbouring their home country. We must look for solutions to those problems, and I have some sympathy with the idea that we should have proper accommodation centres in the European Union. That is not up to the British Government to decide, but we could facilitate the idea through the various European institutions, and encourage other European countries to adopt a policy similar to that announced on 29 October in the House—a system of induction, accommodation and removal centres. I understand that there are such centres in the Netherlands, and that although there have been some problems, they are now dying down.

A site in my constituency is being considered as an accommodation centre. My Cleethorpes constituency, and north-east Lincolnshire itself, has few ethnic people and is a very white community. That is not to say that there has been no immigration, but because the region is to the east of the country, and because of the presence of the former fishing industry, such immigration has consisted of white—for want of a better word—people from Norway, Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Denmark.

I appreciate that such proposals will always cause people concern, but some of their fears are based on myth rather than fact. As I have tried to stress, in discussing what we can do about asylum we must maintain a balance. Stark headlines about floods of immigrants and images of people storming the channel tunnel can often give rise to fears that should not exist. Many people have expressed concern to me about the pressure that dispersal placed on services in north-east Lincolnshire, which was part of the dispersal system. If the new system of accommodation centres takes the pressure off local authorities, it should be explored.

We must demonstrate compassion and humanity in this debate, because there are real-life stories behind the headlines. As elected representatives, we have probably heard about the horrors that some families have been through; indeed, it is impossible to imagine how they have survived those experiences. As the hon. Member for West Dorset said in the debate on 29 October, it is one of the British state's highest duties to offer a safe haven to those fleeing persecution, and we have a long and honourable tradition of doing so. I hope that we maintain that tradition—but without resorting to pejorative language and screaming headlines.

I am gratified that today's debate has been constructive and I hope that it will continue to be so, but blaming France is not the answer. This is an international problem that requires international solutions through working with European countries and other countries around the world.

5.3 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): Last year marked the 50th anniversary of the United Nations convention on refugees—the international law that has underpinned the policies of successive Governments of both major British political parties, and which has commanded the almost universal support of all democratic politicians in that time. Indeed, one striking feature of several debates on asylum in the past few years is that although there have been occasional heated disagreements between Members on both sides of the House about asylum policy, there has been a common wish to uphold and defend the convention and its underlying principles.

As the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) said in her concluding remarks, it is the duty of a country that claims to be civilised to offer a safe haven to people who are genuinely fleeing persecution. However, if that convention and those principles are to be successfully defended and upheld, it is of the utmost importance that we are seen to have a fair and efficient system for handling asylum claims, at both the European and national level. Our normal requirements of immigration control must not be evaded—all too often they are—by people claiming asylum in order to extend their stay or establish themselves for a considerable number of years, if not permanently.

If I had a disagreement with the hon. Member for Cleethorpes, it was that at times I felt that in her understandable wish to express reassurance, she underestimated the scale of the problem in this country and the genuine nature of public concern about it. Each year, about 90,000 people come quite lawfully as immigrants to settle permanently in the United Kingdom. In 2000, there were about 80,000 applications for asylum. Those applications were made by the head of the household, and if we include dependants we realise that the figure was somewhat larger. The number of applications for asylum roughly equates to the yearly number of lawful applications to settle in this country, which poses a significant challenge to the integrity of our immigration controls and to our ability fairly and honestly to implement the 1951 United Nations convention, as we would wish it to be implemented.

The greatest danger from an organisation such as the British National party—and the history of Europe in the 20th century bears out my contention—arises when democratic politicians of the left, right or centre appear indifferent to or ignore the genuine concerns of the electorate whom they represent. We must be careful about the language that we use and the policies that we advocate, but we must clearly show that we recognise that public concern springs from much more than racist caricatures; it springs from deep-seated worries about the scale of the applications for asylum.

Simon Hughes: The hon. Gentleman has had much experience of Home Office matters. Does he agree that it would be reasonable for those who seek asylum here or anywhere else in the EU to put their case outside the country to which they were seeking to travel? People would not then have to break into countries before being able to put their case. Instead, they could apply from somewhere that was safe, without being required to make it to the country where they wanted to end up.

Mr. Lidington: It is perfectly sensible for us to explore how such an idea would work in practice. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) will look at such matters over the next couple of years.

A number of difficult practical issues would have to be addressed if we were to adopt the approach advocated by the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes).

As the hon. Gentleman has often and rightly said, the number of refugees and asylum seekers throughout the world is large by historical standards. Sadly, it continues to grow. It is difficult to see how any quota system could match the number of people who might wish to migrate to a western or northern country in which they and their families would be safer and might legitimately hope to have a better chance of material prosperity. We should have to engage with some awkward practical questions if we followed through on the hon. Gentleman's idea.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset for bringing this matter before the House. I have no doubt that a new bilateral agreement between the United Kingdom and France would be a useful tool that would help us to deal effectively with the problem of handling asylum applications, but I do not think that it would be a panacea. I agreed with the point made by the hon. Members for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) and for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) that as soon as an asylum law loophole is closed, people—particularly among the organised gangs that are well supplied with lawyers—find a new loophole to exploit.

In a world of mass migration, in which international communications mean that millions of people in poor countries know about the greater opportunities for prosperity and security in western Europe and north America, and in a world of great disorder, there is unlikely to be a permanent solution to this problem in the foreseeable future. It will remain an issue that successive Governments will have to seek to manage as best they can in this and other countries.

None the less, the measure advocated by my hon. Friend would help. The Library note on asylum shopping tells us that between January and August 2001, just under 7,300 applications for asylum were made by people arriving from France at Dover or Waterloo. That figure is clearly at the bottom end of the true figure: it cannot, by definition, include those who came from France and claimed asylum after having arrived, either because they went to the authorities or because they were detected and then made a claim. Nor does that figure include those who may have come from France, by whatever means, and vanished without trace.

We have heard about the enormous pressure on rail operators. Like the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey, I welcome the Home Secretary's common-sense decision to lift the civil penalty from Eurotunnel and EWS. However, even if the figures for those who apply at port of entry from France have fallen in recent months, and even if the majority of would-be applicants are stopped in France before they ever reach the UK, we cannot believe that everything in the garden

[Mr. Lidington]

is fine. There is huge financial pressure on those rail operators: Eurotunnel estimated that the cost of disruption last year was £20 million.

Shona McIsaac: Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House who, in this debate, has suggested that everything in the garden is fine? Hon. Members on both sides of the House have said that there are problems that need to be addressed.

Mr. Lidington: I take the hon. Lady's point. Everybody has admitted that there are problems that need to be addressed. However, it is not enough to argue—as has been argued during the debate—that, because the majority of people who want to seek asylum in this country are, it is claimed, being stopped on the French side of the channel, that should cause us to relax our attention to the issues. We need to ask why large numbers of young men go to Sangatte to live in the dreadful conditions described by the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey. An advantage of the bilateral agreement is not only that it would provide a means for the swifter and more effective return to France of applicants whose claim was unfounded, but that its existence—and its effectiveness, once it was established—would act as a deterrent to others who were tempted to follow that course of action.

There appears to be no legal or treaty barrier to the British Government taking such an initiative. Reference has already been made to the bilateral agreement between Germany and Denmark, which operates in tandem with the Dublin convention. The Government are certainly right to say—as the Under-Secretary did in the debate in Westminster Hall on 29 January—that the politics of that agreement are different. That agreement boils down to the fact that Germany recognises that the problem is primarily hers and accepts the responsibility for preventing its export in large measure to Denmark. That gives rise to the question of how seriously the French Government take their responsibility not to export their problem to the United Kingdom.

Let us look elsewhere in Europe—not at a full member but at an applicant member of the European Union. According to a report published by the Select Committee on Home Affairs about a year ago, people crossing from the Czech Republic to Germany are returned, without the question of asylum being raised or given substantial consideration, because under German law the Czech Republic is deemed a safe country. Although I stand to be corrected if the Minister has more up-to-date information, I am not aware of any proposal that that arrangement should be rescinded if the Czech Republic in due course becomes a full member of the EU.

Bob Russell (Colchester): The hon. Gentleman refers to the Czech Republic as a "safe" country, but is he not aware that the Czech Roma are being driven out of the democratic Czech Republic, having survived under communism and under the Nazis?

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): They are being driven out by the Slovaks.

Mr. Lidington: I am aware of the allegations that have been made although, as my right hon. Friend reminds us, those allegations are more usually made about the Slovak than the Czech authorities. However, if the Czech Republic cannot be trusted as a guardian of civil liberty and human rights, what on earth are we doing saying that the Czech Republic should be—as it is—a full member of the Council of Europe, or that it should be admitted to the European Union? If it were a member of the EU it would, presumably, participate in the pan-European arrangements that the Government are proposing. There is a broader question as to how we treat European countries whose respect for human rights we nominally acknowledge through our participation with them in the Council of Europe and the EU.

Mrs. Ann Cryer: The Czech Republic is already a member of the Council of Europe and has been for some time. However, the hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell) is right: the country has a terrible track record on its treatment of the Roma. The Roma leave the country because of that and many of them come to the UK as refugees. I imagine that that will continue, whether or not the Czech Republic joins the EU.

Mr. Lidington: I do not want to have a long discussion about the Czech Republic, but the point is that a country has to sign the European convention on human rights to become a member of the Council of Europe. If a remedy has to be sought against the Czech Republic, or any other member of the Council of Europe, that should be done by applying the ECHR, to which that country has subscribed.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I want to return my hon. Friend to the point that he was making previously—the comparison between ourselves and France, as opposed to Denmark and Germany. The German understanding is that, overwhelmingly, Germany is the first safe country entered by those who travel to Denmark. The French contention is that that is not necessarily the case. However, given the absence of border controls in the Schengen group of countries, should not those countries collectively realise that such refugees will have entered one of them as the first safe country? Should not those countries begin to negotiate with us on that basis to share burdens?

Mr. Lidington: My hon. Friend makes an important contribution, and it certainly would fit logically with the Schengen members' conception of their own political arrangements, with a common area for immigration, asylum and, increasingly, criminal justice arrangements.

I said earlier that I felt at times there had been a lack of urgency in tackling the issue on both sides of the channel. The Home Secretary referred in his speech to recent French legislation to make it easier to carry out immigration checks on certain cross-channel routes. I have obviously not been able to leave the Chamber to check the facts since hearing his speech, but if my memory is correct, we in this country made good our side of that agreement about 12 months ago, under a statutory instrument that was briefly debated in Committee. If almost a further year has elapsed before such legislation has been implemented on the French side of the channel, some questions remain. I am happy to give way to the Minister if she wishes to correct me.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Angela Eagle): I do not want the hon. Gentleman to be confused. The Home Secretary referred in his speech to a change in French domestic legislation, which comes into effect today and ensures that United Kingdom immigration officers can control all passengers who board UK-bound train services that travel through France. That change in law will close the Paris-Calais loophole. It is entirely beneficial, and we are very grateful to the French for changing their domestic law to allow that to happen.

Mr. Lidington: I do not deny that that change is beneficial, but I wonder whether such a change could not have been introduced more speedily.

Let us consider the position this side of the channel. In July 1998, the Government published a White Paper on asylum and immigration, entitled "Fairer, Faster and Firmer", which stated:

> "There is a common appreciation among most Member States that the Convention"—

the Dublin convention—

> "is not working as it should."

The White Paper continued:

> "The Government—

the present Administration—

> "made the operation of the Convention a key priority for the United Kingdom's Presidency of the EU, which ended in June 1998. The Government secured agreement to a comprehensive programme of action designed to improve the operation of the Convention, and is committed to work with our European partners in that task."

It is now three and a half years since the publication of that White Paper, which would have been drafted and framed shortly before July 1998, but the Government do not yet show the degree of urgency that is justified by the circumstances that we now face.

Fiona Mactaggart: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that seven years elapsed not just between the negotiation but the signing of the Dublin convention and its coming into force? By that standard, we are operating really fast.

Mr. Lidington: If the hon. Lady looks back at what is becoming rather ancient history, she will see that there were problems with the ratification of the Dublin convention because one or two other signatories had fairly profound objections that needed to be sorted out before the convention could proceed to ratification. My point is that there was an acceptance by the Government, very early in their term of office, that the Dublin convention was proving ineffective, and a declaration that their concerns about the convention in practice were shared by the majority of their EU partners. Against that background, the progress to date has been tardy.

Last September, the Home Secretary met his counterpart, Mr. Vaillant, the French Interior Minister. The package of measures that were agreed seemed, to my eyes, somewhat ambitious. It was agreed that British officials should go to Sangatte and, with French support, try to deter would-be migrants. It was agreed that both countries would take action to persuade would-be refugees to seek asylum in the first country of arrival. I do not know whether the video to which the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey referred was the fruit of that summit meeting—

Simon Hughes: It was.

Mr. Lidington: If that video was the outcome of that meeting, I hope that, when the Minister replies to the debate, she will tell us a little about what those initiatives, about which the Government made much at the time of the summit, have meant in practice over the last few months. I also hope that she will be able to flesh out the comments that she made at the conclusion of the debate in Westminster Hall on 29 January about a successor to the Dublin convention now existing in draft. Will she give some indication of the content of the draft convention, and of the time scale for its introduction and implementation?

Both the motion and the Government amendment recognise that the issue of migrants coming to the United Kingdom from France is intimately bound up with the overall effectiveness of our asylum system. Why are many thousands of young men going to Sangatte with the sole objective—which they declare themselves—of using it as a base to reach the United Kingdom? As other hon. Members have said, it is partly due to the attraction of the English language, and partly due to the existence of communities in this country who are willing to provide support to compatriots who come to Britain. However, it is also due to the fact that many of those young men know that, once they reach here, effective action to remove them if their claim is unfounded is unlikely or, if it happens, is likely to be delayed for a long time.

Last year, after visiting Sangatte and exploring the question in considerable detail, the Select Committee on Home Affairs concluded that administrative and legal measures in the United Kingdom made an appreciable difference to the readiness of applicants and people smugglers to try their luck in the United Kingdom rather than elsewhere. If we look back at the history—the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993, the introduction of the bilateral agreement in 1995, the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 and the court ruling in 1996 that significantly weakened the effectiveness of the arrangements introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley)—we see that the number of people applying for asylum in the United Kingdom has altered over the years as a consequence of different Acts of Parliament, administrative actions and judicial rulings. In that context, I have three questions for the Minister on the operation of the system and whether she believes it adequately deters people such as those who live in Sangatte.

My first question is on initial asylum decisions. I welcome the fact that the backlog is down to about 43,000, but it is still far too high. What concerns me is that a large proportion of decisions are refusals on non-compliance grounds, perhaps because not all sections of the form have been filled in or it has been returned to the Home Office late. In 2001, 17 to 20 per cent. of all Home Office decisions were refusals on those grounds alone. Although that is down on the high 25 to 30 per cent. total of 2000, it represents a massive increase on the 3 per cent. of such decisions in 1999.

Can the Minister explain what is going on? Is it the case that people who are not genuinely fleeing persecution and who vanish into the community are not bothering to

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return their forms properly completed, because that would be cause for concern; or is it that people who have an arguable case for asylum are struggling to fill in unfamiliar forms in a strange language, because that would mean that the improvement in initial decisions as reflected in Home Office statistics conceals the fact that the substantive determination of such cases is being shunted down the line to the appeals system and not being dealt with by the Department in the first instance?

My second question relates to appeals. Home Office figures for the third quarter of last year show that it received more than 16,500 appeals, but, as only 10,950 were determined, about 5,500 were added to the backlog. There was also a big increase over the 2000 figures in the proportion of appeals that were allowed by the adjudicators. What does that mean? Either the adjudicators are taking a softer line, which I find difficult to credit, or there are serious doubts about the quality of decisions taken by the Home Office at initial determination and the adjudicators are feeling obliged to reverse them in a greater number of cases.

My third question is on removals. A bilateral agreement with France will work only if we have an effective system for removing people when we decide that they are not entitled to remain here. The number of removals of failed asylum seekers was lower in each quarter of 2001 than in the corresponding quarter of 2000. Although more than 75,000 people were refused asylum in 2000, only 8,900 were removed from this country. There are still questions to be answered about the state of our domestic asylum system. Getting that right is an essential counterpart to the sort of international agreement that my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset advocates.

Looking back to the preface to the 1998 White Paper, written in the name of the previous Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), I find it ironic that it says:

> "Despite the dedication and professionalism of immigration staff at all levels, the system has become too complex and too slow and huge backlogs have developed. Perversely, it is often the genuine applicants who have suffered, whilst abusive claimants and racketeers have profited. The cost to the taxpayer has been substantial and is increasing."

I am sorry to have to say that little seems to have changed in the four years since the former Home Secretary wrote those remarks.

My right hon. and hon. Friends' motion represents a constructive start to building a fairer, faster, firmer and more effective and trustworthy system of asylum, which will enable us to discharge our responsibilities under the United Nations convention.

5.35 pm

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): I had not intended to speak in the debate, but I have been tempted to do so by the fact that, in the main, it has been constructive. That makes a pleasant change from some of the asylum and immigration debates that I have sat through here over the past few years.

The debate has not been 100 per cent. constructive. I know that the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) did not say that everything that had gone wrong had been since 1997, but he got close at times. I think that I am the only Member who served on each of the Committees that considered what became the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993, the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 and the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. On every one, the Minister concerned told us how the legislation would provide all the solutions to the asylum system. I treated the Bills in the same even-handed, objective way: I voted against all three of them. It looks as though I might have the opportunity in a few weeks to consider my attitude to the 2002 legislation.

It has sometimes been implied in the debate— to some extent, the motion implies it—that the United Kingdom shoulders an unfair burden in comparison with other European Union countries. As the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) pointed out, that is not so. Between 1997 and 1999—the last complete set of figures across the EU that I have seen—there were twice as many asylum seekers in Germany as there were in the UK. Certainly when measured against population, we come nowhere near the top of the league. Figures obviously vary from year to year, but in most years we are probably eighth or ninth in the number of asylum seekers per head of population.

To suggest, as has been frequently suggested in the debate, that a bilateral approach with France would go a significant way towards making big changes is to take a very narrow view. I understand the arguments about closing Sangatte, but let us look back at why it opened in the first place. It was because there were large numbers of people on the streets of Calais and neighbouring towns who, exactly like those now in Sangatte, had every intention of trying to make their way to the UK.

We perhaps ought to have learned some of the lessons of the past 10 or 20 years, in that policies that are simply based on putting up barriers will not work. Each change that has done that has not worked. I know that numbers fell between 2000 and 2001, but it has been claimed today that since 1997, there has been an increase in the number of people coming to the UK from France who could otherwise have claimed asylum in France. However, that change is just one that has occurred since 1997. At the same time, we have changed carriers' liability and put airline liaison officers in many overseas countries whose specific job is to stop people getting on to planes to come directly to the UK. As I said, when one route is closed, people try to find another. We should not assume that putting up ever higher barriers will solve the problems.

In the past couple of years, significant changes have taken place within the EU, involving not only Britain and France, but other EU countries. Moves have been made toward a common asylum policy across Europe. The 1999 Amsterdam treaty made immigration and asylum policy an EU competence for the first time. There is provision enabling the UK to opt out, but I think that we should be closely involved in those discussions, because it is foolish to think that if common asylum or immigration policies were achieved across other EU countries, the UK could stand outside with different procedures and standards.

I appreciate that the hon. Member for West Dorset would encounter problems with some of his Back-Bench colleagues if he tried to suggest that EU-wide agreements were desirable. He therefore tries to limit the debate to France.

Mr. Letwin: I hesitate to strip away an illusion, but the Conservatives would be delighted with a more EU-wide agreement. We welcome Dublin II and the prospect of the shared burden being distributed more evenly. The problem is that it might take years. The question is not whether multilateral agreement is a good idea, but whether it might be worth trying in the meantime to reinstate a bilateral agreement as one helpful approach.

Mr. Gerrard: I am not sure that all the measures would take as long as the hon. Gentleman suggests. I am glad that he agrees that we should seek wider agreement—most people welcome in principle moves towards harmonisation of asylum policies across the EU.

There is danger in the fact that the debate so far has focused on harmonisation rather than on the more important issue of standards. We have focused far too much on how to get policies to converge, rather than on what the policies should be and what the aims of EU-wide policies should be.

Despite the fact that the tone of today's debate has been mainly constructive, I am worried. If the attitude of every EU country is to say, "We want common standards, agreement and harmonisation, but we also want fewer people coming to our country to claim asylum," we will never reach agreement, and no progress will be made. The debate is couched in terms of wanting harmonisation and agreements—bilaterally with France, and perhaps multilaterally involving other countries—but at its root is the desire for fewer people to come to the UK to apply for asylum. If every EU country adopts a similar attitude, we will either get nowhere or end up with a policy that does not work.

I was interested in some of the suggestions of the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey about how we might examine the issue of applications made from another country. I strongly agree with the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon), although it was greeted with scepticism by some hon. Members. Factors such as knowledge of a particular language, or family connections, or friends who are already asylum seekers or recognised refugees, have a great influence on an asylum seeker who is deciding the appropriate point at which to make an application.

There are so many complex factors of that nature involved in the process that I find it difficult to envisage the "first safe country" concept ever really working, whatever arrangements along the lines of the Dublin agreement are reached. There are those who flee wars and end up in a neighbouring first safe country but when people travel halfway round the world to come to the European Union, I seriously doubt whether a policy based purely on first safe country will achieve the results that some people wish.

Mr. Lansley: I recognise the hon. Gentleman's great experience in these matters but is he not falling into the trap of confusing asylum policy and immigration policy, as if they were not separate matters? At the heart of asylum policy must be the concept that those who seek asylum are genuine refugees. Therefore, the first safe country principle must have a role to play in that when someone has left a place where he is in fear of persecution or risks losing his life, the first safe place that he comes to is a valid country in which to claim asylum, even if it is not his final place of residence.

Mr. Gerrard: I hope that the hon. Gentleman's last couple of words are an acknowledgement that there may be family connections and family ties, which presently are not recognised. I recently met an asylum seeker from Sri Lanka who had been given exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom. He has family members who have been given refugee status in Switzerland. However, it is impossible in the EU for that family to come together. That strikes me as ludicrous. Different countries have recognised different members of the same family, but there is no mechanism to bring them together within the EU. We need to go beyond saying that the first safe country is the only thing that matters.

It is highly unlikely that any of us in this place will have to seek asylum. However, if I were in that position, I am not sure that France would be the first country to which I would want to go to live. That is not because I have anything against the French. I would think about language and where I might have a friend or relative whom I might want to reach.

We shall have to consider gateways from other countries. During the Kosovo crisis, the humanitarian evacuation programme brought people who had gone from Kosovo to Macedonia to the UK and other EU countries. But only in major crises have we tried to operate mechanisms to allow approaches through an organisation such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in another country. We must think about such situations if we want seriously to deal with traffickers and cut their routes.

As long as we erect barrier after barrier, someone will always be trying to find their way round them. He or she will try to make money by doing so and bringing in people illegally. I hope that we shall start to think about mechanisms that will allow people from other countries to make applications rather than causing them to try to smuggle themselves through the channel tunnel, for example.

We must remember that the UN convention on refugees does not let us say that we must regard someone as a bogus asylum seeker or failed asylum seeker because he has come to this country illegally. The present position is that it is virtually impossible to come to the UK legally to make an application.

When my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary publishes his White Paper, I hope that that will allow us to have a sensible debate on some of the wider issues. The debate must not focus on a narrow bilateral question but consider what happens throughout the EU. We must consider the links between asylum and immigration policy and economic migration. We have started to have that debate today. I hope that we can develop it when the White Paper is published in the same constructive tone that has characterised much of this afternoon's debate.

5.50 pm

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) for rescuing this subject from the comparative obscurity of Westminster Hall, where I raised it early last week, and introducing it in the Chamber, where it is assured of a blaze of publicity and packed Benches—at least for his speech. I am glad that my hon. Friend has done so, and that he adopted a positive and constructive tone which has infected most of the subsequent speeches. There was however a degree of complacency in the Government's response, which is reflected in their amendment.

[Mr. Peter Lilley]

It is generally accepted that the flow of asylum seekers to this country represents a significant part of a major problem. I do not want to repeat in the Chamber what I said in Westminster Hall, but we must reaffirm what we mean by the problem, which is not about individual asylum seekers. In so far as they are genuine asylum seekers genuinely seeking refuge from persecution elsewhere, Members on both sides of the House endorse and accept our responsibility to take them into this country and give them the security that they need. Even in so far as they are economic migrants who constitute a great proportion of those who come here allegedly seeking asylum, we should respect the fact that they are trying to do their best for their families. They often come from impoverished and troubled countries and, by definition, they have shown themselves to be entrepreneurial and ambitious even to have got here in the first place. As individuals, they could no doubt make a sizeable contribution to this country.

The problem is one of numbers. We cannot be a country of unlimited immigration, and must therefore limit the number of those who come here; we must try simply to meet our obligation to those who are genuine refugees and perhaps, beyond that, those who are given exceptional leave to remain. We must restrict and prohibit entry for those who are not true asylum seekers.

There is plenty of evidence available to all of us that the flow from France is a major part of the problem. There are continual newspaper stories of people being discovered in the back of lorries; people waiting in the Sangatte camp and repeatedly trying to get in; large numbers of people trying to break into the tunnel at Christmas; and gangs trying to rig the signals so that people can get on the trains before they reach the tunnel. All those stories provide qualitative evidence of a sizeable problem. The quantitative evidence, however, is less clear. The Government amendment cites the figures for 2000 and 2001, when 13,500 and 11,000 would-be asylum seekers, respectively, came here illegally from France.

Those figures are puzzling. First, why did the Government just give us figures comparing 2001 with 2000? Our debate is about the situation between 1995 and 1997, and whether we could replicate and reproduce it if we restored the bilateral agreement that obtained then. Will the Minister give us the figures, comparable to those that the Government gave for 2000 and 2001, that applied during 1995, 1996 and 1997? The Government amendment says that there was a 20 per cent. reduction between 2000 and 2001, which is obviously welcome. It then says that

> "the number of clandestine entrants was reduced by 27 per cent. in 2001".

Can the Minister tell us the distinction between the number of people crossing illegally into the United Kingdom, which showed a drop of almost 20 per cent., and the number of clandestine entrants, which showed a drop of almost 27 per cent. in 2001? Is there a distinction that we need to know about? We also need to be told whether either category—illegal entrants or clandestine entrants—is the whole story? Do not a number come here legally, then claim asylum? In addition, are there not people who come illegally, but about whom we subsequently know nothing? And are there not people who claim asylum, but we do not know which route they took?

Are there not also dependants of claimants, since the practice is simply to give the number of claims, not the number of people covered by those claims? In addition, are there not people who will subsequently be brought here as dependants of claimants? Once people are given the right to stay here they ask, not surprisingly, whether their dependants can join them. We need to know those figures in more detail if we are to understand the size of the problem constituted by the flow of people from France to this country.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset rightly pointed to the fact that we had a bilateral agreement between 1995 and 1997. So far as I know, no one denies that it was pretty effective. It may not have been 100 per cent. effective; it did not seal this country hermetically and stop the flow of immigration from France. However, it was effective and gave us the capability to return people either within 24 hours or, if we lodged a statement that we might have difficulty doing so within that period, within seven days. In certain circumstances there was a month's further grace, if I understand the agreement correctly.

If the agreement was effective then, why cannot it be renewed now? A number of reasons have been given by the Minister and the Home Secretary. The first is that France will not agree. But France agreed in 1995 or, to be precise, the agreement was drafted in 1994 and came into force in 1995. France continued to agree, even though it had the right to resile from the agreement with a month's notice. Indeed, it continued to agree with terms that did not lapse when the Dublin convention came into force. Are the Government saying that our influence over our French friends and partners is less now than it was then? Are they saying so despite the fact that, in the interim, they have made many unilateral concessions to our partners in the European Union, including signing up to the Amsterdam treaty, unilaterally agreeing the social chapter, and agreeing with the French to co-sponsor a European rapid reaction force? All those unilateral changes, we were told, would increase our influence and take it to previously unknown heights. If that is the case, why cannot that influence now bring about something that we could achieve in 1994 and 1995?

The Government argue that everything was stopped by the Dublin convention; the agreement was superseded by the convention, so we cannot rely on bilateral agreements any longer. As my hon. Friend pointed out, that is not the case. Germany and Denmark have, subsequent to the Dublin convention, entered into a bilateral arrangement. We are told that Germany is different from France; it is in a different geographical location, which means that, more frequently than France, it is the first place of entry into the community; and more people have made a claim there before making a claim in Denmark. All those things were true in 1995; the relative geography of France and Germany has not changed since 1995, and the arrangements have remained rigidly in place. What was possible in 1995 must surely be possible now.

The Minister has also said that the agreement was not much use because action had to be taken within 24 hours, which has become more difficult. I am glad that some of the difficulties created by the courts have subsequently been overridden by legislation introduced by the Government, which specifies that the courts cannot treat France or Germany as unsafe countries, in the sense given in the Geneva convention. That would make it easier for us automatically to return people within 24 hours if we restored the agreement and renegotiated bilaterally.

I repeat to the Under-Secretary, who has the misfortune of facing me once again, the questions that I put to her in the previous debate and which she did not answer. Have the Government tried to renegotiate the bilateral agreement? If so, when, where, with whom and on what terms? Why was it refused? As all of us are more interested in the future than in the past, an even more important question is whether the Government will try in future.

The Home Secretary made the legitimate point that the French are facing elections and that, in the immediate run-up to an election, it is more difficult to get an agreement with them. That may or may not be true, but may we at least have an assurance that once those elections are out of the way, the Government will not rule out trying once again to resume the bilateral arrangement with the French, or something like it?

A characteristically thoughtful and even more characteristically lengthy and unfocused speech from the Liberal Democrat Benches failed to address the question whether there should be a bilateral agreement. When pressed on the point by my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron), the view of the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) was that there was no point. If we sent people back, they would keep trying to enter the country, so we might as well let them in in the first place. That was the logic of the hon. Gentleman's position.

That highlights an important point. We must ask why the United Kingdom is so attractive to so many people who, having got to France—a country which I love and in which I would willingly spend more time, if the House would allow me—do not want to stay there, but want to come to this country. Theoretically, under the terms of the Geneva convention and the obligation of those seeking asylum to seek it in the first safe country to which they come, the United Kingdom should, for that reason and because it is an island, probably have the smallest flow of asylum seekers of any major country in Europe. Instead, it has the highest proportion of asylum seekers per head of any major country, though not as high as some smaller countries, such as Ireland—that is even more strange, as reaching it requires crossing two stretches of water—and Denmark.

Why, then, is the UK so attractive? It is not just language; it is not just the generosity of our benefits. I have made it clear in the past that our benefit levels are not supremely generous, compared with those often available on the continent. It is not just because jobs are relatively available in the UK, although that obviously is a factor. When one asks asylum seekers, they say, and all the surveys show, that it is because they know that when they get to this country, they face the least likelihood of being returned to their country of origin.

That is demonstrated by figures quoted in one of the court cases, which was held to prove that France was not a safe country and the UK was. Five per cent. of claimants who come to the UK seeking asylum from Algeria are returned to Algeria, and 80 per cent. of those from Algeria seeking asylum in France are returned to Algeria. There is a great disparity between the likelihood of their being returned once they get to the UK, and the likelihood of their being returned from other countries.

That has not come about intentionally or wilfully. The House did not decide to make this the most attractive country in Europe for economic migrants. It has come about by accident, because we moved from a system that was essentially administrative to one which was put in the hands of the courts. In so doing, we have effectively extended to every inhabitant of the globe who can find his way to these shores the right, once he has done so, not just to seek asylum, but during the period of seeking asylum, to obtain benefits; after six months, to obtain a job; after refusal, to appeal; after the appeal being turned down, to seek a judicial review; and after the judicial review failing, to seek remedy under the Human Rights Act. By that time the person will have been here so long that he will have put down roots in this country, become part of the community, perhaps have married and probably have had children.

The people who come to my surgery expressing generally racist views about asylum seekers one day will come the next day about Mohammed who lives next door, whom they want to stay because he has been here five years already, he is part of the community and a member of the parent-teacher association, his children go to the same school as their own, they like him, he is a good chap, and they worship in the same church, or whatever. They are right, of course. It would be inhumane to send such people back, and it becomes increasingly inhumane the longer they have stayed in this country and the deeper their roots are.

Effectively, we have created a system for ourselves under which we cannot send people back because the whole process takes too long. They know it, so they come here and will go to great lengths to come here, including running great risks and facing great dangers to do so, because once here, they are pretty confident that they will not have to return.

We know, although no one expresses it with as much bluntness as I perhaps can, now that I am on the Back Benches, that there are only two ways to solve the problem. One is to make the UK a less attractive place for economic migrants and asylum seekers to stay. The other is to make it a more difficult place for people to stay.

The options for making the UK less attractive include those which apply in the period during which people may not take a job—the experiment tried by the previous Home Secretary and scrapped by the present Home Secretary to introduce voucher payments instead of benefits, and the changes that I introduced to the benefits system, which meant that if people had entered the country with a visa, to get which they had had to convince the visa authorities that they had the means to support themselves, they would not be entitled to benefits.

All those measures were designed to make the UK a less pleasant place for asylum seekers to be. On the whole, I would prefer not to rely on such methods, even though I was responsible for one of those that I mentioned. I would prefer to make it legally more difficult for people to exploit all the loopholes in our legal system to stay in the UK when they are essentially economic migrants, not asylum seekers.

Bob Russell: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept the Home Office figures which show that people born outside the UK, including asylum seekers, contribute 10 per cent.

[Bob Russell]

more to the economy in taxes and national insurance than they consume in benefits, which is worth about £2.5 billion a year to the British economy?

Mr. Lilley: I will not comment on the figures, most of which are pretty dubious, but I accept the hon. Gentleman's general point, which I made earlier. As individuals, not just genuine asylum seekers but economic migrants can make a positive contribution to this country. However, I do not believe, and I should be interested to know whether the hon. Gentleman and his party believe, that we can open up the country to unlimited immigration. We cannot—there must be some restriction.

The number of asylum seekers coming to the UK last year approached 100,000, taking into account their dependants. The vast majority will stay, under our present arrangements. That equates to the population of my constituency. It means that every year we will have to house the equivalent of the population of my constituency. One of the great issues in my constituency is the constraint on housing and building in the green belt. I would be hypocritical in the extreme if I said that all those people should be allowed to come into the country as they would make a wonderful contribution to the economy, but that we would not provide extra houses for them, or extra towns or settlements.

We cannot have it both ways. Not being a Liberal Democrat, I will not even try to have it both ways. We must accept that we have to make this country less pleasant in terms of the magnets of attraction, or less easy for people to stay in by exploiting legal loopholes. We need to review the way in which the Geneva convention has been enshrined in law, rather than the process of dealing with asylum seekers being essentially an administrative one, relying on a judgment of officials which will inevitably prove fallible and difficult.

The reason is that, ultimately, the courts cannot, while meeting the usual standards that we require of them, assess what happened in a distant country on the basis of evidence supplied by the people who are coming here. It is nonsense to suggest that we can prove beyond reasonable doubt that such people have no case or that they can prove beyond reasonable doubt that they have a strong case. An assessment must be made as to whether they are genuine asylum seekers, but ultimately it cannot be made to the normal, rigorous standards that would apply in the court in relation to events that happened in this country.

We must also realise that the process of dealing with asylum seekers has specific problems. I had to look into the matter in some detail when I was Secretary of State for Social Security. My right hon. Friend the then Home Secretary and I conducted an analysis—it was carried out by my officials and his—of the whole process. We established that there was a series of bottlenecks, arising in respect of initial asylum applications, appeals, judicial reviews, further appeals and deportation and removal orders. All the effort of the bureaucracy tends to be spent on widening the bottlenecks that are already widest, but as anyone who has ever understood process engineering will know, that is the wrong way of going about things. One should try to widen the narrowest bottleneck first. In this case, that is the process of removal and deportation. Until we enhance and speed up that process and reduce the length of the pipeline—the period between an initial claim and liability for deportation and removal—we will not solve that problem, or at least we would be able do so only by taking the less humane approach of making this country less attractive for people to live in. I do not think anybody in the House would like to do that.

I hope that the Government will take the small step that my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset pressed upon them so eloquently and endeavour to renew the bilateral agreement. In the longer term, I hope that they will look to see whether we need more fundamental changes in the process and the legal structures through which we handle the asylum problem, if we are to gain some control of it in future.

6.12 pm

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): I welcome this very reasonable-sounding debate. I hope it is a sign that the approach that the Opposition adopted on asylum during the election campaign—certainly in my constituency—is now behind them. The issue was used to create fear among residents in an attempt to generate support for the Conservatives, but I am glad to say that it was unsuccessful, and I hope that such tawdry exploitation of people's genuine anxieties about the way in which asylum is administered will be a thing of the past.

I also hope that the positive tone of the debate reflects a recognition that such discussion cannot be based on the assumption that the presence of one extra asylum seeker is inevitably a problem. Such assumptions have always damaged the debate on asylum and immigration in Britain. Let us not forget that Einstein was a refugee, or that many of the most entrepreneurial and dynamic communities in Britain started their lives here as refugee communities and have contributed hugely to Britain's success and international reputation in many different fields. We should celebrate that. The tolerant character of this country in welcoming people who flee persecution is one of our great strengths, and we should be proud of it.

I fear that, in trying to present itself as being very reasonable, the Conservative party is portraying an issue that I think of as a matchbox lid as a vast set of gates comparable to those at St. Stephen's entrance. Although better bilateral arrangements with France could make some difference to the number of people seeking access to Britain to claim asylum, let us not pretend that it would make a huge difference. Such an assumption would once again contribute to the sort of misinformation that has dogged debates on asylum.

What would most improve the situation in terms of the numbers of applicants and of the way in which we deal with asylum applications? The answer is pretty straightforward. More than anything else, we must improve the speed and integrity of the current system. I know that the one-stop appeal introduced under the most recent legislation was an attempt to reduce delays, but it was established on top of a failing administrative system. The current delays benefit only bogus applicants. Some people are making bogus claims, and are aware that they are doing so. It is they who benefit hugely from bad administration, lost files and delays. We must remind ourselves constantly that that is the case. I hope that in his statement later this week my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will make proposals that put speed, efficiency and integrity back into the asylum system.

I was both depressed and amused to hear the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Barker) tell the Minister about an Afghan who had sought asylum in his constituency in 1999 but had received no decision. I felt like sending a note to my office asking for details of a bunch of cases in which people have been here for a decade without receiving a decision. I promise hon. Members that it is possible to find such cases. Before this debate, I looked at the cases of the people who have come to see me in the past week about asylum claims, as well as the letters that I have received in that time. One letter from the Minister said that I was slightly wrong in connection with a point that I had made to her about a constituent who has been served with a notice of decision. I was glad to receive the letter, but in the meantime another development had occurred. I had been trying to ensure that my constituent's case was considered with her husband's. That did not happen. Her husband was given asylum and she was again refused it in the letter with which she has now been properly served.

Similar examples of failure in the administrative system are common. At my advice surgery on Friday, I spoke to a Sri Lankan family who appealed in May 1997, before I was elected as Member of Parliament for Slough. Their decision was received in June 1998, so it took more than a year for it to be promulgated. It gave them asylum. The husband received his status letter confirming the decision in July 2000, but his wife and children have still not had that notification, even though I have been re-elected in the meantime. Those examples are not extreme—I picked them because they were recent—but they illustrate problems that have developed over time and that are so serious that they in turn create new problems.

A properly administered decision-making system is more important than an agreement with France. Expert decision makers should operate early in the system, thus leading to fewer stupid decisions, such as refusals because of out-of-time returns of applications, to which other hon. Members have referred. The quality of initial decisions should be good so that adjudicators do not overturn so many decisions. The system should enable us to recognise genuine refugees early and reduce delays for them.

Mr. Letwin: Does the hon. Lady share our hope that the forthcoming White Paper will propose to include in accommodation centres, or even reception centres, a full suite of the experts, ranging from doctors and lawyers to decision makers and adjudicators, who are required to make on-the-spot, effective decisions, for the sake of those who try to get into the country because of dire circumstances?

Fiona Mactaggart: If the hon. Gentleman reads the question that I asked when the Home Secretary made a statement several months ago, he will realise that I made the point that there should be proper advice in reception centres. I was pleased to hear my right hon. Friend make the same point in Question Time today. I am not sure whether adjudicators are needed in reception centres, but expert advice is required to enable people to present their best case. Adjudication is not necessary in the first week, but we need to ensure that people can present the best case and that the decision makers have sufficient training, autonomy and sense to make the best decisions.

In addition, I hope that the White Paper will include proposals for good-quality documentation about countries' circumstances that is accepted by those who represent asylum seekers and Home Office decision makers. Such a provision exists in Canada, where both sides accept documentation about countries' circumstances. That means fewer arguments about whether a country from which people have fled is safe because both sides depend on internationally recognised, independent human rights monitors, which gets rid of some confusion. It is important to include the right people early.

Let us consider the proposition that a bilateral agreement will make a substantial difference to the number of people who seek asylum in Britain after travelling from France. There is a chronic problem about knowing through which countries people have travelled, and it will not go away for two reasons. First, many people travel in sealed containers; sometimes that has tragically led to their deaths. Secondly, some people believe that admitting through which countries they have travelled is likely to lead to their being returned to a place where they have a well-founded fear of persecution. We must deal with that in the long term; I accept that it is difficult in the short term, but we must do it.

The necessary changes involve not only a bilateral agreement between Britain and France, about which I do not feel optimistic, but a better agreement between European countries about common procedures for dealing with asylum applications. It is currently possible for France to remove those who have not applied for any status: the people at Sangatte. The French authorities choose neither to remove them nor to require them to apply for asylum, although they know that the people in Sangatte are seeking refuge.

If the French authorities held the positive views that Conservative Members are slightly overstating, they could adopt a simple method of tackling the problem. They could require those who reside in Sangatte to make asylum applications. They do not, partly because the people there do not want to do that. However, such a requirement would have the same effect as a bilateral arrangement. I accept the Home Secretary's points, but one of the sensible requests that we could make to the French Government would be to encourage the people in Sangatte to make asylum applications.

If the Dublin II arrangements were implemented, the people in Sangatte would have to make an application to France within two months, or, if they remained for two months, France would become responsible for them. We must acknowledge that France has not always honoured agreements to the extent that is being suggested. I was involved in immigration in the period when, according to Conservative Members, a bilateral arrangement worked perfectly. On many occasions, France did not accept people whom Britain attempted to return under it. I can also think of current examples of France unilaterally repudiating agreements. For example, it continues to refuse to recognise United Kingdom-issued stateless travel documents for people with exceptional leave to remain.

The tenor of the debate has been of people preferring to remain in Britain rather than France, but let us be clear that France operates as I described. The French authorities refuse to allow people with refugee travel documents and refugee status here to visit France without visas. We should not become too confident that France is enthusiastic about a bilateral agreement or that it would abide by it.

[Fiona Mactaggart]

We will solve the problem not only by improving our systems and making bilateral agreements with France but by working energetically for full harmonisation throughout the European Union on the definition of a refugee and the process that people undergo to determine their status. I appreciate that we cannot do that in months, and it is not therefore the short-term solution that the Conservative party wants. However, it is necessary because the minor differences between EU countries' methods of deciding applications often determine the places to which people choose to apply. People do not apply to Britain simply because there are more jobs here; they feel fearful about some countries' treatment of them. There is no reason for not achieving an EU agreement on interpreting the convention and proper procedures for dealing with applicants.

There are stumbling blocks, such as Germany's refusal to accept oppression by groups and forced marriages as grounds for refugee status, but working on EU agreement is important. If we put a lot of energy into that, we would be able to create a genuinely level playing field in the system to define who is a refugee within the European Union, and then we could work towards equality in procedures for granting and refusing status, reception conditions and so on. That must be the Government's priority.

The final line of the amendment reminds us of the difficult situation that the Conservative party put many local authorities in through its chaotic arrangements. Some authorities are still suffering from that, and I urge the Minister to ensure that there is fair treatment for local authorities close to London that are still burdened with high costs because they have to provide for large numbers of asylum seekers.

6.31 pm

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to a debate in which some very important points have been made. I was surprised that, in responding to my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), the Home Secretary did not tell us more about what is being done to try to achieve an effective border control between ourselves and France.

The Home Secretary was in France on 19 September last year and spoke about the juxtaposition of different regimes and the introduction of new equipment to try to improve the detection of people attempting to enter illegally. It would have been a service to the House if he had given us some more detail on that. Perhaps the Minister will do that; otherwise, a few months on from 19 September, people will still be in the dark about the effectiveness of those new technologies.

Some of the more aggressive attempts to get into the tunnel and on to the trains may in fact be the result of successful new measures, and people should be made aware of that. One of the things that I would like this debate to achieve is to deny the *Daily Express* a headline. If we can add to public information and show that there is a system in place to try to deliver effective border control, that will be all to the good.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) spoke about the Government's failure to secure bilateral agreement with France. I offer him a suggestion as to why it did not happen. Back in February 2001, the Prime Minister had a discussion with President Chirac about these issues. The principal result was that the French Government offered the Prime Minister a cross-channel commission. The French Government have noticed that a commission—rather than the delivery of substantive measures—is our Government's solution to most problems, so it is hardly a surprise that they offered him rhetoric and a procedural solution, rather than a substantive one.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) asked about juxtaposed immigration officials. That was reasonable, and not at all churlish, because back in February 2001, when the decision was being made, Downing street said, according to the BBC, that the scheme would be in place by summer 2001—so where is it?

We should have an agreement with France. It is perfectly clear that such an agreement was relatively successful in the past but fell down under the implementation of the Dublin convention. The French Government simply cannot abandon their responsibility. People who have entered a Schengen country, which is where they should have made their asylum application, and who are illegally in France are seeking to come illegally to the UK. France has a moral, if not a legal, obligation under the Dublin convention to do something about it. It should work with the Schengen group and the British Government to deliver. Dublin II is a lengthy process, and something needs to be done in the meantime.

The hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) said that the most important thing was to deliver an efficient and quick system of asylum decision making that has integrity. I entirely agree, but frankly that is not separate from the problems in France. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden said, the fact that our system has not been effective and we have not been able to offer asylum rapidly to genuine refugees, while those without a valid claim remain here with no realistic prospect of removal, has led to the problem of large numbers of people in France making repeated efforts to get here, because the reward is seen as worth the risk. We must reduce the reward for illegal entry into this country and ensure that only those with a well-founded fear of persecution seek asylum here.

At the heart of that is whether the Government can deliver on their promises. I acknowledge that many more caseworkers have been taken on—finally, last year—but we need to know how quickly the Government will start reducing the backlog not only of initial decisions but of appeals. On 29 October last year, the Home Secretary promised us 6,000 appeal decisions a month. How quickly will we achieve that and the 2,500 removals a month which, as I understand it, he promised would be delivered by spring 2002? How soon will we be able to establish in our own minds and the minds of those who might wish to come to this country that we understand the difference between those who have a claim to asylum and those who want to come here on grounds of economic migration?

We must distinguish between the two, although that does not mean that we put up a "Closed" sign and refuse to allow anyone to come here on economic grounds. I hope that the White Paper will set out a reasonable basis for offering economic migration to the UK, because that can be of considerable benefit to us. This country spent a couple of hundred years in the 18th and 19th centuries exporting people to various parts of the world, so we ought at least to understand that there might be occasions when it is reasonable for people to come here.

We need to have a system whereby those with a reasonable claim to asylum have a confident expectation of securing a welcome here, with good accommodation, delivered through a quick system of decision making, while those who want to come here as economic migrants know that it is far better to put in a claim from their country of origin or, if they have left countries such as Afghanistan or Somaliland, that they will be part of an international system of sharing the burden of looking after such migrants, and that if they have a special reason for wanting to come to the United Kingdom, we will acknowledge it.

Those who put themselves in the hands of the traffickers should be increasingly sure that illegal entry to the United Kingdom will be prevented or reversed, and they will be rapidly returned to their country of origin. If people knew that trying to secure illegal entry here would not pay, we would have a much more successful system. That is what my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset put to Ministers. My debate in Westminster Hall on 24 October 2000 was designed to secure answers to the same questions, and it took the Home Secretary only five days to respond in large measure to that. I hope that the Government will respond positively today.

6.39 pm

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): This has been a thoughtful and constructive debate. Measured contributions have been made in a non-party political way from all parts of the House, and we should all be grateful for that. I begin by thanking my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), who introduced this topic in what might in sporting terms be described as a warm-up match in Westminster Hall the other day.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Angela Eagle): The second XI?

Mr. Malins: Is the hon. Lady talking about her own side? Surely not.

Some of the players in that debate are here again today. I was grateful for the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), who has great experience in home affairs. My hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) made a thoughtful and well-argued speech, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden outlined many of the issues that we raised together in Westminster Hall last week. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin)—who decided that after last week, I was not to have a quiet afternoon today but would have to do the same thing again—for the constructive way in which he put our arguments to the House.

I hope that I shall be forgiven, Madam Deputy Speaker, for reminding the House that in 1992 I was privileged to found the Immigration Advisory Service, the largest national charity that gives free legal help and advice to those with rights of appeal under immigration law. It does excellent work throughout the country, and I am proud of my association with it. As the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) said, expert advice for asylum seekers is important, and the IAS is one of the bodies that provides it.

We would all agree with the proposition that any country with decent values—I am thankful to say that we remain such a country—must speedily and happily grant refugee status to those who are entitled to it. Further, we must display not just good sense but humanity, not only in what we do but in what we say—and, most important, in the way we say it. That point was reinforced by the hon. Members for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) and for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard).

Twenty years ago, or even 10, asylum was not a political issue in this country. Today it is. Why? Perhaps the answer is simple. It is because of the dramatic increase in the number of applications, and the publicity, some of it rather inflammatory, given to the topic by the media and others.

The world has changed. Today millions of people are on the move: many are displaced by conflicts and war, but many are simply seeking a better life. We are witnessing a steady march of genuine asylum seekers from war-torn areas and regimes that persecute—but there is also a steady march of the poor and desperate, who seek no more than the chance to work, to live decently and to support their families. Both those categories of people deserve our respect—and, I venture to suggest, our help.

The hon. Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer) referred in an intervention to the appalling criminal gangs that smuggle people into this country—and there is, of course, another date that should be impressed on all our minds: 19 June 2000, when 58 Chinese people were found dead, suffocated, in the back of a lorry at Dover. Yes, they were illegal immigrants, but we should never forget—I am sure that none of us, on either side of the House, will ever forget—that they were also ordinary people who sought no more than a better life, to which who would say that they were not entitled?

A glance at the figures illustrates the changed world in which we live. In 1990 there were 26,000 asylum applications; in 2000 there were more than 97,000, including dependants. There is also the backlog. I cast no blame for this, but in August 2001 more than 43,000 applicants were awaiting an initial decision. We were—and still are—faced with the sadness that several Members have referred to when people are refused asylum and have to leave this country having been here for months, even years. Those people have put down roots, and many of us have seen in our surgeries the human tragedies that sometimes result.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset rightly drew the attention of the House to the bilateral agreement that we had with France. As he said, it worked well for two years and would work well again. The Opposition support without reservation my hon. Friend's call for the Government to do their utmost to reinstate that agreement. The hon. Member for Slough suggested that we were saying that that would be a short-term solution, but we were not. I do not think that any of us thinks of it as a solution; it is simply one step that we could and should take, for the benefit of all concerned.

In the Westminster Hall debate last week I tried, not forcefully but in a rather laid-back way, to press the Minister to tell us what the Government had done over the past four years to try to persuade France to reinstate

[Mr. Malins]

the agreement that had worked so well. I think that my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden would agree that the Minister could not tell us much. She spoke of the

"considerable bilateral work with France, centring mainly on the Sangatte issue",

and when pressed further she simply said that the two Governments

"meet regularly to discuss immigration issues."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 29 January 2002; Vol. 379, c. 19WH.]

I hope that when she winds up the debate she will be able to tell us in more detail what the Government have done over the past four years to try to reinstate the agreement.

France has co-operated well. I hope he will forgive me if I am wrong, but I think it was the Home Secretary who mentioned the French legislation which means that passengers using an international train service with a domestic leg—Paris to the UK via Calais, say—have to submit to UK entry controls in Paris. I congratulate the Government on the work that they have done with the French in that respect, and I believe that that law comes into force either yesterday, today or tomorrow. Such co-operation is important, and should be repeated with the bilateral agreement.

I must say a word or two about Sangatte. The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes), who speaks for the Liberal Democrats, spoke movingly and accurately about the state of affairs there. When I visited Sangatte with the Home Affairs Committee, I saw almost 1,000 people herded together in what seemed like an aircraft hangar, gathered to make their attempt to enter this country. They were in a sorry state; it was cold, nasty and damp, people were cramped together, and the lavatory conditions were awful. Nobody on that all-party Committee could have failed to be moved by what we saw.

We saw thousands of people who had passed through a series of safe countries and arrived in France, which is itself a safe country. The obvious question to ask is, if they were asylum seekers, why did they not make their claim—indeed, why were they not obliged to make their claim—in the first safe country they reached, or in France itself? If they were not asylum seekers, what was being done to prevent their attempts to enter this country illegally?

I ask the Government to do all that can be done to persuade the French to close Sangatte—on humanitarian grounds, if for no other reason. As the hon. Gentleman suggested, perhaps there is an argument for centres to be further away from the French coast. I was sorry to read in the papers that an attempt by Eurotunnel to have the centre closed was rejected a few days ago by a French court, for the second time in about five months.

What advice can the Opposition offer the Government? I simply ask them, "Please do all you can to work closely with the French to reinstate the bilateral agreement that served us so well, and also work hard to ensure that Sangatte is closed." I also make the nuts-and-bolts point that they should put more detection equipment not only at Dover but at Felixstowe, and at Coquelles and Calais. There should be more equipment on the other side of the channel, where it would be so much more use.

The Opposition believe that the House is united in the aim of reducing the inflow of asylum applicants, and is also committed to a more equal distribution. We believe that a reinstated bilateral agreement is a most useful measure. Perhaps the issue that divides us is the Government's belief that a long-term, EU-wide distributional treaty is the whole answer, but we both accept that there is merit in the other's principle. All we say to the Government is that now is the time to act. With good will, the bilateral agreement, which could—and should—bring more order to our system, could be reinstated within months. Whatever we do, sooner rather than later we must adopt a policy that ensures that the tragedy of the 58 Chinese can never be repeated.

6.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Angela Eagle): There has been considerable agreement during the debate on what needs to be done to address the problem of those who seek asylum in particular European Union countries. There has also been a great deal of discussion of wider asylum issues, to which we will be able to respond when the White Paper is published. Right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House mentioned the need to consider end-to-end processes and a more holistic system, rather than relying purely on asylum. Reference has also been made to illegal working and establishing international agreements to deal with this evolving issue, and I can assure right hon. and hon. Members that the White Paper contains such analysis. I hope that its suggestions will be welcomed on publication later this week.

I also welcome the tone of the debate, which has established at least one thing that we can all agree on—that the problem cannot be solved purely by unilateral action in the UK. This is a global issue with international and supranational aspects, and we need to co-operate internationally if we are to defeat the scourge of the people traffickers. While listening to today's debate, I was heartened to hear many hon. Members acknowledge that trade's criminal nature, its growth in recent years and its dire effects on those who fall into the clutches of the people traffickers. Again, the White Paper will have something to say about that.

I must, however, move away slightly from the warm glow of the cross-party approach, because I do not agree with the analysis that the bilateral agreement was a sunny upland that we should look back on nostalgically and attempt to repeat. Actually, it did not work very well, and I should chide the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) slightly for his article in today's *Daily Express*, the tone of which does not quite match his comments in the House today. In it, he states:

"the flow of people crossing the Channel from France reached unsustainable levels and brought our asylum system to its knees".

That is not true. Although there have been increases, our bilateral and co-operative agreements with the French have substantially reduced the numbers getting through, which is one reason why Sangatte is holding double the amount of people that it was designed to hold.

The hon. Gentleman's article also suggests that the bilateral agreement—it was called a gentleman's agreement, funnily enough—worked well. I can give him some figures on how well it worked. His article states that, when the Labour Government took office, the lower figure that was achieved under the bilateral agreement increased to as many as 43,000, and it implies that all of that increase was associated with France. However, in 1996, when the gentleman's agreement was in place, his Government returned numbers of people in the low teens every month. Overall, between 150 and 200 people were returned in 1996. The figures improved slightly in 1996-97, when 516 asylum seekers were returned to France under the terms of the bilateral agreement. Those figures are nowhere near being of the kind that his praise of the agreement would imply.

The plain fact is that the agreement was weakened and rendered even less effective by judicial action and suspensive appeals as soon as it came into force. It took longer for an appeal to a judicial authority to establish that a return was sensible than the 24 hours, seven days or one month that the agreement specified. As a result, there were an increasing number of judicial review challenges. Even after the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 and just before the end of the agreement, the monthly removal rate was 43 a month, but there were 127 judicial reviews. The agreement was faltering before it was superseded.

Mr. Letwin: We have acknowledged during this debate that the judicial review caused difficulties, but have not the actions of the Minister's own Government rightly limited the scope for such reviews? Surely the real measure of the bilateral agreement's effectiveness is not how many were returned, but how many were deterred from moving in that direction in the first place.

Angela Eagle: Deterrence is a major theme in the forthcoming White Paper, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will welcome some of the things that we have to say about that issue. I am merely saying that the gentleman's agreement was probably put in place in the absence of the Dublin convention, which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) rightly pointed out, was not brought into effect until seven years after it was negotiated because of difficulties arising from negotiation. To say that the gentleman's agreement would solve all our problems is therefore simplistic, to say the least. Any agreement that we reach, be it Dublin or Dublin II—which we hope will replace the first convention—will always be challenged by changes in behaviour that result from its coming into force.

In his *Daily Express* article, the hon. Gentleman says that the agreement, which was negotiated by the previous Conservative Government,

"was allowed to lapse when . . . Labour came to power".

I shall read to him the last sentence of the first paragraph of that agreement, which states:

"in relation to asylum seekers, it"—

the gentleman's agreement—

"shall be superseded by the relevant provisions of the Dublin Convention once that Convention has entered into force."

The hon. Gentleman was good enough to point that out to the House, but that is not quite what his *Daily Express* article says.

If we are to debate this issue, we need to get the facts on the table. We must not cling to the gentleman's agreement as if it will solve problems that we have spent three hours debating today, and which we all know are very difficult to solve. There are no simple and easy answers to global migration and the question of how to deal with asylum. I would be the last to say that our systems are perfect. The White Paper will be a substantial step in the right direction, but I am not going to argue that, even if the White Paper's proposals were put in place tomorrow, we would not face substantial difficulties in dealing with global migration. We have to deal with the issue at source country. We have to negotiate bilateral and multilateral agreements, where that is necessary, that we can put in place. It has to be in everyone's interests, however, so burden-sharing in the European Union is an important part of our plans.

I am glad to have had the chance to debate this. It has been a fair and interesting debate, and I hope that it is a taster for what is to come with the publication of the White Paper later in the week.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 138, Noes 325.

Division No. 151] **[7 pm**

AYES

Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnside, David
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen

Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond

Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Mr. John Randall.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger

Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive

Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Holmes, Paul
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*

Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lammy, David
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam

Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thurso, John
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House notes that co-operation with France on immigration and asylum issues is greater now than it has ever been; recognises that there has been an overall drop from 13,527 in 2000 to 10,927 in 2001, a drop of almost 20 per cent., in the number of people crossing illegally to the UK from France; further notes that bilateral co-operation continues to address the problem of asylum seekers in Northern France, that the French have made significant investment in police reinforcements in the region and judicial action has been taken against human traffickers and that, as a result of the imposition of the civil penalty, the number of clandestine entrants was reduced by 27 per cent. in 2001; and further notes that the previous Conservative Government left the asylum system in complete disarray, with local authorities left to pick up the pieces.

Pensions and Benefits

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

7.14 pm

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): I beg to move,

That this House welcomes the Government's stated aim of increasing from 40 per cent. to 60 per cent. the proportion of pensioners' incomes which comes from the private sector, but notes with concern that the trend is in the opposite direction; deplores the regulatory burdens now placed on pension providers; condemns the Government for its failure to reform annuities; regrets the low level of saving and the decline of funded pensions; recognises that this poses a significant threat to the incomes of pensioners in the future; and further regrets that the Government's response is to increase the number of pensioners dependent on means-tested benefits.

The motion begins by endorsing an objective set by the Government. I had hoped that that would provide a starting point on which we could all agree. That point was the aim of moving from a system in which pensioners receive 40 per cent. of income from private savings and 60 per cent. from benefits to one in which the figures are the other way around. I regret that Ministers have, in the Government's slash-and-burn amendment to our motion, removed even our welcome for their stated aim. I hope that the Secretary of State can assure us that no matter what problems he may have with what we now call delivery, he remains committed to the aim of increasing from 40 per cent. to 60 per cent. the proportion of pensioners' incomes that comes from the private sector. I hope that that is shared ground and a goal in which we all believe.

The reason for the debate is our concern that we are moving in the opposite direction. We worry that the decline of funded pensions that has gathered pace is spinning out of control. The proportion of employees with an occupational personal pension is declining. We know from parliamentary answers that the number of occupational pension schemes closed to new members is rising. We know from the latest survey by the National Association of Pension Funds that the percentage of members in schemes closed to new members has risen from 8 per cent. to 20 per cent. in the past year. There has even been a slight decline in the number of pensioners receiving an income from an occupational pension scheme.

The picture before us is one of declining funded pension savings. That is borne out vividly by the statistics for the assets of our pension funds that have been released over the past few weeks. We thought that the picture was clear. The Office for National Statistics produced statistics on insurance companies' pension funds and trust investments. I am sure that those figures were closely read by many hon. Members; certainly, they should have been read by Ministers. They showed that in 1998 the total assets of our occupational pension schemes were £706 billion. That figure had risen by 1999 to £783 billion.

With no comment or explanation, a new set of statistics was released more recently. Those figures show a very different picture. For precisely the same period covered by the previous statistics, they show that in 1999 our pension funds contained not £783 billion but £679 billion. Call me old fashioned, but £100 billion is still quite a lot of money to lose. We are entitled to hear Ministers

[Mr. David Willetts]

explain those statistics rather than smuggle them out. Why was the value of our pension schemes suddenly reduced by £104 billion?

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Might the answer lie, at least in part, in the fact that the Government have raided pension funds through advance corporation tax changes to the tune of £5 billion a year for the past few years?

Mr. Willetts: My hon. Friend is quite correct, but we have two problems. First, on the snapshot date in 1999, the ONS estimate of the value of our pension funds had fallen by more than £100 billion. Secondly, there are questions about the trend in the value of our pension funds, which my hon. Friend rightly raises and to which I shall turn shortly.

The ONS produced the revised figures for the value of pension fund assets with no apology or explanation of what had happened. If we are confronting what seems to be the biggest revision of economic statistics in the history of British economic management, we are surely entitled to some explanation of why £100 billion has gone from our pension funds. In the past hour, the ONS has stated:

> "Preliminary investigations suggest there is an error in the revision to 1999 and to the figures for 2000, particularly in the estimates of holdings of quoted shares. Further investigation is needed to clarify the position. In the interim, the figures are being withdrawn."

So just before the debate, the Government withdrew their figures for the value of the assets of the pension funds of this country. In the press release that has just been rushed out, the Government are saying that they do not have the faintest idea how much there is in our pension funds.

I hope that, at the very least, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions will give us an explanation of what has gone wrong. Perhaps someone's finger slipped on the calculator—it is easy to lose £100 billion in the roundings—but I hope that at least we shall have an explanation as to what has gone wrong and a promise that, next time £100 billion goes astray from our pension funds, the Government will offer us—on time—a proper explanation and account instead of trying to smuggle out a statement with no explanation.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): My hon. Friend may have noticed that some Labour Members have been laughing. Does he agree that this is no laughing matter but one about which our pensioners should be deeply concerned?

Mr. Willetts: My hon. Friend is right. We are talking not only about a massive statistical error—serious though that is—but about a new picture of what is happening to our pension funds. The old model, on the old statistics, was that there was £706 billion in 1998 and £783 billion in 1999, and that we would be moving onwards and upwards into the sunny uplands with more and more funded pension savings.

I realise that nowadays there is complete uncertainty as to what is reliable, but the new statistics instead gave a figure of £706 billion in 1998, with the 1999 figure revised down to £679 billion, while the new figure for 2000 was even lower—£658 billion: a clear downward trend. If the glory days of all that money in our pension fund assets have passed, those statistics and that new trend establish for the House the scale of the problem that we face in ensuring that our pensioners enjoy prosperity when they retire.

There are of course many reasons for that decline. My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) has already referred to the increase in the tax burden and the regulatory burden that has fallen on many pensioners. However, no matter which of the many explanations one offers, the picture of decline in funded pensions is difficult to gainsay.

Ministers may try to gainsay that fact, however. Let me suggest some of the arguments that we may hear. We may be told, "Ah, but of course markets go down as well as up." There will be a Financial Services Authority health warning on shares in pension funds. That is not what the Government used to say. It is certainly not what the Prime Minister said when he was challenged on the effect of his massive tax hit on our funded pensions. Then, he said that

> "as a result of pension funds rising 70 per cent. because of rises in the stock market since the election, those sums"—

the sums for the tax—

> "are entirely illusory."—[*Official Report*, 1 November 2000; Vol. 355, c. 704.]

In fact, the Prime Minister's statistics were illusory. The reality is that people have less money in their pension funds because of the tax hit that he has imposed.

I am sure that we shall also be told, "Don't worry, the funds are still pouring in." We have heard those statistics many times from Ministers and they are hinted at in the Government's amendment. However, I warn the Secretary of State that those figures for the flow of incomes into funded pensions come from the same source as the figures for the value of the assets in pension funds that he has withdrawn in the past hour. We shall not rely on those figures for the total income going into pension funds. If the right hon. Gentleman tries to develop that argument, I warn him that he is straying into dangerous quicksand. We know how those figures went wrong, and I shall be happy to enlighten him if he tries to deploy them.

The Government will also argue—as the motion suggests—that there is no need to worry because they have introduced the marvellous stakeholder pensions. The Opposition want stakeholder pensions to be a success, but we know the problems that they face. I shall not go over the ground that we debated in this place just before Christmas regarding the take-up of stakeholder pensions. The Government have a target group—

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): The hon. Gentleman is wrong.

Mr. Willetts: The latest figures—out today—confirm that, exactly as we warned in that debate, there are 5 million people in the target group with earnings of between £10,000 and £20,000 a year. Approximately 600,000 stakeholder pensions have been sold, and by the time one removes the people who have transferred to stakeholder pensions from other schemes, people who have been advised that their non-working wives should have a stakeholder pension, or people who have bought stakeholders for their grandchildren, the total number of people in the Government's target group will—as I suggested in that previous debate—be rather smaller than the number of life peers that the Prime Minister has created since 1997. It may do the Government an injustice, but the figure is still many millions short of their target.

I had intended not to repeat that point but to raise another one. What we are trying to focus on in this debate is the value of the funds in our pensions. I hope that the Secretary of State will also enlighten us on what are called in the trade "empty stakeholders". Those are stakeholder pensions that are perfectly formed, legally compliant and designated, as required by the legislation passed by the Government. Employees have been informed—just as they should have been. Such pensions are included regularly in the totals issued by Ministers of the number of stakeholder pensions that have been set up—but there is one minor technical problem: there is no money in them. They have no funds whatever.

I shall quote from an employer's account. She said that she had a group personal pension, but

> "last month my independent financial adviser kindly advised me to set up a 'dummy' stakeholder scheme in order to be certain not to risk a £50,000 fine. This was duly done and announced, to gales of ironic laughter from staff. No one will ever contribute to it, but I've got my certificate."

That anecdote is borne out by assessments made by independent financial advisers, one of whom calculated that nearly 80 per cent. of group stakeholder schemes that have been sold are designation only. That means that currently no contributions are going into them.

The empty stakeholder is the apotheosis of Labour's pension policy. The legislation was passed; the brand name was launched; the employers comply with the new regulation; the employees are informed. Ministers boast about the number of schemes, but there ain't no money—no money whatever. They make no contribution at all to tackling the problem of pensioner poverty. Stakeholders will not do so either.

Ministers do have one answer to the decline in funded pensions, however. It was revealed in a document published at almost the same time as the statistics that showed the decline and was entitled "The Pension Credit: Long-term Projections". The document shows what will really happen if we all retire with a modest amount in our funded pensions—which is now a dangerous risk: we shall be dependent on means-tested benefits.

The projections in the document show that in 2040, assuming that the cost of the pension credit grows in line with earnings and that the revised level of funded pensions saving is a real prospect—scenario one—the pension credit will cost not £2 billion, as it is supposed to do in 2004, but £20 billion. In 2050, the cost will be £26 billion. It is forecast to take more than 1 per cent. of our entire national income.

If we put together the statistics on the decline of funded pensions and the projected cost of the pension credit, we can see that there is a strategy behind what the Government are doing. We can see exactly in which direction our country is headed: to a situation where our funded pensions shrink in value, where we retire with lower pension incomes than we had hoped and, as a result, where we are dependent on means-tested benefits. That is the direction in which the Government are taking us. We are already moving in it; the number of pensioners dependent on means-tested benefits has risen from 41 per cent. in 1997 to 57 per cent. in 2003, as the Library says in a letter to me, but that trend could go still further.

Our vision is one of a society where people build up more funded pensions for their retirement. That involves a pensions regime that is straightforward, comprehensible and encourages people to save, so that their incomes are not dependent on means-tested benefits. We have called this debate because it is clear that the Government are taking us in exactly the opposite direction.

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): The hon. Gentleman talks about means-tested benefits and reducing the number of people who have to claim them. Obviously, one way to do that would be to cut the value of the minimum income guarantee. Can he give us a guarantee that, if he were the Secretary of State, he would continue to uprate the minimum income guarantee in line with earnings?

Mr. Willetts: We will have that debate as we approach the next election. The Government have not promised indefinite upratings of their means-tested benefits in line with earnings, and our warning is that that is where we will end up if we carry on in the direction in which we are going; but the long-term uprating of benefits in line with earnings is not consistent with the objective in which Ministers say they believe—funded pensions providing 60 per cent. of pensioners' incomes.

We want a society in which people have more funded-pension savings. That vision is as important as high-quality public services. When people are stuck on trolleys waiting for medical attention in hospital, they can see what is going wrong with our health service. When people are delayed by yet another rail strike, they can see that our transport system is not working. The decline in our funded pensions is much less visible, but it is more insidious and equally dangerous. The long-term consequences for our society of the decline in funded pensions could be very serious indeed. That is why we have called this debate, and it is why I ask the House to support the motion.

7.32 pm

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Alistair Darling): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

> "welcomes the Government's framework for pensions which will reduce pensioner poverty and encourage saving; further welcomes the fact that pension savings are now at record levels and the increased choice given by stakeholder pensions; further welcomes the Government's decision to set up the Pickering review; and congratulates the Government on the extra £6 billion paid to pensioners from April and its intention to bring in the Pension Credit which will increase the incomes of around half of all pensioners."

I commend the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) for one thing at least—he spoke for substantially less time than he did when we last debated pensions. The only thing that seems to be the same is that he said absolutely nothing then about what the Conservative party would do to increase people's pensions savings, and tonight he did exactly the same—he said exactly nothing about what the Conservative party would do.

I will deal with all the issues that the hon. Gentleman raised during his short speech, but I am surprised that almost a year into this Parliament there is still no Tory policy. I am surprised because in the previous Parliament policies flowed from him like water. He told us that the

[Mr. Alistair Darling]

winter fuel payments were gimmicks, as were free television licences. A year later, with a new policy, winter fuel payments were so good that he wanted to pay them to everyone, not only those who lived here, but those who lived in sunny Spain as well. Instead of being gimmicks, free television licences became so good that he wanted to given them to everyone—even to those without television licences.

By the election, the hon. Gentleman was on to a new policy—he wanted people to opt out of the basic state pension, the result of which would be that a 16-year-old boy would have to save about £10 a week just to buy back his basic pension. So there is no shortage of inventiveness from the hon. Gentleman, but he said absolutely nothing today.

In case the hon. Gentleman did say nothing, I looked at the Conservative party's website, which is usually the repository of what a party has to say. It said, "Click for more", so I clicked for more and found out that there is no more. For the benefit of Conservative Members who do not have to hand a personal computer—it is probably against the rules of the House to have a PC in the Chamber—I have a copy of the web page on the Tory party policy, and it is absolutely blank, as hon. Members can see, except for a picture of the dome, for some reason. If that is the Tories' policy, good luck to them.

It is surprising that the hon. Gentleman had nothing to say, because I happened to glance through the February edition of *Pensions Management*, which includes an article by him under the odd heading, "Kiss—keep it simple stupid". Indeed, he is to be commended because he has kept it extremely simple. He says:

> "There are far too many pensioners living on low incomes."

That is from the man who has opposed every measure that we have introduced precisely to help pensioners on low incomes. He might have got away with that if he had said at the same time what his policy was to help pensioners on low incomes share in the rising prosperity of this country, instead of which there is no policy whatever. We are well into this Parliament, and whereas some of his colleagues are coming up with policies here, there and everywhere, we hear not a single word from him on what his policy is.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): The Secretary of State calls for policies from the Opposition in the first year of Parliament. Will he confirm that the last Conservative Government provided the largest-ever increase in pension funds, whereas he has presided over a very sad decline?

Mr. Darling: I well remember what the last Conservative Government left us. I remember the mis-selling of pensions and the fact that the Conservative Government halved the value of the state earnings-related pension scheme and then forgot to tell anyone that they had done so. I remember that the gap between the better-off pensioners in this country and the poorest widened and that the Conservative Government left 2 million pensioners living in poverty. The hon. Member for Havant clearly also remembers those things because he at least said that something ought to be done about them. My complaint is that he has said absolutely nothing tonight or indeed at any other time when he has been principal Opposition spokesman on pensions about what the Conservative party would do to tackle pensioner poverty.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Darling: Yes. I then want to deal with the points made by the hon. Member for Havant, but I shall give way to the Liberal Democrat spokesman in the meantime.

Mr. Webb: The right hon. Gentleman quoted from February's *Pensions Management*. An article headed, "Government support slips" appears on page 9. Would he care to comment on the survey that found that Liberal Democrat policies on pensions were the most favoured among pensions experts?

Mr. Darling: I am afraid that the professor who speaks for the Liberal Democrats is a bit behind the times. The article in *Pensions Management* was probably printed some time before an interview given by the leader of the Liberal Democrat party. On "Breakfast with Frost" on 28 February, he said:

> "What we go into the next general election with may not obviously make sense in terms of what we are saying at a previous general election."

It is obvious that Liberal Democrat policies are all up for grabs as well. Indeed, I look forward to hearing what the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) has to say because the leader of his party has said:

> "We might go into the next election saying we favour lower taxes."

But the hon. Gentleman wants to spend £3 billion more on pensions alone. If his party leader is right, the hon. Gentleman may well have some difficulty with his policies. I suspect that those who read *Pensions Management* and similar publications will hold the same view on their pension policies. Everyone knows that the problem with the Liberal Democrats' policies on pensions and everything else is that they simply do not add up.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs) *rose—*

Mr. Willetts *rose—*

Mr. Darling: I want to deal with some of the points raised by the Conservative party, and then I shall certainly give way.

Let me first deal with stakeholder pensions. Interestingly, when we last debated the subject the hon. Member for Havant spoke at great length about the perceived shortcomings of stakeholder pensions, but he was extremely brief tonight, and I am not surprised. I notice that the Conservative party is somewhat divided on its attitude to stakeholder pensions. The hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait), who used to speak on pensions for the Conservative party, said:

> "stakeholder is a useful product and the charging cap has a had a beneficial effect. I believe even the industry would acknowledge that."

So at least some Conservatives believe that stakeholder pensions are a very good addition to the options available to people.

The hon. Member for Havant, however, glided over the issue of stakeholder pensions. He did not mention the fact that, whereas in October just over 400,000 stakeholder pensions had been sold, the latest figure shows that just under 638,000 have been sold, with nearly 70,000 being sold in December. Therefore, stakeholder pensions are being sold month in and month out. We always said that it would take time for them to be sold. After all, people do not suddenly run out and buy a pension as they would another consumer good. People have to think about a pension and they have to receive the proper advice and so on. However, so far, there are encouraging signs that stakeholder pensions are being sold in the way that we anticipated.

As I said when we last debated the issue, it is worth bearing in mind that, in addition to stakeholder pensions, new pension sales rose by 9 per cent. in the quarter from July to September and regular premium business rose by 50 per cent. That is encouraging. It shows that the general awareness of pensions and the willingness of people to buy them are increasing. Clearly, there is still a long way to go, but the fact that more than 637,000 pensions have been sold is part of a trend that should be encouraged. It is not surprising that Conservative Members have glided over that point as if, somehow, it did not matter. The last time we debated stakeholder pensions, they spent a considerable time going on about the fact that only 400,000 of them had been sold. Now that the number has increased considerably, they have absolutely nothing to say about the issue.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling): My right hon. Friend mentions the impressive figures for stakeholder pensions, but will he take this opportunity to remind people of the equalisation of pension ages that will take place between 2010 and 2020? As I have found in my constituency, that is an important issue, but I am not sure that many people's pension planning has taken account of the equalisation.

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend raises an important point, which perhaps highlights the problems that arose following the changes to the SERPS rules. It is obvious that all Governments of whatever political colour need to do far more to tell people about pension rules and about changes in pensions. I attach importance to that issue. I suspect that, whereas some people know that the state pension age will start to be equalised from 2010, the vast majority of the population, who tend not to talk about pensions every day of their lives, will not yet be aware of the change. We shall have to attend to that matter. No doubt, members of the Conservative party will complain about the advertising that will be necessary, but we will have to spend a considerable time telling people about that and other changes.

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): According to the Secretary of State's latest figures, what percentage of the stakeholder pensions sold have been sold to the target group? What improvement has there been on the previous distinguished figure of 1 per cent. sold to the target group?

Mr. Darling: The answer is that we will not know until later this year. The Inland Revenue collects the statistics and examines the contracted-out figures and it will know the figures then. It is too early to say what they will be. When stakeholder pensions were introduced, Conservative Members told us that no one would sell them. In fact, many providers are selling the pensions. Conservative Members then said that no one would buy them, but more than 637,000 stakeholder pensions have now been sold. I expect to see the figure improve year on year, but we shall know later this year exactly who has bought them. I will be happy to debate the matter with the hon. Gentleman if he is still here then. *[Interruption.]* I shall say nothing more on that and proceed.

The hon. Member for Havant made much of his point about pension funds. It arose from the fact that an article appeared in today's *Financial Times*, although not in other newspapers despite his best efforts to hawk the story round yesterday, headlined:

> "Tories warn of £100 billion hole in pension funds".

It is no wonder—especially as the Leader of the Opposition was present for a short time—that the hon. Gentleman was keen to explain how he had got himself into this pickle.

The hon. Gentleman is, of course, a clever man, but although he had given the story to the *Financial Times*, the newspaper reported:

> "Mr. Willetts said he suspected a falling stock market and statistical error might be partially responsible for the drop."

The Office for National Statistics is—as he knows, and as I know to my chagrin sometimes—independent of Government and, this evening, it has withdrawn those figures, because it says that they are not right and that it needs to do more work on them.

I am sorry that the ONS has done that, but I have no control over it because it is entirely independent of Government. However, I understand the hon. Gentleman's problem. He has given the story to a newspaper and he has now had to backtrack because it does not stand up. In fact, the total invested in United Kingdom pensions exceeds £1,000 billion, so he has got it completely wrong yet again. He is now having to explain himself.

Mr. Willetts *rose*—

Mr. Darling: I will give way if the hon. Gentleman is going to apologise.

Mr. Willetts: The cheek is quite breathtaking. The Secretary of State, who believed until a month ago that we had £783 billion in our pension funds, produced figures on the same day suggesting that we have £679 billion. This evening, the ONS has withdrawn its figures, because it does not have the faintest idea how much is in pension funds. None the less, the Secretary of State asks us to apologise. He should apologise to the pensioners of this country.

Mr. Darling: The ONS is independent of Government. It produced figures that it now says are wrong. My point is that, yesterday, the hon. Gentleman tried to hawk a story round the journalists of the Sunday newspapers. He managed to get it into the *Financial Times*, but the Conservative party's central allegation—

> "Tories warn of £100 billion hole"—

simply does not stand up.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Darling: Perhaps later, but not at the moment.

[Mr. Darling]

I want to deal with some of the other points that the hon. Member for Havant made. He referred to the fall in the proportion of pensioners with income from an occupational pension. I concede that the figure has fallen slightly. It was 60 per cent. according to the last figures, but it is now 59 per cent. We shall have to wait to see whether that is statistically significant but, when one takes the incomes coming from occupational pensions, private pensions and pensions as a whole, the figure is actually 73 per cent. Whatever point he was seeking to make, it does not seem to have much strength.

The hon. Gentleman's second main point related to something that is undoubtedly true—there has been a decline in the number of people in defined benefit schemes since the mid-1960s. The number has declined for a number of reasons, including the shrinking public sector and the fact that there are no longer so many very large corporations, which typically used to run such pension schemes. Other factors undoubtedly have an effect. The introduction of the international accounting standard—FRS17—no doubt shows up pension funds in company accounts differently from in the past and companies are reacting accordingly.

There is no doubt that the reforms that the Conservatives introduced in the 1980s, which removed the compulsory nature of employers' schemes and enabled people to contract out, had an adverse effect, as did the changes that they introduced under the Pensions Act 1995. The hon. Gentleman is right: there has been a long-term decline and it has been going on since the 1960s.

We have done some things that, I hope, will help. For example, the rebate has been increased by £11 billion over the next five years and we have also set up a review—I think that the hon. Gentleman welcomes it because he referred to it in the article in *Pensions Management*—that is designed to examine the regulatory burden on pensions. I have said before that the fact that some products are tightly regulated and the selling process is also regulated could result in some products becoming more inaccessible than they should be. That is why I asked Alan Pickering, formerly of the National Association of Pension Funds, to produce recommendations on reducing the regulatory burden. That is the right approach.

Mr. Butterfill: I welcome the appointment of Alan Pickering to conduct the review, which has been long delayed by the Government. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that, according to the NAPF, the principal reason for the decline in such final salaries schemes is the impact of the increased regulatory burden, especially in the past five years?

Mr. Darling: To be fair to the NAPF, it also attributes the long-term decline, which has been going on since the 1960s, to a number of causes. I have made it clear several times that we should now look at the regulatory regime. For good reasons, successive Governments have introduced regulations to prevent mis-selling, especially after the scandalous events of the 1980s. If products are regulated—stakeholder pensions are an example of a product that is fairly tightly regulated—and the selling process is regulated, we could have too much regulation and the product might become inaccessible. Other matters, such as the contracted-out rebate regime, need to be considered. Alan Pickering is doing that and we will have his report later this year.

The hon. Member for Havant did not mention annuities, which is surprising given that he feels so strongly about them. The consultation document on annuities, which was mentioned in the pre-Budget report, will be published by the Department for Work and Pensions and the Inland Revenue tomorrow. I hope that it will provide an opportunity for people to examine the options and will encourage them to save more for their retirement. It should also give them the chance to understand annuitisation better and consider the options on offer so that they make the right choices.

Although we will maintain the principle that for most people annuities are the best way to ensure security in retirement, we are prepared to consider options for change. We are determined to ensure that any changes will increase the retirement income that people can expect to receive through an annuity. We also want to ensure that the funds that are saved with the benefit of tax relief are used to provide a secure income in retirement. It is not our aim that people who have money saved for their retirement and who become entitled to income-related benefits should not use their pension for the purpose for which it was intended. The consultation paper will be published jointly by the Economic Secretary and me tomorrow and no doubt we will return to it.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): I want to clarify an issue that a constituent recently raised with me. His company pension scheme will give him a reasonable pension. He has also invested in a free-standing additional voluntary contribution and has been told that because of various rules he has to take out the annuity at 65. His argument is that the company pension scheme will give him a reasonable basic retirement income and he wants to keep reinvesting to save up an additional sum so that he has something to fall back on when he is in his seventies and may be in greater need of it. Will that be dealt with in the review?

Mr. Darling: We will give the hon. Gentleman and his constituent ample opportunity to make representations. For obvious reasons, I am wary of giving advice, especially across the Floor of the House, on the hon. Gentleman's constituent—not least because I am not authorised to do so under the Financial Services Act 1986. The document sets out the options that might improve the annuities market. The Government remain of the view, however, that the principle of annuitisation is important. We are determined to ensure that any changes that we implement benefit the majority of the pensioner population. As I said during Question Time last week, it would be a great pity to make changes that benefited only a handful of people, especially if that had an adverse effect on the pensioner population as a whole. The document sets out the principles against which we will judge any changes. The hon. Gentleman and his constituent will have ample opportunity to consult. The object of the consultation exercise is to ensure that we receive representations with a view to legislating in this year's Finance Bill.

On pension credit, the Conservatives' ambivalence is again becoming apparent. We do not know from Conservatives Members—at least, those in this House—whether they are for or against it. I am convinced that it is high time that we ended the anomaly in the social security system. It is nonsense that had pensioners done everything that successive Governments asked them to do, they would have lost out. I was especially pleased that on Second Reading of the State Pension Credit Bill in the other place, one of my predecessors, the noble Lord Fowler, said:

> "To be frank, I should have preferred it if my government had introduced the pension credit . . . It is long overdue, and my hope is that it will provide support for some of the most deserving people in this country."

I can think of worse references. Indeed, Lord Higgins, who speaks for the Conservatives in the upper House, said about the pension credit:

> "we welcome the increase in money for pensioners . . . The change in capital limits is welcome, as is the abolition of the weekly means test . . . Extra money for pensioners is obviously a good thing".—[*Official Report, House of Lords,* 18 December 2001; Vol. 630, c. 147-165.]

One might have thought that if it is good enough for the Conservatives in the upper House, it is good enough for the Conservatives in this House. However, we shall wait to see what they have to say on that. The Conservatives chose not to go into the last general election promising to take £200 off every pensioner voter by getting rid of the winter fuel payment, so I find it hard to believe that they will go to nearly half the pensioner households in this country and say that they intend to scrap the pension credit, which could cost some pensioners more than £400 a year.

As I said in response to an intervention, our pension policy has to be seen in the context of what we inherited. Too many pensioners were living in poverty; about two in five people of working age were making no voluntary provision for retirement; and too many people were not saving enough. Not enough was being done for the low paid, people with broken work records, the widowed or the divorced. We have put in place reforms to help all those people. Above all, with the pension credit, we are removing the disincentives in the social security system that hit pensioners with modest savings or modest occupational pensions who should be rewarded for their effort and thrift, not penalised because of it.

We have tackled pensioner poverty through the minimum income guarantee, which the Conservatives have always opposed. As a result of that, some of the poorest pensioners will be at least £20 a week better off than they would have been under the Conservatives. We reformed the state earnings-related pension scheme through the state second pension, from which 18 million people will gain. We have introduced new savings options, such as individual savings accounts—again, condemned by the Tories when they were introduced—and stakeholder pensions. We are ensuring that it pays to save. All those changes are necessary.

My final point is that, almost gratuitously, the hon. Member for Havant commented on public services. It is difficult to understand where that fits into the Conservative party's pension policy. All I can say is that the Conservative party, its leader and its shadow Chancellor are committed to reducing public spending to 35 per cent. of gross domestic product, which equates to about £60 billion—almost as much as we spend on health or education. [*Interruption.*] The Conservatives do not like it when I point out their policies—some are agreeing, some are saying that I am wrong. No wonder they are a bit unhappy. They have to face up to the fact that no matter what they say about public services, if we cut investment the quality of service—whether it is health, education or pensions—will suffer.

We believe that public investment in pensions and other public services is justified and necessary. We will carry on with it and make the necessary reforms along the way. It is just a pity that the Conservatives do not face up to what their policies mean. After all, they have only to contrast what happened in their 18 years in government and the mess that they left behind with the difference that we are making to millions of people in this country.

7.58 pm

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): I congratulate the Conservatives on raising such an important topic and broadly support their motion. The hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) rightly referred to the amount of money in funded pensions, which is the linchpin of the Government's pension strategy. They have described occupational pension provision as the great success story of the welfare state. If private provision is to form not 40 but 60 per cent. of final retirement provision in years to come, we clearly need a growing foundation in the private sector.

That is why at the beginning of last week I tabled a question to the Secretary of State querying the dubious figures on the amount of money going into funded pensions. The Minister for Pensions has cited the figures repeatedly—in good faith, I am sure—but they have never quite rung true. They have always seemed a bit fishy. So, at the start of last week I asked him to break down those figures and to say where they came from. It will not surprise the House to learn that I have received a holding answer. Whether it was my intervention or that of the hon. Member for Havant that prompted the Office for National Statistics to withdraw its statistics, it is clear that the revision is so radical and so queries the fundamental basis of the Government's claims that we need accurate figures. The hon. Gentleman raised an important issue.

The Government's attitude to pension provision is best characterised by the complacent washing of their hands wherever any criticism is levelled, particularly with regard to private provision.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it was appallingly complacent of the Government, knowing that the figures were different by £100 billion not to ask the ONS why? What were they doing?

Mr. Webb: The hon. Gentleman is right; the Government are complacent. They say that they want to rely increasingly on the private sector, which still means predominantly occupational pension provision, but when asked questions about occupational provision, they say, "That is for companies and the market to decide."

To give an example, the Secretary of State mentioned the FRS17 accounting standard, which is having a profound effect on company pension provision. *Pensions Management,* to which he referred, highlighted the fact that most pensions professionals cite that as the single biggest issue in pension provision. However, when I tabled a question to the Treasury about FRS17,

[Mr. Webb]

the answer came back that that was a matter for the Accounting Standards Board, as if it were nothing to do with Government.

Mr. Darling: Well it is.

Mr. Webb: The Secretary of State may say, "Well it is," but if the Government are to rely increasingly on private provision, most of which will be occupational, and that provision is being undermined, resulting in lower not higher coverage, they cannot just sit and watch. If they have a target, they must have the means to achieve it.

The Government have watched such things go on. The Secretary of State referred to the long-term trend towards a decline in final salary schemes, but is it accelerating? Do the Government know? I am happy to give way if the Secretary of State knows the answer. One assumes that such schemes are declining. Given that major employers are closing their final salary schemes to new employees, one would imagine that that was so. If the industrial restructuring that the Secretary of State is talking about is carrying on, one would imagine that that was so. Do they know? Do they care? Are they doing anything? We have had no answer.

The theme of the debate is the disappointment caused by Government pension policies. I want to highlight just three quite large groups of people who will be let down and disappointed by the Government's pension policy.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): The hon. Gentleman seems to share the aspiration to increase the proportion of private pension provision, and I am surprised by that. Nobody has yet said how that is to be achieved. Does he agree that the only way to achieve it would be to make pension provision compulsory? If so, does that not raise the question of which provides better value for money, a compulsory private pension or increased spending by the state?

Mr. Webb: The hon. Lady raises a series of important and relevant points. I shall come to the compulsion issue in a second. I would like good-quality occupational provision to be expanded rather than cut as part of the process. For example, the Government should look at why people who would previously have had a final salary scheme are now no longer allowed entry to such schemes, and they should try to reverse that trend so that more people for whom it is appropriate can get good-quality occupational provision.

The hon. Lady is right to suggest that there will be people who do not have access to such provision. In that case, in old age there needs to be a good foundation of both state and private provision for as many people as possible—because both have risks. State provision, as history has shown us, is liable to be ripped up by successive Governments and does not provide any real guarantee, while private provision is subject to the vagaries of the capital market and various other uncertainties. Both are uncertain; neither provides a guarantee, and that is why we want a foundation for both for as many people as possible.

The first of the three groups that have been let down by the Government on pension provision has to be women. Women have historically had a very bad deal from pension provision and are likely to lose out in future. One reason—it relates to the point that the hon. Lady mentioned—is the 60 per cent. private target. One danger is that private pension provision in old age very much reflects the working experience of people. If there is to be an emphasis on private provision, how will the Government stop the inequalities from which women suffered in the work place filtering through into old age?

One group of women have done quite well out of the Government's pension policy: the wives of rich men. I have nothing against the wives of rich men. I have no problem with husbands buying them pensions, given that they may not still be married when they retire. However, if that is the main group that has benefited from the Government's policies, something is missing.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Targeting.

Mr. Webb: Indeed. Clearly, there is a danger that with enhanced reliance on the private sector and without a clear strategy, women will lose out.

Let us consider the stakeholder pension. When people take out a stakeholder pension, they have to buy an annuity with it. Although some small part of the pension buys a unisex annuity, most of that pension will be smaller for women. So, although women are living longer and therefore receiving a comparable amount over their lives, the amount that they have to live on each week will be smaller.

We have heard nothing from the Government on how or whether they intend to address that. The stakeholder pension is intended particularly for people on modest incomes, so not a lot will be going into it in the first place. If it is then lower for women, they will lose out. Do the Government have any strategy for women's pensions in that respect?

Mr. Butterfill: Has the hon. Gentleman seen the recent report by the Association of Consulting Actuaries on the position of women in occupational pension schemes? It says that whereas 21 per cent. of full-time working women did not have occupational schemes in 1989, the figure is now 26 per cent. So, 5 per cent. more women do not have an occupational scheme now compared with 1989.

Mr. Webb: I am grateful for that intervention. The hon. Gentleman is very knowledgeable about these matters and highlights the problem. The Government say that reliance on the private sector is a key part of their strategy, but they do not seem to know or care about what is going on, even if things are going backwards for women and other groups.

Women are vulnerable not just in private sector provision. The Government have trumpeted their measures on state provision. Increases in the minimum income guarantee will go predominantly to poorer pensioners, many of whom are women, and that is to be welcomed, but what about those who do not take up their entitlement, who are also predominantly women? The Government's obsessive emphasis on the means-tested strand, at the great expense of the universal strand, is prejudiced against women, because they will take up their pension but will not necessarily take up their minimum income guarantee. That is why our party remains committed to the basic state pension, particularly for older pensioners, many of whom are women and all of whom take up their entitlement.

I am surprised that the Government have not mentioned much about the state second pension, which is another element of their strategy. Again, it is claimed as a great thing for women, with credits and all the rest of it. In 40 or 50 years' time, if the policy survives that long, it might be such a great thing. However, for anybody already at pension age, it is irrelevant, and for those who are 10 or 20 years below pension age, it will make precious little difference. Therefore, we are talking really only about 30 or 40 years down the track. Such changes are likely to be ripped up and restructured many times during that period. So, women cannot be sure of an enhanced pension through that scheme. It is too complicated and bound to be revised again and again. I should like to give one example in that regard.

When the state second pension was introduced, we said that it was not enough and that it would not bring pensioners, together with the basic pension, above the means test. The Government said, "Nonsense; it is adequate," yet they have now introduced a pension credit. Therefore, someone who has made no voluntary saving and has only the basic state pension and the state second pension will receive a top-up through the pension credit to bring their combined income to a better level because the scheme that the Government have introduced was not good enough. If the Government have to rewrite the rules just two years after they have introduced them, what hope is there that such a scheme will be in place in 40 years' time? Women are missing out because of the Government's pension strategy.

In "The House Magazine" this week, the Secretary of State wrote an article about pension provision and looked at the long-term future for the group to which I have just referred. He said:

> "The key to people having a decent pension in retirement is getting today's twenty-somethings to start putting their money away as early as possible. To this end, we have introduced stakeholder pensions and are reforming SERPS with the State Second Pension."

Clearly, 20-year-olds are all down the Dog and Duck or wherever they go, discussing the state second pension and its reform. I wonder whether the Secretary of State, who I assume wrote the article, can tell us how many 20-year-olds have bought stakeholder pensions? I am happy to give way to the Secretary of State if he is able to provide that figure—but, of course, he has no idea. *[Interruption.]* He says that he told us earlier, but what he said earlier is that the Government do not know and will not know for some time. The article says that 20-year-olds will be okay because there are stakeholder pensions, but he does not have a clue whether any 20-year-olds have bought a stakeholder pension—such is the Government's complacency about pensions.

Women are not the only ones who lose out from the Government's proposals. Those who want to retire in a phased way, instead of going over the current cliff edge of retirement, also miss out because of the Government's policy. In the same article, the Secretary of State expresses all the usual platitudes about early retirement or flexible retirement. He writes:

> "The UK's employment and early retirement culture urgently needs to change. That's why we have introduced a number of policies to help these changes along and start tackling ageism".

Here is one of those crushing policies:

> "We have . . . sent out 75,000 copies of the voluntary Code of Practice on Age Diversity in Employment; which points out the benefits of an age diverse workforce."

Let us imagine the scene in offices throughout the land as the Government leaflet drops on the mat and people say, "Oh, we hadn't thought of that. Employing older people will help us, so let's rush out and employ them." What nonsense. The Government are dragging their heels on legislating in respect of age discrimination. They are doing as little as possible and delaying until the last possible moment.

What can be done? Bizarrely, one can spend one's life working for one firm, Tesco, then retire from Tesco, draw a private occupational pension and go to work for Sainsbury—that is allowed; but one cannot retire from a life working for Tesco and then go to work part-time for Tesco, as that is not allowed. In the latter case, the Inland Revenue says that one has not really retired, so one cannot have one's pension with its tax privileges. That is absolutely barmy.

If, as the Secretary of State—or whoever wrote the article—claims, the Government want people to go on working longer, perhaps past state pension age, should not the Government be helping people to phase their retirement? Should not people be able to draw their pension while doing some part-time work? Should they not have flexibility and choice? No—the Inland Revenue rules the roost. On flexible retirement, the Government sound great, but there is no sign of action.

If anything, retirement is happening earlier, not later. Far too many people who would like to continue working and phase in their retirement are forced to stop work. Despite reports and reviews, the Government have nothing to say on the issue.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): I am fascinated by the hon. Gentleman's highly enjoyable speech. Does he agree that it was regrettable that when the issue of age discrimination was raised in the House, in the form of a Labour Back Bencher's proposal for an age discrimination commission, the Government passed up the opportunity to do something positive, saying that Europe would provide the answer in a couple of years' time?

Mr. Webb: It was regrettable that that opportunity was not grasped. The Government are doing everything they can to slow down the introduction of legislation. People are suffering from age discrimination now, yet the Government are dragging their heels and making matters worse.

A third group of pensioners who have not been mentioned so far—a group who are losing out because of the Government's mean spiritedness—are those who are entitled not to widows' pensions, but to widowers' pensions. The Government have been found out: only this week, a court case resulted in a ruling that a woman who was bereaved would get a widow's pension, a widow's benefits and tax allowances, whereas a man in the same position would not. The Government have legislated for the future, but what about the people who have been discriminated against for years? The Government settled the case out of court to avoid setting a precedent, but I have constituents who are widowers and who ought to be entitled to benefits and pensions.

[Mr. Webb]

I will give the Minister for Pensions the benefit of the doubt and hope that he will respond to the debate, and specifically to that point. I live in hope—but he is smiling knowingly at me, so perhaps I should not. Will the Government evade their responsibilities or will they recognise that there is an injustice that must be remedied? Will they do something about widowers, especially those with children, who have missed out?

Previously, I alluded to that fine magazine, *Pensions Management*. It reports the result of a survey on political parties' records on pensions policy, and it is worth summing up for the House what those who know about pensions are saying. Those who responded to the survey are those who run pensions. They have—is it £600 billion or £700 billion? Who knows? It is certainly plenty of money, and the figures have lots of noughts. Such people are the linchpin of the Government's pensions strategy, because if 60 per cent. of people's income in old age is to come from the private sector, the vast bulk will be derived from the occupational pensions sector. The people who answered the survey know what they are talking about it—and if they do not, the Government are in trouble.

Those people were asked which party has the most appealing and effective pensions policies, not pensions spokesman—and at this point I have to disappoint and part company slightly with the Conservatives. In February 2002, the survey indicated that 7 per cent. of respondents thought that the Conservative party had the most appealing and effective pensions policies—which is not bad for a party that has none at all—and 9 per cent. chose the Labour party. With all due modesty, I should say that the figure for the Liberal Democrat party was not large; however, at 14 per cent., it was double that for the Conservatives. Let us remember that the people who were asked that question know what they are talking about—and if they do not, we are all in trouble. It is a salutary lesson for us all that "None of the above" was the runaway winner.

Perhaps we should reflect on the fact that if we all continue to change our policies—the Government seem to change theirs with the wind—if none of us settle, and if we do not achieve an all-party consensus, no one will have the security they need to plan for their old age. In the past, we tried to talk to the Government about pensions, but they have their rigid strategy of means-testing, and that is the approach that they will take. That is regrettable, but it is not too late for them to repent of that strategy. If we work together, perhaps in future those who run pensions and those who receive them will think better of all of us.

8.16 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I, like many Labour Members, am grateful to the Opposition for the spirit in which they framed tonight's motion. On many aspects of that motion, a fair number of us agree with the official Opposition, but the lack of generosity in its drafting shows how far the Conservative party has to go before the electorate will once again start to listen to it.

The big divide between the Government and the Opposition is that, despite criticism of the Government's strategy, most of the electorate believe that the Government's heart is in the right place. The Government's effort to help the poorest pensioners the most is one with which most voters agree. The Opposition still stand charged at the bar of public opinion with being a party that, when in government, was successful in ensuring that richer workers gained more adequate pension provision on retirement, whereas those who had fewer assets were less fairly dealt with. Had the motion taken notice of the marked change in the temper of the debate that the Government have brought about, some Labour Members might have gone into the Lobby to support it this evening.

There is real concern among Labour Members—I am not the only one who feels it—about the direction of Government policy in significantly increasing the number of people on some form of means-tested assistance. I do not believe that that is a sustainable policy in the long run. That will be the single focus of my contribution to the debate. The difficulties that the Government are getting into because of their adoption of means-testing become all too apparent when we read their consultation document on the pension credit.

When the Government introduced the minimum income guarantee, many hon. Members on both sides of the House pointed out that a considerable number of our constituents who were doing everything that previous Governments and the current Government had asked them to do—that is, save for their retirement—would probably make themselves worse off. Initially, the Government denied that. Then, thank goodness, there was a Pauline conversion—*[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State is mumbling, but I can give him evidence; perhaps this can be followed up by letter.

After a Pauline conversion, the Government decided to introduce a further means test—on the pension credit—to overcome the disadvantages that some pensioners, perhaps a significant number, faced and would face in future because of the minimum income guarantee. The pension credit became urgent when the Government linked their strategy to the sale of stakeholder pensions. It is clear that at least half the members of the target group could make themselves worse off by buying a stakeholder pension instead of not doing so, spending all their money and relying on the minimum income guarantee on retirement.

To overcome that difficulty and reward people for saving, the Government intend to introduce a pension credit scheme. I merely wish to point to where that policy is going and to draw attention to how unsustainable it is. The sooner we admit that, the sooner we shall acquit ourselves of any charge in future that we were a party to pension mis-selling.

I do not believe that the State Pension Credit Bill is sustainable. We shall go into the next general election with the working families tax credit and the beginnings of the pension credit, forgoing a reduction of 5p in the standard rate of tax to foot the bill for the tax credits up to the next election. There has been no debate about whether that is the best strategy or the right strategy, and such a debate is overdue. There are many who might feel that the objectives of the minimum income guarantee could be better met by a mixture of pension increases and tax cuts than by the model that the Government have adopted.

I wish to take us forward to 2050. I direct attention, as the Government rightly argue in their consultation document, taking into account current prices, to what the bill will be for taxpayers if the link with earnings is maintained. If it is not to be maintained, we should tell people quickly that stakeholder pensions will become more attractive because the pension credit will become less attractive.

If we take the Government's figures and move to 2050, the end of the period covered by their consultation document, the cost of paying the pension credit, if it is linked to earnings in the meantime, will be the equivalent of 11p on the standard rate of tax, at today's prices. Does anyone think that we shall fight elections to maintain that sort of tax increase? I do not. For that reason, I do not believe that the link will be maintained. If it is not to be maintained, we should say that quickly. People will be deciding whether to save or not, and their decisions will be based on whether they think that the Government's proposals are viable in the longer run.

An alternative to the spending of the sum that will be committed to pension credits over the time span that we are contemplating would be to increase by more than half the amount that we spend on the national health service. Are we seriously thinking about going into elections with a commitment that will so restrict our ability to spend money? Do we wish to tie ourselves into pension credits when those sums could be spent in alternative ways?

We might wish to see that money spent on the standard retirement pension. At the end of the period outlined by the Government, we would have enough money to raise every pensioner above the minimum income guarantee in that year. Would not that be a better strategy than one that is reinforcing the means-testing strategy? In the longer run, that strategy will defeat the Government. People will adapt their behaviour to make the best of whatever framework the Government lay down. They are sensible and it is proper for them to take that approach. They should not be condemned for taking it.

Whether it is desirable in the longer run that people decide that they should save less because they cannot make themselves better off by saving, and that they should in future depend more on the minimum income guarantee and pension credit, is a question that will increase in urgency as the years pass by.

I thank the Opposition this evening for being so mean-spirited that they could not recognise both the efforts that the Government have made to look after the poorest pensioners and their commitment to do so, even if some of my right hon. and hon. Friends and I are increasingly wary about the strategy that they have adopted. This is not the place to exchange views about who is right and who is wrong. Events will show us who is right. Given the sums that will be involved in maintaining the minimum income guarantee in line with earnings—equally important is the pension credit being in line with earnings—these will be unsustainable objectives in the long run.

As we come to the end of this Parliament, it will not be the Opposition who are asked about their position. We shall be asked by our electorate whether in the next Parliament we shall increase these two means-tested benefits in line with earnings. If we give in because we are worried about losing votes, we shall undermine still further the chance that many decent working people have who are urged to look after themselves and save for the future. We shall make the pensions problem that has been illustrated in the debate even worse than it is now.

The timing will be of the Government's own choosing, but the sooner we say that while we have introduced these two important initiatives, the minimum income guarantee and the pension credit, and given them a boost by the link with earnings, they will not be sustainable in the longer run, the better. People will then know where they are. They will have a certainty that they do not have now. In the long term, we will have more rather than fewer people saving for their retirement.

8.28 pm

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): I frequently follow the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) in debates on this subject. He is being a little less than charitable to most of my right hon. and hon. Friends. When we last debated these issues, I and many of my right hon. and hon. Friends agreed that the Government had probably acted from the best of motives in introducing stakeholder schemes and pension credit. We said, however, that the probable outcome would not be what they intended. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman's speech illustrates better than the contributions of my right hon. and hon. Friends in the previous debate the difficulties that attach to what the Government are proposing. Indeed, I have long been an advocate of compulsory—

Mr. Frank Field: That was not my objection; I was arguing that the motion showed a lack of generosity of spirit.

Mr. Butterfill: Perhaps that is the way that politics is today.

An element of compulsion is inevitable if we are to achieve the objectives that we would all like to achieve, although, as I shall demonstrate, as long as we retain the existing annuity regime, compulsion is not a viable alternative because people will rebel against it.

Our great difficulty at the moment is that occupational schemes, which historically have been the mainstay of savings for retirement, are declining at an alarming and accelerating rate.

Mr. Heald: Does my hon. Friend agree that the more the Government send out the message that such schemes are the responsibility of Government, the less likely it is that employers will continue their historic role in occupational schemes, based on the belief that a decent occupational pension scheme is part of the pay that they give their workers and the conditions that they provide in an enlightened work place?

Mr. Butterfill: That is certainly a danger. The Government have been sending out adverse signals on occupational pensions schemes, and some of their actions have been more serious. I recommend to the House the excellent document produced by the Association of Consulting Actuaries, "Pensions in Smaller Firms Survey 2001". Such firms employ 250 people or fewer, and their work force constitutes 55 per cent. of the total in this country. The document is sub-headed "Occupational

[Mr. Butterfill]

Pensions: the End of an Era?" The ACA is seriously worried that occupational pensions, as we have come to know them, are in terminal decline.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Butterfill: I would like to make more progress, as I have taken rather a lot of interventions and been unable to develop my argument coherently. I trust that the hon. Gentleman will allow me to continue a little longer.

We have received representations, including a briefing from the National Association of Pension Funds dated 1 February, which states:

> "46 companies had closed their final salary scheme to new members"

during the current year to October, compared with 18 that closed in the previous year. The briefing continues:

> "13 schemes had switched from final salary to money purchase",

compared with six in 2000. The trend is therefore accelerating. Unfortunately, that involves not only the smaller firms to which the ACA referred, but the very largest firms in the country, including Lloyds TSB, J. Sainsbury's, BT, Marks and Spencer, Whitbread and British Airways, all of which have gone down that route. Surely, that is an alarming prospect for the Government.

Some reasons for the trend have already been alluded to by previous speakers, but are worth repeating and emphasising. The NAPF and the ACA believe that the biggest single problem is bureaucracy and red tape, particularly additional burdens incurred as a result of Government action in the past five years. To be fair, the Pensions Act 1995—it was passed, with the best of intentions, by my own party to deal with perceived problems, particularly following Maxwell, and to impose safeguards for those who were the beneficiaries of such schemes—in many ways compounded the problem. At the time, I argued that the cost of regulation would be unnecessarily high. I also argued that the cost of policing the system and ensuring compliance should not fall on firms providing the pensions; I said that the Government should accept that responsibility, thereby reducing the cost for employers. Otherwise, we would drive employers away from making such provision which, I am afraid, has proved to be the case.

I very much welcome the announcement by the Secretary of State of the appointment last autumn of Alan Pickering. An urgent review of the burden of regulation, and the possibility that the Government may still take over some costs, especially regulation costs, may yet prevent firms leaving the scheme altogether. FRS17 has already been referred to; the problem is not the Government's fault, as accounting standards are nothing to do with them, although they have an input in the measure, which brings us into line with US accounting standards. However, its short-term impact is extremely negative.

The real difficulties have arisen by various routes. The changes in advance corporation tax were profoundly damaging. I am not sure that Labour Members appreciate the scale of the damage that was done by them. Tesco's scheme, for example, had to increase total contributions by 15 per cent. to compensate for the cost of the ACT changes. That is one firm alone, which has now come out of a final salary scheme and gone into a defined contributions scheme. The lower investment returns have not helped, nor has increased life expectancy, earlier retirement or gaps in working careers. All those factors make the situation of occupational pensions much more difficult. The Government must act to make pension provision easier and more attractive for employers. Everything that the Government have done over the years that they have been in power has had the reverse effect on employers.

The other possible route to help with pension provision is private provision. If we do not make it compulsory, we must encourage individuals to save for their retirement, but again we run into all sorts of circumstances arising from the existing legislation which make that profoundly unattractive. The least attractive of all is the annuities regime. The requirement to put all one's savings into an annuity at the end of the day, regardless of what one's life expectancy may be at the time, and regardless of the fact that one may wish to leave money to dependent relatives, is a profound disincentive.

In correspondence with me, Ministers have suggested that the problem of annuities affects only the very rich. That is not true, although it is true that only those with above-average earnings tend to take out private provision. That could be altered in all sorts of ways, which we could discuss later. These people are not the very rich; they are the modestly off, for the most part. Only a tiny minority are the very rich about whom the Treasury is concerned.

I know that the Association of British Insurers recently produced a report supporting the Government in their position on annuities. However, the members of the ABI are the principal providers of annuities—in fact, the only providers—and it might be thought that they could conceivably have a vested interest in maintaining a product from which they make considerable profit.

The Government statistics hide the fact that millions are deterred by the annuity requirements from taking out pension policies at all. It is significant that many, many young people, who write to me because I am known to take an interest in these matters, tell me that they will not take out a policy because of those restrictions, and that they will instead turn to buy-to-let, for example.

One reason why so many young people with surplus earnings are buying properties on the buy-to-let scheme—there has been an enormous and unhealthy growth in that; it has gone much too far—is that they see it as a more realistic way of saving than going through pensions. They are doing so without tax relief. They say, "Blow the tax relief. It is not worth having the tax relief, if those are the restrictions." That is a sad reflection on the present situation, which we must change.

The chairman of the ACA states in the conclusion of his report:

> "We are also growing very concerned that the drift away from 'good' occupational arrangements is accelerating towards a trot, if not quite a gallop."

The situation is urgent, but the Government seem to think that there is nothing terribly wrong.

Unfortunately, as we have all seen, the take-up of stakeholder pensions to date has been extremely disappointing. We all hope that it may get better. In my view, it has had only one good effect—driving down charges.

Mr. Frank Field: It is a very big one.

Mr. Butterfill: Indeed, it is a very big improvement and it has been extremely valuable, but it was a side effect rather than the main reason for introducing the stakeholder pension.

I am concerned that the thrust of Government policy is to take us further and further down the dependency route. It is now estimated that by 2050, the combination of minimum income guarantee and pension credit will mean that 65 per cent. of all pensioners will be on some sort of means-tested benefit. I do not believe that that is the Government's intention, but that is where they will be headed unless they do something about it—and soon.

8.40 pm

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): People of my age are not really all that interested in pensions. In fact, I only recently found out quite how uninterested they are. Having spent the weekend with the hon. Members for Havant (Mr. Willetts) and for Northavon (Mr. Webb) at Ditchley park for a conference on pensions policy—on reflection, perhaps that does not make me all that typical of thirty-somethings.—the following Sunday evening, at a dinner with friends and flushed with the excitement of discussing actuarial projections of the forthcoming population bulge, I decided to try to interest my fellow diners in the implications for pensions policy. There was a short embarrassed silence, after which the conversation immediately returned to football.

The issue of pensions should be at the centre of modern politics, however. When Labour came to power, about 2 million people were earning less than £70 a week. From next April, the minimum income guarantee will ensure that they earn £100 a week. It is often said that politics does not make any difference to people, but that £30 will make a genuine difference. Although it may not seem an enormous amount to broadsheet column writers, who often spend more than that on lunch each day, for the people of my constituency, it will often eliminate the difference between being able to shop properly and buy presents for their grandchildren or being able to heat their homes.

Given the lack of interest on the part of journalists in tonight's debate, it is unlikely that every single word of it will be repeated in the papers, but people did not always find pensions policy uninteresting or difficult to understand. When the Beveridge report was printed, about 200,000 copies were sold. I read that people queued around the block in Kingsway to get copies from HMSO. Beveridge himself became a broadcasting celebrity, and could be heard on radio even more often than the hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) today. Of course, Beveridge would probably be gyrating in his grave if he could see what successive Governments have done to his plans. He expected almost everyone to benefit from the basic state pension, with national assistance reserved for the very few. Successive Governments of both parties have engineered a situation in which, for the past 25 years, about 1.7 million people have been claiming means-tested benefits—a significant number, at just under one sixth of all pensioners. Beveridge expected the basic state pension to provide subsistence, but I defy anyone in the House to try to live on £72.50 a week these days.

Why has this happened? It would be easy to play the game of party politics and try to assign blame to one side or the other, but the problems were inherent in the system that Beveridge bequeathed to us. He never defined the level of subsistence even in theory, and in practice, successive Governments have been unable to afford to provide a basic state pension at a level that would offer subsistence. Governments have therefore faced a choice of either leaving the poorest pensioners in poverty or targeting money at them. The more generous the means-tested benefits, however, the more pensioners will be affected and the more we risk the problem identified by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) in terms of disincentives to save.

Mr. Webb: The hon. Gentleman is making a thoughtful contribution, but he elided the gap between targeting those most in need to means-testing. Does he accept that an alternative method of targeting those in need is targeting the oldest pensioners, the vast majority of whom are among the poorest? That would avoid the problems of means-testing.

James Purnell: That is an interesting point, and I am interested in other ways of targeting those most in need. However, a Government could not rely purely on the policy that the hon. Gentleman suggests, because it would omit people outside a specific age group and perpetuate the problem of benefiting richer pensioners, although they are few.

What did Beveridge plan for our society? He expected most women to stay at home and their husbands to be employed and thus to provide for them. He failed to provide for the growing number of carers, and for people who are unemployed, take career breaks, change jobs and have been unable, through state or private provision, to build up sufficient income for retirement.

Those basic problems have plagued Ministers with responsibility for pensions since 1945, and many of the resultant reforms have failed. I do not know how many people today remember Boyd-Carpenter's reforms to the second state pension, which involved different levels and an earnings-related element. How many people remember the Labour Government's attempt in the 1960s to introduce a minimum income pension, which was much like our minimum income guarantee?

Many Ministers have come up against the stark reality of pensions policy—

Mr. Butterfill: I was interested in the hon. Gentleman's comments about Beveridge. I am sure that he knows that Beveridge proposed building up a fund at the outset and making no distributions until an adequate amount had been accumulated. The post-war Labour Government rejected that recommendation, and that created many problems for subsequent Ministers.

James Purnell: That is exactly the case. I believe that Jim Griffiths made the decision because, at the end of 1945, after Britain had won the war, he did not believe

[James Purnell]

that a Government could tell people who had suffered for the past 50 years from a system that was partial and left many dependent on charity from the National Assistance Board that they would have to wait another 10 or 15 years for contributions to be built up. I therefore understand the reason for the decision and I doubt whether any hon. Member proposes adopting the system that Beveridge was planning.

Mr. Heald: The hon. Gentleman appeared to be slightly critical of Lord Boyd-Carpenter, who devised opting out, on which all private sector provision since 1958 has been built. Does he not agree that, whether the figure is £600 billion or £700 billion, it is due to the work of Lord Boyd-Carpenter?

James Purnell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I was not criticising Lord Boyd-Carpenter, who established a principle. However, I believe that it was a slightly panicked and inadequate response by the then Government to Dick Crossman's work for the Labour party in opposition, and in practice, it failed to deliver. We had to wait for a Labour Government to introduce SERPS, which tackled the matter two decades later.

Pensions reform is rarely considered a success. The costs are felt immediately, but the benefits are not experienced until a Government have long passed into history. The objectives of pensions policy are mutually contradictory, and there are always losers. Even when a Government get something right, it is often too complicated for people to understand at the time.

Against that background, far from being a failure, the Government's policy will be adjudged by history a significant success. It has been expensive—about £6 billion by next year—but poor pensioners can now be sure that, for at least the rest of this Parliament, the minimum income guarantee will increase in line with earnings. That is a major change from what we inherited. Some who claim to argue on behalf of the poorest pensioners argue for a return to the linking of the basic state pension with earnings, but that would benefit those people less by reducing the amount of money available.

Mr. Boswell: I know that the hon. Gentleman has advised Ministers over the years, as indeed did I at one stage. Will he advise the Secretary of State to extend that guarantee beyond the current Parliament?

James Purnell: No Government can make proposals for a Parliament for which they have not been elected. It is certainly right that we have made the promise for the rest of this five-year term, and we will no doubt consider it again when we write our manifesto.

I do not mind pleading guilty to the charge that the Government have increased means-testing. Faced with a choice between spreading the £6 billion among all pensioners and targeting some of it on the poorest pensioners, through the minimum income guarantee, I would be proud to choose the latter. The important issue is not the number of pensioners whose income is assessed but whether the assessment undermines dignity.

The means test gained a bad reputation in the early part of the 20th century, when it meant frequent visits by the means-test men and detailed interrogations about household income, including even a youngster's paper round or anything that an elderly relative who came to live with the family might possess. I believe that George Orwell called the means test an encouragement to tittle-tattle and to the informer. A neighbour's jealousy about a new coat or pair of shoes could lead to a visit from the means-test men. It is not surprising that so many people grew up absolutely dedicated to ensuring that they would never have to rely on the means test, which at that time was genuinely a matter of shame.

The reticence of many pensioners today about claiming their entitlement stems from their memories of those days. Unfortunately, that reticence will not be eased by this debate and Opposition claims that the increase in means-testing is in itself a bad thing. In that sense, this debate will not in any way encourage people to claim the benefits to which they are entitled.

It is important to start to change the language that we use about means-testing. Pensioners are entitled to these benefits, which are no longer a quasi-charitable donation to them in their old age. They have paid for them through their taxes, just as they have paid for the basic state pension. We should tell them that they should claim this income as of right. Moreover, rather than scaring them about means-testing, we should make it clear to them that the procedure for claiming the minimum income guarantee, and the pension credit when it comes into force, has been significantly simplified: the form has been cut from 40 pages to 10, and people claiming the credit will be assessed on their income not every week but only once every five years. They will be asked to provide the information at the time of claiming the basic state pension, so a far larger number will receive the credit automatically.

Andrew Selous: The hon. Gentleman said that pensioners would be assessed every five years. Will he comment on how they will fare when their circumstances change within the five-year period? Are there not real difficulties in coping with those circumstances?

James Purnell: It is an important point, but Baroness Hollis answered it in the other House when she made it clear that there are only four or five circumstances that will require reassessment: the death of a partner; moving overseas; moving house; and another one or two that escape me. We must have some flexibility in the system to allow such major changes to be taken into account—we can do that in a simple way—but the important thing is that the vast majority of pensioners will be assessed only once every five years, which makes the means test much simpler than it was.

My noble Friend also made it clear that a huge range of items of information that can currently be required no longer will be. With pensioner credit, pensioners will no longer have to report savings of over £6,000 or child maintenance payments. They will not have to report student grants or loans, if they have gone into higher education or the university of the third age, and they will not have to report rent on land or on a second property.

All in all, this will be a system in which pensioners are entitled to the income because they have paid for it through their taxes over their working lives. It will be a simple, non-intrusive system, with changes only once every five years. That is a universe away from the means tests of the early part of the last century: that is why we need to rehabilitate the means test.

The policy choice that we face is stark—between targeting money on the poorest pensioners and spreading it equally among rich and poor; between putting the investment into pensions, as the Government have done, and have pledged to continue to do, and cutting spending on pensions, as the Conservatives would have to do to meet their public spending goal of 35 per cent. of GDP. They tried to wriggle out of that, and complained when the Secretary of State mentioned it earlier, but that is no use. That aim has been broadly stated both by the party leader and by the shadow Chancellor, and if that is their goal they will have to tell us at some point where those cuts would come from.

We heard no policy proposals from the hon. Member for Havant, but the agenda behind his speech was fairly clear, and it is worrying. The Conservatives would reduce the number of people being means-tested by cutting the minimum income guarantee and the pension credit, and claiming that the slack should be taken up by stakeholder pensions. They would then say that if that were not possible, it would be because of design faults in the Government's policy.

If that is the way the Conservatives plan to save the billions of pounds that would have to come out of pensions to meet their goal of 35 per cent. of GDP, they should be ashamed of themselves. They know as well as anyone else that for a significant number of people in lower-income households there will never be any sense in saving huge amounts in an occupational or private pension, because it would be much better for them to spend that money as income now, on feeding their families, rather than saving a tiny amount for their retirement, which would probably be dwarfed by the benefits that they received from the state.

The earnings limit for the minimum income guarantee is a major departure for pensions policy. The Conservatives make the charge that that reduces incentives to save. Of course that is true, but it was also true of income support, which the MIG replaced. The reason why it now affects more people is simply that the MIG is more generous than income support. In introducing the pension credit, we are therefore addressing a problem that has been inherent in our pension system for decades. As Lord Fowler said in the other place:

> "I should have preferred it if my government had introduced the pension credit . . . . It is long overdue, and my hope is that it will provide support for some of the most deserving people in this country."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 18 December 2001; Vol. 630, c. 165.]

Of course I am aware that many people say that the pension credit is too complicated. I look forward to examining the details of the scheme during the Select Committee's next inquiry, which will be into that very issue. The outcome of the pension credit is simple, even if its workings may be complicated. Pensioners will keep 60 per cent. of any private pension, which will make a significant difference to 5.5 million people. We have already started to see progress: more than half a million fewer pensioners now live in households with a low income than did in 1997, and people of working age now contribute £19 billion more in real terms to non-state pensions.

The Opposition say that the Government's policy is failing. Is that why stakeholder pensions have been welcomed by the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), by Lord Fowler in the other place, and even by the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman? The Government's policy will stand the most important test of any pensions policy—the test of time.

8.59 pm

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): I was disappointed that the Secretary of State responded to the raising of serious issues in what I felt was a party political, knockabout way. There are two clear interrelated problems. One is that the combination of measures intended to address the need for those who are less well-off to have a decent income in retirement—the minimum income guarantee, quickly followed by the pension credit to help stakeholders—has put in place a system whose original thinking was pretty short-term but which, as the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) pointed out, is highly unlikely to be sustainable in the long term.

A provision that will cost the equivalent of 11p on income tax—about £26 billion in today's money—and put 65 per cent. of the population on means-tested benefit is highly unlikely to survive in the long term. A further serious effect is that it has demotivated employers' in their efforts to provide proper pension schemes for their staff. Everyone in the pensions industry now thinks that the Government's professed objective of reversing the 60 per cent. state funding versus 40 per cent. private funding of pensions is completely unrealistic, and that we are going in the other direction.

Other hon. Members have said quite a bit about the decline in occupational schemes, but I should stress that they have been one of the British economy's great successes. They are one reason why Britain has enjoyed lower tax rates than the countries of euroland—even under a Labour Government—and why the British economy is doing better than the economies of continental Europe, yet we face the prospect of a serious reversal. Membership of occupational schemes has declined by 500,000 in the past decade, and by 2 million in the past 30 years. As has been cited, 28 per cent. of men and 26 per cent. of women have no occupational employment scheme, whereas 10 years ago the figures were only 19 per cent. and 21 per cent. respectively. The movement away from occupational final salary schemes to money purchase schemes is accelerating. In the past five years, 24 per cent. of firms have made such a shift, and 46 major companies have closed their final salary schemes in the past year alone.

The key point—it is perhaps not realised—is that, typically, contributions to money purchase schemes are about 7 per cent. less per annum than contributions to final salary schemes. Just when it appears that real returns on investments are declining, as measured by the long-term yield on gilts, savings in pensions are actually being reduced. As a result, in the next 30 years the great majority of people—a generation that will aspire to higher living standards—will not enjoy the pension provision that the present generation enjoy, whether from final salary or money purchase schemes.

The moral is that there will be a greater burden on taxpayers and the state, at a time when the population will be ageing, the number of people in work declining and the number of retired people increasing. As it stands, the policy does not stack up and is not capable of surviving

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the next 20 or 30 years. Above all, pensions policies should be long term. It is no good trying to address a genuine short-term problem by cobbling together a policy that is impossible to deliver and that damages long-term provision.

I am horrified by what I see happening today. Typically, employers will say, "Your remuneration package is worth so much, so between 7 and 10 per cent. can be put into a money purchase pension, or you can have the money." Quite understandably, many people under 35 are saying, "We'll have the money." As a result, they have no form of occupational provision. They say, "We've got the pension guarantee and the minimum income guarantee—we don't really need such provision. The state will be there to look after us." As the right hon. Member for Birkenhead pointed out, that is unrealistic.

There is a positive angle. In America, independent retirement accounts—IRAs—and 401Ks have been extremely successful in reviving pension saving in the private sector. In Canada, more than 40 per cent. of the population have a regulated retirement savings plan. Under that system, there is no obligation to buy an annuity on retirement.

The case has been argued in different places. It is unwise of the Government not to recognise that when ordinary people up and down the country save for their retirement, they do not want to be locked into buying what they perceive as a bad-value annuity. That is why, increasingly, people save and buy properties. In the past, thank the Lord, they used personal equity plans and today they use individual savings accounts, but they are not attracted by pension arrangements with an annuity obligation.

When he was at the Treasury, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions was a keen promoter of the independent pension account. It was envisaged to be much like an ISA—a tax wrapper, but subject to the pension rules. It would be extremely simple: there would be no requirement to belong to a pension scheme on top of it, people could save for their old age with a mixture of ISAs and IPAs—one governed by pension rules and one by ISA rules—and then provide for their old age themselves. It was thought that it would suit many people who were self-employed, especially women, who might not work for their full careers. However, the IPA was stillborn—it has been a complete failure, with no providers and no takers because it adds costs. There is the double cost of belonging to a pension scheme, as well as the IPA charges. Moreover, there is the terminal problem of IPA moneys having to go into an annuity upon retirement.

I caution the Government: they have had five years to address pension policies. We were told that the stakeholder pension was to be the main solution. The Minister for Pensions was a little disingenuous on one occasion in arguing that the people who have bought stakeholder pensions are those whom the Government intended should buy them. The Government clearly intended stakeholder pensions as a savings vehicle for ordinary people, not just as a tax benefit vehicle. The take-up rate has been disappointing. The large numbers of corporate schemes are merely intended to meet the legal requirements, and the members thereof are few and far between.

It is unwise for the Government to continue to argue that they place their hopes of private sector pension accumulation on the stakeholder. It is not happening, nor does it look as though it will. I wish that it would, but I do not think that it will until the annuity issue is addressed. Furthermore, it will not happen easily while there is the promise of the Government's minimum income guarantee and pension credit. People who find it hard to save for their pension wonder why on earth they should bother if they know that they will be looked after out of overall taxation.

It is a growing, invisible problem. It is ridiculous that, in an age of greater affluence, the majority of people will be less well provided for in their retirement than the generation coming up to retirement. There is the risk that the policy will lead to the same problems found in continental Europe. Retirement income will become a massive burden on taxation, leading to excessive taxes on employment, which will, in turn, damage overall economic performance. I cannot believe that that is what the Government want. Indeed, their commitment to reverse the swing from 40:60 to 60:40 suggests that they want to go in the other direction.

Pension policy is not working, and I would like to see greater cross-party collaboration to get it right. However, the onus is on the Government to recognise the problems. Let us hope that the Pickering report will propose some solutions. This is not a party political issue. The Government are the Government; it is not for the Opposition to make the Government's policy on pensions, but there are major policies to address, and address quickly.

9.9 pm

John Mann (Bassetlaw): I rise humbly after hearing some of the earlier speeches. I am among those new Members who have great problems in working out whether the transfer value of my previous occupational pension is such that I should move it into the parliamentary scheme. I suspect, even so, that my knowledge and instincts are somewhat greater than those of the vast majority of my constituents, particularly those who are 45 or younger.

The hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) made a thoughtful speech, but his final point perplexed me. He spoke about young people and buy-to-let schemes. I do not mean to question his remark, which I am sure was quite accurate, but it would be fairly safe to bet that no young people in my constituency will buy to let rather than take out a pension. I have received no correspondence on the notion of pension planning, and I suspect that my predecessor also received little. Pension planning is not much discussed at dinner or in pubs and clubs in my constituency.

The "live for today" mentality is not new to our society, but it has increased. That is not the fault of any political party, but it is a key problem that we need to address. Those who are expert in pensions and who give me their views in my surgeries are retired people. They can quote me the value of the BT shares that they expectantly bought some time ago. They can tell me about the windfall that they have not had and can tell me year by year—some of them, day by day—the value of their holdings. They are waiting for a change in fortune so that they can cash in on their windfalls, and they are precisely the people who will hold the Government to account.

Indeed, the mistaken policy of the 75p increase in pensions was repeatedly rammed down our throats on the doorstep during the election by a section of the population who spoke from an informed, not an ignorant, standpoint. We need a civic debate about pensions, and education that reaches younger people. Perhaps it could start in schools—I am not sure whether that occurs at present. Certainly, young workers or students in higher education need to know what it all means to help with their forward planning. If we expect them to take responsibility, we must realise that it will not happen unless they have knowledge.

Home ownership is preponderant, but less usual in the coalfields. A great phenomenon—pronounced as we move to the south coast, but existing in microcosm in the coalfields—is the way in which homeowners downsize their houses as they reach their chosen age of retirement. Usually, it happens once, though sometimes it is more frequent. Perhaps the most important thing that the Government could do for my constituents would be to safeguard retirement income by encouraging housing regeneration among former mine housing stock. Some homes are owned, but are in an appalling state of repair. Others are owned by private landlords, who bought them from the National Coal Board. Those homes ought to be occupied by private owners, giving them a legacy that they could cash in at some stage for their pensions. My point may strike the debate at something of a tangent, but it would help with forward planning.

My next point relates to the role of the trade unions. The case for occupational pensions has been made strongly several times during the debate. However, the whole ethos of such pensions goes hand in hand with strong and effective workplace representation where there is negotiation with employers. Pension contributions are deferred earnings that should be negotiated and safeguarded by workplace representatives. In coming years, we must as a priority increase the roles, responsibilities and powers of pension fund trustees to safeguard those funds.

In this country, we tend to take a little Englander—or rather a little United Kingdomer—view on pensions. We might look to Germany for examples of the assistance given to pension fund trustees or, more usefully, at the fundamental role played by trade unions in Denmark and Belgium in the provision of pensions. We need not adopt their programmes wholesale, but they can inform our debate on how unions can promote occupational pensions.

Indeed, I would go further in respect of the role of trade unions in stakeholder pensions. I am surprised that there was no criticism on that point from either of the Opposition Front Benchers. We have heard much from trade union leaders in the past 48 hours. Would that those leaders put the same passion and thought into the important issue of stakeholder pensions. By seizing that issue—by using stakeholder pensions in negotiations—unions could begin to recreate part of their traditional role in the workplace and in society. That role goes back more than a century and was itself part of the genesis of the occupational pension programme.

That is only a partial solution within a partial solution; nevertheless it is waiting to be grabbed. If the unions will not come to the Government, the Government should go to them and ask that they play their rightful historical role by promoting stakeholder pensions along with occupational pensions.

The problems of short-termism as regards the Government's record are somewhat mitigated by the fact that the Government are doing quite well, although the Opposition obviously do not want to admit it. The basic pension is up. The minimum income guarantee is up. The winter fuel allowance is popular.

I am all in favour of our continuing to please today's pensioners. Far be it from me to do anything other than applaud our Government and to expose the changes that would result from a tax cut should the Opposition come to power. However, I urge Ministers to take a longer view—beyond today's pensioners to those of 20, 30 or 40 years hence. That will require courage from the Government—as it would from any Government—but my plea is that we should have that courage.

The Government may be in power for a long period—naturally, I hope so. The last Government were in power for a long time—18 years—and they squandered the opportunity of giving us a long-term pensions policy that would benefit future generations. Let us ensure that our Government do not make the same mistake.

9.19 pm

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): I very much welcome the Government's stated intention to increase from 40 to 60 per cent. the share of pensioners' incomes that will come from the private sector, not only because of the increase in independence and security that will be afforded to those pensioners, but because it will release more funds from the public purse to be spent on other public services, such as our schools and national health service. I also pay tribute to the attention that the Government have paid to less well-off pensioners; we have an important obligation to current pensioners.

The decline in funded pensions, however, is extremely worrying. The most recent family resources survey shows a reduction in the proportion of employees with occupational or personal pensions across all age groups. A new Government report tells us that by 2050, when 40 per cent. of pensioner incomes are supposed to come from the state, 65 per cent. of pensioners will, in fact, rely on the pension credit. Those are the current forecasts.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's latest report on poverty says that a substantial fall in the number of poor pensioners is unlikely

> "until and unless the Government's policies aimed at encouraging greater use of private pensions start having an effect in the longer term."

It is regrettable that we are heading in the other direction. What is most regrettable in the decline in funded pensions is the decline in final salary or defined-benefit schemes. Many companies have recently stopped providing such schemes to their employees. Lloyds TSB, Sainbury's, British Telecom, ICI, Marks and Spencer and, not least, Bedfordshire's very own Whitbread, have all recently ended their final salary schemes, and pension fund trustees tell me that the complexity of regulation, the contracting out rules and the market circulars are largely to blame.

I am told that, whereas only two or three years ago a pension fund trustee would have to take a slim file of papers to meetings, he now probably needs to take a ring binder 4 in thick to carry the different documents needed to cope with the complexity of regulation. So is it any wonder that those schemes are in decline? The regrettable

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outcome of the demise of those schemes is that benefits are no longer provided to dependants. Death-in-service pensions, rather than lump sums, used to be payable to surviving spouses and dependent children; they are not generally payable with money purchase schemes.

The principles that underlie our pensions system should be those of simplicity, clarity and a strong incentive to get our young people to save. Those principles are lacking in the current rules that govern annuities. Pensioners tell us that the requirement to buy an annuity at 75 provides poor value. Contrary to what Ministers have told us, that is an issue for vast numbers of people—some 10.5 million workers in this country have contracted out, so half our work force are affected and have an interest in annuity matters.

The crux of the issue is inheritability, which has been touched on by several hon. Members. Under the current rules, an annuity is paid and if people die a few years into their pensions, that is it. People take a longer-term view with their savings and pensions. One of the reasons why interest has increased in the buy-to-let schemes is that the assets belong to people, just as their houses, cars or any other assets do. We should do well to remember that people aspire to that.

I should also like to raise the issue of what rights employees have to the surpluses on their pension funds. They have contributed to those funds, so it does not seem right that the company can simply take them back. That ownership issue needs to be explored further.

Mr. Butterfill: My hon. Friend will be aware that, in a final salary scheme, the employer has an obligation to pay the percentage of that final salary, come what may. Therefore, the issue of who owns the surplus is very much more complex than he seems to suggest.

Andrew Selous: I bow to my hon. Friend's greater knowledge of this subject. In terms of getting people to take an interest in their pensions and providing them with an incentive to do so, the issue of inheritability merits further study. However, I appreciate his point that it is a complex issue.

According to a report by Oliver, Wyman & Company in September last year, the savings gap in this country at the moment is £27 billion. That is the difference between what we should have invested to treat future generations of elderly people in a respectful way and what we have invested at present. The bad news is that that savings gap is projected to increase by a further £6 billion over the next five years. There are several reasons why that gap is projected to worsen. We have heard about the complexity of current schemes, and about the lack of inheritability. We are also told that there will be a net decrease of 9,000 in the number of financial advisers across the country. It is estimated that about 3.6 million people on lower incomes have no proper access to financial advice.

An independent financial adviser in my constituency contacted me on Friday in despair about the Government's current proposals for independent financial advisers, and about the new proposals that will move on from polarisation. He is in fear of losing his job, and his firm is in a state of paralysis. That means that another group of people will not have access to independent financial advice, which is indeed regrettable.

I deal now with the subject of means-testing, which is reflected in the motion. Many distinguished Members from all parties understand the problems of means-testing, not least the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer who have clearly acknowledged the difficulties involved, particularly for pensioners. Indeed, the Chancellor of Exchequer has boasted that he would like means-testing for pensioners to be outlawed. We know that 580,000 pensioners do not claim their income support and that 1,215,000 do not claim their council tax benefit. In total, there is £3 billion of unclaimed benefits. We know that older people in particular have a difficulty with claiming benefit. Although they are entitled to it, they worry about going along to the Benefits Agency. We know that that should not be the case but it is the fact, and we must recognise the way in which people regard such issues.

In 1995, only 38 per cent. of pensioners were on means-tested support of any sort. That figure is projected to increase to 57 per cent. by 2003. We have heard the future projections up to 2050, so we know that the trend will carry on in that direction. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has said that recent pension announcements

"look set to create a substantial increase in means testing."

The Select Committee on Work and Pensions, of which I am a member, published a report on pensioner poverty in August 2000, which states:

"The increase in non-means tested pension is inevitable and should be done sooner rather than later."

That was the view of the Select Committee only a year and a half ago. Clearly, the Government have not heeded its advice. As a member of that Select Committee, I hope that the Government will heed our advice when we consider the pension credit, which is the subject of our next report.

9.29 pm

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): In an encouraging clutch of stories about pensions in today's press, both tabloids and broadsheets, I was struck by a remark by Mr. Mark Duke of Towers Perrin who was quoted in *The Times* as saying:

"People expect a lot, aren't doing enough and don't understand their pensions at all."

I tend to agree. I am reminded of the man who expressed himself confusedly on a complicated topic, was advised to attend a conference, came back from it and opined that he was still confused but at a somewhat higher level. I suspect that the debate will produce the same effect.

There are real and simple points to grasp, and it behoves us all to remember them. The savings ratio is at an historically low level. That is unsustainable. There is an estimated historic gap in savings provision of £27 billion. That is unsustainable. The hit is being taken not by the rich, the poor or any particular class but involves nearly everyone who is still in work and who in due course hopes to retire. One of the most encouraging features of the debate is the sense of mutuality. We all have a common problem to face. It will not be solved within the span of a single Parliament and it requires collective action preceded by collective debate.

The debate has been marked by some interesting and worthwhile contributions by Back-Bench Members. I certainly wish to mention those by Conservative

Members. My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) made a speech of characteristic balance and erudition. He is a loyal supporter of occupational pensions. My hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) complemented that by chipping in with his knowledge of investment and the City. My hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) brings to such debates a passionate commitment to all groups in our society.

I do not want to suggest that my hon. Friends were the sole contributors. As we would expect, the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) made a magisterial contribution. If we are ever in the business of Government swatting, we may need him to add his voice to ours. The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell) was more supportive of the Government. Nevertheless, he presented with honesty some of the dilemmas that have to be faced. The hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) also made a characteristic contribution. If the trade unions are not as active in stakeholder pensions as one might have expected, it is possibly because they do not see them as a good deal for their members. We may need to return to that.

The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) usually helps us along. He shared some interesting insights with us, as he often does.

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): A new alliance.

Mr. Boswell: The hon. Lady must not tempt me. Perhaps she is trying to build a consensus.

The Secretary of State's contribution still displayed his misplaced self-assurance, however. There was a whiff of complacency and inertia in the face of a fast deteriorating situation. How unlike our dear Marshal Foch in 1918. That distinguished generalissimo of the armies, faced with the German spring offensive of that year, acknowledged the problem honestly by saying, "We are in a terrible mess. The situation is excellent. We shall attack." This Secretary of State does not have the spirit for that. He cowers in his bunker and confines his offensive action to occasional sniping exercises at the Opposition.

Let me deal with our main concerns about the pension scheme, which are touched on in our substantive motion. There is an extraordinary black hole in pension provision, as revealed in the brilliant forensic introduction to the debate by my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts). However much the Government try to puff up the level of current contributions to pension schemes, they have had to reveal a staggering deficiency of £100 billion in the value of funds that were in pension schemes in 1999. Frankly, that could enter the "Guinness Book of Records" as the biggest accountancy write-off of all time. Were Oscar Wilde here, I am sure that he would say that to lose £100 million by statistical adjustment might be seen as a misfortune, but to lose £100 billion looks like carelessness.

If the answer is to shoot the messenger, take the statistics away, and attack the Opposition for daring to say that there is something odd, that shows a gross misconception of our role. I hope that the matter will be sorted out, and for a reason that I will touch on in a moment, there is a systematic problem that merits closer and more reflective discussion.

Let us remember at any rate that any such reduction in pension funds, whatever the size, is a hit on the value of funds, and, in the real world, reflects funds' collective ability to service pensions. We have only to think of the consequences of the write-down for Equitable Life pensions to see that the value of the funds really matters.

Pension funds also cast some doubt on the veracity of the figures for contribution inflows, to which the Secretary of State referred. I am highly suspicious and sceptical that if, on our calculations, self-administered arrangements, which account for 6 million occupational pensioners, bring in £14 billion annually to the party of contributions, that must logically mean that that group and personal pension schemes, which account for fewer pensioners, must bring in £58 billion; that seems implausible. There must be an element of double-counting and asset transfers.

The second area of grief is the inexorable decline in defined-contribution schemes. That was well set out in the National Association of Pension Funds annual survey, which broadly coincided with our last pensions debate. Every week, the pensions press brings further bad news. For example, this week, *Professional Pensions* leads with the story, "Ernst and Young closes DB plan amid FRS17 fears". I apologise to non-regular readers for the rather terse and technical presentation, but perhaps I can draw out two salient points from the article.

First, Ernst and Young is rightly described in the text as an "accountancy giant". Presumably, therefore, even if I do not know, it at least knows what it is talking about. Secondly, the problem identified is Ernst and Young's worry over the new accounting standard FRS17, which is only now beginning to work its way through the system and will doubtless involve many other firms in unpleasant decisions, as they look at their profit and loss accounts, the provisions that they will need to make, the profits that they can declare and the dividends that they can pay, with the consequential effect on pension schemes and the incomes thereof.

Let us note, too, that the Ernst and Young decision does not merely close the defined-benefit scheme to new entrants. It starts the process of winding up the scheme altogether and the transfer to defined contributions. However good, that replacement defined-contribution scheme must at least increase the element of risk to the individual pension investor.

Then, perhaps, we should look at what is happening to defined-contribution or money purchase schemes themselves. The same front page, which I offer to the Minister to save time if he has not been able to read the whole analysis, adjacently reports the study by actuarial consultants William M. Mercer, which predicts that up to 3 million occupational scheme members and individuals will contract back into the state second pension scheme over the next five years because, according to its Mr. Dick Strattan, the Government's contracting-out rebates

> "fail to take proper account of current market conditions, such as lower interest rates and investment returns."

He goes on:

> "On our calculations, they account for considerably less than the full value of the state pension foregone—in some instances, arguably as little as half."

That of course rings a bell with those already familiar with the stakeholder pension situation. We discussed that in detail last time, hence its relatively lower profile in this debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Havant showed that most of the uptake lay outside the target groups. *[Interruption.]* It is no good the Secretary of State

[Mr. Boswell]

attempting to laugh it off—he does not know where there has been uptake. In any event, uptake is rather disappointing. A trickle of money continues to go in, but Ministers are dragging their feet. They are most reluctant to give a now overdue answer to my question about measures to improve uptake—they do not know whether they want to improve it, or, if they do, how to do so.

Ministers have been less than frank about pointing out that proper advice on whether to take out a stakeholder pension might be charged as independent advice, and so be extra to the 1 per cent. administration charge of which they are so proud. None the less, the Government continue their lavish advertising campaign on general pensions awareness, which is costing almost £10 million. The authentic voice of new Labour is heard in a written answer given to me last week by the Minister for Pensions. It states:

> "Changing attitudes towards planning for retirement is not a straightforward task and will take time. We are planning to continue pensions education activity."—[*Official Report*, 31 January 2002; Vol. 379, c. 537W.]

We have been warned.

The Government have, however, made it clear that they intend no major activity in respect of annuities. They are bent on disregarding the view of the House so clearly expressed on 11 January in giving Second Reading to the admirable Bill introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry). By so doing, they deny choice to pensioners.

The Government cannot even manage to get their own consultation paper out on time. It is to come out tomorrow, but that is at least six weeks late, which is typical of the Government's dilatoriness. I understood that the outcome of the annuities consultation exercise was to be published before Christmas; I might be misinformed, but I understand that Christmas was approximately six weeks ago.

If the Secretary of State does not get his administrative act together, the new pension service, of which Ministers are all so proud and which will have to service 11 million pensioners and 5_million pension credit beneficiaries, might, as Age Concern warns, prove unequal to the task.

Mr. Webb: Would the hon. Gentleman care to speculate on where and when hon. Members will first read the detail of the annuities report?

Mr. Boswell: It would be unwise, and possibly invidious, to say. The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is no, in the nicest possible way. The Government will sit there, fiddling like Nero over the general pensions front, until the US Cavalry in the shape of Alan Pickering reports with what I hope will be a major deregulatory package. The sooner that report is received and acted on, the better.

Meanwhile, the apostles of complexity on the Treasury Bench add new touches and torments in the State Pension Credit Bill. They are indeed spending a couple of billion pounds a year, but they do so at a remarkably heavy price in complexity and disincentives to saving. In the long term, the costs might escalate to a staggering £26 billion—but if one has just wiped £100 billion off the funds, £26 billion does not seem too much between friends.

Our motion is ready to give the Government credit for their objectives where and if credit is due. We welcome their stated aim of increasing from 40 to 60 per cent. the proportion of pensioner income coming from the private sector. Delivery, not intention, is the problem. We remember that it was the Labour Government who set their face against an increase in means-testing, and we judge their intentions against their achievements in that respect. By 2003, pension credits are likely to involve 57 per cent. of pensioners, and that proportion might rise to two thirds as the scheme rolls out. Two thirds of our pensioners might be on means-tested benefits in future; however softened, it will still be means-testing.

Opposite sits the sorcerer in the shape of the Secretary of State, and the sorcerer's apprentice in the shape of the Minister for Pensions, who will shortly reply to the debate. They like to brandish the goodies they put into the pot, and they enjoy giving it the occasional stir to keep things apparently busy. Now they are simply sitting back, waiting for Pickering. The pensions pot beneath them is holed and draining fast. There will soon be little left except thin gruel for the taxpayer.

To return to my beginning in these remarks, and to adapt my initial quotation from Mr. Duke of Towers Perrin, in pensions it is the Government who are not doing enough, and they do not understand pensions at all.

9.45 pm

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): I came to London this morning full of hope that, the Conservative Opposition having initiated the second debate in 10 weeks on pension policy, we would learn something. Of course, it has been a policy-free debate on the part of Conservative Members. We started with a spokesman from the Opposition Dispatch Box and we finished on the Siegfried line. We had crocodile tears, scaremongering and hand wringing from one or two of the old-fashioned one-nation Tories who have been banished to the Back Benches for ever. We never received one view from the Conservatives about what they would do for older people, whether in terms of a pension policy or any other policy related to older people.

The Leader of the Opposition would hit pensioners hard. He is a bitter opponent of both the winter fuel scheme and the minimum income guarantee. He has said:

> "MIG is a huge rise in spending . . . . I can think of nothing to recommend it".

Yet about 2,000 of his constituents benefit from it. By attacking the MIG, do Conservative Members want to continue to withdraw resources from the poorest pensioners?

Mr. Boswell: The right hon. Gentleman has accused us of not producing any policies. I think he will have noticed that we are unlikely to be in a position to enact any of our policies until after the next general election. We shall certainly do so when the time comes. I ask him what he would like to do at the next election. Will he commit the Government to maintaining the earnings link for pension credit after the next election? When he has answered that question, he may start lecturing us about our policy.

Mr. McCartney: It is a weak excuse to say, "I will not be in power for a generation", and not give the public the Opposition's view of their pension policy. As for the minimum income guarantee, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has made it clear time and time again that the arrangements are for this Parliament. When we come to the next general election and present our manifesto, we will once again be the only party with policies to tackle pensioner poverty and, more important, to ensure in future that there will be no pensioners living in poverty, which is what we inherited from the Conservative Government.

We have heard winter fuel payments described as "cock-eyed", yet 20,000 of the Leader of the Opposition's constituents receive winter fuel payments. The right hon. Gentleman supported value added tax on fuel and voted for it to increase to 17.5 per cent. If that were not enough, let me refer to his view on the basic state pension. He said that it

"should become a function of the Private Sector".

That is the Tories' hidden agenda. That is why they have taken it off the website. That is why they are not giving an opinion in public. It is the same agenda as was rubbished at the last election. It will be rubbished at the next election and the election after that. It will be rubbished until the Tories learn something about working with older people in a more effective way.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. McCartney: No, I will not give way to the hon. Lady, and I will explain why. First, she has not been in her place for more than half the debate. Secondly, we were debating poverty in Scotland last week, and the Scottish National party did not turn up for that debate either. I tell the hon. Lady to stop being a part-time Member and to attend debates in this place more regularly.

I have read the records. The hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) is the Baldrick of the Conservative Front Bench. In March 1996, he said:

"BSE is not a risk in the normal sense of the word."

Would you trust this man with your pension fund, Madam Deputy Speaker?

The Tories failed not just once, but time and time again, in the 18 years they were in power, when they consigned millions year on year to a life of poverty, treating them with utter contempt. They failed to tackle the legacy of pensioner poverty, but we introduced the MIG so that the poorest pensioners will be at least £15 better off. If the Tories were in power, they would withdraw that and cut £15 from the pensions of 2 million of the poorest pensioners.

We inherited the SERPS mess, which affected millions of people. We are putting in £50 billion over the next 50 years to put that error right. We made sure that compensation was paid to those who were conned through the mis-selling scandal; again, thousands and thousands of people were swindled. The total cost of putting that right is estimated at some £13.5 billion. Conservatives may have come to debate holes in pension policy, but the only holes in pension policy in the past two decades were created by their party; it has taken the Labour party in government to plug those holes.

Ten weeks ago, the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) said that stakeholder pensions were a flop. Tonight, we have the latest figures; from a standing start in eight months, 637,000 people working in the private sector who, a year ago, did not have a pension or the possibility of having one, now have one because of the Labour Government. Some 310,000 employers, over 80 per cent. of those who should register, have already registered; a year ago, those employers were not prepared to provide a vehicle for their staff to share in a pension when they retire.

Mr. Willetts: I should like to give the Minister an opportunity to correct the assertion that he has just made. He said that 600,000 people who did not previously have a pension have taken out stakeholder pensions. Will he confirm that we know that 170,000 of those people already had a pension from the construction industry scheme, and that many others had concurrent pensions? Perhaps the only people who did not have a pension, and about whom the Minister is right, are grandchildren and non-working wives.

Mr. McCartney: The construction industry's old pension scheme was closed down. If it were not for stakeholder pensions, 170,000 construction workers in Britain would not have a pension entitlement. Construction industry employers are choked to find that the Conservatives continue to attack their efforts to introduce an industry notorious for lack of commitment to the stakeholder pension. The industry and its work force are fully supportive of stakeholder pensions.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge) *rose—*

Mr. McCartney: Okay, I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, who was here for the full debate.

Richard Younger-Ross: I note that the Minister frequently says that Conservative policies have no clothes, and I remember what was said about pensions management by my hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb). Does the Minister not concede that, by comparison, the Government have barely a fig leaf?

Mr. McCartney: I did not quite catch the hon. Gentleman's last remark, but if it was anything like the contribution of his hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb), the answer is no.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) is in his place; I thank him for supporting the Government's efforts to help poor pensioners. The issues are indeed difficult, and we may well be dealing with them in a rough and ready way. However, the truth is that the Government, in the long term as well as the short term, will provide sustainability and investment in state sector pensions. My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell) made an excellent contribution on the benefits of the Government's strategy of targeting poor pensioners. Neither the Conservatives nor the Liberal Democrats have come up with an adequate answer tonight; if they really want to tackle pensioner poverty, why do they oppose every measure that we take to tackle pensioner poverty, either by voting against it in the House or rubbishing it outside?

James Purnell: I thank my right hon. Friend for his kind words. Is it not typical of Opposition Members that they refuse to say whether they would support any single

[James Purnell]

policy? They refused to say whether they supported the MIG or the earnings limit. The one thing that they made clear they would support is annuities reform, which would disproportionately benefit the rich and the better-off.

Mr. McCartney: The only declared policy of the Conservative party is to support the richest 5 per cent. of pensioners against the other 95 per cent., whom the Government are helping on a regular basis.

In a wide ranging speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) spoke not only about pensioners' income, but about coalfields regeneration. The Government are putting tens of billions of pounds not only into pensions, but into coalfields regeneration, working with local authorities, the European Community and the public and private sectors to improve housing stock, jobs and the environment, and will continue to do so. It was the Conservatives who abandoned coalfield communities. They tried to destroy those communities and close them down, but they never could and they never will, because of the support that the Government give to coalfield communities.

As for pension provision, my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw spoke about trade union issues. Through the Trades Union Congress, the trade union movement has a stakeholder pension policy. I ask my hon. Friend to encourage trade union members to support that and to sign up to it. He asked what we were doing in respect of pension fund trustees. The next step is to encourage stakeholder activism. A scheme should have independent custodians, and trustees should be familiar with issues involved in reaching investment decisions.

The hon. Member for Northavon made a curious speech. He called on us to spend, spend, spend on pensioners, yet he will go into the Lobby tonight with the Conservative party, which is committed to cutting public expenditure by £60 billion a year. The hon. Gentleman might have a point about all the issues that he raised, were it not for the fact that he voted against the minimum income guarantee, he will probably vote against the pension credit, he voted against the second state pension, and he voted against new deal and new deal 50-plus.

We are the first Government in history to do something about the long-term unemployed, especially those over 50 years of age. Members of the Liberal Democrats talk a good story, but they never do anything practical to help the poor, whether the unemployed or the pensioners.

In a thoughtful contribution, the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) dealt with defined benefits and defined contributions. We will shortly issue a consultation document, and I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman and I will have further discussions about some of the matters that he raised. The issues that he raised tonight were legitimate concerns which I am happy to discuss with him.

To hon. Members who spoke about the Government and the black hole in pension investment, may I say that as well as the take-up of stakeholder pensions, the value of new pension sales rose by 9 per cent. in the last recorded quarter? Regular premiums increased by 50 per cent. in the last reported quarter, and new single premium pension policies rose by 2 per cent. The Government are ensuring investment in the public and private sectors.

I am not one to bear a grudge against the Opposition for their past failings, but I am thinking of writing to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health after the debate, seeking additional funds for the local hospital of the hon. Member for Havant. I am keen to ensure that the hon. Gentleman has his brass neck dealt with before it becomes fatal. After the debate, perhaps the hon. Member for Daventry should take a taxi to St. Thomas' to have his chronic humbug cured.

The Opposition can go on all they like about our pensions policies, but let us consider what they would certainly have done for pensioners had they remained in power. The poorest pensioners would have been abandoned, because the Tories would not have taken up our challenge and introduced the MIG. They would have done nothing about fuel poverty, and would have withdrawn winter fuel payments. They would not have introduced pension credit, and they would have done nothing for future pensioners, as they try to rubbish stakeholder pensions at every turn. They would have put no extra cash into resolving the problems of SERPS and pensions mis-selling. Indeed, the Conservatives tried to hide the mis-selling of pensions, and nothing would have been done about it if the present Government had not been elected.

Like the leopard, the Tories cannot change their spots. Perhaps that is another ailment for which they should be seeking medical help. I fear that, if left untreated, the problem might become terminal.

I call on my colleagues, first, to reject the Tory motion tonight and to vote for today's and tomorrow's pensioners; and secondly, when we go out on the campaign in the country, to let the pensioners know that the Liberal Democrats voted with the Tories for cuts in public expenditure, cuts in employment, cuts in transport, cuts in health care and cuts in social services. That is the true face of the Liberal Democrats. They are just another bunch of right-wing fanatics.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 175, Noes 296.

Division No. 152] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnside, David
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue

Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Randall and
Mr. Julian Brazier.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen

Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tony McNulty and
Mr. Phil Woolas.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 290, Noes 174.

Division No. 153] **[10.18 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack
(Copeland)
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*

Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
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White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:

Mr. Tony McNulty and
Mr. Phil Woolas.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnside, David
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*

Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John Randall and
Mr. Julian Brazier.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the Government's framework for pensions which will reduce pensioner poverty and encourage saving; further welcomes the fact that pension savings are now at record levels and the increased choice given by stakeholder pensions; further welcomes the Government's decision to set up the Pickering review; and congratulates the Government on the extra £6 billion paid to pensioners from April and its intention to bring in the Pension Credit which will increase the incomes of around half of all pensioners.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation).

CIVIL AVIATION

That the draft Air Navigation (Environmental Standards) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 17th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

Question agreed to.

1901 Census

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

10.28 pm

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): Tonight, I am raising an issue that I can genuinely say is of interest to millions of people in the United Kingdom and across the world. About 30 million people sent a powerful message to the Government when, from 2 January this year, they tried—mostly in vain—to connect to the 1901 census website. Overwhelmed, the website closed on 6 January. I hope that the Minister will reassure me and those millions of people that the Government have heard their message and recognise not only that Ministers should ensure that a relaunched site works but that there is a huge opportunity for the Government on the web if they get this right.

For hon. Members who are not sure what I am talking about, let me briefly explain. The 1901 census was published on 2 January 2002. The Public Record Office met its statutory requirements to make that information available, and the public can now access the census using microfiche from the Public Record Office at Kew as well as from many local record offices and public libraries up and down the country.

This year, however, census publication was supposed to be different. As well as using the common microfiche format, the plan was to make the 1901 census available online. That was a fabulous concept. It would have enabled the whole world to search a database of 32 million names from Edwardian England, a transformation for historical research and a dream come true for the fast-growing number of professional and amateur genealogists.

As a newcomer to addictive family research, I should probably declare an interest. For nearly a year, I have dabbled in the search for my ancestors, and it was with some excitement on 2 January that I typed www.pro.gov.uk into my computer's search engine. Like millions of others, I was sadly disappointed. On behalf of those millions of frustrated people, I feel it right to raise the matter so that the Government may answer questions about the project.

I shall seek answers on three main points. First, how was the scheme's failure allowed to happen, and what went wrong? Secondly, how is it being put right, and is the Minister satisfied that it will be put right with no repetition of failure? Thirdly, what lessons have been learned? I believe that profound and far-reaching lessons emerge from what happened.

Before I approach the meat of those questions, I want to record my admiration for the Public Record Office. That may sound surprising given what I have just said, but I do not blame the PRO for the failure. If anyone should carry the can, it should be the contractor—QinetiQ—or the Lord Chancellor's Department and the wider private finance initiative programme. I have visited the PRO and seen the rest of its online work, and I know that it is a deeply impressive public service in which committed civil servants are dedicated to high-quality delivery for the public. One need only examine the PRO's annual reports and the extremely high customer satisfaction ratings that it achieves to realise that it is a public service that works. The PRO has done well when it has undertaken other information technology projects, such as its amazing online catalogue—PROCAT—or its access to archives initiatives. It has delivered them on time and on budget. The Minister may rest assured that I have no wish to have a go at the PRO. It is a cutting edge example of the public sector at its best.

My focus falls only on the 1901 census web-based project. The concept of putting the 1901 census online cannot be faulted. It was the right decision. The number of people who tried to visit the site shows that the public thought it the right decision. The problem lay in the execution of the project.

In 1998, it was clear to the PRO—presumably, therefore, to Ministers—that it could not pay for a project from its existing budget to put the 1901 census online. A decision was taken to opt for the PFI route. That initial decision raises a series of questions. Did the Lord Chancellor's Department ever consider funding the 1901 census as a one-off public sector project, led by the Public Record Office? What alternatives to the PFI were put to Ministers? Which Ministers took the decision? Was the e-envoy consulted?

One might understand why the PFI was considered suitable in 1998. It was presumably recognised that the website would be popular, and that money was to be made. In 1998, the dotcom bubble had not yet burst. The PRO went to tender in November 1998. I hope that the Minister will confirm that about 30 expressions of interest were received in response to the initial notice in the *Official Journal* of the European Communities. What I have not been able to discover is how many companies ended up on the shortlist. I understand that many companies withdrew when they realised the sheer enormity of the project—the transcription of 32 million separate 1901 census entries in a relatively short time, and the building of a website database system robust enough to withstand large demand. I am led to believe that the number of companies able to reach the final shortlist was extremely small. Will the Minister give the House that number? If she cannot do so now, will she write to me? The point is germane to the National Audit Office's future consideration of the project.

I have a sneaking suspicion that only one firm was on the shortlist: DERA—the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency—since transformed into the commercial, publicly owned company, QinetiQ. However, when the contract was awarded in October 1999, DERA was still an agency of the Ministry of Defence. My guess is that DERA was the default public sector option, as the private sector eventually declined to bid properly.

DERA still had to bid for a quasi-commercial contract to meet the tender standards and the so-called rigours of the Government's PFI. The Lord Chancellor's Department had to be seen to be participating in the PFI movement. DERA as QinetiQ is now truly commercial and may also soon be privatised. It may be bought by the US company Carlyle, whose chairman is former Prime Minister John Major according to *The Sunday Telegraph* and *The Guardian*. However, QinetiQ will never do more than the contract demands. It has no wider sense of the public good and no wider duty to the public good, although the census is public information and is thus almost by definition what economists mean by a public good.

What are the terms of QinetiQ's contract? Well, of course, we cannot be told—they are commercially sensitive. That was the frequent refrain in ministerial replies to my questions and those of the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), who is in his place this evening. We asked for details of the penalty clauses affecting QinetiQ—commercially sensitive. We asked for the final tender price—commercially sensitive. We asked for the contracts to be placed in the Library—commercially sensitive.

Will the Minister tell us whether we will ever learn the details of that contract? Will they ever become public and, if so, how long after the contract began? Will the 30-year rule—or perhaps even the 100-year rule—apply? Is commercial sensitivity always to be used as an excuse to prevent MPs from searching for the truth on behalf of the public good? Some of us think that commercial sensitivity is sometimes a pseudonym for "politically sensitive".

We know a few things, however. Since 1998, the taxpayer has spent £1.2 million on the 1901 census online project, but the bulk of the funding came from QinetiQ. It used independent finance, although no one would tell me how much. Perhaps the Minister can enlighten us.

We are told that QinetiQ is allowed by the contract to "cover their costs" and make "a reasonable return". We do not know how much the return might be. That is politically—sorry, commercially—sensitive. However, page four of the annual report of the Keeper of the Public Records notes that, after the contractor has made a reasonable return:

> "Any additional revenue will be invested in digitising further census."

Will the Minister tell the House whether the digitisation of further census is dependent on what is left over after QinetiQ has made a reasonable return? If so, on current form, it might never happen, because we learn from the Minister's answers that the cost of the additional work needed to relaunch the site will be met by QinetiQ. At one level, that is reassuring, but there are two concerns.

If QinetiQ has to invest more to put the problem right, will it take the company even longer to make a "reasonable return"? Will it thus take even longer before QinetiQ can fund the digitisation of another census, such as that for 1891? One would need to see the detail of the contract to answer that question—but that is of course commercially sensitive.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): Does the hon. Gentleman recall that the question of access to the accounts of publicly owned companies by the Comptroller and Auditor General and by the Public Accounts Committee was explored in some detail by the Sharman review set up by the Government? We have been waiting for more than a year for the Government's reply to that review. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the census project would offer a good test case of the Government's readiness to allow the access by the Comptroller and Auditor General and the PAC that Lord Sharman recommended?

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. Lord Sharman carried out an important public audit review and I hope that the Government will meet its recommendations. The project would indeed make a good test case.

[Mr. Davey]

I want to return to the amount of investment. If the investment needed to put the website back online with a guarantee of good service was very large, QinetiQ may have been willing to make that investment, but no one may have been able to force it do so under the contract. That is a real concern, which takes me back to the inherent problem that lies behind this tragic episode—guessing the public demand for that new public service. As the apology on the PRO's website makes clear, the website was designed for 1.2 million visitors a day. On the launch, however, it received 1.2 million visitors an hour.

So we need to know how the projected demand figures were arrived at, what extra capacity will be built in for relaunch and what are the site's estimated settled or long-run capacity needs. Those were, and are, genuinely difficult questions, mostly because there has been no comparable site before. I am told that the PRO and QinetiQ looked at other sites, such as the American site on the passenger lists of ships arriving from Europe—the Ellis island site—and at the Mormon genealogical sites and that they used the figures from those sites, and added some, but that still was not enough.

Should they have built more capacity? We are also told that many genealogists were worried that site capacity was not sufficient and that they told the PRO that in October 2001. Yet the PRO is locked into a Government-required PFI contract, so it has little room for manoeuvre. If QinetiQ is not prepared to pay for the extra investment, it will not happen; it did not before the launch, and, worryingly, the extra investment may well not be there for the relaunch. Is the Minister aware that no new extra capacity is planned for the relaunch? Does she think that wise?

We have read about the increased bandwidth, the firewalls, the divert sites. I have heard that cookies might be developed to knock people off the site if they stay on for too long, blocking others. But what about extra capacity? The aim seems to be to make the site more robust for the 1.2 million estimated visitors to ensure that they have a good experience when they finally get on, but that may well mean long waits and long queues because there is no intention to increase the capacity.

Does not the Minister realise that the site's capacity will not increase unless and until she and the Department intervene to make that happen? The PRO simply does not have that power over its contractor. I urge the Minister to think long and hard about that. The House will hold her and her colleagues to account if the relaunch does not work. People want to know when the site will be up and working. Can she give the House and the millions of people interested in the site in the United Kingdom and around the world the categoric assurance that the site will work when it is eventually relaunched? When does she expect it to be relaunched?

In the short time that remains to me, I want to explain to the Minister why I think the project and its success deserve her attention, and, with due respect to her, the attention of Ministers at the very highest levels. The project deserves significant political attention because the site was so popular. When so many millions of people overwhelmingly show that they want information on their own kith and kin that the Government hold, surely the Government should sit up and take notice.

More people visited the site than watched "Big Brother", than voted on "Pop Idol" or than voted in the last election. The focus groups may not have told those at No. 10 that, but the Minister should do so. Here is a chance to put family values back into the internet, rather than the smut and pornography that has dominated it. Pornography may speak to a human desire, but the desire to contact our family—to reach out to our past and our own genes—is also a powerful human desire, and the Government can back that desire by backing the 1901 census website. Just as the website "Friends Reunited" has been so successful, appealing to the human desire to find long-lost friends, so the census appeals to another positive human instinct.

Let me put this huge opportunity another way. Rupert Murdoch realised that he needed sport to sell satellite television. He paid huge sums to win exclusive rights to screen test cricket and football, and it worked. With the public sector's monopoly over the census data, the Government could use the census website to build e-government. Let us compare the experience with that site to the hundreds of other Government websites. Yes, people find those websites useful, in their tens, in their hundreds and in their thousands, but which Government website has had millions of visitors in an hour? If we harness that public excitement and the curiosity that people have about their own families, we might transform the prospects and popularity of e-government. People who would otherwise never think of surfing the net might just try it out.

For example, I have tried several times to explain the internet to my grandmother, but she smiles at me and says, "Yes, dear. But it's so boring." However, when I talk to her about her parents, grandparents and our shared family history, she comes alive. I am not suggesting that I will ever get her surfing the net, but the 1901 census would certainly make it interesting for her. Therefore, for relatively tiny amounts of cash—especially in the context of the hundreds of other e-projects around Whitehall—the Government might just attract the interest of millions more to the web and eventually even to other e-government sites.

The 1901 census site has the proven potential to move online government on to a new, higher level—and cheaply—but only if the Government move fast and back the Public Record Office before the site's relaunch.

10.45 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Ms Rosie Winterton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) on securing this debate on the 1901 census website. The site has certainly generated considerable interest over the past few weeks and I now realise the personal interest that he takes in the subject, about which he spoke passionately.

I am glad that the hon. Gentleman took the opportunity to praise the staff of the Public Record Office. They certainly deserve our praise, and I too would like to praise them for putting together this project and for doing so in the way that they did. The project is a cornerstone of the PRO's strategy to use information technology to make the historical records in our national archive more accessible to the public.

As the hon. Gentleman said, the Keeper of the Public Records has a statutory duty to make all census returns available after 100 years. That is her statutory duty, and in the past it was done solely by providing a service on microfilm. However, in planning for the release of the 1901 census, the PRO thought beyond that and wanted to come up with a new and exciting initiative. It wanted to provide an additional online service as it recognised that this was a time of rapidly expanding internet access. It also recognised that that presented a tremendous challenge and an opportunity. Making the census available in that way offers users, for the first time, the prospect of accessing information and images about the more than 32 million people who lived in England and Wales in 1901.

The hon. Gentleman asked a number of questions. I shall try to answer as many as I can but if I do not answer them all, I hope that he will feel free to write to me. I shall certainly respond as best I can, bearing in mind that issues of commercial confidentiality are involved. Some of the questions that he raised are covered by that.

Let us start from the basis of the hon. Gentleman's argument, which was about how the project was funded in the first instance. It was clear that the creation of 1.5 million digital record images and complex IT systems could not be funded out of the PRO's resources. Its annual budget is about £25 million, and there is no doubt that the project would have required upfront several million pounds of additional funding. He mentioned many of the PRO's other commitments and, because of them, it was clear that partnership funding would be required if we were to get this exciting project off the ground. The PRO therefore rightly sought to establish a public-private partnership, the procedures for which it followed to the letter at all times.

I note the hon. Gentleman's views on the decision to use the process, but I think that the right decision was made. It is a good example of how the public and private sectors can work together to bring service benefits to the citizen at a lower cost to the public purse and at a reasonable cost to the customer, whether accessing the website from the United Kingdom or overseas, because many people outside the country were expected to use it.

The PRO began the process in November 1998. About 30 organisations expressed interest in the contract, and a full tender exercise was undertaken. Four organisations were shortlisted to produce a full submission. One could not commit to making the 1901 census available online by January 2002 and another withdrew, which left two organisations to provide full submissions. That gives an idea of the scale of the project and the possible risk involved.

The contract was based on the standard Office of Government Commerce model for information technology projects. The contracts are outcome-based, and the commercial and development risks are transferred to the contractor. The PRO established a dedicated team to work closely with the contractor through a joint programme board to ensure that the deadlines were met. That included the successful delivery of a pilot project, which I saw, using the 1891 online returns for the county of Norfolk.

In addition, the PRO spent £1.2 million on essential work related to the 1901 census, such as quality assurance. I emphasise that it has not made over any public funds to QinetiQ. The development costs for the online service have been met entirely by QinetiQ using its own sources of finance; it has not received payments, management charges or other fees from the PRO. As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, QinetiQ recoups its investment costs through revenue on the charged services from the census website. Once the company has recouped its investment costs, it will pay a proportion of its income back to the PRO for investment in further online services, notably other censuses. In that sense, it is fulfilling the requirement, which the hon. Gentleman set out, that we should consider putting other censuses online. On the extra money that has been invested to improve the site, it is difficult to give the exact timing for the recouping of the money and so on, but we hope that we will put the 1891 and the 1881 censuses online in about a year.

An advisory panel comprising amateur and professional family historians as well as staff from QinetiQ was set up in January 2000. It met 11 times to give users a full say in the development of the online service. On estimated demand for the service, it is true that members of the advisory panel highlighted the problems that family history websites in the United States experienced at initial launch when attempted use was much heavier than anticipated. At the same time, the panel carefully considered the example of other US websites. It is always difficult to make precise comparisons because some sites provide different information to different audiences. However, the important lesson that was drawn from the US experience—this is at the very heart of many of the hon. Gentleman's questions—is that, after the initial surge in interest, demand for the service markedly declined.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would accept that it would not have made business sense, or any sense, to construct a service that was capable of meeting all demand experienced daily between 2 and 6 January because, in the long run, all the evidence is that demand falls off. That would therefore have been a waste of resources and unnecessary expense.

There were initial problems with the launch, but they largely arose because the service's popularity outstripped even the generous estimates of likely use. Up to 1.2 million users per day were planned for, which is a massive site by general internet standards. By way of example in the United States, the Genealogical Society of Utah's website, which is probably the biggest such site and, incidentally, had the same kind of problems to start with and crashed at its launch, now has 89,000 users a day.

We know that nearly 30 million users a day attempted to access the 1901 census between 2 and 6 January. We are working to put right some of the problems that have arisen. I assure the hon. Gentleman of that. Officials from the Lord Chancellor's Department are working with officials from the Public Record Office and staff of the company to ensure that the website is up and ready as soon as possible.

I am aware of the time, so I hope that I have covered a number of the issues raised by the hon. Members for Kingston and Surbiton and for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington). I know that the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton has shown an interest in the work of the Public Record Office recently, and I know that he visited it last week. His hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) has also shown a keen interest in and been very supportive of this ambitious and innovative project.

Of course I understand the frustration of those people—including the hon. Gentleman, now that I know of his intense personal interest—who were looking forward to

[Ms Rosie Winterton]

finding out about their families and roots on the census site, but I firmly believe that it was right for the PRO to undertake the project. It will provide millions of people with the opportunity to access public records and provide a revenue stream to fund other online services. We would never have been able to do that without a partnership between the public and the private sectors.

I am very aware of the hon. Gentleman's concerns, and assure him that we are doing everything we possibly can to ensure that the census site becomes the success that it deserves to be and provides enjoyment and interest for the many millions of people who wish to use it.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 5 February 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

National Missile Defence

1. **Norman Baker** (Lewes): When he last discussed the foreign policy implications of national missile defence with his US counterpart. [30481]

5. **Brian White** (Milton Keynes, North-East): What discussions he has had with the US Administration on their proposed withdrawal from the anti-ballistic missile treaty of 1972. [30485]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): I have regular discussions with the United States Secretary of State, Colin Powell, on many matters, including threats to international peace and security from weapons of mass destruction and missile proliferation. We last discussed specific proposals for missile defence on 11 December.

Norman Baker: I am grateful to the Foreign Secretary for that answer. When he is asked about this matter, he generally hides behind the formula that no request has yet been made by the US authorities, and that therefore he is not in a position to state the Government's policy. However, he must have made an assessment of the British national interest in this matter. Will he tell the House what that assessment is, and whether it is in our national interest for this country to be used as a base for NMD?

Mr. Straw: I hide behind no formula, but the truth is very simple: we have received no request to use Menwith Hill or Fylingdales in respect of a further upgrade of US missile defence.

As for the general issue of missile defence, the hon. Gentleman would be well advised to take the rational and proportionate approach of his right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), the foreign affairs spokesman for the Liberal Democrat party, according to which the merits of missile defence are considered carefully, if I have got it right. The simple fact of the matter is that we in this country have long recognised the case, in appropriate circumstances, for measures of missile defence. They are permitted by the ABM treaty. Moreover, if missile defence systems had been available at the time of the German V1 and V2 rockets, many thousands of lives in this country would have been saved.

Brian White: My right hon. Friend will be aware that the measured response of President Putin and the Russian Government is one of the reasons why this has not yet developed into an international crisis. He will also be aware of the perception in many parts of the world that US foreign policy is based on double standards, because America is prepared to rip up the ABM treaty, reject the Kyoto agreement, ignore the World Trade Organisation ruling, blockade Cuba and so on. Is it not up to us as the closest ally of the US to make it aware of the dangers of that approach?

Mr. Straw: One of the reasons why President Putin's response to these proposals has indeed been measured is the fact that the proposals themselves have been measured. That has been recognised by the President of the Russian Federation. Moreover, although I understand that this is a matter of regret to some of my hon. Friends and indeed other people, the decisions taken by the US to seek an end to the ABM treaty were taken in accordance with the terms of the treaty and international law.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that a good phrase to describe the rogue states against which missile defence might provide some protection is "an axis of evil"; or does he think that those who use that phrase are just electioneering?

Mr. Straw: As I said when I was in the US, I applaud the fact that President Bush has drawn attention to the twin threats of weapons of mass destruction and international terrorism.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): In reviewing the nuclear non-proliferation treaty in 2000, all countries promised to maintain and strengthen the ABM treaty and rapidly to ratify the test ban treaty. Will the Government try to impress on our US allies the fact that, by directly contravening those undertakings while blocking other arms control agreements, they increase the risk of proliferation and endanger us all?

Mr. Straw: I am afraid that I do not accept the conclusion that my hon. Friend draws about the US position. Although the US has not ratified certain international instruments, it has respected almost every instrument in this field that I can think of.

We are not a party to the ABM treaty; it is a bilateral treaty between the US and the former Soviet Union, now the Russian Federation. The US is entitled to give notice under that treaty, as it has done. As the House has already recognised, the response of the Russian Federation has been measured, in my judgment, because of the measured proposals from the US.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): Will the Foreign Secretary reassert today his words reported in *The Times* on 21 November last year that there was

> "an overwhelming case for missile defence in principle"

and that

> "the overall case for new forms of missile defences has been strengthened since September 11 . . . because . . . of the extreme nature of the threats that we can face"?

Does he also recall referring in a parliamentary Labour party briefing on missile defence of 1 August last year to the "growing missile threat" and to states, including Iran and Iraq, acquiring such missiles, and commenting that it was difficult to see the purpose of that other than

> "to threaten and deter the United States"?

Does he also recall in the same briefing note, under the heading, "Dealing with 'Rogue States'", specifically referring to North Korea and commenting that we could not stop it

> "passing on this deadly technology"?

Does he still stand by those comments? In the light of them, does not he agree that he should have thought twice before criticising President Bush's speech last week, not least by judging it according to the criteria by which he obviously writes his own?

Mr. Straw: I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his homework in reading my speeches. I hope that he agrees not only with those speeches but with others. In particular, he drew attention to the excellent *Tribune* column that I wrote on 24 July.

I repeat that I strongly support the President's call for action on the twin threats of international terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. As for the right hon. Gentleman's reference to the domestic context of the state of the union speech, I can do no better than draw on the view expressed by the Leader of the Opposition last week, when he said:

> "For me . . . a successful foreign and security policy is one which always has a clear understanding of the national interest."

I agree with him.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): How would a nuclear missile defence system have protected the United States from the events of 11 September? Clearly, it would not have done so. If America were to go ahead with a programme that had little scientific base for being successful and that would be astronomically expensive, would this country automatically grant the United States of America a right to site bases on our soil, or would there be a debate before any such undertaking was given?

Mr. Straw: Of course there would be nothing automatic about the granting of any such rights, as these matters require careful consideration. My hon. Friend is also right to say that a missile defence system would palpably not have prevented the atrocities of 11 September. However, that does not lead me to conclude that the world is safer as a result of the atrocities of 11 September—rather, that the danger not only from such international terrorism but from the use of missile systems by rogue states and semi-states is much greater. Therefore, we should consider and examine propositions for missile defence on their merits.

I must say to my hon. Friend that it is slightly ironic that the implication, as in the past, of people saying that they refuse to discuss missile defence is that they fall back on the old doctrine of mutually assured destruction, which was exactly the doctrine that many of us opposed when it was proposed. Had there been missile defence then, we would have been in favour of it.

Middle East

2. **Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger** (Bridgwater): What steps he is taking to help the Israelis and Palestinians to negotiate. [30482]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): We are in regular contact with the Israelis and the Palestinians. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister spoke to Mr. Sharon this morning. I visited the region two weeks ago. We urge both parties to de-escalate the tension and resume negotiations to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: The Minister sums up nicely the Government's attitude—do nothing and hope that the problem goes away. This tit-for-tat situation is getting worse and worse. When will the Foreign Secretary go out there to try to get both sides together and start negotiations to sort out the situation before it gets out of hand? When will he do something about it in practice, as opposed to spin?

Mr. Bradshaw: The reaction of most hon. Members showed what they thought of that supposed question. The British Government have been very engaged in the middle east peace process before and since 11 September. The hon. Gentleman may remember a visit that the Prime Minister paid to the region after 11 September, which was shortly followed by a visit to the United States that was crucial in persuading the Americans to become more engaged, in President Bush making a speech in which he became the first President to talk about a Palestinian state and in Colin Powell making a similar speech.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Does my hon. Friend believe that negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians are more likely to begin and succeed if this country stands up to Iran and opposes its support for terrorism in the middle east and its specific support for the annihilation of Israel? In particular, is he aware of the statement by Kind Abdullah of Jordan that Iran, through Hamas and Islamic Jihad, is planning major attacks on Israeli civilians from Jordanian territory?

Mr. Bradshaw: I agree with my hon. Friend that the role of Iran and of other countries in the region that support rejectionist Palestinian groups not only threatens to terrorise and cause death and mayhem in Israel but undermines the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): The fact that Hamas and Islamic Jihad are now on the Government's proscribed list of terrorist organisations is very welcome. What evidence do the Government have of links between those terrorist organisations and foreign Governments? What aid is the British Government giving to Israel to help to defeat those terrorist groups?

Mr. Bradshaw: We always make plain our abhorrence of terrorism in all its forms, from whatever quarters it comes. We acknowledge that there is contact between countries in the region and rejectionist groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad. We condemn that and regularly raise the issue with the Governments with whom we have diplomatic relations.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Has my hon. Friend had an opportunity to see early-day motion 763, tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) and the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick)? It identifies the role played by the Israeli reservists who have refused to participate in a campaign the purpose of which is to occupy, deport, destroy, blockade, kill, starve and humiliate an entire people. Does my hon. Friend agree that the refusal of Israeli defence forces to serve in southern Lebanon ended the occupation of that area by Israel and brought peace to Israel? Would not the Israeli Government be well advised to pay attention to the advice of the Israeli reservists, because only when they end the occupation will there be peace between Israel and Palestine?

Mr. Bradshaw: It is not for me to comment on the internal matters of the Israeli defence forces or, indeed, on the behaviour of some of Israel's reservists. During my visit two weeks ago I noticed an encouraging resurgence of criticism among ordinary people on both the Israeli and the Palestinian sides of the current policies deployed by the Israeli Government in the occupied territories and by the Palestinian Authority against Israel, which they saw as unhelpful and simply contributing to a spiral of violence.

Zimbabwe

3. **Mr. Mark Hoban** (Fareham): What recent discussions he has had with other members of the EU concerning the future of Zimbabwe; and if he will make a statement. [30483]

4. **Mr. Henry Bellingham** (North-West Norfolk): When he next expects to meet other European Foreign Ministers to discuss the imposition of smart sanctions against members of Zimbabwe's Government. [30484]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): On 28 January, the European Union decided to impose targeted sanctions on senior members of the Government of Zimbabwe if they prevent the deployment of election observers between now and the election or prevent the international media from having proper access, or if there is a serious deterioration on the ground.

The first group of EU election observers has now been deployed, but I am under no illusions—the Government of Zimbabwe have moved this far only because of the international pressure that has been exerted on them, which must be maintained. The Government there will be judged by actions, not words.

Mr. Hoban: I am grateful to the Foreign Secretary for his answer, but following the arrest, detention and now release of Basildon Peta, *The Independent* journalist in Zimbabwe, is it not time to trigger sanctions against Zimbabwe for preventing the international press from following the elections closely?

Mr. Straw: I wholly condemn the arrest and detention of Mr. Peta, even though he has now been released. He is an extremely courageous Zimbabwean journalist. I have asked for a full report from the British high commission in Harare on the circumstances of his arrest and detention, which I shall send to the EU Commission. I accept that it is evidence of a prima facie breach of the EU policy.

Our overall objective, however, is to work as far as we can to achieve a better environment in Zimbabwe in which fairer elections can take place. That continues to be difficult to achieve, but in my view it is a worthwhile objective, and I hope that it has the support of hon. Members on both sides of the House. We are fully supported in that objective by the Opposition parties and non-governmental organisations in Zimbabwe. Although it may be easy to suggest that we should cut off all relations or not send in observers, we should bear that objective very much in mind in every decision we make.

Mr. Bellingham: Does not the Foreign Secretary agree that the EU package is far too little too late? Since our last Foreign and Commonwealth questions, Opposition party members in Zimbabwe have been arrested, falsely imprisoned and tortured; some have even been murdered. Mugabe has forced laws through Parliament to restrict press freedoms that are much more draconian than anything in China, resulting in the imprisonment of Basildon Peta. Does the right hon. Gentleman understand why Opposition Members here are so angry about what is going on? Why does he have a blind spot for Zimbabwe? Surely the time has come for him to account for his shameful performance in a full-day debate in Government time.

Mr. Straw: The blind spot, I am afraid, is the blind spot of Opposition Members, especially those who adopt a policy of isolation from Europe and effective isolation from the multinational Commonwealth. If the Opposition had been in government, there would have been no possibility of any kind of Commonwealth backing to condemn what has been going on, and no possibility of any kind of backing by the Southern African Development Community to condemn what is going on—still less would there be any possibility of the European Union, having been hectored and lectured by the Opposition, drawing together not only to condemn what is going on in the fullest possible terms, as we have done, but to impose effective sanctions, if at any stage between now and election day or thereafter we do not believe that it has been possible to hold fair and free elections.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we must be careful in judging the presidential elections? We must recognise that when parliamentary elections were last held in Zimbabwe, the pressure on

Opposition parties lessened as the elections approached. Is it not important, therefore, that the observers look at what has happened in the past six months and, indeed, two years, as there has been a rapid erosion of democracy and true freedom in the tragic country of Zimbabwe?

Mr. Straw: Yes, I entirely accept that. When we reach an overall judgment about whether the elections were free and fair, we shall certainly have to take into account not just events from now on, but events in the preceding six to 12 months. It was precisely because of the history of election monitoring in Zimbabwe—in the past, election observers were allowed in only for the last few days—that the European Union, the Commonwealth and I insisted that election observers should start to be admitted now, five weeks before the elections, rather than just a few days before.

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): Historically, has not the Commonwealth suspended members only in limited circumstances—for example, when a country has had a coup against an elected Government? Does not Zimbabwe provide an opportunity for the Commonwealth to reconsider the issue of suspension and widen the range of circumstances in which it might be considered?

Mr. Straw: My hon. and learned Friend is right. A key decision taken at the Commonwealth ministerial action group on 20 December was to widen the interpretation of the Harare principles, to which he refers. We declared before Christmas that Zimbabwe was in persistent violation of principles that, ironically, were drawn up in Harare in 1991 by President Mugabe. It is precisely because of that persistent violation of the principles that I judged that the Commonwealth, at the CMAG meeting last Wednesday, should suspend Zimbabwe immediately from the councils of the Commonwealth. As the House knows, that recommendation did not attract unanimous support from CMAG, so it fell, but we shall continue to pursue it. There is a further CMAG meeting on 1 March.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): May I say to the Foreign Secretary that his efforts of last week have the support of all Liberal Democrat Members? Do not the last few days demonstrate what is typical of Mr. Mugabe? He gave a minimalist response to the EU ultimatum on observers and at the same time arrested *The Independent* correspondent Basildon Peta—no doubt a deliberate attempt to intimidate like-minded people. If there is clear evidence of malpractice in the course of the presidential election, will the Foreign Secretary consider a withdrawal by Her Majesty's Government of recognition of the Government of Zimbabwe?

Mr. Straw: We will certainly monitor robustly what is happening in Zimbabwe, and ensure that our monitoring, as with the arrest of Mr. Peta, is transmitted to the EU. There was unanimity around the room when we decided the sanction policy last Monday; 12 of the 15 member states spoke, and all 12 spoke in favour of the policy, which represents a sea change in attitudes towards Zimbabwe.

We—the European Union, the United States and our Commonwealth partners—are carefully watching what is happening in Zimbabwe. If we believe, notwithstanding the admission of observers and their report, that the elections were not conducted freely and fairly, then, yes, withdrawal of recognition of that Government is obviously a possibility.

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): I was in South Africa early last month. One of the clear impressions that I gained from that visit, both from discussions and from following the local media, was that there is real concern about the impact of developments in Zimbabwe on South Africa, a strong belief that a solution to the problems of Zimbabwe lay within southern Africa, and that the countries of southern Africa should take the lead in any solution. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, as the ex-colonial power that failed to stop a rebellion in Zimbabwe, we should listen closely to the Governments of southern Africa before taking any action in respect of Zimbabwe?

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is right to say that, in addition to Zimbabwe, the economies and reputations of the countries of southern Africa have been most grievously damaged by the policies of President Mugabe. Anybody who needs any reassurance about that need only look at what has happened to the South African rand over the past year, the decline of which tracks almost exactly the decline in human rights in Zimbabwe.

Yes, we do listen carefully to our southern African friends in the Commonwealth and outside. CMAG is chaired by the Foreign Minister of Botswana, but the whole international community in Africa and across the rest of the world is profoundly concerned about the anti-democratic actions of President Mugabe and ZANU-PF; we are entitled, therefore, to take our own decisions about the action that is necessary.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): Can the Foreign Secretary confirm that despite last Sunday's deadline set by the European Council, there are still no official EU observers in Zimbabwe? Can he also confirm rumours that despite his frequent assertions that Britain is at the heart of Europe, if and when observers are sent, they will not include British observers, and that the free access for the international media required by the Council will not include the BBC or representatives of our major newspapers?

Does the Foreign Secretary agree that such qualifications on the composition of the observer team and on the definition of the international media would be totally unacceptable to the Government and the House, because they would be nothing more than concessions to the demands being made for electoral purposes by President Mugabe?

Mr. Straw: I made it clear that we will not get into a game with President Mugabe about who is or is not to be a member of those teams. Those are matters for the European Union and the Commonwealth to deal with independently. Neither of those bodies is accepting conditions from President Mugabe.

As for representatives, the right hon. Gentleman is not correct. I am told that as of this morning at least four EU representatives are in the country setting up an observation mission. The leader of the mission will arrive at the weekend with colleagues. We expect other members of the EU observer team—about 100—to deploy in the coming weeks. A head office for the mission in Harare has already been set up, and a contract with a logistical support company is being finalised.

Given the gravity of the situation, I would have hoped that was something on which the Conservative party could join us. For all the bluster that we hear from the right hon. Gentleman, the simple truth about the priority that is attached to Zimbabwe was told—or rather, not told—in the keynote speech on foreign and commonwealth affairs made by the Leader of the Opposition last Thursday at Chatham house. I have read through the speech—every single word. There is not one word in the speech about Zimbabwe—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Straw:—still less—

Mr. Speaker: Order. That has absolutely nothing to do with the Minister. I should be obliged if, when I stand, the Minister would be seated and not continue his remarks.

Mr. Ancram: Last week, we were told by the right hon. Gentleman that the Council's conditions were clear and unambiguous and that we meant business. Today, we are told that the deadline has been waived, that the conditions have now been qualified and distorted to suit Mr. Mugabe and that, in effect, Mugabe is being given the benefit of the doubt again. Can he not understand the widespread feelings of disgust about what is happening in Zimbabwe? Three members of the Zimbabwean Opposition were brutally murdered at the weekend, but apparently that is still not enough to trigger action from him. When will he and his European colleagues realise that appeasement does not work? He welcomed the Abuja agreement, but it was not worth the paper it was written on. History teaches us that appeasing dictators merely encourages them. When will he stop talking and start doing something before it is too late and nothing can be done?

Mr. Straw: I think that shows the error of writing one's supplementary question before one knows the answer to the original question. The right hon. Gentleman's basic assumption is wrong. Whether he and I like it or not, the initial condition—that observers must start to be admitted by 3 February—has been met. That is why he is wrong.

I would have thought that the Conservatives would be the last party to start talking about appeasement. I do not just mean the 1930s; I mean appeasement by the Conservative Government whom the right hon. Gentleman supported in the 1980s. They sat by and did nothing when Mugabe and his henchmen were murdering more than 5,000 native people and taking action in Matabeleland. That was real appeasement, as the Conservative Government did nothing.

We are taking action now to secure, if we can, a democratic transfer of power in Zimbabwe. If we cannot do that, we must then ensure that further actions follow. The Opposition's propositions would lead to nothing but isolation by Britain and would play into Mugabe's hands.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Does my right hon. Friend recall that the Conservative Government not only did nothing about the situation in Zimbabwe in the 1980s, but managed to become isolated, 48 to one, in the Commonwealth in support of apartheid South Africa? Will he therefore carry on with his sensible, prudent policy and not fall into the trap of allowing Mugabe to claim that there is some sort of neo-colonialist plot against his Government? Is it not more important that we get united European Union action as well as support throughout southern Africa?

Mr. Straw: I have already referred in slightly different terms to the fact that, in my judgment, while this issue may be a personal priority for the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), it is not one that is shared by the Leader of the Opposition. That speaks volumes about the priority that the Opposition attach to the matter. Of course, my hon. Friend is exactly right. The natural consequence of the strategy—if one can adorn it with that phrase—that is being offered by the Opposition Front Bench would not be an end to Mugabe. In my judgment, it would strengthen Mugabe, because he would be able to do what we have denied him for the past nine months and present what is happening as a bilateral dispute, in respect of which, for sure, the Opposition's position would have no support from the European Union, the Southern African Development Community and the Commonwealth. In other words, it is a strategy of failure of the sort that we have seen so many times before from the Conservative party.

EU Enlargement

6. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What recent meetings he has had with his Spanish counterpart to discuss the presidency priorities for EU enlargement. [30486]

The Minister for Europe (Peter Hain): My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met his Spanish counterpart in London on 19 December to discuss a range of EU issues, including EU enlargement.

Miss McIntosh: Will the Minister confirm that one of the issues that have been discussed is the date of the first direct elections to the European Parliament by the applicant countries? Will he also confirm that he will use the Spanish presidency not only to grant full British citizenship to the people of Gibraltar, but to ensure that, by the date of those first direct elections from the applicant countries, the people of Gibraltar will have the right to send their own directly elected Members to the European Parliament?

Peter Hain: The answer to the question about Gibraltar is yes; we have already made a clear commitment. The answer to the hon. Lady's first question is also yes. Countries that conclude their negotiations on the timetable by the end of the year will be ready to participate in the European elections in the summer of 2004 and, before that, to take part in the intergovernmental conference to shape the future structure of the European Union. We hope that up to 10 countries will attend as members and vote in the subsequent elections.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Was there any discussion of Turkey's failure to enact important human rights reforms, especially its failure to implement the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in July last year? The court found that the imprisonment of Leyla Zana, the Kurdish Member of Parliament, and of three other

Kurdish Members of Parliament who have been in jail for eight years, was due to an unfair trial. What are we doing about it?

Peter Hain: I commend my hon. Friend for her long and active interest in the problem of human rights abuses in Turkey. They remain a serious matter, and while they continue, they will prevent Turkey from joining the European Union. Although we support Turkey's application, it must comply fully with the Copenhagen criteria, which include support for human rights and good governance, before it is eligible for membership of the European Union.

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): Although I welcome the Spanish presidency's commitment to enlargement, does the Minister agree that successfully expanding the European Union will ultimately depend on a clear division of competencies? In a written answer to me yesterday, he stated:

> "Unlike the Member States, the European Communities have no inherent competence; they only have such competence as is accorded to them by the community Treaties. Accordingly, the competence of the Member States is limited only to the extent that the Communities have competence in accordance with the Treaties."—[*Official Report*, 4 February 2002; Vol. 379, c. 766W.]

Given the importance of enlargement, how about more focus and clarity instead of the Eurobabble that the Minister always attacks?

Peter Hain: I thought that the hon. Gentleman was about to commend my plain English. The European Union needs to consider its structures, and especially the role of the nation state as the foundation of the intergovernmentalism that should drive its future. Enlargement will make that even more important, because we hope that an additional 10 countries will join the EU. That is precisely why the Prime Minister has appointed me to join the European convention that will discuss such matters and why the IGC in 2004 will take them forward with a strong British input.

Cameroon

7. **Mr. David Chaytor** (Bury, North): What plans he has to visit Cameroon to discuss bilateral relations. [30427]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary was in Africa two weeks ago. All Foreign and Commonwealth Office ministerial visits are kept under review and announced when plans are fi[illegible]

Mr. Chaytor: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Did the Government take the opportunity to discuss Cameroon with the French Government during the recent Anglo-French initiative in Africa? Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government in Cameroon routinely use death squads from their special security forces to eliminate political opponents? Does he also agree that the United Nations rapporteur on torture recently described the prisons in Cameroon as the worst that he had seen anywhere? Are not the repressive and discriminatory policies of the Government in Cameroon directed against the English-speaking minority, especially members of the Southern Cameroons National Council? Will my hon. Friend assure—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister now has enough to cope with.

Mr. MacShane: My hon. Friend has listed many of the human rights abuses in Cameroon. The Government are greatly concerned about them. Cameroon is a bilingual Franco-and Anglophone country which causes anxiety to the EU and the Commonwealth, and is likely to be discussed at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights next month.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): The Prime Minister has described Africa as a scar on the conscience of the world. Why will he pass Cameroon by in his forthcoming visit to west Africa? Surely it is in special need of a visitation from him, in the dire circumstances that the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) described. Will the prosperity of Cameroon and other countries in Africa be enhanced by the part-privatisation of the Commonwealth Development Corporation?

Mr. MacShane: I welcome my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's visit to Africa. There are many people and organisations in all our constituencies for whom concern about Africa is a priority, and such comments come ill from the Conservatives, who did not lift a finger to give any serious help to Africa during their long years in government, and whose leader has just made a great speech on foreign affairs which did not mention that continent once.

Great Lakes

8. **Tony Cunningham** (Workington): If he will make a statement about his recent visit to the Great Lakes region. [30488]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): My recent visit to the Great Lakes with my French counterpart, Hubert Védrine, reinforced our joint commitment to the Lusaka peace process. We made clear to all sides the need for progress in enforcing all Security Council resolutions and for full co-operation with the United Nations mission to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Tony Cunningham: I thank my right hon. Friend for finding the time to visit the Great Lakes area of Africa. I am sure that he is aware that the war that has been going on in the Congo for four years has cost the lives of 2.5 million people. Two million more are displaced, and something like 66 per cent. of the population—that is, 35 million people—are still undernourished. What are the British Government doing to try to bring this terrible conflict to an end?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those remarks. He is right to draw attention to the scale of the suffering in the Great Lakes region, because this is the world's worst conflict. The genocide and starvation that have been suffered in the region are almost beyond record. We are working very carefully with France and

Belgium—which has historic links with the DRC—as well as with the United Nations to see whether we can advance progress on the Lusaka peace process. Indeed, this was the purpose of my trip. There is a clear framework for peace there, and up to now—in fairness to that framework—it has led to a relative ceasefire for the last year.

A great deal more progress has to be made, however, and one of the things that Mr. Védrine and I undertook to do while we were in the four countries that we visited was to see what initial steps could be taken for the safe transfer of 1,800 former rebel troops who are being held at Kamina, in the DRC, to Rwanda. Sadly, we were not able to achieve that while we were there, but if we could do so, we would be able to unblock many of the other problems relating to confidence in military co-operation that lie in the way of a permanent settlement.

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): In recognising the need for African countries to assume leadership over pan-African problems, with our help and encouragement, did the right hon. Gentleman discuss the new partnership for Africa's development during his visit? What practical support is he giving to the partnership's goals for conflict resolution, for improved environments for trade and investment, and for better governance in Africa?

Mr. Straw: We did indeed discuss the new partnership for Africa, which will be a major theme of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's visit to west Africa this week. Since 1997, this Government have done a huge amount to advance a strategy for the development and reconstruction of Africa, including making major increases in development aid under the leadership of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development. She and I, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, work closely together in a Cabinet Committee that I chair to ensure that diplomatic, aid and military efforts are effectively co-ordinated to prevent conflict, or, where conflict occurs—as in Sierra Leone—better and more quickly to resolve it.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his recent visit to the Great Lakes region. Does he share my sense of frustration that this conflict, which he suggested was the worst on the planet, has been given so little attention either in Europe or in the United States? Will he acknowledge the need for all the world to get involved in resolving this conflict? Britain has extraordinary influence in Rwanda and Uganda, and we should be telling those countries' Governments that fighting proxy wars in other people's territories is simply unacceptable in this century.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. The problem, however, has been not a lack of attention from the United States or from European countries, but—to put it bluntly—the fact that it has been possible for some countries and rebel groups to play off France and Belgium against the United Kingdom. The reason my trip with Mr. Védrine was so important was that we were able to develop a common strategy. It was, therefore, much easier to ensure that Mr. Védrine was giving the hard messages to President Kabila in the DRC, while I was giving the hard messages to Presidents Kagame and Museveni in Rwanda and Uganda.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): I am sure that the Foreign Secretary was right to focus on humanitarian issues on that recent and important visit, but did he give time to allow the Governments of those countries to make representations on the changes that this Government are making to the Commonwealth Development Corporation, which appear—I emphasise that—to place short-term profits in high-tech corporation industries above long-term jobs for people in many African countries who live in abject poverty?

Mr. Straw: I am sure that that is not the case and not remotely the intention of my right hon. Friends the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for International Development, but the hon. Gentleman will not object too much if I gently observe that there is always room for sinners to repent. This afternoon's repentance—against privatisation and in favour of public ownership—is much to be welcomed.

Arctic

9. **Colin Burgon** (Elmet): What recent discussions he has had with the Governments of *(a)* Canada and *(b)* the USA about the effect on the Arctic environment of oil and gas exploration and development. [30489]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): None.

Colin Burgon: I thank my hon. Friend for that constructive reply. I had hoped that he might be able to give a lead on a problem that concerns hundreds of thousands of people around the globe—the future of the Arctic wildlife refuge in Alaska. It appears that the hard-nosed men of the big oil companies want to get in there to exploit and start drilling in that pristine wilderness, but I understand that they need the support of Congress to do so. What can we in Britain do to help defeat their disastrous plans?

Mr. MacShane: I meant no discourtesy to my hon. Friend; I simply want to move Question Time forward as fast as possible. He is right to reflect the deep concern, but he must address the fact that the Energy Bill to allow drilling in the Arctic was passed by the House of Representatives by 240 votes to 189. It is going through Congress and is supported by a number of US trade unions.

The House must understand that we need to engage with the American democratic process rather than name-call the White House. America is a great, vibrant republic and a great federal democracy. As parliamentarians, we need to talk to our colleagues over there to raise those issues, which I fully accept are of great concern to my hon. Friend and, indeed, to many Americans; but it is not for this Government to dictate what the US does inside its own boundaries.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Have the Government made any representations to the American or Canadian Governments on behalf of any UK energy company?

Mr. MacShane: To my knowledge, no.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Does it follow from the answer to the hon. Member for Elmet (Colin Burgon) that the Minister will have a word with the Foreign Secretary about his offensive remarks about the speech made the other day by the President of the United States?

Mr. MacShane: I do not think that the United States has a better friend in the House than my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. The Conservative party, which last week reconfirmed its commitment to the most foolish isolationism that harks back to Neville Chamberlain, has no lessons to offer anywhere in the world.

EU Enlargement

10. **Mr. Mark Lazarowicz** (Edinburgh, North and Leith): What recent discussions he has had with his EU counterparts about the reform of the common agricultural policy in advance of enlargement. [30490]

The Minister for Europe (Peter Hain): We frequently raise the importance of CAP reform with European Union and applicant Governments.

Mr. Lazarowicz: I thank my right hon. Friend for his answer. In those discussions, will he tell his European colleagues that it is entirely unacceptable for accession country farmers to be expected to compete with highly subsidised farmers from existing EU countries? Will he call for a level playing field for accession country farmers, which could be achieved by drastic cuts to the obscenely large CAP subsidies paid to big farmers?

Peter Hain: We agree that there must be a level playing field once the applicant countries have come fully into the EU, but transitional arrangements are inevitable in an enlargement of such dimensions, and the proposals published recently by the European Commission provide for that. There will be a transition process.

I do not think that my hon. Friend is asking for, nor will the Government support, any additional funding for the CAP, which desperately needs reform along precisely the lines that he suggests. Farmers from Britain and other members states should be able to benefit from that reform, as should applicant states when a level playing field is created following the necessary reforms.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): Is the Minister not concerned about the fact that one accession country, Poland, receives more development aid from the European Union than the whole of Asia? Farmers will not stand a chance of escaping the chronic poverty suffered by these countries unless they are given fairer access to European markets for their agricultural produce.

This is not just a dispute between accession countries and existing member states. We shall never make progress on Africa until we reform the common agricultural policy in Europe.

Peter Hain: I agree. I just wonder why the Conservative Government of whom the hon. Gentleman was, I think, a member—certainly a supporter—did not achieve the CAP reforms which we began in 1999, and which we will carry through. They will be necessary once enlargement has taken place.

The hon. Gentleman spoke of the very high—some would say obscene—level of agricultural subsidies in the rich world, Europe included. The total is equivalent to the entire gross domestic product of sub-Saharan Africa. There is no way in which we can conquer poverty, in Africa or elsewhere, unless we get rid of those bloated subsidies and create a level playing field for the agricultural markets of the developing world as well as those in Europe.

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the progressive replacement of the CAP with a policy of agricultural and rural development would be much better for the different nations and regions of the European Union, and indeed the enlargement countries, than the present over-centralised, over-regulated policy? Will he press for such a change in both the enlargement negotiations and—this is very important—the "future of Europe" negotiations?

Peter Hain: Yes indeed; I agree wholeheartedly with my right hon. Friend. Let me return to the original question, and say that I think many applicant countries would benefit from considering the opportunities for agricultural rural development funding, rather than agricultural funding in the traditional CAP sense, that are available in the European Union. I think that that would help them enormously, if it took place in parallel with efforts to reform the CAP.

Iraq

11. **Patrick Mercer** (Newark): What discussions he has had with the United Nations concerning the prospect of weapons inspectors visiting Iraq. [30491]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): In the United Nations Security Council, we regularly review the prospects for a resumption of UN weapons inspections in Iraq. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary led intensive discussions on that in the margins of the United Nations General Assembly ministerial week in November. The UN expects Iraq to comply fully with its disarmament and monitoring obligations, and to permit the immediate return of UN weapons inspectors.

Patrick Mercer: Does the Minister agree that it is now high time Iraq abided by UN Security Council resolution

678, and allowed on-site inspections throughout Iraq? Does he agree that only by so doing can Iraq leave the cabal of rogue states and join the civilised world?

Mr. Bradshaw: Yes. I think Iraq knows exactly what it must do to comply with UN resolutions. It is very simple. There have been vague signs recently that some elements of the regime may be having a change of heart, but I should warn the House that we have seen this before. What we want is action, not just words.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Instead of issuing warnings like this, would it not be at least prudent to listen to what Baghdad has to say to Kofi Annan?

Mr. Bradshaw: As I just said, Saddam Hussein has done this before when he has felt under pressure, and he rightly feels under pressure now, post-11 September. He has put out feelers; he has spoken to a number of people, including those in the United Nations. These, however, are simply diplomatic ploys. We should wait and see whether any of his moves are followed by actions rather than words.

Zimbabwe

12. **Mr. Peter Viggers** (Gosport): What role the Commonwealth will have in respect of monitoring the 2002 presidential elections in Zimbabwe. [30493]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): The Government of Zimbabwe have stated that Commonwealth election observers will be invited to the presidential elections on 9 and 10 March, but no invitations have yet been issued. On 30 January the Commonwealth ministerial action group called for the immediate deployment of Commonwealth election observers.

Mr. Viggers: With the Foreign Secretary's failure to carry our Commonwealth partners with us, I suppose we must take comfort where we can and reflect on the fact that there will be observers, notably from the Commonwealth, and that if the elections are not seen to be fair and free, further action can be taken; and the Commonwealth would be the ideal body to take that action. Does the Minister agree?

Mr. MacShane: The hon. Gentleman repeats exactly what the Foreign Secretary said.

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Has there been any indication from the Government of Zimbabwe that they would seek to exclude British observers from any teams, and if so, what would be the response of both the Commonwealth and the European Union?

Mr. MacShane: The simple answer is that that is a matter for the Commonwealth and the European Union, but it is important to stress that there are two institutions seeking to "bilateralise" this matter—to make it a UK-Zimbabwe affair. One is the Government of Zimbabwe; the other is the Opposition Front-Bench team. This Government have sought to get support from the EU, from the Commonwealth, from the Southern African Development Community and from our friends in the United States. That is the way to deal with Zimbabwe, not the isolationist, old colonialist approach of the Conservative party.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Exactly how many election monitors and observers will be in Zimbabwe by the time the elections take place? I have taken a deep interest in Zimbabwe over many years and raised the genocide in Matabeleland in 1983 with questions in the House. I am ashamed that this country and the civilised world did absolutely nothing about that genocide; I was angry and disgusted. We set a shocking example. Unless there are 500 or 600 monitors and observers in Zimbabwe, I do not believe that the elections can be free, transparent or fair.

Mr. MacShane: The hon. Gentleman has a distinguished record in this matter, but when the massacres in Matabeleland were raised in another place in 1984—they were not debated in this House—the then Minister said:

> "The Zimbabwean Government face a serious security threat from dissidents in Matabeleland and obviously must try to take effective action to deal with it."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 23 May 1984; Vol. 452, c. 259.]

That was the position of the Conservative party then. We and our international friends and allies are insisting that election observers be in place, and if they are not, there will be consequences. The important thing is that we co-operate internationally, not puff and posture like the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), who seeks to bilateralise the matter, falling into the trap that President Mugabe has set for us.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): Between now and the presidential elections in Zimbabwe, more money from Zimbabwe will be trying to find its way to the City of London. What extra steps are we taking to talk to the City of London to ensure that money is not laundered here?

Mr. MacShane: My hon. Friend raises a serious point. Discussions are currently taking place with the City and with other appropriate departmental ministries to ensure that any improper money, as it were, that arrives in the City of London is notified. If, after the elections are over, the international institutions, of which we are partner members, express dissatisfaction with the election result, consequences in that area will surely follow.

Golden Jubilee

13. **Mr. Andrew Rosindell** (Romford): What plans he has to encourage celebrations of HM the Queen's golden jubilee year in the British overseas territories. [30494]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): Governors of the overseas territories have received guidance on arrangements for the Queen's golden jubilee. It is for the Governments and people of the territories to decide how best to celebrate the jubilee. The best present for the overseas territories will be the British Overseas Territories Bill *[Lords]*, currently going through the House; it gives the people of the overseas territories British citizenship, which the Conservative Government failed to do for 18 years.

Mr. Rosindell: I thank the Minister for his reply. Does he agree that the overseas territories have as much right to celebrate the Queen's golden jubilee as people living on mainland Britain? Is he aware that it is nearly 50 years since Her Majesty visited the British Crown colony of Gibraltar? Does he feel that the year of the golden jubilee would be an appropriate time for Her Majesty to visit Gibraltar? If not, perhaps an appropriate occasion would be the 300th anniversary of British sovereignty over Gibraltar, in 2004.

Mr. Bradshaw: We never comment on royal visits or where Her Majesty the Queen should or should not go, but she has asked that there should be no undue expenditure from public funds in connection with the jubilee. I would however draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to a number of the planned celebrations, including those on Gibraltar, where there will be a birthday parade and trooping the colour. Some territories will issue special commemorative stamps and many will have a public holiday. I am sure that the newly British citizens of the overseas territories will have a good time—an even better time than those back home.

Gibraltar

3.30 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) (*by private notice*): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his talks on Gibraltar yesterday with the Spanish Foreign Minister in London.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): Yesterday I met the Spanish Foreign Minister, Josep Piqué. We held the third in a series of meetings under the Brussels process. A copy of the joint communiqué from yesterday's meeting has been placed in the Library. At every stage we have kept the House fully informed of the process of the negotiations, including in a three-hour debate in Government time last Thursday in Westminster Hall. A further meeting under the Brussels process is due to be held within the next two months. The date has yet to be fixed.

There are four aspects to the approach that we have adopted: preserving Gibraltar's unique way of life; greater internal self-government for Gibraltar; practical benefits through co-operation and putting the long-running dispute about sovereignty to rest.

I am convinced that this dialogue represents the best way forward for the people of Gibraltar as well as for Spain and the United Kingdom. It must be better to try to settle differences through dialogue, and I am convinced that the people of Gibraltar have more to gain than to lose from the process. Moreover, they will not lose their British citizenship nor their traditional way of life. However, they will gain greater self-government and many practical benefits of a much more co-operative relationship with Spain and its people.

I underline the commitment that was first given in the House by the Labour Government in 1969, and that we have repeated in this round: that any proposals affecting the sovereignty of Gibraltar will not and cannot be put into effect without the consent of the people of Gibraltar in a referendum.

I want the Government of Gibraltar to be directly involved in the Brussels round talks. Yesterday, the British and Spanish Governments reiterated our invitation to Chief Minister Caruana to participate in the discussions on the basis of the two flags, three voices formula, in which he would have his own distinct voice as part of the British delegation.

Lastly, there is nothing inevitable about the outcome of the discussions, but it is in all our interests to make a constructive effort to find a lasting solution to the problems—above all, one which we believe will be in the interests of the people of Gibraltar.

Mr. Kaufman: I thank my right hon. Friend for sending me a copy of yesterday's communiqué and his article in the *Gibraltar Chronicle* yesterday.

Is it not bizarre that Spain has imposed and maintained what my right hon. Friend described in the *Gibraltar Chronicle* yesterday as

"obstructions to everyday life"

which

"the people of Gibraltar are forced to endure",

and that the Spanish Government are now graciously offering to lift those restrictions provided that the British Government sell out the interests of those same people of Gibraltar?

Yesterday in London, despite what my right hon. Friend has just said about his ambition to put the long-running dispute over sovereignty to rest, the Spanish Foreign Minister said that

"Spain could not accept that the Gibraltarian people had a right to self-determination and would not drop its historic claim on the colony."

An agreement from those negotiations would therefore be only the first slice of the chorizo. Should not the British Government value the fact that the people of Gibraltar are so proud of being British that, to maintain their present status, they are ready to endure those obstructions to everyday life, just as they endured far worse in the second world war in defence of Britain and of democracy? Will my right hon. Friend make it absolutely clear that, apart from the telephone lines referred to yesterday, Spain will remove the restrictions—my right hon. Friend described them as those that the people of Gibraltar have to "endure"—only if the outcome of the negotiations is satisfactory to Spain and is then endorsed by the people of Gibraltar in a referendum? Will he also understand that there is no majority in the House for a negotiation conducted under duress?

Mr. Straw: I accept that there would be no majority in the House for negotiation under duress, but I believe that there is a majority for negotiation conducted within the Brussels process, which was initiated in 1984 by the Administration of Lady Thatcher with all-party support and the support of the shadow Cabinet. Indeed, at that time my right hon. Friend and I were on the Opposition Front Bench. Bipartisan support for the process continues to this day. As we discovered on 12 January during a similar private notice question, the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), the shadow Foreign Secretary—notwithstanding his bluster—supported a continuation of the process.

As I have said to my right hon. Friend—I am happy to repeat the point—I accept entirely that all kinds of obstructions to daily life in Gibraltar have been imposed by the Government of Spain. Those obstructions should not be there and I am trying to do something about them. However, I defy any Member of the House to explain how we can deal with them—short, as I said on 12 January, of sending gunboats or threatening military action—except through discussion and dialogue with the Government of Spain.

My right hon. Friend also asked whether—apart from the telephone lines—Spain will remove other obstructions only if there is a satisfactory outcome to this phase of the negotiations that is then endorsed through a referendum. As part of the Brussels process, we are discussing with Spain the removal of further obstructions—as he calls them—well before any referendum. It is for that reason that we undertook considerable negotiation to get Spain to agree in principle to the transfer of the 70,000 lines. Yesterday, we agreed to further work on some of the technical problems associated with their connection.

I want to make two final points. First, whether we or the people of Gibraltar like it or not, the world for Gibraltar is changing. It is changing not because of Spain or the United

[Mr. Straw]

Kingdom, but because of the rules of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the European Union, which will quickly bring to an end Gibraltar's tax-free status. Gibraltar needs a new future and everybody in Gibraltar understands that.

Secondly, as I have said, the process that we are involved in—which cannot conceivably be described in my right hon. Friend's words—means that nothing that we agree can come into force without the consent of the people of Gibraltar in a referendum. I have made a point of that.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): Does the Foreign Secretary accept that yesterday has done nothing to allay or dispel suspicion and anger in Gibraltar or in the House? If anything, the fears that I previously raised with the Foreign Secretary, and which until now he has dismissed, are turning out to be true. The process in which he is engaged is clearly seen as the disingenuous sell-out that we have always believed it to be.

Does not the Foreign Secretary accept that, once made, a bilateral agreement between the British and Spanish Governments to share sovereignty over Gibraltar cannot be rescinded? Even if it is subsequently rejected by the people of Gibraltar, the principle of ceding sovereignty over the Rock to Spain will have been established, the pass will have been sold and the promised democratic rights over sovereignty of the people of Gibraltar will have been fatally undermined.

Cannot the Foreign Secretary see that that is the sell-out, the done deal, that we and the people of Gibraltar fear, and which we and they will oppose? Why does not he accept the suggestion that I made in my letter of 18 January, which he dodged in his reply? That is that, in this process—which we accept—nothing should be agreed by any party until the overall proposals being put forward are approved in a referendum, and that, in the absence of Gibraltar's acquiescence, neither Government could claim that an agreement had been reached on any issue. That would meet the concerns and fears of the people of Gibraltar, and of Opposition Members.

Cannot the Foreign Secretary accept, even at this late date, that he owes the people of Gibraltar, not least for the loyalty that they have shown us, an open and democratic process, with nothing agreed by him on behalf of the British Government until all the proposals are agreed by the people of Gibraltar? Anything less would be a dishonourable betrayal, which would shame not only the right hon. Gentleman, but us all.

Mr. Straw: Yet again, we see a man without a policy. On the one hand, the right hon. Gentleman says that the Brussels process will lead to a sell-out, and on the other that we should continue with it. He needs to make up his mind.

Only by discussion in the Brussels process can we conceivably reach the point where proposals can be put to the people of Gibraltar. I should much prefer it if the right hon. Gentleman were to write me a letter about a different architecture for the discussions. I would prefer there to be a different architecture for the discussions, and for the Government of Gibraltar to be part of those discussions. I keep repeating that invitation to Peter Caruana. I believe that it is safe for him to take part in the discussions, as nothing to do with his involvement in them would remotely prejudice anything that he said to the people of Gibraltar by way of advice about voting yes or no in a referendum.

I would value Peter Caruana sitting alongside me—two flags, three voices—in the process. In that way, instead of having to meet him separately and make telephone calls to him—which I am always happy to do—I would have his advice in the room. At the moment, that is not possible. The only alternative under the Brussels process, which the Conservative party in government initiated and with which the right hon. Gentleman agrees, is that there should be bilateral discussions.

If the discussions are satisfactory—they may not be—their outcome will be that we agree proposals. However, those proposals will come into law only if the people of Gibraltar agree. That is a sensible way in which to proceed. It has the absolute democratic guarantee that, ultimately, it will be the people of Gibraltar who will decide. Let them decide, is what I say.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): I know that my right hon. Friend has a great interest in trying to achieve agreement over Gibraltar, but the real problem is that Piqué has stated openly and clearly that he will never accept that the people of Gibraltar have a right of self-determination. That declaration should be reason enough for us to withdraw from the talks.

We must be aware that we face the danger that people will accuse us of double standards. We cannot go around the world saying openly that we believe in democratic rights, and that we went into Bosnia and Afghanistan because we believe that people have the right to democracy, at the same time as we are beginning to put an end to the rights of the people of Gibraltar.

Spain has stated deliberately today that the people of Gibraltar have no rights. I declare an interest in what goes on, as I am chair of the all-party Gibraltar group. I believe that we should reconsider our position and allow that other countries in the EU have differing tax statuses within their borders. One example is Spain, and the circumstances covering Ceuta, Melilla, Tenerife and the Canary islands. Another example is France, and the differing status accorded to Monaco. Another example is Britain, with Jersey and the Isle of Man—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Straw: Let me deal with the issue of self-determination. I apologise for not picking up on it in my response a moment ago.

The Spanish Government and people have maintained a long-standing position on Gibraltar. However, they are involved in the negotiations and we have made it clear that there is no way that we shall accept that position and hand over sovereignty, lock, stock and barrel, to Spain. I have said that repeatedly, as has my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe. We are involved in negotiations. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) is an expert on the origins of British sovereignty in Gibraltar, he will know that by the treaty of Utrecht, sovereignty was ceded to the English Crown, to the United Kingdom, and that the same clause in that treaty states clearly that if ever sovereignty is given up by the United Kingdom it has to go back to Spain. So in the classic terms of normal decolonisation—when we had absolute sovereignty and no country had first refusal on it—we could of course grant independence if we and the other country so wished. That does not arise in respect of Gibraltar, so the alternatives are sovereignty with the UK, sovereignty with Spain or something in between.

As regards self-determination, whatever Spain may have said in the past, Spain has acknowledged, as part of these negotiations, that we will put any agreed proposals to the people of Gibraltar and that we will not implement them without the consent of the people of Gibraltar. We can argue about whether that really is self-determination, but in the context that I have described I think that it is.

I hope too—Spain has also acknowledged this—that as part of those discussions, if we reach an agreed outcome, we can grant a far greater degree of internal self-government to Gibraltar than exists at present. Spain is entirely in agreement with that.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): Has the Foreign Secretary been able to identify any advantage to the people of Gibraltar from their Government staying out of the negotiations, especially when they would have no obligation either to accept or to endorse any result of the negotiations? Furthermore, what efforts has he made in his conversations to persuade the Spanish Government to take unilateral measures designed to increase confidence in Gibraltar—not least by the removal of the bureaucratic obstacles at the border? Finally, can he think of any greater illustration of the principle of sovereignty than that the people of Gibraltar should have an unencumbered veto over the British Government—something that no part of the United Kingdom enjoys?

Mr. Straw: The right hon. and learned Gentleman's final point is absolutely right. I also believe in the wider sense of the word sovereignty. If sovereignty means greater control over one's own life, the kind of future that we seek to map out for the people of Gibraltar—in which there is real freedom across the borders and for trade, and where the economy can be opened up not only to the people of Gibraltar but to the whole of that part of southern Europe—would provide them with a much greater degree of practical sovereignty than they have at present.

As to why Chief Minister Peter Caruana should not take part in these discussions, he has advanced reasons to me that I do not want to go into in public, but in discussion with him I continue to try to identify the rubbing points for the Government of Gibraltar and to try to accommodate them. I regret that that has not proved possible so far, but the invitation remains open. In my judgment—although ultimately it is a matter for him—the people of Gibraltar would be better served by Mr. Caruana being in the negotiations rather than outside them. However, we shall continue to consult with him.

As regards Spain taking unilateral steps to build confidence, the right hon. and learned Gentleman is correct: Spain should do that. It was for that reason that we urged Spain to put in the telephone lines. We obtained agreement in principle and we want those lines actually to be installed. Furthermore, it would greatly help if Spain could now take other measures—they have formed a major part of my conversations with Minister Piqué—to reduce the lack of confidence that exists across those borders.

Denzil Davies (Llanelli): My right hon. Friend has mentioned the rather bizarre concept of two flags, three voices. He has also mentioned Spain's so-called historic claim to Gibraltar. Can he give us an assurance that, if agreement is reached on the two flag concept, an express condition will be that Spain give up its historic claim?

Mr. Straw: That is obviously one part of the discussions. *[Interruption.]* As people who have ever been involved in the negotiations will know, that is, of course, one part of the discussions. I shall not anticipate the outcome of the negotiations, until there is a satisfactory outcome, but I am happy to say that there is no way, in these negotiations, that we intend to cede, lock, stock and barrel, the sovereignty of Gibraltar to Spain. That is not part of our agenda—not now, not for the future.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): As the Government of Spain have been shamefully and blatantly depriving the people of Gibraltar of their entitlements in anticipation of the discussions, would not the Foreign Secretary, as a great enthusiast for the EU, think that a better start to the negotiations would be to invite the Commission to take Spain to the European Court of Justice for blatantly and wrongfully depriving the people of Gibraltar of their rights?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman suddenly seems to have been converted to the merits of the European Court of Justice. *[Interruption.]* Well, he mentioned it. That is a rather dangerous path down which to take Gibraltar because the infraction proceedings that are in prospect before the European Court of Justice are not against Spain, but against Gibraltar for its failure to transpose a number of EU directives. Whether or not one accepts another party's position in the negotiations, it is always at least worth comprehending that position. Spain has a number of points against Gibraltar. We have to examine carefully the way in which Spain thinks that Gibraltar and, indeed, the United Kingdom have behaved towards Spain historically, and we have to take that into account in any final agreement that we may reach.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is it likely that there are more than 12 people, at the very maximum, in Gibraltar, who are in favour of what is happening? Is not the truth of the matter simply that, over the years, Spain has pursued a policy of harassment, obstruction and downright annoyance against the people of Gibraltar, whose only crime is that they simply want to retain their links with Britain? Good luck to them.

Mr. Straw: I suspect that the number is rather more than 12, but I shall not start counting just yet. Of course, I understand the intense feeling among the people of Gibraltar about the harassment that takes place against them; nor do I remotely think that it is justified or necessary. I am involved in these negotiations, even at the risk of finding that, just at the moment, I do not have majority support in Gibraltar. I am glad that it is not my constituency, but that is okay because I know that the

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people of Blackburn support me in this endeavour, as I suspect do the people of Walsall, although we have no need to put it to the test.

Even though I understand some of the difficulties and complexities of the issue that faces us at the moment, I am involved in the negotiations precisely because I am concerned about that harassment and those obstructions by the Government of Spain. But I also look ahead down the track and see a different environment, in which Gibraltar will have to operate whether or not we reach agreement. I cannot say what the final conclusion will be, but we are working in the best interests of the people of Gibraltar, as well as the United Kingdom.

In case my hon. Friend did not hear this right at the beginning, there is no question that the people of Gibraltar will lose their British citizenship, or their British way of life. Those are absolutes; we made that clear to the Spanish Government at the start, and to lift the veil a little on the negotiations, they have accepted both points. If they had not done so, we would not still be involved in the negotiations.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): Does the right hon. Gentleman understand that many hon. Members on both sides of the House can smell the stench of betrayal and sell-out wafting out from underneath the doors at King Charles street? If, as he says, the people of Gibraltar have an arm-lock on the results of the negotiations and given that he knows perfectly well what the results of the Gibraltarians' considerations on his negotiations will be, would it not be much better for his extremely clever and dedicated team of staff in the Foreign Office to get on with something rather more worth while?

Mr. Straw: The value and importance of this process were recognised 18 years ago by a distinguished Conservative former Foreign Secretary, now Lord Howe, and it was pursued with the active support of the then Prime Minister, Lady Thatcher. We supported the process at that time precisely because of the problems faced by Gibraltarians. There has to be a process of discussion.

As we have heard, despite all the bluster from those on the Opposition Front Bench, they support the process, too. I have not heard one proposal this afternoon from any of those who have a slight difference of emphasis from me in regard to the negotiations about what they would do other than to engage in discussions to seek to resolve the problems for the people of Gibraltar.

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): May I point out to my right hon. Friend that there are Labour Members who support the hard work that he is putting in to try to resolve an anachronistic constitution in a modern Europe? People in business in Gibraltar recognise that, if there are no changes to its constitutional status, their businesses will not prosper in the future and they will be denied any real independence. That view is widely held.

Mr. Straw: I have always admired my hon. Friend's independent judgment and the quality of the arguments that he advances.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): If the Foreign Secretary accepts the principles of decolonisation and self-determination, why are the British Government and the Government of Spain, who wish to become the colonising Government in Gibraltar, attempting to construct a joint sovereignty arrangement over the heads of the people of Gibraltar? Such an agreement will be turned down by the people of Gibraltar, because they cannot be bought in that way. However, the agreement will remain as a rebuke and a threat to Gibraltar for long afterwards and in defiance of the people's wishes and, indeed, of the principle of self-determination. What principle of international relations or international law is the right hon. Gentleman following, or is this really about the demands of the Spanish Government and the convenience of the European Union?

Mr. Straw: The principle is that international negotiation is a far better process to follow than the alternative. However, Conservatives Members baulk at that suggestion. We have problems with Spain over Gibraltar, and the Gibraltarians have even greater problems. There are two ways of seeking to resolve such problems. The first is by force of arms and the other is by force of argument. I believe—international law requires this—in using force of argument. Moreover, it is utter nonsense to suggest that we are going over the heads of the people of Gibraltar. We are going to the people of Gibraltar and we shall not just ask for their opinion, because they have a veto over the final conclusion that we come to.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that it is part of his thinking that the Government of Gibraltar's engagement in this process would enable them to improve Gibraltar's identity and place in Europe? It would also improve and strengthen relations between Britain and Spain and between Britain and the Government of Gibraltar and would not allow those relations to wither away, as they are at present. Does he agree that, although those Labour and Opposition Members who use the language of betrayal and sell-out may be genuine friends of Gibraltar, they do not help the process and are making it even harder for him to accomplish what he is trying to do?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend; he is exactly right. I do not believe that using such misplaced and inaccurate descriptions helps anyone, least of all the people of Gibraltar. I find it difficult to understand how such labels can be attached when the process is open and we want the Chief Minister of Gibraltar to be involved in the negotiations. As that has not been possible to achieve, we are consulting him as much as we can.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Will the Foreign Secretary accept that we do not have a dispute with Spain? The right of the Gibraltarians to be involved with the United Kingdom is recognised in an international treaty that is almost 300 years old. What we are experiencing is the unreasonable behaviour of Spanish Governments and the Spanish people. Can he tell the House—if he truly believes in democracy—whether the people of Gibraltar came to the British Government to ask for help in negotiating joint sovereignty with Spain so as to remove some of the problems, or whether they asked him to intercede to get a co-member of the European Union to behave in a civilised and reasonable way?

Mr. Straw: It is a matter of record that the request for the Brussels process arose from discussions between the then Conservative Government and the Spanish Government. It did not arise directly from a request by the Gibraltarian Government. However, we have received many requests for us to sort out the difficulties in Gibraltar. I repeat that the only way to do that is by discussion. That has to be within the Brussels process because the die was cast in 1984 by the Government whom the hon. Gentleman and Conservative Front-Bench spokesmen supported. One part of the negotiations deals with sovereignty because that was what was agreed between the Government of Spain and a Conservative Administration.

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): Has my right hon. Friend been offered from any quarter practical proposals on how to get rid of the restrictions on the people of Gibraltar other than by entering into discussion and negotiation? Can he explain why those who oppose the process think that the status quo, which includes those restrictions, is acceptable and why they think that a process in which the people of Gibraltar have the final say in a referendum is not self-determination?

Mr. Straw: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. The answer is no; there have been no alternative practical proposals for resolving the problems—none at all.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): The Foreign Secretary said that there were only two choices: to go to war or to negotiate. There is a third choice, however: to maintain the status quo. That has been successfully achieved in facing down other regimes and can be successful in Gibraltar. Does the right hon. Gentleman honestly believe that even if restrictions are removed for the duration of a referendum campaign and the vote goes against the acceptance of shared sovereignty once he has done his dirty deal with the Spanish, those restrictions will not immediately be reimposed by Spain?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman is not using his usual analytical skills on the arguments. I was talking about the two choices that are involved in the process of negotiation; he is talking about the outcome. If proposals are agreed between this Government and the Government of Spain, that outcome will be put to the people of Gibraltar. If and when a referendum takes place, the arguments for those people to consider will be either to maintain the status quo or to have a different future. In the end, that is a matter for the people of Gibraltar.

As the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) explained, no other colonial situation has had such a degree of effective self-determination. It did not happen with Hong Kong—those negotiations were carried out by a Conservative Administration who just handed Hong Kong over to China without any suggestion of a referendum—so I do not want to hear any more nonsense about self-determination from the Conservatives.

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): Does the Foreign Secretary accept that the Chief Minister of Gibraltar has made it clear for some time that he would be more than happy to negotiate with Spain on the restrictions placed on Gibraltar because of the effects that Spain claims they have on it? That has not happened because Spain will not talk about anything unless sovereignty is at the head of the agenda. The Foreign Secretary knows perfectly well that the referendum in Gibraltar, whenever it is held, will result in a resounding rejection by the Gibraltarians. We must therefore ask what his agenda is. Does he mean to say to the United Nations that Spain and Britain have agreed on the future of Gibraltar and the problem is merely that Gibraltar has yet to come to terms with it, and all other options are closed?

Mr. Straw: Sovereignty is part of the agenda; it is not a prior condition, but it was agreed as part of the Brussels process. The hon. Gentleman asked me to predict the outcome of the referendum. My track record is poor. I was an active member of the no campaign in 1975. When the four-week campaign began, there was a 2:1 majority in favour of a no vote; at the end, there was a 2:1 majority in favour of a yes vote. I am therefore making no predictions. During that process, people listened to the argument. I hope that if we again agree proposals with the Government of Spain over time and through discussion, we will be able to discuss them in more detail with the people of Gibraltar. In any event, I made it clear yesterday that it will be their decision; we will respect it and we will stand by them whatever it is.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): May I remind my right hon. Friend that the concept of "two flags, three voices" is fairly similar to the device used in discussions with Argentina and the Falkland Islands, which did not lead to betrayal of the interests of the islanders, any more than my right hon. Friend's present negotiations will lead to betrayal of the Gibraltarians? Will he reinforce his point that a Spain that has to come to the negotiating table knowing that the people of Gibraltar will have the final say on their future is also a Spain that has to negotiate in good faith? He was therefore right in his statement that the process of negotiation is the best way of getting rid of the artificial impediments to Gibraltar's progress imposed by Spain.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his sage observation about negotiations concerning south America and the Falkland Islands. I repeat: we need a process to deal with these problems, and this is the best way of achieving that. I very much wish that the Chief Minister of Gibraltar was taking part in the negotiations. I believe that we have made it possible for him to do so; he takes a different view, which I respect. The invitation remains open.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): Can I help the Foreign Secretary to retain at least a fig leaf of credibility in these shoddy dealings, and respond to questions that he has been asked repeatedly by Members on both sides of the House? Will he state categorically that in the event of the people of Gibraltar rejecting the stitch-up, which they surely will, the negotiations and anything relating to them will be taken off the agenda once and for all?

Mr. Straw: In the event of a no vote, the proposals will not be implemented. I cannot rewrite history in the

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event of a no vote. If there is a no vote, the hon. Gentleman and his Front Bench are asking me to rush to the archives and tear up—

Mr. Ancram *indicated assent.*

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Gentleman says yes; we are to be like Arthur Andersen and shred the records. It is the Enron approach to foreign affairs: to negotiate, to agree proposals, and then when people do not like them—as obviously the Opposition do not—to rush back and destroy all the evidence that there had ever been agreement. I am sorry, I am not following that line; I believe in being straight with the people of Gibraltar, which is what we shall be.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): Is not it true that the Little Englander mentality of people who refuse even to countenance the idea of any kind of talks can only harm the long-term interests of the people of Gibraltar? Is it not true also that the old Franco mentality of people in Spain who refuse to countenance any change in their position can only harm the future of Spain? Would it not make much more sense for the Government of Spain to renounce their long-term aspiration to sole Spanish sovereignty of Gibraltar and for the Government of Gibraltar to take part in the talks as soon as possible?

Mr. Straw: I accept entirely what my hon. Friend says. Spain has imposed restrictions on Gibraltar which we do not accept and do not believe are justified. There is a parody of Spain and the Spanish people among some hon. Members which bears no relationship to the truth. The Kingdom of Spain is a democracy and a member of the European Union. Fifteen times as many British people live happily in Spain as live in the British colony of Gibraltar, and they live there voluntarily. Many Gibraltarians, notwithstanding the restrictions, have a stake in Spain as well. Moreover, although I do not accept most of what is said, if one is going into negotiations, it is a good idea to understand where the other side is coming from. Whether we agree with them or not, some of the concerns of the other side have a foundation that we cannot ignore. The purpose of the negotiations is to try to find a way through. Again, I repeat that not once in the past 40 minutes of discussion has there been any proposal for resolving the problem for the people of Gibraltar, except through the Brussels process.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Why not—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps I could have the attention of the Foreign Secretary. Why not three voices and three flags?

Mr. Straw: The hon. and learned Gentleman is a lawyer. Because of the treaty of Utrecht.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): In view of the deep hostility felt by the people of Gibraltar towards falling under Spanish sovereignty, shared or otherwise, will the Foreign Secretary tell us what unpleasant circumstances and trick question he is preparing for the referendum?

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend asks me a disobliging question. She should not judge the Government by her own standards.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): If the Foreign Secretary cobbles together some deal with Spain which involves the diminution of Gibraltarian sovereignty, and if that question is asked in a referendum and wholeheartedly rejected, as it will be, will he guarantee that the rights of the Gibraltarians as British subjects will be no less vigorously protected by his Government, and that he will no less vigorously pursue the iniquities of the Spanish treatment of Gibraltarians through the EU, which he should have been doing rather more vigorously for some years?

Mr. Straw: I said yesterday, as I have already repeated twice in the House, and I said in Barcelona that if the people of Gibraltar decide to reject the proposals, as they are fully entitled to do—I hope that they will not reject them if we agree them, but I accept the possibility that they may—we will stand by not only our legal but our moral and political obligations to the people of Gibraltar.

One reason why I am committed to this process for resolving the problems faced by Gibraltar and those that arise in respect of Gibraltar in the European Union is that, in my experience as Home Secretary, we ran into difficulties time after time with a number of instruments, when Spain raised problems, sometimes with justification, because of the application or otherwise of the instrument to Gibraltar. The proposals are a way of resolving those problems, as well as making a better future for the people of Gibraltar.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): My right hon. Friend mentioned what might happen if there were an agreement between the Government and the Spanish Government. Will he speculate on what may happen to the people of Gibraltar, their economy and their future if there is no agreement with Spain?

Mr. Straw: That, in the end, is a matter for the people of Gibraltar, but my hon. Friend raises an important question. One thing is certain: the, as it were, duty-free, low tax status of Gibraltar will end over the next four or five years. That has nothing directly to do with the Government of Spain or the UK, but results from decisions principally by the OECD and the EU against such tax-free status. That will change the environment in which Gibraltar operates, and there are some people—I accept that they are a minority at present in Gibraltar—who understand that and believe that Gibraltar has a far better future in a wholly open environment as a full member of the EU. That is likely to be my view, but in the end, it is a matter for the people of Gibraltar to make the choice, because it is their life, not ours.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Does not the Foreign Secretary think that it was strange and indeed discourteous to the House that at no time during last Thursday's debate in Westminster Hall did the Minister for Europe ever mention the fact that further talks would be taking place yesterday? Does not that illustrate why the House is so suspicious of what the Government are doing?

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Gentleman is wrong. He owes an expression of regret to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe, because we made that announcement.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Is it not the case, in respect of the events of the past few years, that trying to negotiate an agreed constitutional settlement that is acceptable to the people of Gibraltar is simply hopeless without the prerequisite of confidence-building measures on the part of the Spanish Government? Such measures need to be in place over a period. The suggestion that there are no diplomatic levers that the UK Government can use with Spain short of sending a gunboat into Cadiz is frankly ridiculous.

Mr. Straw: I do not think that that view is shared by Liberal Democrat Front Benchers or by many other people. Between 1987, when the airport agreement failed, and the resumption of negotiations under the Brussels process last year, this Government and previous Governments have sought—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let the Foreign Secretary answer the question.

Mr. Straw: In that period, various diplomatic negotiating devices were tried by Conservative and Labour Administrations. None of them worked, so the proof is there that the Brussels process provides us with the best possible means of solving this matter.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Is it not supremely unedifying for our Foreign Secretary to presume to know better than the people and elected Government of Gibraltar what is in their best interests? If he wants to put the issue of sovereignty to rest, should not he quite simply refuse ever to discuss it with Spain? Will he bear it in mind that the last time we tried a joint sovereignty solution—in the Falkland Islands—it merely increased the appetite of those who had malign intentions towards British territory and citizens?

Mr. Straw: I dealt with that point at some length, so I refer the hon. Gentleman to earlier answers.

I should like to point out to the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) that, in Westminster Hall on 31 January, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe specifically announced that

> "the next in the series of ministerial meetings in the Brussels process will be held in London on 4 February."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 31 January 2002; Vol. 379, c. 138WH.]

The right hon. Gentleman owes my right hon. Friend an apology.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Will the Foreign Secretary explain to the House the difference between our relationship with Gibraltar and that of Spain with Ceuta and Manila? Why are there not two separate sets of negotiations in which Spain can change its relationship with Ceuta and Melilla while his Government are seeking to change our relationship with Gibraltar? Furthermore, he said that Gibraltar was in the dock in the European Court of Justice for not applying directives. Of course, it had no political representation concerning those directives. Neither Gibraltar nor its people were represented in any discussions whatever, as they have no directly elected Members of the European Parliament. Will he therefore take this opportunity to confirm the words of the Minister for Europe and tell us that Gibraltarians will not only be guaranteed British citizenship, but have the right to elect their very own Members of the European Parliament?

Mr. Straw: We have already accepted that judgment and work is in hand. Gibraltar would have to be part of another constituency. Let me explain to the House that we have got this problem because of an unsatisfactory outcome to the negotiations in 1713 following a slightly inconclusive result in the war of Spanish succession. That is the truth: in 1713, insufficient attention was given to the prospects 300 years later for negotiations with Spain. That is why we are in a unique legal position in respect of the sovereignty of Gibraltar. Had the treaty of Utrecht resulted in the United Kingdom gaining Gibraltar without any first refusal for Spain, we would not be in our current difficulties. However, the legal base of our title to the Rock is different, and so the problems exist.

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): The Foreign Secretary claims that there is no serious alternative to his proposal. Why has not he considered the obvious alternative of giving the people of Gibraltar the same rights as the people of the overseas territories of France and Spain, and allowing them the option of full integration into the United Kingdom?

Mr. Straw: That proposal has not been put before us, but if it happened, all Gibraltar's economic and tax advantages would go.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): I declare my interest as an active member of the all-party group on Gibraltar. The Foreign Secretary has said repeatedly that he wants constructive suggestions about the way forward. Would not he be wiser to recognise that his job as British Foreign Secretary is to represent the British people of Gibraltar in their complaints about Spain's bad behaviour? Since he refuses to do that, will he acknowledge that he has caused additional offence, as one of my Gibraltarian friends with family in my constituency said, by appointing as the Minister responsible someone who is less British than the people of Gibraltar?

Mr. Straw: That shows a certain poverty of argument. Of course I try to represent the interests of the people of Gibraltar in the negotiations; I am the only person at the head of a delegation on our side. I should much prefer Peter Caruana, the elected representative of the people of Gibraltar, to sit alongside me so that there could be two flags and three voices. I look forward to the realisation of that hope.

Ofsted Annual Report

4.22 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Estelle Morris): I am delighted, Mr. Speaker, to lay the 2000-01 report from Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools before Parliament. Let me begin by thanking and paying tribute to Mike Tomlinson, whose last annual report we are considering. He has made a huge contribution to education as a teacher and inspector, and I know that he will continue to do that after he steps down from his current post in April. I also thank the inspectors and those who work for Ofsted for their professionalism and dedication.

Ofsted has shown the value of an independent inspectorate, identifying the strengths and weaknesses in our education system and telling it as it is. I congratulate the schools that appear on this year's list of outstanding schools and all those who work with them. We also congratulate and thank the more than 200 schools that have been removed from special measures this year.

Today's report shows that the quality of education is getting better. Our education system was recently acknowledged as a star performer by the programme for international student assessment study. We can be sure at last that we have a good and improving education system. We know that further improvements are needed; big challenges are ahead that need to be addressed.

Quality of teaching and school leadership is key to raising standards. The report describes teaching in the past year as the best ever. The proportion of lessons found to be unsatisfactory is the lowest ever recorded and the proportion of teaching found to be good or better has never been higher.

Schools are reported as being increasingly well led and managed. That is a tremendous achievement and I thank and applaud teachers, heads and all those who work in our schools for their hard work.

The chief inspector's report acknowledges the enormous gains that have been made in recent years through reforms to primary education. Between 1997 and 2000, the proportion of children attaining level 4 by the end of key stage 2 increased by more than 10 per cent. for both literacy and numeracy. This year saw continuing improvements in science, but results for literacy and numeracy levelled off. Although that was disappointing, the chief inspector acknowledged that

> "we cannot expect progress to be even, year on year,"

and that

> "We should, however, remind ourselves of how far we have come."

As levels of achievement rise, it is inevitably more difficult to maintain the rates of improvement that we have seen to date. As we move towards our goals, the challenge will be greater, but we are determined to meet it.

At secondary level, too, management and leadership continue to improve, with the proportion of schools in which Ofsted judge these to be unsatisfactory now down to just one in 20. Achievement has also risen, with the Government's target of 50 per cent. of our children attaining five A to C grades at GCSE achieved one year ahead of schedule.

The chief inspector reports that in most special schools, pupils are achieving well, and that that improvement has been particularly marked in schools for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. In the mainstream, too, the achievements of pupils with special educational needs are showing welcome improvement. As a result of the further improvements in teaching and leadership, the number of schools in special measures has fallen again, and those that do fall into special measures are recovering more quickly. This year, 137 schools were placed in special measures, compared to 230 the previous year, and 194 schools have improved sufficiently to remove them from special measures altogether.

The report contains some encouraging findings, but we should not be complacent about the scale of the challenge still ahead of us. We have much more to do, as is also set out in the report. The chief inspector comments on

> "the variation in performance between schools."

He says that

> "the gap between the highest and lowest attaining schools remains too large."

Ofsted goes on to report that, while the gap between the highest and lowest performing schools is narrowing at primary level, it has widened at secondary level. Closing this achievement gap is one of the main aims of the Government's policies and we are determined to make even further progress. As the report notes, our literacy and numeracy strategies have closed the gap in primary schools, and we will further address the secondary school gap as part of our secondary schools reform.

While standards of achievement are rising for the majority of our pupils, Ofsted believes that some children continue to be failed by the system. It has been a national disgrace that children in care leave school with so few academic qualifications. Our children in care programme shows that there are early signs of improvement, but being able to say that the latest figures show that only 37 per cent. of young people leaving care in 2000–01 obtained one or more GCSEs or GNVQs—up from 30 per cent. the previous year—reveals just how far we have to go with that group of people.

The performance of certain ethnic groups is still one of significant under-achievement, but although there is still some way to go, improvements have been made. The youth cohort study published in January 2001 reveals a significant improvement in the achievement of many ethnic groups at GCSE level. Although there is as yet no similar national data source for the primary sector, the latest key stage 2 test results show that inner-city local education authorities with high ethnic minority populations are among the most improved in the country. This year we are introducing new national data collection arrangements, which will help the performance of ethnic minority pupils to be monitored locally and nationally. That will help us to ensure that resources are better targeted at need.

I am pleased that HMCI draws attention to the value of the excellence in cities programme for pupils in our urban areas. It is already making an impact because standards in schools benefiting from the programme are rising faster than elsewhere. The latest key stage 3 English tests showed an improvement in inner-city schools four times the improvement elsewhere. I am progressively extending the programme to more schools in clusters of deprivation beyond the inner cities. Twelve new excellence clusters are now operating, and I intend 12 more to start in September. They will be in Barnet, Bishop Auckland, Crewe, Derby, High Wycombe, Hillingdon, Lancaster, Milton Keynes, Norwich, Peterborough, Stockport and Wigan.

The fundamental challenge, of course, is to improve the quality of education for all our children. That is what we have set out to do through our White Paper, which is an agenda that aims for nothing short of the transformation of secondary education. That programme is given added weight by the report we have received today.

At the core of secondary transformation is the key stage 3 strategy. Too much time and previous gain is lost in the transition from primary to secondary school and we know that dissatisfaction with schooling can take hold at that stage. We need to turn that around and use those early years of secondary education to build on achievements at primary level and to provide a solid platform for attainment in the 14-to-19 phase.

We are investing £489 million in our key stage 3 strategy between now and 2003–04 and early feedback from Ofsted and schools is very encouraging. From September this school year, the strategy began to impact on 1.8 million of our children, building on the best of the literacy and numeracy strategies in primary schools, to achieve a similar step change in performance at secondary level.

Schools will also have to be structured more to meet the needs of the individual pupil. We have made progress with individual pupil targeting, learning mentors for individual students and encouraging secondary schools to have a distinctive mission and ethos and to accept their responsibility to other schools and the wider education community. That is where beacon and specialist schools have an important role to play. We want all schools to develop a sense of mission and, in doing so, to develop centres of excellence and networks that lead to innovation and higher standards for all children.

Yesterday, I announced the biggest ever expansion of the specialist schools programme. By September 2002, we shall have 1,000, each teaching a full and balanced curriculum, using their additional specialism as a catalyst for whole-school improvement and increasingly sharing that expertise with other schools.

The best ideas on school improvement are so often developed in the schools themselves. We want our best schools to be the innovators of educational reform. That is why we are giving them greater autonomy and supporting innovation so that it has an impact on the whole system, but none of that can happen without teachers.

The report acknowledges, as we do, that teacher recruitment and retention continue to pose a challenge, but the chief inspector acknowledges that the measures that we have introduced are beginning to bear fruit. Apart from rapidly increasing numbers of people starting training and joining the profession, the alternative routes are expanding fast too.

Retention is mentioned by the chief inspector as a particular concern. A great deal has been asked of teachers and we need to make sure that they are supported to do their jobs. I know that work load is a key issue. I see giving teachers the time that they need to teach as critical to raising standards of achievement. At the end of April, the School Teachers Pay Review Body will make recommendations on work load.

Behaviour in schools is reported by Ofsted to be generally good, but the poor behaviour of a minority of pupils is reported as a significant factor in teachers' decisions to leave the profession. To help teachers to tackle disruption effectively, we have expanded our programme of on-site learning support units and learning mentors. About 3,000 learning mentors have been recruited and 323 pupil referral units are providing more places with better quality teaching. Our Connexions service will also offer advice to young people throughout the country when it is rolled out nationally later this year.

As *The Times Educational Supplement* survey reported last Friday, teaching is a profession on the up. It found that the typical teacher enjoys an improved standard of living and enjoys the job and that seven out of 10 teachers are satisfied with their jobs.

The Ofsted report is an important document. Its value is in its independence. It demonstrates the real gains that have been made and continue to be made in our schools. It also signposts for us continuing challenges, which we intend to address in raising standards further still.

The report states that one reason that teachers leave the profession is lack of esteem. They have no reason to think that their profession is anything other than one of the most important in this land. I hope that Members of the House will join me in paying tribute to teachers for what they have achieved for our children. We have it on Ofsted's authority that the quality of their work has never been better.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): I thank the Secretary of State for giving me a copy of her statement in advance, and join her in praising Mike Tomlinson and his inspectors at Ofsted.

The right hon. Lady was assiduous in picking out the positive aspects of the report, and of course no one can blame her for that. I too pay tribute to teachers and all others working in schools for the hard work they are putting in and the successes that they are seeing, but in her honest moments the right hon. Lady will admit that serious problems have been identified by the chief inspector, and that, alarmingly—she did not mention this—some are becoming worse year by year. The report reveals that the right hon. Lady's strategy of centralising and interfering as much as possible can yield some short-term successes, but it sows the seeds of its own destruction by demoralising the work force—the teachers whom she and I both admire.

Let me start with the primary sector. As the House knows, it is the part of the school system that the Prime Minister thinks has been "sorted". I hope he reads the report, and notes that of Ofsted's six main findings on primary schools one is positive, three are neutral and two are negative. This, remember, is the Government's best area of attainment—but there are many questions that the Secretary of State did not address.

Can the right hon. Lady tell us why she thinks reading standards have fallen among 11-year-olds, why performance in maths has become worse at the same stage, and why spelling is becoming worse in tests for 11-year-olds? By any standards, those are basic skills for our 11-year-old children. Can she also explain why Ofsted says that underperformance by boys—by comparison with girls—in English is becoming worse by the year?

Will the right hon. Lady address questions relating to the curriculum? Ofsted says that all the primary head teachers it surveyed are finding it difficult to sustain as broad and balanced a curriculum as they would like.

[Mr. Damian Green]

Indeed, using a bland phrase that it must have hoped no one would notice, it says that one school in five can provide a curriculum that is broad and exciting, and challenges pupils across the full range of national expectations.

Let me translate. According to Ofsted, four out of five primary schools are not providing a broad, exciting and challenging curriculum. Is the right hon. Lady as alarmed by that finding as I am, and does she accept responsibility? Does she accept that the very strategies about which she boasted in her statement contribute to the narrowing of the curriculum?

In the secondary sector, problems are getting worse under the right hon. Lady's stewardship. Can she tell us why the gap between high-performing and low-performing schools is becoming wider? Can she say what steps she is taking to reverse the erosion of foreign language teaching identified by Ofsted, which she did not mention? Why—most alarming—is truancy so rampant? Ofsted says that more than a quarter of our secondary schools have unsatisfactory attendance levels, and the figure rises to 37 per cent. among those that have been inspected fully. That is a terrible figure, which should really frighten the Secretary of State.

Will the right hon. Lady address herself urgently to the underlying cause of these growing difficulties—the crisis of teacher retention, which has been brought about by some of the policies of which she is so proud? Ofsted says that the quality of teaching is in jeopardy in some schools, and that this is no longer an inner-city issue. Equally important are the findings that more teachers are being asked to teach outside their specialisms, and that the proportion of poor teaching is, in Ofsted's words, "considerably higher" among temporary or supply teachers—which is what we would expect.

The right hon. Lady is asking teachers to do jobs for which they are not trained. Every interfering directive from her Department adds to teachers' work load, and persuades a few more to bale out for a quieter life. The Department is not the solution to the crisis in teacher numbers; it is the main cause of the problem.

As Conservatives, we know that every day teachers, pupils, parents and governors put in an immense amount of hard work so that our schools can flourish. We worry that the interfering, centralising, bureaucratic way in which the Government behave towards schools and local government makes that task harder. The report shows that any improvements based on centralised command and control are fragile at best. Will the right hon. Lady heed its message and for once start trusting heads, teachers and everyone else in education to get on with their job?

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Estelle Morris: I thought that that was a bit grudging. The hon. Gentleman started with a sentence or two of praise but his analysis quickly declined.

I think that there is general agreement about the progress made. The chief inspector talks about the finest ever teaching, fewer lessons being taught unsatisfactorily, fewer schools going into special measures, and those that are in special measures being removed from them more quickly. That does not happen with a teaching work force who are demoralised and are not doing their job well. It has happened because there is a true partnership between central Government and local authorities to support teachers, governors, classroom assistants and others to raise standards in schools.

Let us talk about central prescription. If the Government had not introduced the literacy and numeracy strategies, improvement would not have taken place in the schools that needed it most. The good schools—those that were already improving and those achieving at the highest level—would have taken what the literacy and numeracy strategies had to offer, but those that were probably not teaching effectively would not have done so.

Teachers have got to the stage where they take from the literacy and numeracy strategies, bring their professional judgment to bear and mould those strategies to the needs of individual pupils. If we had not insisted that teachers address the problem and if we had not supported them through money for professional development, that would not have happened over the past five years. Tory Members, particularly Tory spokesmen and spokeswomen, are the only people in this country who do not acknowledge that the literacy and numeracy strategies have been the success story of this Department.

Other things would not have happened without the Government, who are accused of central prescription. Mike Tomlinson said in his report that where support and effort are targeted through the excellence in the cities and education action zone initiatives, progress is made at a faster rate than elsewhere. That is a success.

We were always straight about the rate of progress. We always said that in the first four years we would prioritise primary and early years education. We did so. We delivered and it worked. At the second election, we always said that we would prioritise secondary education. That is exactly what we will do because we are addressing the difficulties at secondary school. We will build on our work in the first term. The results show that with targeted effort, financial support and partnership between the Government and others, standards can be raised.

I share the concerns of the hon. Gentleman that no progress has been made on truancy and attendance. A number of people, including the Government, must do all that they can to ensure that we improve that record. First, there is a responsibility on parents. Mike Tomlinson notes that 80 per cent. of children who miss school do so with the permission of the parents. As I say repeatedly to parents, letting their child miss school when there is no need damages their child's life chances. We must get that message across.

Schools need to do their best and they must be more assiduous in following up early absence as quickly as possible. We need to give support by spreading good practice and through measures such as electronic registration, but the hon. Gentleman is right; the report says that little progress has been made on truancy. It remains a concern. If children are not at school, they cannot learn. If they do not learn in our society, their life chances when they leave education are not as good as they should be.

On teacher recruitment and retention, Mike Tomlinson says in the report:

> "Although nationally there are very few teaching posts with no one to fill them and most pupils have a suitably qualified teacher to teach them, there are real problems in recruiting teachers and in retaining them."

I know that. It is precisely why the Government have introduced golden hellos and training salaries. In the Education Bill currently before Parliament, we are introducing measures to pay off loans. It is not the case that there are now fewer teachers than there were last year. In fact, there are 7,000 more teachers than there were last year and 12,000 more teachers than there were in 1997. More people are going into teacher training than at any time during the past decade. In the past year alone, 7,000 more teaching posts have been created because heads have more money in their hands. The dilemma is that additional money has led to more vacancies and I have never pretended anything other than that.

I conclude by quoting the chief inspector again:

> "Action is being taken by the Government to deal with these concerns, but there are no quick fixes."

Mr. Damian Green: What about language teaching?

Estelle Morris: The United Kingdom has a long history of failure to teach modern languages. It is a cyclical problem and it is not improving. As we teach languages more ineffectively, fewer students study them at A-level, fewer take a university degree in them and fewer train to teach languages. In due course, the Government will announce how we intend to tackle the problem.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): My right hon. Friend will know that the Select Committee on Education and Skills will shortly examine the report in some detail with the chief inspector, so I shall not ask a substantial question, but I welcome her decision to make a statement to the House today. Does she agree that the atmosphere in the school teaching profession generally has much improved with the appointment of Mike Tomlinson as chief inspector? As Chairman of the Select Committee I see great evidence of that as I travel round the country visiting schools. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the new partnership is a healthy one? The chief inspector is answerable to the House through the Select Committee and we have a healthy, but not a cosy relationship with him. We have detected a clear change for the better under Mike Tomlinson's reign as chief inspector and we look forward to interviewing David Bell when he takes over.

Estelle Morris: I am also a fan of Mike Tomlinson, who has done an excellent job since taking it on at relatively short notice. I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Chairman of the Select Committee shares my view. There is a real difference in tone, because teachers are more confident. They know that they are teaching more effectively; their performance is better and children are getting better results. It is important that Ofsted remains independent. I am glad that my hon. Friend is not too cosy with Mike Tomlinson and I trust that he will not be too cosy with David Bell either.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): I also thank the Secretary of State for giving us an advance copy of her statement and I share the interest of the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) in the fact that this is the first time we have had a statement in the House on an HMI report—indeed on the very day when we are short of time to discuss the Education Bill. I draw no conclusions from that.

I add my thanks to Mike Tomlinson. It is not just that teachers are more confident; Mike Tomlinson has created a new ethos within Ofsted—a genuine sense that the purpose of inspection is to improve schools and that Ofsted is working with teachers rather than against them. We certainly wish Mike Tomlinson well when he goes to Hackney—it is certainly an improvement on *The Daily Telegraph*.

I also join the Secretary of State in congratulating our schools, our teachers and our local education authorities. This report is the biggest compliment to our teaching force that we have seen for many years. I suggest that the Secretary of State put on all her literature a little statement saying that teaching in 2000-01 was the best ever. That would be a powerful statement to put on a press release and send out to all teachers.

I also welcome the compliment that the inspector's report paid to special schools, which rarely get mentioned. I hope the House will accept that the statement that they are working with children with emotional and behavioural difficulties far better than ever before is a real compliment.

We are also delighted that far more schools are being turned round much more quickly from needing special measures or showing serious signs of weakness. I wonder whether the Secretary of State will have the grace to praise local education authorities, because the vast majority of those schools have been turned round not by private sector companies but by such authorities.

However, the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) is absolutely right to say that a lot of messages in the report are not being specifically addressed. How the Secretary of State proposes to narrow the gap between high-performing and low-performing schools is a mystery. We were told that education action zones will do the job, but she has abandoned them and one of the great planks of her policy is therefore missing. How does she propose to address the huge problem of the underperformance of children from Afro-Caribbean, Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities? In particular, what plans has she to recruit teachers from those communities? Until we do that, we will not make the necessary impact on that underperformance.

How does the Secretary of State intend to correct the finding of this year's report—and, indeed, of last year's—that too many children are being taught by non-specialists at key stage 3? The curriculum and staffing survey should have been carried out in 2000, but it was not. When does she intend to carry out that essential research, so that we can make proper plans for the future supply of teachers?

Can the Secretary of State also explain how we will provide an adequate supply of teachers—a point that the report describes as critical? In September, delayed retirements that were initiated under the previous Conservative Government will come to fruition, and more teachers will retire this year than ever before. Given that recruitment targets have been missed every year since 1997, how will we deal with that problem, particularly in key subjects such as mathematics, science and modern languages?

It is all very well for the Secretary of State to quote *The Times Educational Supplement* survey; in fact, she should quote the evidence in the report, which shows that one in five teachers are leaving within three years. What is she going to do to address that horrendous problem?

Estelle Morris: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not deny me the opportunity to quote *The Times Educational Supplement*—it provided the first decent headline on this

[Estelle Morris]

subject in about five years. Give me a break—it was a joy to read on Friday morning. I sometimes think that our Department's headed notepaper has too many words at the bottom, but I take the general point that there is an onus on all of us to praise, and I certainly accept my responsibility to ensure that I am as generous when I give praise as when I criticise failure or demand even more from teachers. We must get the balance right. Teachers often hear words of criticism but not praise. We do not want to soft-soap them or to make their life easy—indeed, they do not want that. They want us to recognise good performance, and to challenge them when necessary.

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) raised many issues, and I too am delighted at the performance of schools that deal with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Theirs is the toughest job in teaching and it is more difficult now than ever, because of the nature of the society in which such children are growing up.

The hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) mentioned closing the achievement gap, and I want to return to that issue because I may not have dealt with it fully. He will acknowledge that, as Mike Tomlinson says, we have closed the achievement gap in primary schools. We did so through a universal programme for the literacy and numeracy strategies, but we also provided extra targeted help for those who were under-achieving. Where there was an entitlement to resources and training, every single primary school in the country was offered extra training and support, as well as help for those who needed it most. If my memory serves me right, we began with the 15 per cent. with the lowest level of achievement each year, and moved on to the next 15 per cent. We raised the standards year on year, and that is exactly what we will do with key stage 3.

We will have a universal strategy for key stage 3, and every single school in the country will feel its impact. Every school will get money and every teacher will get training, but those who need it most will get more help from the consultants—in fact, those schools will get more of whatever is going. What we do not want to do—and the hon. Gentleman will recognise the danger—is to hold the top schools back while the bottom ones catch up. I know that he would not wish that to happen either. The report shows that standards in the least well performing secondary schools have risen, but so have those of the top schools.

Our approach is always to give help to everyone, and to give extra, targeted help to those who need it most. I am confident about that approach, because it worked in primary schools. We have learned from that experience. We are good learners, and I hope that our secondary school strategy will have the same impact.

I also take seriously the difficulty caused by the lack of specialist teachers in early key stage 3. We have already discussed the situation regarding modern foreign languages, and we know how difficult it is to get enough maths teachers. However, I have always been straight enough to say that I cannot promise that we will recruit for teaching 40 per cent. of the maths graduates leaving university this year. That is the proportion that we need to reach our target.

We have to do more, and the key stage 3 strategy allows us to train teachers to teach maths who have not achieved the necessary qualifications. People who do not have degrees need extra teaching; they do not deserve to be driven from the classroom. We have to tackle the problem on all fronts.

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough knows that we have made progress in recruiting teachers to teach maths, and I shall not go through the list. However, I accept that more needs to be done with regard to training those who are already in schools but teaching out of their subject. That is an integral part of the key stage 3 strategy.

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough mentioned the problem of recruiting ethnic minority teachers. Again, we must break a cycle—people who do not do well at school do not go to university because of their bad experience of school, and they choose not to go back to school. Some years ago, the Teacher Training Agency agreed to have targets for the recruitment of ethnic minority teachers. Progress is slow, as it involves breaking a cultural tradition.

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough will know that most progress on the matter is being made in areas such as Tower Hamlets. In inner-city Birmingham, sometimes more than half of the people working in a school are from ethnic minorities. That is good, but we must keep to the targets. Advice from any quarter—inside the House, and outside it—on how we can do more in regard to recruitment of ethnic minority staff will be welcomed. I know that the notion of a role model is very important for many youngsters going through secondary school.

Ms Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): I am deeply disappointed that only three of the four outstanding schools in Lewisham—Brindishe, St. Winifred's and New Woodlands—are in my constituency. However, another school in my constituency—Launcelot—is coming out of special measures. The progress being made in my area is therefore remarkable.

Will my right hon. Friend say a little more about how outstanding schools can help others in the same borough to achieve more? Will she also say something more about the problem of truancy? She will know about Lewisham council's initiative on truancy, and the consultation that is in hand at present. What does she believe should be done to ensure that children who become disaffected with school return to education and become achievers?

Estelle Morris: I congratulate my hon. Friend on having three outstanding schools in her constituency. There must have been an awful lot of Ofsted inspections in her area this year, but I hope that she will send the schools my congratulations. I especially congratulate the school that has come out of special measures. It is tough for a school to go into special measures, and it is tough while those measures apply, but it should be an immensely joyous moment for staff when a school comes out of special measures. Today is a day of celebration for those teachers, as well as for the staff in the couple of hundred schools in the same position. I also pay tribute to the work that Lewisham has done.

Schools that are not performing well should learn from the ones that are. The answers can be gleaned from good teachers, not from Government. Our job is to make the links, and many of the initiatives and structural changes proposed in the Education Bill to be discussed later are about freeing up and encouraging good schools to twin with underperforming schools. In that way, staff can learn from one another.

It is important to remember that learning is not a one-way process. I have never known a good school help an underperforming one and not learn something of value. I hope that that will remain the case in Lewisham and elsewhere.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): The Secretary of State said that, in their first Parliament, the Government concentrated on primary schools. Will she therefore offer a little more explanation of what appears on page 22 of the chief inspector's report? In one of his main findings, the chief inspector states:

> "Many aspects of primary education have again shown some improvement this year, but in some key areas there has been little or no measurable progress."

What is the right hon. Lady going to do to improve that over the next 12 months?

Estelle Morris: Transforming 17,000 primary schools, with 17,000 head teachers and governing bodies and hundreds of thousands of teachers, will take some time. The mess we inherited after 20 years of Tory misrule was such that—I apologise to the House—it will take us slightly more than four years to put everything right. However, I am immensely proud of what the Government have done and immensely proud of the progress that has been made in primary schools. Yes, we shall take on the progress that still needs to be made. Yes, we shall look at closing the gap further. Yes, we shall look at those schools that are still in special measures. Yes, we shall look at the underperformance of ethnic minority pupils. What is absolutely clear, however—and not just because I say it, but because Ofsted and Her Majesty's chief inspector say it—is that there is more progress than falling back. As Mike Tomlinson says, the report is a good one and primary schools are indeed a success story.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): The Secretary of State and the Government deserve our congratulations, as well as our thanks for the continued success of the Government's education policies, for their recognition that more needs to be done and for their commitment to do it. Is my right hon. Friend aware that Dunston Hill community primary school in my constituency has been singled out in the report as being particularly successful? Will she join me in congratulating the teachers and, in particular, the pupils on their hard work in achieving that? Does she agree that the school thoroughly deserves to be awarded beacon status?

May I also draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the hard work being done in Hadrian special school in Newcastle, which is a model of how to help and assist young people with special educational needs?

Estelle Morris: I am happy to do that. If I heard my hon. Friend rightly, that sounded like a bid for beacon status. I am sure that the school stands a good chance and that it will be considered in due course. I also hope that those schools gain recognition locally. The media in my hon. Friend's area give education good and positive support. During the next few weeks, I hope that the performance of schools that have been nominated as outstanding will truly be recognised and rewarded.

It is important to remember that some of the schools in that list serve the most challenging areas of the country. They have the most difficult job—breaking the historical link between poverty and underachievement. That is what lies behind the words in the report. My hon. Friend's constituency includes many such areas and I am delighted to join him in his tribute.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): I agree with the Secretary of State that there is much to celebrate as regards the success of our schools outlined in the Ofsted report. However, as a fair person, the right hon. Lady will acknowledge that the improvements in our schools did not take place over five years—they go further back than her period in office.

I pay particular tribute to a school in my constituency that was mentioned in dispatches—St. John's middle school. The Secretary of State will be aware that there are many outstanding schools in my patch and we offer our congratulations to St. John's on its mention this year.

May I ask the right hon. Lady about her plans for the teaching of foreign languages? After many years of relative failure, that is a great disappointment to all of us. Does the right hon. Lady have any plans to exploit our links with the European Union—for example, by creating teacher scholarships or initiating teacher exchanges—to tap into the resources available to our partners in Europe to provide competent modern language training?

Estelle Morris: The hon. Lady's comments on foreign languages are positive. My reply is similar to the one I gave the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) about maths teachers. If we carry on in the same way, there will be no change and things will continue to get worse. I hope that the hon. Lady can be patient because in the not too distant future we shall make an announcement about the teaching of modern languages. As she suggests, we should use modern foreign language expertise wherever it may be—using our connections not only with schools in Europe, but with language departments in universities and elsewhere. We should exploit that. Imaginative and creative thinking will break the logjam. I very much hope that when we make further announcements, the hon. Lady will find much to applaud, but I accept that we have much to do in order to catch up. I feel a great sense of shame when I meet my European counterparts and they talk about the quality of English teaching in their country, given our lack of ability to teach foreign languages at all in primary schools—let alone teach them effectively in secondary schools.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): When my right hon. Friend makes her announcement on foreign languages, will she examine the way in which Endon high school is trying to improve its teaching of modern languages?

I welcome and appreciate the hard work that has gone into the report. In Stoke-on-Trent and in Staffordshire, we are starting to see real improvements on the ground. I hope that my right hon. Friend will use the report to persuade her Cabinet colleagues that we need urgently to review the standard spending assessments and the area cost adjustments.

[Ms Joan Walley]

The report highlights the outstanding achievement of St. Margaret Ward Roman Catholic high school. The inspector says:

> "It achieves very high standards in art and music because teachers have very high expectations to which pupils respond very well."

Robbie Williams, who is an ex-pupil of that school, has donated £50,000 towards specialist college status and is absolutely desperate—as am I, as well as the six primary schools that are feeder schools to that school in Stoke-on-Trent—to get specialist college status for the performing arts. When my right hon. Friend considers the next round in March, will she look very closely at what the inspector has said? I hope that it will not be too long before I am welcoming the fact that we have achieved that specialist college status in Stoke-on-Trent.

Estelle Morris: My hon. Friend is a fearsome advocate for the schools in her constituency. The area started from a low base and has been traditionally neglected in allocating additional resources. It certainly suffers from not having the best standing in the standard spending assessment allocation table. I grant all that, but my hon. Friend will not like what I am going to say. I certainly look forward to a further application for specialist school status from the school in her constituency that she mentions, but that teaches us that being an outstanding school is not sufficient in itself to achieve specialist school status. Achieving that status is about schools working with other schools, spreading their expertise elsewhere and taking on even more demanding targets and using the extra resources to meet them, but it is clear that that school has very good foundations on which to work. I know how disappointed the school was not to be successful this time, but I hope that the report gives it the confidence to try again.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I thank the Secretary of State for the fact that, in the list of schools accorded specialist schools status yesterday, she included King Arthur's school, Wincanton, and Frome community college, which are in my constituency. I congratulate the governing bodies of those schools on all their hard work. That status brings an enormous benefit to the local community and the schools with which it interacts. However, all schools should have access to the extra resources that allow them to develop their capabilities. The right hon. Lady may recognise the fact that governing bodies go through agonies in trying to make the areas of excellence in their schools conform to the established framework, underpinning the whole curriculum and not just a single subject. Does she accept that there may be an argument for more flexibility in the categories of specialist schools to enable those schools to have the freedom to follow their noses towards the excellence that they can provide in the local community?

Estelle Morris: I am pleased that two schools in the hon. Gentleman's constituency were designated as specialist schools. He is probably pleased that his hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough, who speaks from the Liberal Democrat Front Bench, did not have the chance to abolish the status before his schools achieved it. The Liberal Democrats have more than spent the penny on income tax; they do not have enough money left to grant all the money to all the schools that might want specialist school status.

I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman makes about the sorts of specialism. We have expanded the categories this session, as he knows. Our minds are never totally closed to what will happen in the future, but it is probably important that we develop the criteria in a way that is manageable for us, by working with our partners, as we see the demand arise. For example, in developing engineering schools, we have worked with the Engineering Employers Federation and the universities, which find very difficult to recruit people for engineering degrees.

I would not want to say, "You have a specialism in whatever you like and let us know." I know that that was not what the hon. Gentleman was suggesting, but there would be a real danger that such an approach would undermine the rigour of the system. I assure him that we will expand the programme as quickly as we can, as standards rise. We will not say that we will never again consider the need for further specialism to be added to our current list.

Mr. Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): I associate myself with the remarks about Mike Tomlinson. He has brought a different tone to the Ofsted inspection, which has benefited the process. My right hon. Friend may care to note that *The Daily Telegraph* has dispensed with the employment of a certain columnist. I do not know whether any assessment has been made of the individual's competence.

Mr. Willis: They probably deserve each another.

Mr. Shaw: Indeed. When my right hon. Friend introduces the Green Paper on the curriculum for 14 to 19-year-olds, will she take account of the fact that many boys in secondary schools find that a purely academic curriculum does not suit their needs? That may be one of the factors that explains the lack of improvement on truancy. If a curriculum is completely alien to young people and they do not feel that it meets their aspirations, they are not likely to embrace it with much enthusiasm, and the result will be more truancy.

On special measures, is my right hon. Friend concerned that schools that are designated as having serious weaknesses may slip into special measures? Perhaps local authorities might focus their good work on schools in the serious weaknesses category, so that they do not get worse before they get better.

Estelle Morris: On disaffection, truancy and disengagement from the curriculum, I know that my hon. Friend did not suggest this, but the mere fact of young people being fed up at school does not mean that they should play truant. There should be no misunderstanding about that—there is never an excuse for not sticking with school. However, it may sometimes be an explanation.

For too long, this country has not valued vocational work. The routes and pathways through to higher education and continued learning for youngsters who are interested in vocational work have not been as clear as they should be. I have always paid tribute to the last Conservative Government, who tried to put that right with general national vocational qualifications and national vocational qualifications. Although their introduction did not work as it should have done, I have always said that they were an honest attempt.

We will shortly introduce our plans for 14 to 19-year-olds, and I hope that my hon. Friend will be pleased with that and will feel that it goes some way to meeting young people's needs.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): The Secretary of State will know my concerns about recruitment and retention in the London borough of Hillingdon. I therefore give a cautious welcome to Hillingdon's inclusion in the excellence clusters. Will she congratulate the London borough of Hillingdon on the priority that it places on education? In particular, will she congratulate two schools in my constituency—Abbotsfield school and West Drayton primary school—that have come out of special measures? May I also take this opportunity, on behalf of those schools, to invite her to visit them, so that she can see the excellent work that they have done?

Estelle Morris: I am happy to join the hon. Gentleman in congratulating those schools. I know that, as a local Member, he takes a strong interest in what goes on in the schools in his constituency, and I have received delegations from him. He has always been present on those occasions on which I have attended Hillingdon schools in the past. He is an enthusiast for education, which is greatly to be welcomed.

I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman is pleased that his constituency is in an excellence cluster. It will make a difference. Like beacon status and specialist school status, the excellence cluster is a part of Government policy that people criticise but which, if one is on offer, they want for themselves. I do not have a problem with that. I have no doubt that I shall return to Hillingdon in the future, and I shall certainly bear his kind invitation in mind. Meanwhile, if he could pass on my best wishes and congratulations to the two schools, I should be grateful.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I welcome this year's Ofsted report. I also point out to my right hon. Friend that the results in primary schools are reflected clearly in the primary schools in Barnsley. If anybody has any doubts about that, they should visit the primary schools in my constituency.

I want to draw my right hon. Friend's attention to achievement in secondary schools in coalfield areas generally. It is clear that schools in those areas lag behind. Will she consider what additional measures may be taken in education action zones, which have been very good in coalfield areas, to ensure that we can lift the attainment rate to the national average as quickly as possible?

Estelle Morris: My hon. Friend has made a very fair point. If we look at performance in the coalfield communities, we see that the nature of their difficulties is very different from those in the inner cities. The coalfield community of Barnsley has underperformed, as has my city of Birmingham, but the causes of that underperformance are totally different. As ever, we need to examine why that underperformance is taking place, and then provide targeted help. A one-size-fits-all approach to raising achievement is not appropriate. I have visited the coalfield communities where it is traditional, as it is in some other areas, to work in one sector. As a result, there has not always been a connection between doing well in education and getting work. My hon. Friend might not share that view, but historically there has been a link between living in an area and getting a job. We need to change that culture and raise people's expectations.

We should learn from each other. I know that the coalfield communities form a strong network. My hon. Friend knows that we are working with local authorities in such areas, especially Yorkshire. By providing extra support in the key stage 3 strategy and by ensuring that communities benefit from the best of the education action zones and the excellence cluster, and that they benefit from the "Aim Higher" campaign, which is designed to encourage young people to aspire to higher education, we are sure that over the years we will make progress. I am delighted to have my hon. Friend as a partner in that.

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): I congratulate Uplands primary school, which is one of several outstanding schools in my constituency. Another outstanding school is Cams Hill secondary school. Before Christmas, its head teacher had to deal with his recruitment and retention crisis by recruiting teachers in Sainsbury's. In that context, I draw the Secretary of State's attention to the key issue outlined on page 90 of the Ofsted report, which says:

> "Teacher shortages are leading to the increased use of temporary supply teachers and the use of permanent teachers to teach subjects in which they are not adequately qualified; this commonly leads to weaker teaching, lower expectations and less effective learning."

What impact will that have on standards? Does not the Secretary of State think that that will put them at risk, especially in light of the recruitment and retention crisis in teaching, particularly in London and the south-east?

Estelle Morris: I shall not go over the figures again, but they show not only that there are more teachers but that more are in training and more have applied to train. It is common sense that continuity of teaching helps children to learn most effectively. Even short-term contracts are not as effective as a teacher being in a school for a longer period. Of course I accept that.

We also have to accept, however, that every school will need supply teachers at some stage, either to cover for teacher absence, because someone has to teach the class, or to cover for teachers who are engaged in professional development. One of our dilemmas is that the increase in demand for supply teachers is partly due to the fact that we are providing more opportunities for professional development. We have reflected on that and know that we need to do something about it. That is why we have taken action. Unlike other Governments, we are ensuring that training opportunities are also available for supply teachers so that they can be trained in literacy and numeracy. It is not fair to them or the children to put them in schools without the training that they need.

Many people, especially women, would sooner work as a supply teacher than have a permanent contract because it gives them flexibility. My opinion is not significantly different from the hon. Gentleman's on that. I do not want to demean or downgrade the work that supply teachers choose to do, but I would never claim that a supply

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teacher is preferable to a permanent teacher if that is the head's first choice, because a permanent teacher offers the child continuous teaching. That is why we have put so much effort and resource into improving recruitment and retention even further.

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): My right hon. Friend rightly drew attention to the report's comments on the variation in progress between schools and the need to raise standards at key stage 3. Will she look at improving the links between primary schools that have achieved beacon status for English and maths and the early years of secondary school, because there is much that they can teach other schools about the best way to make progress in those subjects?

Will my right hon. Friend also consider suggesting to Ofsted that it examine the way in which schools use new technology to improve their teaching, because some schools are far better at utilising that than others? While she is considering the need to provide extra training for those who are teaching maths but are not qualified to do so, will she not forget the large number of teachers who have for many years been teaching English in secondary schools when their first qualification is in another subject? Will she ensure that they receive extra training as well?

Estelle Morris: The answer to all those questions is yes. My hon. Friend made an important point about primary school literacy and numeracy teachers teaching in secondary schools. I must tell secondary teachers that they have been rather slow in waking up to progress in primary schools. The more they go to primary schools to see what is happening, and the more primary schools work with them, the greater is the progress. The only change for a child between years 6 and 7 is the six-week summer holiday. However, we have changed the whole system—the school, the timetable, the routine, the hours, the teachers, the expectations, the lot—and we have not managed that transition as well as we should have done.

My hon. Friend made an excellent suggestion. We have made available £10,500 for all secondary schools from this April, and they can spend some of that on exactly that sort of teacher exchange. I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend's other suggestions, including making sure that teachers without an English qualification who are teaching English get extra support; all of those issues are being addressed by the Government.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): May I start by endorsing the comments of hon. Members about our teaching profession, whose members deserve great credit for many aspects of their work that are highlighted in the report? The Secretary of State makes disparaging comments about the previous Government. Given that she came to the House a few months ago to praise our educational system after the publication of the report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development which highlighted the excellent performance of our 15-year-olds, she would do well to remember that those 15-year-olds spent nine of their 11 years of education under the Conservative Government.

When heads in my constituency tell me that they are losing young teachers because they "want to get a life", should I believe them? When they tell me that they are deluged by bureaucracy and that their jobs, as well as those of their teaching staff and their governing body, are becoming more difficult all the time because of Government initiatives, should I believe them? When they tell me that they are increasingly frustrated that they are not getting support from the Government on discipline in the classroom, should I believe them? And when the chief inspector of schools starts to highlight the future impact of those issues on future examination performance, should we believe him?

Estelle Morris: The hon. Gentleman raised a number of issues. I have acknowledged again today that we ask more of our teachers now than we have ever done before. Teaching is such an important job; the truth is that we would not have achieved the highest standards in primary education without asking more of teachers. The Government have launched a lot of initiatives. Should I believe the teachers who tell me that our initiatives have raised standards? The initiatives are not bad, but teachers find it difficult to manage them along with everything else that they are asked to do.

It is not just a case of too much paper and too many initiatives; the problem is more complicated than that. I do not want teachers to stop pupil-level target setting, or stop monitoring achievement and sending information to parents. I do not want them to stop looking at best evidence or what other schools do well. However, each of those demanding tasks asks more of teachers. The challenge is more sophisticated than we may think; it involves looking at things that teachers do not need to do, and providing support from people with other skills wherever possible. I outlined my ideas on that in a speech to the Social Market Foundation last year, and it is the core of what is being considered by the School Teachers Review Body.

I tend to think that the hon. Gentleman should not believe teachers who say that the Government are not offering extra support to deal with bad discipline. There are 3,000 learning mentors in schools; Ofsted said today that they are making a difference. There are 1,000 learning support units in schools, which were not in existence in 1997; Ofsted and teachers say that they are making a difference. However, that does not detract from the fact that, doubtless, there are heads in the hon. Gentleman's constituency who find it tough. They must be aware that we are aware of that; parents need to do what they can. However, the problem is not caused by lack of support; it is the nature of the challenge which many teachers face today from the children who attend school.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, which is a tribute to her work and that of her predecessor, both of whom presided over one of the most rapid periods of improvement in achievement in British education that the country has ever witnessed. On the OECD report on the programme for international student assessment, while I welcome the enormous achievement of the United Kingdom, is it not the case that those countries that systematically performed better than the UK—I am thinking of Canada, Finland and South Korea in particular—had adopted universal comprehensive secondary education? Does my right hon. Friend draw any conclusions from that? Does it not remain a feature of our system that the impact of the individual school on the pupils' achievement is greater than in almost any other OECD country? Is my right hon. Friend convinced that the move to greater diversity will deal with the problems of differential achievement by individual schools?

Finally, my right hon. Friend mentioned the Ofsted research on the excellence in cities programme and the rate of improvement in excellence in cities schools. Is there in the report any similar evidence on faith schools and their levels of achievement or rate of improvement? If not, has Ofsted produced any relevant information since the 2000-01 report was published?

Estelle Morris: My hon. Friend raises a number of points. With regard to the PISA report, there may have been one country—I will not cite it, as I cannot recall exactly—that was better than us in all the aspects that were tested. Although in each of the areas there were between two and four countries that performed at a higher level than we did, it was not always the same countries. There was no pattern of our always being outperformed by five or six countries.

As far as I know, the PISA report made no correlation with the way in which schools were organised. However, it stated, and it is right, that the impact of the individual school was greater in the UK than in other countries, as was the link with poverty and social class, which was a greater determinant of educational success in this country than in any of our competitor nations. That, as my hon. Friend knows, concerns me a great deal and we need to examine it.

My hon. Friend would no doubt agree that that matches up with the view of Mike Tomlinson that there is still too great a difference between the performance of different schools in similar circumstances. We are a data-rich education system. Because we have those data, we must learn from the best. The good news is that for each of the categories in which there is underperformance, we can see that there are schools in similar circumstances that are performing well.

With respect to faith schools, I am not aware of anything in the Ofsted report that particularly highlights the performance of faith schools. I have never made the argument that faith schools are by nature higher performers than schools that are not faith schools, and I will not make that argument when I speak later on the amendment to the Education Bill dealing with that subject. The argument is a different one. I have always said that I think that faith schools are confident in their value base, and there is often a natural link between school and home that stands them in good stead. Equally, I have always said that schools which do not have a faith base often have a strong value base and similar links between home and school. Later, perhaps we can explore more thoroughly than we should now some of the issues raised by my hon. Friend.

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): With reference to religious education, the Ofsted report states:

> "In schools having a full inspection, the match of teachers and support staff to the demands of the subject are worse in RE than in any other subject, being good in only three out of ten schools."

What conclusion does the Minister draw from that, and what does she propose to do about it?

Estelle Morris: I draw the conclusion that teaching in RE is not as good as in other subjects. The measures for recruitment, retention and training need to be assiduously followed. To make sure that we get the message right, I pay tribute to those RE teachers who do teach to a high standard. There is a danger sometimes that our conversations in the House go outside and are misinterpreted, in this case as damning all RE teachers. Clearly, the matter has been raised as requiring further improvement. Religious education is an important part of the national curriculum and is entitled to be taught as effectively as any other. If deficiencies have been identified, they ought to be addressed.

Charlotte Atkins (Staffordshire, Moorlands): I welcome my right hon. Friend's justified praise of teachers and school management. I note from the report that, although significant improvement has been made in the teaching of information and communications technology, further improvement is necessary. Does my right hon. Friend therefore welcome the development in secondary schools of NVQs and GNVQs in ICT, which recognise that ICT is a key skill, alongside numeracy and literacy? It is a subject that appeals right across the ability range. What role do specialist technology schools such as Clough Hall in Kidsgrove have in trying to improve ICT teaching, not just in their local area but right across the LEA?

Now that they have a wider role under this Government than under the Tory Government, such development could be of key importance in improving the level of ICT teaching and leadership.

Estelle Morris: I agree. Many adults have not yet caught up with children in terms of ICT competence and confidence, and that is true for teachers as well as other adults. In our first term, we ensured that a great deal of resources—more than £1.8 billion over six years—was spent on ICT infrastructure and on training, but there is still a long way to go. I am pleased that progress has been made this year. As teachers learn, more developments occur, so we are constantly chasing the latest developments in ICT. She identifies exactly what needs to be done. Schools such as Clough Hall, which I know about from discussions with her, have a key role in ensuring that they share their teachers either through ICT links—including well-equipped specialist technology courses—or face-to-face training.

My hon. Friend spoke about spreading good practice across the LEA. Those involved should be more ambitious about that and listen for the opportunities that we offer in respect of being national leaders and creating links with other countries. If we want to be world class in education systems, we must look beyond our boundaries. She will know that there is a list of partner schools with which those who are involved must work in her constituency, and beyond. When they come to reapply for specialist school status, they will be judged just as critically on how well they have carried out their community links as on how much they have raised standards in their school. I hope that that message will go back and encourage them to work hard on both counts.

Mr. Colin Challen (Morley and Rothwell): I, too, welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. In doing so, I should like to declare an interest as a governor of Morley Newlands primary school in my constituency, which is this week celebrating an excellent Ofsted report. As a governor, I think that we should recognise—this has been

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an occasion of praise and recognition—the work of school governors in helping us to achieve high standards. They give their time freely and have had to learn many more special skills in the past few years. The complexity that they now face is considerable. Will she not only join me in praising school governors for their work, but suggest ways in which we might recruit more governors? In certain areas, there are problems with recruitment of good-quality governors.

Estelle Morris: I am delighted that Morley Newlands school has been listed in the report and I congratulate it. Again, I thank governors for their work, as I did at the start of my statement. They ask for little reward or recognition and certainly no pay, and give generously of their time, energy and enthusiasm. A good school is the result of the partnership of everybody concerned, including the governing body. Like my hon. Friend, I worry that the schools that need the most effective governors sometimes find it most difficult to recruit. That is why, some three to four years ago, we financed the one-stop shop for recruiting, training and encouraging governors, so that governors could be recruited and placed in the schools that need them most. If things are tough and there are a lot of other pressures, head teachers will have neither the time nor the energy to go out and recruit governors, and yet they need them for support. The one-stop shop has been successful and we will continue to offer the support that it needs. None the less, I say to all hon. Members that they can also play a role. When they meet business people or others, including concerned citizens who want to play a part in education, they should direct them to schools in their constituencies where good governors are needed. I know that that will be welcomed.

Clive Efford (Eltham): My right hon. Friend is aware that my education authority is carrying out restructuring throughout the service, which has placed a burden on some aspects of education in Greenwich. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to all the schools in our LEA without exception for the hard work that they are doing to bring about the improvements in education that we all want to see.

I also welcome today's statement and the inspector's report. We can only reflect on how much more we might have achieved in our early years in government if we had got rid of Mr. Woodhead sooner.

A friend who has worked for many years in a secondary school as a maths teacher told me that the numeracy hour means that, for the first time in his experience, young people in their first year at secondary school have a grounding in maths that allows him to start to extend them from the day that they arrive. That is testament to the Government's changes in education.

I want to make a plea about recruitment and retention in London. The cost of living, especially housing costs, is high in the capital city. Those costs bite in many schools. We solved the problem in the police service by dealing with the housing allocation two years ago. Training colleges in London are now full of police recruits. That is the only solution to the problem in London.

Estelle Morris: I am pleased by my hon. Friend's comments about maths. Many secondary school teachers have had to rewrite the maths curriculum to build on what has happened in primary schools. It is therefore important that the key stage 3 strategy for 11 to 14-year-olds takes into account children's improved mathematical and literary ability.

I accept my hon. Friend's point about housing costs, which are a major cause of difficulty in recruiting in London. There appears to be a pattern: young teachers work in London for a year or two but move elsewhere when they want to buy their homes or have families. In his previous post, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister launched the £250 million starter home initiative from which education was a major beneficiary. However, I am not complacent, and I know that there is a challenge not only for my Department but throughout Government.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): I thank my right hon. Friend for the statement and the report, especially those aspects that deal with ethnic minority children, of whom there are many in my constituency.

We have dealt a little with truancy. Will my right hon. Friend comment on parent-organised truancy, which has a devastating effect on children in my constituency? I fear that it may also have a long-term effect.

I want to comment on the remarks of the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) about recruiting teachers from ethnic minorities and the good role models that they would make in some of our ethnic minority schools. An increasing number of young women in Keighley and Bradford are doing well and training to be teachers, but teaching in an Asian school is the last thing they want to do. We must examine that matter because they would make excellent role models.

Estelle Morris: My hon. Friend has spoken privately and on the Floor of the House about that matter, which causes her great anxiety because she knows that the best hope for her constituents' children is a decent education. I do not mean to be insensitive or critical, but it is not helpful when children are removed from school for a long time. They need to be in school to learn. When they come back to school, it is difficult for them to catch up. As a former teacher, I know that it is almost impossible to teach a class and the children who return to school after absences of six to eight weeks or even longer. There must be a clear message about that. Many members of the Asian community join us in conveying the message to give the kids a chance and not to take them out of school unless they are ill.

Mike Tomlinson said today that 80 per cent. of student absence is condoned by parents. That is not fair to the children. No matter how much we or teachers do, unless parents are true and active partners who get their children to school ready to learn, they will be left out. I suspect that the cycle will be repeated when they become adults and have children. We shall do whatever we can, but there is no easy solution. We must go on and on and convey that message.

Points of Order

5.39 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wish to raise a delicate point of order of which I gave Mr. Speaker notice this morning. On 29 January, I went to the Table Office and tabled a question that was accepted. It asks:

> "what the practice is in regard to the provision of holidays and other benefits given to witnesses in murder trials by the police and the prosecuting authorities?"

That was accepted by the Table Office for a named day, Friday 1 February. Normally, I give Departments 14 days notice for written questions, but this one was rather urgent. There was no reply on Friday, and on Monday there was neither a reply nor anything in *Hansard*. By some alchemy, however, on coming into the Chamber this afternoon, I received a reply—not from the Home Office but from the Lord Chancellor's Department—from the Solicitor-General. My question was very precise, and the Solicitor-General answered:

> "I have been asked to reply. There is no distinct provision for holidays or other benefits given to witnesses in murder trials by the police or prosecuting authorities. However, where the court necessarily lists a case for trisl"—

incidentally, "trial" was mis-spelled "trisl". I do not want to make too much of that, but this answer was clearly hurriedly put together—

> "when a witness is due to be on holiday then some provision can be made to compensate the witness for any loss incurred by way of a financial loss allowance. Alternatively, arrangements can be made to return a witness from holiday to attend court."

That did not answer the question that I asked, which was on a substantial matter about which I have a question to put to Mr. Speaker: what on earth is going on at the trial at Camp Zeist, in relation to Lockerbie? I am aware of the sub judice rules, but my question is not sub judice. It concerns something else. Mr. Speaker will know from his constituency Sunday press that there have been stories in Scotland for 10 days now asking why the Strathclyde police provided salmon fishing holidays and other treats for a witness in a forthcoming murder trial. The police have taken the key witness in the biggest murder trial in British history, namely Tony Gauchi, on salmon fishing expeditions. This is far from—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. The hon. Gentleman is now widening his original point of order somewhat. Mr. Speaker has informed me that the hon. Gentleman advised him in advance of his question. I am in no position to comment on the substantive part of the answer to which the hon. Gentleman refers. I can say, however, that Standing Order No. 22(4) states:

> "Where a Member has indicated that a question is for written answer on a named day the Minister shall cause an answer to be given to the Member on the date for which notice has been given".

When a Department is unable to give a substantive answer to a named day question on the date on which it is required, the House expects the Member to be given an answer that should give some indication of when the Minister expects to give a full reply.

Mr. Dalyell: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Very briefly, and without intruding on the sub judice rule, may I ask Mr. Speaker to reflect on the fact that I have had 16 Adjournment debates on Lockerbie, but am now being told that that is all a matter for the Scottish Parliament? This is a very grey area. Are Members of the House of Commons not to be allowed to ask questions on subjects that they have been considering for many years? Where is the dividing line between the Members on the Mound and those in the House of Commons? I do not ask for an answer now, but I honestly think that the Speaker should reflect on this.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's comments have been heard, but I repeat that they go much wider than his original point of order.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I protest and ask for your support, and that of Mr. Speaker, for Members' interests? In the past couple of hours, a report, apparently from a Home Office official, has announced Government policy in relation to what might be called identity cards or entitlement cards. That is clearly a highly controversial and highly important matter. The Home Secretary was in the House yesterday, answering questions for an hour, and he stayed for an Opposition home affairs debate. We understand that he is to be in the House again on Thursday to introduce the asylum and immigration White Paper.

Mr. Speaker and his colleagues have made it absolutely clear that matters of policy should be announced to this place and they certainly should be announced by Ministers. They certainly should not be announced by departmental spokespeople without, it appears, any press release or other information. Will you, Madam Deputy Speaker, make inquiries? If, as it appears, there has been no proper announcement, will you ensure that the relevant Ministers come here to make one so that Members on both sides of the House can find out what the policy is and ask appropriate questions?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am certainly not aware of the announcement to which the hon. Gentleman refers or, indeed, of how accurate it may or may not be, but he is quite right that Ministers are expected to come to the House to make statements on matters of policy.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, about a matter of which I gave Mr. Speaker notice this morning. Yesterday, I received a two-line answer to my written question to the Chancellor of the Exchequer asking what will be his policy at ECOFIN on 12 February regarding Germany's budget deficit: the process is as set out in the treaty and the regulations regarding the operation of the stability and growth pact. That is it—a totally inadequate answer, particularly given *The Sunday Times* article at the weekend in which a senior Treasury official is quoted at length and the Government's approach to the stability pact and the German deficit is spelled out in great detail.

Why are the Government able to answer the question when it is put by a journalist, David Smith, but unable to answer when it is put by a Member of Parliament? Can you use your position to request that the Treasury answer my question properly? If it is too busy to do so, could it not simply copy out *The Sunday Times* article?

Madam Deputy Speaker: On behalf of Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving notice of his point of order. As Mr. Speaker has frequently made clear to the House, the content of answers is a matter for Ministers. Mr. Speaker has no powers to direct Ministers as to how they answer questions. However, I understand that the Procedure Committee is conducting a wide-ranging inquiry into all aspects of parliamentary questions. The hon. Gentleman may want to pass his concerns to the Chairman, the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton).

Museums

5.48 pm

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to clarify the respective responsibilities of trustees and the Secretary of State in terms of international co-operation and the exchange of cultural objects between museums.

The Bill is modest, but it would be enormously beneficial to those who want great cultural objects to be displayed to best purpose and best effect. It would clarify the responsibilities of museum trustees and the Secretary of State in terms of international co-operation and the exchange of cultural objects between museums. I take the situation of the trustees of the British museum regarding the Elgin marbles collection, which largely consists of sculptures hacked from the Parthenon in Athens.

The Parthenon is a UNESCO world heritage site, and rightly so, for it has unique symbolic importance in the history of western civilisation. Most marbles in the Elgin collection are integral components of the structural and artistic unity of the building. The Parthenon and its sculptures can be fully appreciated only in conjunction. Without the sculptures, the Parthenon is incomplete. As Neil Kinnock once so memorably put it, without the marbles the Parthenon has a gap-toothed smile. Without the Parthenon the sculptures lack important context.

A new Acropolis museum is to be built opposite the south slope of the Acropolis, in the one location in the world where the Parthenon and its sculptures can be viewed simultaneously, in a single visual experience. My Bill would allow the trustees, if they wished and if the Secretary of State agreed, to transfer the marbles to Athens to make that remarkable experience possible.

It is not a question of ownership of the marbles. The manner in which Lord Elgin obtained them is disputable, and it would be possible to argue about it inconclusively and for ever, but the marbles belong neither to the British museum nor to the British Government, nor even to the Greek government. I can imagine Socrates, who described himself as not Athenian or Greek but universal, looking up at the Acropolis as he said that. In truth, in belonging to the Parthenon the marbles belong to the whole of humanity.

The Parthenon cannot come to the marbles. They, therefore, should go back to the Parthenon. It is a potent argument. The arguments traditionally ranged against the return of the Parthenon marbles are now hackneyed and long since discredited. It is said that they were rescued by Lord Elgin. Okay, but rescue does not justify keeping them for ever. It is said that they have been in safe-keeping in the British museum. Does that include abrading the surfaces with carborundum, or holding buffet receptions in the Duveen gallery?

It is said that the Greeks could not look after the marbles properly. That is an unsustainable slur on the professional expertise of the Greek Archaeological Service. It is said that more people see the marbles in the British museum than would see them in Athens. The figures cited refer to all visitors to the British museum, not all of whom visit the Duveen gallery. Hardly any of the millions of visitors to the Acropolis would miss the marbles if they were there.

It is said that there is not a museum to put the marbles in. As I have said, the Greek Government have commissioned a grand new Acropolis museum with a glass-walled gallery, facing the Parthenon, reserved for the display of the marbles. I repeat that that is the only place on earth where the marbles and the Parthenon can be viewed together in a single visual experience.

It is said that returning the marbles to Athens would open the floodgates, and lead to the emptying of the great museums of the world. That is a serious argument that must be addressed, but it is exaggerated. We are talking about integral components hacked off a great immovable monument. How many of those are there in the museums of the world? We should imagine the sculptures being hacked off the Arc de Triomphe, the chariots being taken from the Brandenburg gate, Nelson's statue being removed from its column in Trafalgar square, several pillars being removed from Stonehenge, or the torch being hacked off the Statue of Liberty. Come to think of it, the latter would probably result not in an Act of Congress—or the presentation of a museums Bill to Congress—but in a coalition against the evil of cultural vandalism.

In fact there are not many such examples in the world's museums, and where there are, perhaps the case for their return should be carefully examined. The German Government provided a good example last year. Their museums contained several pieces of the Philippeion at Olympia. They have returned them, and are undertaking to reconstruct the building at their expense.

It is said that the Elgin marbles are part of the encyclopaedic collection of the British museum. That is a serious argument: perhaps they are—but they are not indispensable to it. They are exemplars of Greek culture. The Greek Government would readily supply an even more comprehensive set of exemplars of Greek culture to replace the marbles. It is said that the marbles have been here for so long that they are now part of our heritage. That argument takes my breath away, and does not merit a response.

Refuting those arguments one by one, however, is to no avail. The trustees of the British museum are forbidden by law to transfer the Parthenon marbles to Athens. So what? They do not want to anyway. The director made that clear in a recent article in *The Times*. But directors and trustees come and go, and in future a director and trustees may find the legal restriction irksome. My Bill would remove it. Then, at the very least, the trustees would not be in the unedifying position of hiding behind the hackneyed arguments I have just refuted, or falling back on the logical stopper of the law.

I am not talking about ceding legal title to the ownership of the marbles. The argument has moved on from that: it is now about where they should be. There is strong and increasing support in the country and in Parliament for their being reunited with the Parthenon. A 1996 Channel 4 viewers poll by William J. Stewart, with a return of 100,000, showed a majority of 90 per cent. in favour. A 1998 MORI poll and a 1999 BBC internet poll returned majorities of eight to three. A 2000 poll of MPs by *The Economist*, to which 200 MPs responded, showed 66 per cent. overall and 84 per cent. of Labour Members to be in favour.

The results of the parliamentary poll are consistent with successive early-day motions attracting more than 100 signatures. Early-day motion 336 has already attracted 107, to which we could add the names of Ministers, Whips and Parliamentary Private Secretaries who have registered their support in the past but are barred from doing so now.

As I have said, my Bill is not about ceding ownership of cultural objects by the British museum or any other museum to which this might apply. Such objects could be sent on renewable loan, the lending museum sharing with the borrowing museum responsibility for their display, study and conservation. That is not a new idea; it accords with modern museum practice. In January 2000, the Museums and Galleries Commission published "Restitution and Repatriation: Guidelines for Good Practice". The guidelines were commended by the Government, by a House of Commons Select Committee and by the Museums Association. Any reasonable application of them would result in a return of the Parthenon marbles.

Great museums in America, Europe and Australia have followed this practice. Even the British museum trustees, according to their submission to the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport,

> "have in the past explored the possibility of reciprocal exchange of objects as long term renewable loans".

They also told the Committee:

> "we could possibly examine the possibility of exchange loans"

involving the Parthenon marbles. Robert Anderson himself said:

> "This has been brought up by the museum before. Where two countries have two halves of two individual objects there is the possibility of a long term loan between them. This does seem to me to be sensible."

What is there for the British museum in such a change in legal practice? Plenty. The museum would gain enormous credit for its enlightened approach to the display of such important cultural objects. Furthermore, the Greek Government are committed to replacing the Parthenon marbles in the British museum with a rotating exhibition of treasures of Greek civilisation that would otherwise rarely be seen outside Greece.

What is in it for Britain? Again, plenty. If the marbles are not returned, when the new Acropolis museum opens in 2004 the glass-walled gallery reserved for them will stand empty in living reproach to Britain in the eyes of millions of visitors to Athens from around the world. If they are returned, in the eyes of all those millions it will redound to Britain's credit that we have shown our commitment to the ideals of UNESCO by making whole again arguably the most powerful symbol of western civilisation, the Parthenon on the Acropolis in Athens. My Bill seeks to make that possible—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

5.58 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): I oppose the Bill. I declare an interest as a member of the British Museum Society, and as one who has studied classics and archaeology.

The hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) made a good case, and I agree with some of what he said. Certainly the marbles belong to the whole of humanity, not just to any one nation. He would be expected to make

[Tim Loughton]

a good case, as chairman of the all-party parliamentary Greece group. He was also honest enough to come clean about the fact that this is really all about the Elgin marbles. His Bill may be a Trojan horse—an appropriate phrase in this context—but that is what it is about. It should really be subtitled "Give Greece the Elgin marbles to show that we are good Europeans".

The hon. Gentleman said that his proposals were modest, but they are not. The implications for the future of all world museums housing universal collections are enormous. I oppose this latest attempt at iconoclastic decontextualisation and will judge it on the following grounds. Are the Elgin marbles rightfully in the British museum, are they in the best place to be appreciated most by the widest audience, and what are the real motives for destroying the status quo?

On the first charge, that the Elgin marbles are not legitimately in the British museum, even Greece no longer challenges the legal ownership of the marbles. In 1815, Parliament bought the marbles by paying part of Lord Elgin's costs. In 1816, a Select Committee said that they had been rightfully acquired. That judgment has been confirmed by a Select Committee report in 1999, by the former Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, the right hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), and by the former Minister for the Arts, the right hon. Member for Newport, East (Alan Howarth), who is here today and who ratifies the judgment in his excellent article in *The Guardian* today.

I come to the defence of the much maligned Lord Elgin. The marbles were not housed in a private collection but given to the British museum in 1816. They became an integral part of the British museum's heritage and are intrinsic to its identity. It was Lord Elgin who saved the Parthenon marbles: without him, they would not exist. They were legally taken under a firman. Placing the marbles in the British museum led to an appreciation of the high classical style in the early 19th century, which had been overlooked in preference to the hellenistic style of sculpture. There is also a case for saying that bringing the marbles to the British museum encouraged an awareness of hellenism and the foundation of the Greek state in 1833, a far cry from the city state of Athens in classical times.

Would it not be odd if after almost 200 years of the Parthenon marbles being in the British museum, and as the British museum prepares to celebrate its 250th anniversary next year, an integral part of its heritage were ripped from its walls? There is no case for saying that they are not rightfully part of the British museum. The hon. Member for Knowsley, South would be better off looking at the urgent matter of clamping down on the illegal trade in artefacts between private collections, which often goes on unprovenanced and unrecorded.

The second charge is that the British museum is not the best place for displaying the Elgin marbles. The British museum holds no place for nationalism. It is a universal museum. The idea of a universal museum is the outcome of the [illegible]h-century age of enlightenment. It is a national museum [illegible] the great tradition of the Louvre, the Metropolitan museum of art in New York and the Berlin national museum. The British museum regards it as a privilege to display some of the finest artworks known to man, and has a responsibility to promote public understanding of them through exhibitions, publications, educational programmes and, in the case of the Elgin marbles, video displays with computer graphics.

The British museum is a world museum. Forces for educational and cultural enlightenment across the globe exist there. It has 6 million visitors a year. Academics, students, school children, Greeks, Britons, South Africans, Koreans all visit for free. They are able to see the Elgin marbles not just as a single artistic treasure but in the context of the great developing panoply of archaic and classical art and architecture.

In the British museum, visitors can trace artistic development through Sumerian gudea figures, Mesopotamian site artefacts, Assyrian reliefs from Nineveh and Nimrud, Egyptian kouroi, early classical statuary and high classical, hellenistic, Roman and renaissance artefacts; the British museum itself is built in a neoclassical style. They are all under one roof, all for free and all properly explained, displayed and set in context.

Decontextualisation would be a disaster and would open a Pandora's box, whatever the hon. Member for Knowsley, South says. Mesopotamian finds dug up because of the tenacity of British archaeologists in the 1900s and previously would be returned to Iraq and Iran, perhaps never to be seen again. The Benin bronzes would go to Nigeria, despite the fact that the British museum helped to build the collection of bronzes in Nigeria itself and has done an awful lot to promote the heritage and history of west Africa. When Nelson Mandela visited the British museum just 13 months ago on the opening of three new African galleries, he praised the British museum as

> "this truly international institution for enriching and cross-fertilising the world's institutions."

The wish is to send the Elgin marbles to a special museum set apart from the Parthenon—a museum that has not even yet been started and has been promised for years. They are not to go on the Parthenon itself. One of the finest metopes on the west end of the Parthenon has been sitting there for centuries in one of the most polluted cities in Europe; it has not been rescued and taken down. Fourteen blocks of the west frieze were removed in 1993 and have not seen the light of day again. The Acropolis receives fewer than 2.5 million paying visitors, less than half the number of visitors who go to the British museum, most of whom go to see the Elgin marbles in particular.

In the fifth century, Pericles and the fleet of artists under Phidias built the splendour of classical Athens not just as an impressive environment for local Athenians but as a symbol to the world of how quickly civilisation had developed under Athens' artistic and military prowess: it was the top nation of the day. No one would be more impressed by the longevity of that legacy in the British museum two and a half millennia later than Pericles himself.

What are the real motives? It is all political. Academically, there is no case to return the Elgin marbles and other works of art to Athens. They are in the ownership of the British museum but they belong to the history of world civilisation. To treat them as some political trophy that can be traded for short-term political advantage is the worst reason for ripping them out of the heart of one of the world's great museums.

The British museum should not be treated as some state Aladdin's cave to buy power and influence at random. To do so would be to return to the classical times mentality of warring fiefdoms whence the Elgin marbles came, and would be deeply patronising to the modern democracy that is Greece.

No doubt the Greeks would view us as better Europeans if we made a gesture of handing them the Elgin marbles after 200 years, just as the Government want to make the Spanish view us as better Europeans by handing over Gibraltar after almost 300 years, yet it does not make our equal partners, Greece and Spain, better Europeans by pressing for such moves and expecting us to comply under duress and for all the wrong reasons.

The intentions behind the Bill are clear but the motives are entirely wrong and the implications for the academic world would be catastrophic. The hon. Member for Knowsley, South made his case with some passion, not as much as the late Melina Mercouri and certainly with fewer tears, but just as we echoed her sentiments to her in "Never on a Sunday", so I ask the House to say to the hon. Gentleman, "Never on a Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday or Monday for that matter."

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 23 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House proceeded to a Division; but no Member being willing to act as Teller, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *declared that the Ayes had it.*

Question agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Edward O'Hara, Mr. Tom Cox, Mr. Andrew Dismore, Mrs. Jackie Lawrence, Andy Burnham, Mr. Richard Allan and Mr. Kevin McNamara.

MUSEUMS

Mr. Edward O'Hara accordingly presented a Bill to clarify the respective responsibilities of trustees and the Secretary of State in terms of international co-operation and the exchange of cultural objects between museums: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 12 April, and to be printed [Bill 92].

Orders of the Day

Education Bill

[1ST ALLOTTED DAY]

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Education Bill, as amended, be considered in the following order, namely, new Clauses relating to Part 1, new Clauses relating to Part 2, new Clauses relating to Part 3, new Clauses relating to Part 4, new Clauses relating to Part 5, new Clauses relating to Part 6, new Clauses relating to Part 7, new Clauses relating to Part 8, new Clauses relating to Part 9, new Clauses relating to Part 10, other new Clauses, amendments relating to Clauses 1 to 18, Schedule 1, Clauses 19 to 35, Schedule 2, Clauses 36 to 38, Schedule 3, Clauses 39 to 48, Schedule 4, Clauses 49 to 53, Schedule 5, Clauses 54 to 56, Schedule 6, Clauses 57 to 62, Schedule 7, Clauses 63 to 66, Schedule 8, Clauses 67 and 68, Schedule 9, Clauses 69 to 71, Schedule 10, Clauses 72 to 115, Schedule 11, Clauses 116 to 143, Schedule 12, Clauses 144 to 147, Schedule 13, Clauses 148 to 150, Schedule 14, Clauses 151 to 180, Schedule 15, Clause 181, Schedule 16, Clause 182, Schedule 17, Clauses 183 to 188, Schedule 18, Clauses 189 to 192, Schedule 19, Clauses 193 to 198, Schedule 20, Clauses 199 to 209, Schedules 21 and 22, new Schedules.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

6.12 pm

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I have accepted the manuscript amendment for debate.

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Timms): I beg to move a manuscript amendment:

That the order of consideration be amended as follows: leave out the words

"new Clauses relating to Part 3"

and insert in their place

"new Clause 1, new Clause 2, new Clause 18, new Clause 3, new Clause 4, new Clause 7, new Clause 8, new Clause 9 and new Clause 12."

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We have certainly not been informed about the change of business or the manuscript amendment and we have been sitting here quite calmly for a considerable time waiting to debate the Education Bill, half of which was not discussed in Committee. Therefore, I respectfully ask whether it is in order for the Minister to propose a new timetable without allowing us to consider it.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): Will you make it clear, Mr. Deputy Speaker, whether we are now debating the amendment?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We are debating the manuscript amendment that I have just put to the House.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I have the greatest respect for my hon. Friend the Minister, but I am slightly startled by this change of procedure. Is it common for the Chair to accept a manuscript amendment when there is a clear statement on the Order Paper of the order in which the Bill is to be debated? If that is the case, may I ask you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you received notice of that manuscript amendment?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Lady is now opening up the debate. I accepted the manuscript amendment

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

simply for the convenience of the House, because it appeared sensible, and it has now been moved. Hon. Members are entitled to speak to the amendment and to vote against it.

6.15 pm

Mr. Timms: I wish simply to explain the reasoning behind the amendment and I to apologise to hon. Members. The amendment resulted from recent hasty discussions. The difficulty is that, under the motion on the Order Paper, we would need to delay votes on a number of matters that we shall discuss this afternoon until the end of all the debates on part 3. The amendment would allow us to vote at the conclusion of the debates on those amendments rather than all together at the end of the discussion of part 3. It is a helpful proposal and I hope that the House will accept it.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): All hon. Members are bemused by this new development. Many of us have been in the Chamber for quite some time, following the statement from the Department for Education and Skills. We have read the timetable motion on the Order Paper and feel that we have a right to expect it to be followed.

Surely it is bizarre for the Minister to give us no notice of the manuscript amendment and to make no attempt to circulate it. Surely it is outrageous for him to bring it before the House in this way. Opposition Members can only protest in the strongest possible way that the Minister has not even attempted to give hon. Members notice. Surely the fact that Ministers and Labour Back Benchers seem unable to organise their business in a rational and coherent way does not make it acceptable for us to be faced with absurd changes to procedure without notice or adequate explanation. I really do protest and I wonder whether any steps could be taken now to allow the House an opportunity to see the amendment before we vote on it.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. At this stage of the debate when we have a little more time, it would be helpful if copies of the manuscript amendment could be circulated while we are in the Chamber. In my experience, most manuscript amendments are brief and can easily be understood when they are read out. They usually involve the substitution of one name or something similar. This is the most complicated manuscript amendment I have ever heard in 28 years in the House. Is it beyond the wit of the Government to circulate some photocopies of it while the debate continues?

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It would also be helpful if you would explain whether the amended order of consideration would have any effect on Mr. Speaker's selection of amendments as already circulated and the order in which they are to be considered.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: If we are not careful, hon. Members will be making debating points on points of order. The answer to the hon. Gentleman's latter point is no, it does not.

Mr. Willis: I am quite outraged that we find ourselves in this situation. The Bill was handled disgracefully in Committee and we were looking forward to two days of debate to address some of its core issues. Members of the public are particularly interested in some of the key aspects of the debate that was expected today.

Earlier today, I asked the Committee Clerk about the order in which the amendments were to be debated and voted on. I was assured that there would be a vote on each group of amendments. I even informed the Clerk that that was our intention this evening. Now, at the last minute, having sat here for the past three and a half hours, we find ourselves having to respond to a manuscript amendment without having sight of it. We are now told that all of a sudden the way in which we debate the amendments and vote on them has changed. If the Government are prepared to show such contempt for the House when it is considering legislation that engages us in a good debate, heaven help us when we consider provisions that are far more tricky politically.

We hope that the explanation for the manuscript amendment and this change of heart will allow us to understand the Government's thinking, and will reassure us that we can debate the current marshalled list of amendments in the existing order and vote on each string of amendments, depending on whether the Opposition wish to press them to vote.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I draw your attention to page 473 of "Erskine May". Even though the Secretary of State and the Minister of State were present this afternoon for an education statement, at no time did the Government tell the Opposition about their intention to table this manuscript amendment. Given the total and utter contempt for the proceedings of the House that we have witnessed this afternoon, I ask you to consider carefully the passage in "Erskine May" that states:

> "Whenever possible, notice should be given of any amendments. However, in committee it is in order to move, as manuscript amendments, amendments of which notice has not been given."

That clearly states that, in all practical circumstances, notice should be given. An education statement was made and the Secretary of State was present, but no attempt was made to notify the House of the Government's intention, so I ask you whether it is right, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we should accept this manuscript amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have already accepted the manuscript amendment and we are now debating it. This is not a matter of the content of the amendment; it was simply that I understood it to be for the convenience of the House to consider the matter in this way.

Mr. Fallon: I make it clear that I am not raising a point of order but speaking to the debate. The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), who spoke very strongly, has every reason to feel aggrieved by the way in which he and new clause 5 have been treated by this procedure. Given that it is now some 10 minutes since the manuscript amendment was moved, I should have expected the Minister at least to have had the courtesy to circulate copies of it or place them in the Vote Office. I wonder whether that can still be done, even at this late stage. It is extraordinary that a manuscript amendment of this nature has been moved without giving any notice to the House, and with no discussion between Front

Benchers, let alone with those who have tabled new clauses and amendments. The Minister will find it hard to justify that extraordinary procedure.

What lies behind this procedure is an attempt by the Government to rig the way in which Divisions are held. The Minister needs reminding that the purpose of our presence here today is not to arrange the timing of Divisions but to consider legislation—

Mr. John Taylor (Solihull): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I apologise to my hon. Friend for interrupting him, but I want to appeal to you as the protector of Back Benchers. It is hard enough being a Back Bencher under this Government. I for one would like more time to consider this matter, so I beg to move that the House be adjourned for one hour, so that we can study it further.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, I am not prepared to accept a motion for the Adjournment of the House at this time. We are dealing with the amendment and the debate must continue.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have just checked with the Vote Office and there still is not available to us any version of this extraordinary amendment, which has been thrust upon the House. Can you please instruct that copies of it be circulated to Members? It is intolerable that our proceedings should be so extraordinarily diverted at this stage, without us knowing what we are being asked to do.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Minister and his colleagues on the Treasury Bench will have heard what has been said about copies being made available. Before we continue, perhaps it would help if I again read out the manuscript amendment, which states that the order of consideration be amended to leave out the words

"new Clauses relating to part 3"

and insert

"new Clause 1, new Clause 2, new Clause 18, new Clause 3, new Clause 4, new Clause 7, new Clause 8, new Clause 9 and new Clause 12."

Mr. Fallon: The very fact that you have had to read out the amendment a second time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, justifies the Government's doing us the elementary courtesy of getting this thing printed so that we can all see exactly where we stand.

Just before I was interrupted, I was saying that the Minister appears to be rigging the order in which Divisions are likely to be held. That is monstrous. We are a legislature. We are here today to debate these new clauses and amendments in the final stages of this important Bill. We are not here simply to arrange Divisions for the convenience of the Executive. As I understand it, the order of consideration for the new clauses and amendments was laid down clearly by Mr. Speaker before lunchtime today, it was published and it has been available in the Vote Office since 3 o'clock. It is quite extraordinary to be told at this late stage—some six hours after Mr. Speaker made his selection and ruling—that the order of debate will be changed. That change is not for the convenience of the House, but for the convenience of the Government, and I urge my hon. Friends to consider pressing the matter to a Division.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Decisions taken by the Chair are for the protection of Members of Parliament and the Orders of the Day are published so that Members of Parliament can have at least a vague idea about what they are debating—something that is not always true even when they have read what they are debating. Frankly, they can have no idea of what they are debating if what is printed on the Order Paper differs from what is proposed.

I had no intention of taking part in the debate, but the order of debate should be clear and transparent to Members, so that they know in advance when the group of amendments that they want to discuss will be debated. That is not exactly a revolutionary idea, but it commends itself to me. Because we are so dependent on the Chair for the protection of our rights, and because it is so vital that we are clear about how we conduct our business, I hope that a much more detailed explanation of the manuscript amendment will be given, even if we end up accepting the Minister's proposal. I have rarely seen such a matter handled with less finesse, and this procedure has not been particularly helpful.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): The House will wish to consider two separate issues at this point, the first of which is the issue of process. Like the hon. Lady, I have never seen anything handled in the House with less finesse. There are two possible reasons why the Government are behaving in this way: either the Department has been monumentally incompetent, or the Government are trying to rig the procedures of the House, not for the House's convenience but for their own. I incline toward the latter explanation, because I cannot believe that Ministers and their officials could be so incompetent. The entire ministerial team were in the House for an hour and a half for a long statement, so it would surely not have been beyond their wit to hand copies of the manuscript amendment to the Opposition parties, and to show the same courtesy to their own right hon. and hon. Friends, who are intimately involved with the debates that the Government are trying to rig. I therefore absolve Ministers of the charge of monumental incompetence, but they cannot be absolved of the charge of reaching a nadir—even by the standards of this Government—in abuse of the procedures of the House.

6.30 pm

The second point worth considering has to do with the substance of the manuscript amendment, with which we have not yet dealt. It is clear that the Government are trying to minimise the number of Divisions that can take place on the matter of faith schools.

I can approach that matter fairly dispassionately, as I support what the Government are trying to achieve with the faith schools amendment. However, they must recognise that there exist other points of view in the House, and that they are legitimate. The various new clauses tabled on faith schools represent varying nuances of view. The Opposition oppose those views, as do the Government, so this is not a partisan matter between Opposition and Government Front-Bench Members.

[Mr. Damian Green]

The question of faith schools engages the House in a non-party way, and it also engages the British people. It is an abuse of power by the Government to seek to minimise hon. Members' capacity to vote fully, clearly and competently on such a matter.

I think that the Minister is at heart a decent man. I can only urge him to withdraw this wretched amendment before we have to vote against it.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Will my hon. Friend the Minister explain to the House—or at least to Labour Members—whether the manuscript amendment is linked in any way to the numerous calls that I and other hon. Members received at the weekend? The Government are clearly somewhat sensitive about how we might wish to vote on the matter of faith schools. Will he make clear what effect the manuscript amendment will have on the votes on new clauses 1 and 18 in particular? The explanation that he has given so far has not assuaged my suspicion about the Government's motives.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): I underline that point. I am sure that the Government's motives are not malign, but I am just a simple Back Bencher. When the Minister responds to the debate, will he say what effect the amendment will have on when we vote on the clauses relating to faith schools? What are the implications for the timetable of votes?

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I have been in this House for 14 and a half years, and I cannot remember ever finding myself in this position before in connection with a subject of such considerable interest to the outside world. Suddenly, the House, having been given no notice at all, is debating a manuscript amendment—

Mrs. Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order to allow hon. Members to speak in this debate who were not even in the Chamber when the manuscript amendment was moved?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Lady must leave these matters to the Chair.

Mr. Brazier: I have one question for the Minister. If the Government are determined to curb hon. Members' right to put their points of view on this extremely controversial issue—on which I have spoken a number of times in the past, and about which the Minister knows that I share his views—where will it all stop? Has the House of Commons become nothing more than an extension of the Labour party's internal battles?

Mr. Beith: I am not a cynic by nature, and it is just conceivable that the Minister might be trying to help the House. If so, however, I wish he would wear a sign on his forehead saying "I am trying to be helpful", or something similar. The process that he has taken us through could hardly have been more unhelpful. It has left suspicion in everyone's mind.

The manuscript amendment that the Minister has moved cannot be understood or construed without the most careful examination of the motion that appears on the Order Paper. You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, read the amendment out most clearly, but at a speed that could not be called dictation speed for people who cannot take shorthand. We were fairly lost until—eventually, and after much pressure—we obtained a photocopy of the amendment.

We now have to decide whether it means what some of us think that it means. I sought advice, from which I glean—I think—that the amendment would allow new clause 18 to be voted on after we have voted on new clauses 1 and 2. The Minister did not trouble to mention that point in specific terms in his opening remarks. If the amendment was intended to be helpful, it still defeats me why some minimal notice of it was not given, or why some fuller and more intelligent explanation was not given at the start of the debate.

One of my reasons for speaking now is to give the Minister an opportunity to give us an intelligible explanation, and to remind him that there are better ways to do something like this

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the Minister replies, I shall repeat that it was my belief, in accepting the manuscript amendment, that it would be helpful and for the convenience of the House. When the Minister responds, I hope that he will explain clearly why it is to the benefit of the House to deal with the matter in this way, and that he will convince the House of the need for the amendment.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As we all know, it is the burden and task of the person in the Chair to defend the interests of Back-Bench Members. I am a member of the Chairman's Panel, and I know that you, more than most in this House, will always seek to do that.

It is clear, from what I have heard of this short debate, that ample opportunity existed earlier this afternoon for the matter to have been discussed through the usual channels. That does not seem to have happened. Hon. Members have tabled amendments—with which I profoundly disagree—and they surely have a right to be consulted.

Will you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, consider suspending this sitting of the House for ten minutes to allow hon. Members—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That point has been put to me already, and I have said that I will not do that.

Mr. Damian Green: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In the very helpful point that you made immediately before calling the Minister to respond, you invited him to convince you that the manuscript amendment was in the interests of the House rather than of the Government. When you have heard the Minister's speech, will it be in your power to withdraw your acceptance of the manuscript amendment?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I invited the Minister to convince the House, not me.

Mr. Tyler: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May we invite the Minister to say whether he would welcome a short adjournment of a few minutes, not an hour—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is not for the Minister to decide on such matters. It is for the Chair, and the Chair has decided.

Mr. Timms: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), who correctly drew the House's attention to the fact that my intention is to be helpful. I emphasise that the amendment will not affect the order of consideration of the groups of amendments before the House, and neither will it affect the content of the debate in any way. What it will do, however—

Mr. McLoughlin: Will the Minister give way on that point?

Mr. Timms: Not just yet. The amendment will allow us to take, one after the other, votes on all the new clauses in the second group of amendments relating to faith schools. The original procedure would have allowed votes to be taken only when we had completed debating all the matters in part 3. It would help the House to be able to take those votes together, instead of after what may have been a lengthy period of debate of other matters in between.

Mr. McLoughlin: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Timms: No. That is the intention behind the amendment, and I hope that the House—

Mr. McLoughlin: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Timms: I want to finish this point. [HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] That is the intention behind the amendment, and I hope that the House will agree that its effect is indeed helpful.

Mr. McLoughlin: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Timms: I will now give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. When did he decide to make this change? When did he write out the manuscript amendment, and why did he not have the decency to tell the Opposition?

Mr. Timms: The hon. Gentleman puts a fair question. An error in the drafting of the amendment came to our attention very late in our proceedings. I regret that, and I expressed my regret a few minutes before I rose to move the manuscript amendment. I hope that, after the explanation that I have provided, the hon. Gentleman accepts that it will be helpful for the House to vote on all those matters together, rather than having a long gap between votes on matters that will have been debated together.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 315, Noes 178.

Division No. 154] [6.40 pm

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*

Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jim Fitzpatrick and
Dan Norris.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Doughty, Sue
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Key, Robert
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit

Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Dr. Julian Lewis.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put:—

The House proceeded to a Division.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I ask the Serjeant at Arms to check whether the Division bells are functioning properly.

The House having divided: Ayes 312, Noes 169.

Division No. 155] **[6.54 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie

Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jim Fitzpatrick and
Dan Norris.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Doughty, Sue
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Dr. Julian Lewis.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Education Bill, as amended, be considered in the following order, namely, new Clauses relating to Part 1, new Clauses relating to Part 2, new Clause 1, new Clause 2, new Clause

18, new Clause 3, new Clause 4, new Clause 7, new Clause 8, new Clause 9, new Clause 12, new Clauses relating to Part 4, new Clauses relating to Part 5, new Clauses relating to Part 6, new Clauses relating to Part 7, new Clauses relating to Part 8, new Clauses relating to Part 9, new Clauses relating to Part 10, other new Clauses, amendments relating to Clauses 1 to 18, Schedule 1, Clauses 19 to 35, Schedule 2, Clauses 36 to 38, Schedule 3, Clauses 39 to 48, Schedule 4, Clauses 49 to 53, Schedule 5, Clauses 54 to 56, Schedule 6, Clauses 57 to 62, Schedule 7, Clauses 63 to 66, Schedule 8, Clauses 67 and 68, Schedule 9, Clauses 69 to 71, Schedule 10, Clauses 72 to 115, Schedule 11, Clauses 116 to 143, Schedule 12, Clauses 144 to 147, Schedule 13, Clauses 148 to 150, Schedule 14, Clauses 151 to 180, Schedule 15, Clause 181, Schedule 16, Clause 182, Schedule 17, Clauses 183 to 188, Schedule 18, Clauses 189 to 192, Schedule 19, Clauses 193 to 198, Schedule 20, Clauses 199 to 209, Schedules 21 and 22, new Schedules.

New Clause 5

POWER OF LEA TO INNOVATE WITHOUT PERMISSION OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE

'(1) This section has effect notwithstanding anything in sections 1 to 4 of this Act.

(2) A local education authority may resolve to implement an innovative project which in the opinion of the authority contributes to the raising of educational standards achieved by children or adults in their area.

(3) Subject to subsection (4), the authority may resolve to exempt, relax or modify any innovative project from any requirement imposed by education legislation on the authority.

(4) The Secretary of State shall by order designate any requirement imposed by education legislation on a local education authority as not subject to exemption, relaxation or modification by the authority.'.—*[Mr. Willis.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Willis: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: New clause 6—*Power of school to innovate without permission of the Secretary of State (No. 2)*—

'(1) This section has effect notwithstanding anything in sections 1 to 4 of this Act.

(2) A maintained school governing body may resolve to implement an innovative project which in the opinion of the governing body contributes to the raising of educational standards achieved by registered pupils at the school.

(3) Subject to subsection (4), the governing body may resolve to exempt, relax or modify any innovative project from any requirement imposed by education legislation on the governing body.

(4) The Secretary of State shall by order designate any requirement imposed by education legislation on a school governing body as not subject to exemption, relaxation or modification by the governing body.'.

New clause 10—*Automatic exemptions from curriculum and pay and conditions provisions*—

'(1) Regulations shall designate curriculum or pay and conditions provisions as attracting exemptions for all maintained schools, subject to subsection (2) below.

(2) Regulations may prescribe circumstances in which a school or category of schools will not benefit from automatic exemption under subsection (1), in which case section 6 shall apply.'.

Amendment No. 79, in clause 2, page 2, line 28, at end insert—

'except section 317 of the Education Act 1996 (duties of governing body or LEA in relation to pupils with special educational needs).'.

Amendment No. 64, in clause 6, page 4, line 34, at beginning insert—

'Subject to the provisions of subsection (3A)'.

Amendment No. 67, in page 5, line 9, at end insert—

'(e) make further provision for the pay and conditions of persons employed to work at the school to be settled by agreement between or in a manner agreed between teachers and local education authorities or teachers and governing bodies and to be given effect in such manner as may be prescribed.'.

Amendment No. 65, in page 5, line 10, at beginning insert—

'Subject to the provisions of subsection (3A)'.

Amendment No. 66, in page 5, line 19, at end insert—

'(3A) No order may be made under subsection (2) nor may any provision be made in such an order unless the Secretary of State or the National Assembly for Wales as the case may be is satisfied that such order or provision may be made without detriment to the education at the school of pupils having special educational needs.'.

Amendment No. 68, in page 5, line 30, at end insert—

'(6) In so far as regulations made under this section relate to a curriculum provision they shall, in addition to providing for an exemption or modification, require persons responsible for the delivery of the curriculum in any school to have regard to the need to maintain a balanced and broadly based curriculum.'.

Amendment No. 130, in page 5, line 30, at end insert—

'(6) No regulations under subsection (1) shall limit or reduce the provision of Special Education Needs in any qualifying school.'.

Amendment No. 131, in clause 7, page 5, line 37, at end insert—

'and, in particular, parents of pupils with Special Education Needs.'.

Mr. Willis: I am delighted to be able to begin this debate at last. I hope that the next day and a half will be as interesting and as entertaining as the last hour.

I want to concentrate on the two new clauses that my hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) and I have tabled, both of which deal with autonomy. One of the great features of the Bill as it was presented to the House on Second Reading—and one of its great features that was presented in Committee—was that it would encourage schools to innovate and that it would encourage a plethora of approaches to raising standards. Schools would be able to present new ideas and thoughts.

New clause 5 deals with the right of local education authorities to be able to present new ideas, innovate and initiate, whereas, during the passage of the Bill, the Government envisaged that local authorities would be passive—they would carry out the wishes of the Government or facilitate the wishes of schools. For some reason, the Government rejected the idea that local authorities should be able to innovate.

Earlier today, the Secretary of State made one of the longest statements ever heard by the House, and we now know why. She did not respond to a question that I asked her about local authorities. The way in which schools are being turned round, in terms of coming out of special measures, is largely due to the brilliant work being done in the vast majority of local authorities. Although the

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Ofsted report clearly states that a number of local authorities are failing to meet the required standards, a significant number are doing so. If new clause 5 were added to the Bill, local authorities would have exactly the same powers but they would not have to ask the Secretary of State for them, provided that they do not show serious signs of weakness in their inspection process, whether it is carried out by Ofsted or the Audit Commission.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): The hon. Gentleman has tabled a couple of interesting new clauses, which are certainly worthy of due consideration. In relation to the point that he has just made about weaker authorities, new clause 5 does not contain a provision to allow Ofsted or the Secretary of State to identify and remove the right to innovate from an underperforming authority. Will he tell us how that might be done?

Mr. Willis: As usual, the hon. Gentleman has applied his diagnostic brain to the new clause. Let me reassure him. Subsection (4) states:

> "The Secretary of State shall by order designate any requirement imposed by education legislation on a local education authority as not subject to exemption, relaxation or modification by the authority."

That includes advice given by Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools and the Audit Commission. The new clause has been carefully drafted by expert draftsmen to ensure that the Secretary of State has that backstop.

Chris Grayling: I interpreted that phraseology as relating to individual areas of regulation rather than to a wholesale power of the Secretary of State to remove from an LEA the right to innovate because it is underperforming. That is what I am trying to clarify.

Mr. Willis: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave before—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members make a telling point, and I accept the compliment—if it was one.

The Minister will tell us whether the new clause will achieve the objective that I desire.

Mr. Fallon: The problem with the drafting, which the hon. Gentleman calls "expert", is that subsection (4) gives a power to the Secretary of State that is mandatory, not discretionary. Subsections (2) and (3) say that local authorities "may" do this or that, but in every circumstance the Secretary of State has to do it because it says "shall". Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will want to reflect on that with his experts, unless he can explain it more fully.

Mr. Willis: The hon. Gentleman has great knowledge of such matters as a former Minister in a former Government, now gone. I reassure him that I did not use the same draftsmen as the Government used to draft their manuscript amendment. However, I take his point. Subsection (4) tries to give the Secretary of State a backstop if she believes that there are reasons why a local authority should not be given powers to innovate. I am sure that hon. Members will regard that as a reasonable way to proceed rather than giving local authorities unlimited powers, irrespective of whether they are performing well.

Mr. Fallon: The problem is that subsection (4) does not give the Secretary of State a power to be exercised under certain circumstances when she feels like it. Instead, it makes it mandatory that she shall in every circumstance designate any of the requirements. There is no choice about whether to do that.

Mr. Willis: The hon. Gentleman is assiduous in wanting his points clarified. We want the Secretary of State to make proper provision to ensure that local authorities in special measures and those that are a cause for concern do not get the power to innovate. For that to happen, the Secretary of State has to have the powers and must use them. That is the purpose behind new clause 5.

7.15 pm

New clause 6 is important and I intend to divide the House on it. It goes to the heart of the Bill. The Government claim that they want to move away from appearing to have total central control of everything that schools do, but the Bill does just that. It takes unto the Secretary of State powers that did not exist before. A school cannot innovate or receive earned autonomy unless the Secretary of State agrees to it. That is the most preposterous level of centralisation ever.

I concede that, in the past, schools perhaps had too much autonomy to do what they liked. That regime went with the introduction of the Education Reform Act 1988, Ofsted and the rigorous inspection of our schools. Mike Tomlinson's report contains evidence that schools have adjusted to those regimes. They now regard inspection and audit as an essential tool within the school improvement process. Schools see the new tenor of inspections, especially the light touch inspections, that Mike Tomlinson has introduced as part of the process rather than something to be dreaded at the end of four or six years.

We have put in place a national curriculum and developed a clear sense of audit and inspection, and schools now operate within that climate. New clause 6 is simple: unless a school is in special measures or showing serious signs for concern, it should automatically be given the right to innovate. It should not have to go cap in hand to the Secretary of State and say, "This is what we'd like to do. Please can we have permission to do it?"

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): I applaud the hon. Gentleman's objectives, and it surprises me that he has been hostile to innovative projects introduced by previous Governments. Would new clause 6 allow a school that promotes the raising of educational standards to charge for admissions, to decide not to admit pupils with brown eyes or curly hair, or to extend the school day without the agreement of the teaching staff? It seems that the new clause could achieve that.

Mr. Willis: I trust that the hon. Gentleman is not going to spend the next day and a half engaged in a hostile debate. I am trying to be helpful. I thought that with his vast consultancy experience in such matters he would applaud the measure. He is far too intelligent not to accept that the Secretary of State has to lay down the parameters within which innovation and autonomy can be exercised. We do not have a problem with that. Indeed, we have co-operated well on that aspect of the Bill. Having set down those parameters, however, schools should not have to go back to the Secretary of State every time they want to instigate an innovation within those broad parameters.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I am following carefully what the hon. Gentleman says. Is it to be inferred that one of the benefits of new clause 6 is the absence of a bureaucratic process of informing the Secretary of State about an innovative project that a governing body of a school might undertake? If that is the case, how does the hon. Gentleman expect the Secretary of State to know whether or not it would appropriate to invoke new clause 6(4) and seek to restrict the ability of a governing body to undertake that kind of project?

Mr. Willis: First, I have made it clear that, under the new clause, I hope the Secretary of State will lay down the condition that schools that show serious weakness, require special measures or are under-achieving in the eyes of Ofsted, are not entitled to apply for earned autonomy or the power to innovate. That is one safeguard. Secondly, under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, local authorities were rightly given a duty to raise standards in their schools. The relationship that local authorities now have with their schools is largely positive; they engage in positive dialogue. That is another safeguard. It is also recognised that governing bodies have a duty because they carry most of the legal powers in a school. If they are to ensure that their ideas for innovation and powers of autonomy are realised, they have got to act reasonably.

We cannot have it both ways. If we argue that schools should be given powers to innovate, if we want a diverse and exciting secondary education system and if we want a plethora of different arrangements in the 14 to 19-year-old sector, we must free schools to get on with the job. That is an exciting concept, and to realise it, we should not confine schools to having to go cap in hand to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Lansley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way again; I do not want to detain him while he is developing his argument. However, new clause 6(4) gives rise to a problem that is similar to the one in new clause 5(4), as it does not seem to allow for the possibility for which the hon. Gentleman argued. He said that there are authorities or qualifying bodies generally, as well as school governing bodies, that may not meet Ofsted requirements. However, the purpose of subsection (4) is not explicitly to allow the Secretary of State to exempt certain qualifying bodies from the power to undertake innovative projects. Its purpose is, by order, to designate certain requirements under education legislation which, by extension, would apply to all qualifying bodies. If the hon. Gentleman wanted to give the Secretary of State the freedom to choose certain schools that were counted as failing schools, why did he not write that into the new clause?

Mr. Willis: The hon. Gentleman will accept that I do not want to put anything unnecessary into the Bill. Sadly, an awful lot of things that should have been included in it will be introduced in secondary legislation.

New clause 6(4) is clear. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman does not appreciate the fact that it is a catch-all for the Secretary of State, who can lay down regulations under which all schools can innovate. I am arguing strongly that, if we want the innovation in schools that most hon. Members want, we must free schools to achieve it. The Secretary of State says that she wants to trust schools, and the chief inspector says in his new Ofsted report that we have better school management than ever before, so we cannot simply say, "Ah, but we just do not trust you enough." We must address that issue.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the key to the new clause is the definition of innovation? As drafted, the new clause hands considerable powers to the Secretary of State to define innovation. Does he envisage that under his new clause admissions policy is an area in which a school can innovate?

Mr. Willis: The hon. Gentleman knows my views on admissions policy, which is key to having an education system that all youngsters can access as a level playing field. One of my great criticisms of current admissions policies—I am being dragged into another part of the Bill—is that there is a plethora of different arrangements, which tier admissions and result in children being creamed off. I do not favour that, but we should have a genuine debate with the Secretary of State about the parameters of innovation. As for individual schools, the new clause tries to ensure that a school does not have to go cap in hand to the Secretary of State every time that it wants to innovate. We want to set down guidelines within which schools can automatically innovate, provided that, for example, they are not in special measures or another category.

Mr. Chaytor: Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that, as drafted, the new clause would allow a school to innovate in admissions policy, and would certainly give a future Secretary of State enormous powers to transform admissions policies by the back door?

Mr. Willis: I must confess that when I wrote the new clause, I envisaged that a Liberal Democrat would be in power. The hon. Gentleman knows that we would apply certain rigorous conditions if we were in government. There is a failing in the Bill regarding earned autonomy; eventually, we learned that only 10 per cent. of schools would get earned autonomy. Many schools that were announced today as having outstanding Ofsted reports would not be in that 10 per cent. We want to pin the Government down; we want them to say what innovation means and what its parameters will be. The Secretary of State must know that when she introduces regulations, there will be certain areas in which schools will not be allowed to innovate; I hope that admissions is one of them.

Mr. Brady: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) hit on a key flaw in the Bill? Under clause 2, the Secretary of State would have the power to permit selection by ability or aptitude; charging by schools in the maintained sector; and the suspension of special educational needs provision. The power would be limitless. The hon. Member for Bury, North hit on what is wrong in a Bill that gives the Secretary of State enormous power, without providing any constraints or giving the House the capability to control what he or she intends to do with it.

Mr. Willis: I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman said; he put his finger on a great problem with

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which all Opposition Members have had to wrestle during the passage of the Bill. In Committee, we had insufficient time to examine the meaning of much of the Bill's contents. On Report, we find ourselves with ludicrously little time to deal with crucial issues.

While it is interesting to analyse a Liberal Democrat new clause, our aim is to try to ensure that the Minister for School Standards and the Secretary of State give a proper explanation of the Bill's intentions. Hon. Members should remember that we have not had much of the promised guidance that would provide an explanation of the Bill.

Mr. Fallon *rose—*

Chris Grayling *rose—*

Mr. Willis: I shall make a little progress. I realise that the hon. Gentlemen are so enthralled with the debate that they want it to continue until 10 o'clock at least.

An illuminating aspect of the Secretary of State's statement this afternoon on Mike Tomlinson's latest report for Ofsted was her response to questions about the increasing division, particularly at secondary level, between schools and children making excellent progress and those not doing so. The whole House shared a sense of frustration that children from Afro-Caribbean backgrounds, from Bangladeshi and Pakistani backgrounds, travellers' children and children in care were not making the progress that we had hoped for. The 2001 GCSE results last summer showed that 30,000 young people were leaving school without a single GCSE between them. That is an indictment of our system. It is not a credit to any of us.

7.30 pm

In answer to questions this afternoon about raising standards at key stage 3, the Secretary of State's vision was that children should have more of the same and be tested more, and that somehow, although that had failed at key stage 2, it would suddenly be a success at key stage 3. I found it an incredibly sad response.

Many of the children who are switched off by the age of 11, and many of the children, especially from ethnic minority homes, for whom the curriculum is a turn-off as well, attend schools in the lower quartile of the league tables. According to the Government's current policy, as reflected in the Bill, none of those schools will be allowed to innovate. They will all have to follow a tightly controlled prescription from the Secretary of State.

The Secretary of State and the Minister shake their heads. I am happy for them to intervene to explain that that will not be the case. In reality, that is what is envisaged. The very schools that most need to innovate will be the ones that cannot. New clause 6 deals with that issue.

Mr. Fallon: I understand that for the Government, freedom is control. The House must be willing to simplify their extraordinary proposal whereby schools will have to beg for their freedom. Does the hon. Gentleman accept, however, that the weakness of new clause 6, especially subsection (3), is that under the guise of innovation, a school could exempt itself from almost anything—not just admissions, as the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) pointed out, but from obligations on attendance, truancy, discipline, testing or almost anything else? The drafting of subsection (3) is too wide, in almost the same sense as the drafting of subsection (4) is too narrow.

Mr. Willis: The hon. Gentleman has his point of view, which he has expressed clearly. In the circumstances that he described, two things would occur. First, the local authority, which has a duty in this regard, would have to intervene. Secondly, when Ofsted inspected, it would fail the school on all those factors and put it into special measures. The school's powers to innovate would thus be lost.

I have great faith in schools. Of course, at times, like my two newly acquired dogs, they let me down. I should tell the Secretary of State that I have two lovely new dogs, but at times they are a huge disappointment to me. However, I do not want another "Diary" piece on the subject. Generally speaking, I believe that schools are desperate to do a good job.

As a head teacher for almost 20 years before entering the House, there were times when I looked back and felt that I should have done things differently. Things should have been performed in a better way. We should have taken different decisions. That will inevitably be the case.

If we want to attack some of the problems in our secondary schools and deal with the issues of under-achievement and of youngsters being turned off, we must free schools so that they can be innovative, and so that they do not have to go to the Secretary of State every time they want to do something different.

Chris Grayling: May I say how much I welcome the hon. Gentleman's conversion to the free schools policy that we advocated at the last general election? As regards the positioning of the new clause within the Bill, would it not cause a legislative problem were the clause to be accepted by the House tonight? In a sense, although the clause might deliver to schools the freedom to innovate that all of us would welcome, it would come directly head to head with the provisions on earned autonomy.

In one part of the Bill, we would be saying to schools that they had the freedom to innovate, subject to the Secretary of State's imposition of a number of restricted areas, but in another part of the Bill, we would be saying that a school had to apply for the right to innovate. In order to introduce the new clause into the Bill, would we not need to delete substantial chunks from the rest of the Bill?

Mr. Willis: The hon. Gentleman, as ever, makes a good point. We never got to the bottom of why the provisions on innovation and earned autonomy were not meshed within the Bill. In many cases, they seem to be one and the same. When we reached the provisions on earned autonomy, which we are not dealing with tonight, we were staggered for two reasons—first, because earned autonomy meant the ability to disapply the national curriculum, or it applied to pay and conditions. That was the extent of earned autonomy.

Secondly, the Committee was staggered to learn that the extent of the Government's confidence in our secondary schools was that by the end of the Parliament, 10 per cent. of them would have achieved that. That would mean that some of the schools that had been granted specialist status or beacon status would not be considered good enough for earned autonomy. I am trying to deal with that controlling element through the new clause and the amendments. I am sure that when he has the opportunity, the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) will speak eloquently and fluently on these matters.

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): Conservative Members seem to be struggling with the meaning of innovation and autonomy. If those are difficult concepts to follow, they are at any rate embodied in the Bill and probably would be involved in any Conservative free school proposals. Will my hon. Friend acknowledge that Conservative Members are in danger of missing the point of the new clause, which is essentially to decide who has autonomy and the capacity to innovate, and who legitimately should have it?

Mr. Willis: The short answer to my hon. Friend is yes. The hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) disowned the Conservative policy on education at the last election, and one can understand why. It was a discredited policy and the Conservative party suffered a landslide defeat because it had no real policies on education that people understood. I understand that the hon. Member for Ashford has learned the error of his ways. The party is a reformed party and he is much more friendly and considerate. In that tone, I am trying to engage members of the Conservative party and meet them half way. I am delighted to be able to do so.

I shall make a little progress—

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham) *rose—*

Mr. Willis: I have not given way to the hon. Gentleman. It would be most discourteous of me not to do so.

Mr. Hoban: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. For those of us who are new to the debate on innovation and autonomy, I want to clarify the aim of new clauses 5 and 6. I understand that the aim is to give every school the power to innovate, which seems entirely reasonable. From the hon. Gentleman's comments, it seems that the range of areas in which a school can innovate will be set by the Secretary of State. Although the new clause would allow more schools to innovate, there is a risk that the Secretary of State would narrow the areas in which schools could be innovative.

Mr. Willis: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point, and I congratulate him on it. How much better that we know the parameters within which schools will be able to innovate than schools spending inordinate amounts of time making presentations to the Secretary of State, only to be told, "I'm very sorry, but that is not an area in which you can innovate." It is that sort of bureaucratic nonsense that I am trying to do away with. Whether or not the drafting of the new clause is as precise as it should be, if the Government were to accept it—I understand that they will accept the principle—they would redraft it in their own image, although it is to be hoped that they would do so slightly better than in respect of the order of consideration.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): I still do not follow the hon. Gentleman's point about subsection (4) of new clause 6. Presumably, it would allow the Secretary of State to designate areas in which innovation is not possible. New clause 6 therefore has a push-me-pull-you element, as subsection (3) says that all schools can innovate, while subsection (4) says that the Secretary of State can decide where that is not possible. If he wants free schools, why is he prepared to give so much power to the Secretary of State?

Mr. Willis: The hon. Gentleman has hit the nail on the head. I do not want free schools. Indeed, I do not want what the Conservative party proposed at the last election, which was simply a free-for-all. He knows what we said about admissions, which were one of the central planks of the Conservative proposals on free schools. I am not proposing free schools, as I accept that there should be parameters in which schools should work. My argument is simple; indeed, it is so reasonable that I cannot understand why the Government would not accept it. After the parameters have been drawn—it is up to the Government to decide them—all schools should be given the same powers, provided that they are not in special measures. Surely, that is an easy concept for the Government to understand.

I have tabled a number of minor amendments that feature in this group. Amendments Nos. 64 and 65 would protect schools so that the guidance from the Secretary of State or the National Assembly for Wales has to be taken into consideration. I think that that is eminently reasonable. Amendment No. 66 takes into consideration special education needs. Again, I do not believe that the Secretary of State should have any problem with that. It is important that, whenever a school is innovating, it thinks very carefully about the effect on children with special education needs. There is a great fear that, in terms of innovation, we will drive out of our schools some of the youngsters who need their school most, so the amendment seeks to ensure some protection.

Amendment No. 68 seeks in respect of the powers to innovate to ensure that schools have a duty to offer a broad and balanced curriculum. It would not be a prescribed curriculum of the sort that we have now, but it would have to be broad and balanced. Amendment No. 67 would establish negotiating structures for schools exempted from the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Act 1991. One of the features of the Government's plans in the Bill is a disapplication in respect of teachers' pay and conditions. Although that may be desirable in some cases, it is crucial that teachers have the power to negotiate, and that is what amendment No. 67 seeks to ensure.

This has, I hope, been an interesting presentation. I appreciate the way in which hon. Members have engaged on the new clause and I commend it to the House.

Mr. Brady: I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), especially after enjoying so many interesting exchanges with him in Committee in the past few weeks. His exposition was very much in keeping with what we heard in Committee, where

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we had useful discussions and found an enormous amount of common ground, sometimes in surprising quarters. The hon. Gentleman and I have not always found ourselves in agreement in the past few years, so such common ground is a measure of the depth of some of our concerns. We are anxious not about the Government's objectives in dealing with innovation and autonomy—we all agree that they are laudable—but about their whole approach, and that anxiety is reflected in the extent to which not only Liberal Democrat and Opposition Members, but sometimes Labour Members who are aware of the potential effects of the Bill, have found common cause.

7.45 pm

It is important to consider the provisions in the context of what happened in Committee. It is also important, not least in terms of our exchanges about the change to the order of consideration, that we consider the Minister's own words about the way in which he believes that education legislation should be developed. First, I cite the remarks that he made in the very first sitting of Standing Committee G on the morning of Tuesday 11 December last year:

> "I make no bones about my third introductory point: we want more education measures to be passed through secondary legislation than has traditionally been the case. Education measures have been out of step with other legislation, and thus have been unnecessarily inflexible and unduly prescriptive. The Committee will discuss the many instances in which greater flexibility would help to meet the different circumstances of communities throughout the country".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee G,* 11 December 2001; c. 13.]

Thus, the Minister stated in very bald terms the preference of Ministers as to how the legislation should be taken forward, which is that as little detail as possible should be included in the Bill and that as much as possible should be left to ministerial discretion and dealt with through secondary legislation with a lower standard of scrutiny.

Mr. Cameron: My hon. Friend talks about a lack of detail in the Bill. Will he try to tell us where in the Bill the concept of innovation is explained? It appears in the new clauses tabled both by Opposition Members and by the Liberal Democrats, but it does not seem to be defined properly in the Bill.

Mr. Brady: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Even if I cannot refer him to a definition of innovation, I can at least cite a definition of what the Minister believes it to imply, because he gave a most helpful and instructive explanation in the Committee's second sitting on the afternoon of 11 December. When I pressed him on what innovation should be, he replied:

> "The term 'innovation' implies something new".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee G,* 11 December 2001; c. 54.]

Thus far, all hon. Members would be with him, but many of us would believe that innovation is a continuing concept in which any entity, whether it is a corporate body, school or public body, would want to engage continually in order constantly to improve its performance. That is the nub of what Opposition Members would like the term "innovation" to embody.

Chris Grayling *rose—*

Mr. Hoban *rose—*

Mr. Brady: My hon. Friends will have to wait a little longer to hear the rest of the Minister's definition. I shall give way first to my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Mr. Grayling), who was on the Committee.

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Does he recognise how disappointing it was in Committee to encounter so many different situations—they are epitomised in the issue of innovation and autonomy—in which Ministers said, "This is what we want to do, but you'll have to take our word for it." We were effectively told that the Secretary of State would provide a definition of innovation through regulations. That does not sound very innovative to me.

Mr. Brady: My hon. Friend is right. It was a cause of anxiety throughout our proceedings in Committee that insufficient flesh was put on the Bill's bones.

Mr. Hoban: Clause 6 is entitled "Exemptions available to qualifying schools". I took it refer to subjects such as the curriculum and pay and conditions, in relation to which innovations could be made. For the benefit of those of us who did not serve on the Committee, may I ask whether the Minister explained any of the draft regulations that the clause covers and suggested the parameters of the scope for innovation that schools could enjoy?

Mr. Brady: The Minister gave a broad idea of the Government's thinking. However, I shall deal with that later, when we consider new clause 10. The Minister's words did not allay our reasonable fears about the use of the provisions. There are two intertwined concepts: innovation and earned autonomy. If my hon. Friend will be a little patient, I am currently trying to deal with the new clauses that the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough tabled on exemptions from education legislation that are relevant to innovation.

I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron), who made a point about the definition of innovation, for my delay in reverting to it. Rather than defining innovation, the Minister defined what was not meant by it. Conservative Members would like innovation to be part of schools' culture and thus improve standards and quality in a key public service. However, the Minister said:

> "it would be a bit odd to talk about innovation carrying on for decades. By definition it would no longer be innovation, and should be dealt with in the ordinary legislative way. These powers are appropriate for trying out new things."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee G,* 11 December 2001; c. 54.]

What a bizarre approach to education policy! The Minister suggests that the only new ideas are those that are knocking about in Ministers' heads or locked in a filing cabinet that is not available to other hon. Members.

Mr. Lansley: I am doing a little catching up on the terms that are being used. Is my hon. Friend suggesting that the Government want a period of innovation but not the diversity that would exist in a normal system with freedom to innovate? They want a period of innovation, no diversity, and the ability to reimpose uniformity.

Mr. Brady: My hon. Friend may have hit on the truth. I am delighted that he is catching up with the terms, because he has made an important contribution. Ministers do not regard innovation as continual, but as happening for a defined period. The Bill defines a period for which innovation would be deemed appropriate, but allows for the possibility of extending it for a further finite period. However, Ministers reject the suggestion of continuing innovation. That is especially important when we consider the scope of the powers to innovate.

As we have already established, the powers to innovate are not specific; they are powers to make exemptions from the requirements of education legislation.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Does my hon. Friend agree that reducing bureaucracy in schools would be a genuine innovation? Will he enlighten hon. Members who did not serve on the Committee about whether a discussion took place on the sort of bureaucratic procedures that a school would have to undergo to apply to the Secretary of State for permission to innovate?

Mr. Brady: Such a discussion did, indeed, take place. It is worrying that although schools are drowning in a sea of red tape and regulation, the Bill provides for even more. Commercial entities face specific circumstances when they tender for a lucrative project. They can place a major burden on such an organisation. Ministers are trying to replicate those circumstances for schools that apply to innovate. They do not know the circumstances under which Ministers may be prepared to deem that innovation can take place.

The Bill includes a definition of the breadth of the exemptions from education legislation. That lies at the heart of new clauses 5 and 6, which were tabled by the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough. I almost called him my hon. Friend, but that proves that we have been in too close proximity for the past few weeks. We shall shortly return to a more natural state.

The exemptions from education legislation that are relevant to innovation include the ability to make an exemption from any provision of the Education Act 1967, the Education Act 1967, the Education Act 1973, the Education Act 1980, the Education (Fees and Awards) Act 1983, the Further Education Act 1985, the Education Act 1986, the Education (No. 2) Act 1986, the Education Reform Act 1988, the Education (Student Loans) Act 1990, and the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Act 1991. The list goes on.

It may not apply to other hon. Members, but in my five years in Parliament, I have never come across a Government Bill that allows not only exemption from any provision of any existing measure but from the Bill that we are considering. That is the most remarkable attempt by a Government to seize all discretion and power. The Minister confirmed that in terms in Committee on 11 December. He referred to my contribution and said:

> "His other point, which was new"—

innovative, perhaps—

> "was what he described as the self-referential issue in the Bill. I refer him to clause 2(1)(a), which states that the applicant would have conferred exemption from any requirement imposed by education legislation including, of course, those elements of education legislation that are in the Bill."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee G*, 11 December 2001; c. 49.]

Mr. Osborne: My hon. Friend's point is spelled out in the explanatory notes, which state:

> "The clauses allow the Secretary of State . . . to suspend legislative requirements and, if necessary, modify legislation or confer new powers."

I suppose that it is some comfort that those powers are limited to primary and secondary education legislation.

Mr. Brady: We must beware. Earlier in our proceedings, we had an example of the Government tabling amendments without giving notice to the House. We must be careful that other Departments do not take such practice as a model. The exemptions that are relevant to innovation mean that the measure is not simply an Education Bill, but the last Education Bill. It marks the last occasion that any Government have to come to the House to obtain powers.

Given exemptions in other clauses that we shall examine later, the powers will be sufficient to allow Ministers to do whatever they want. I say that without qualification. The new clauses tabled by the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives try to constrain the powers a little. In Committee, I suggested that although we had heard a great deal about Henry VIII powers, the Bill was a Charles I measure. It tries to dispense altogether with the need to consult Parliament.

I have given some details of the powers to make exemptions from education legislation. I also took the trouble to obtain a note from the Library on the length of time it had taken the House of Commons to consider all the education measures that clause 2, a small provision, can suspend.

8 pm

In 1962, the Second Reading, Standing Committee, Report stage and Third Reading of the Education Act took the House of Commons 47 hours to consider. The House took only five hours to consider the relatively minor matters in the Education Act 1967, but spent a rather more serious 129.25 hours considering the Education Act 1980. I wonder whether any current Labour Members were here at that time—I am not sure whether any of those present have clocked up that length of service—but no doubt they were doing their jobs, as they were permitted to do in those days, by scrutinising the legislation properly.

I shall not go through all the figures, but 206 hours were spent on debating the Education Reform Act 1988. All the education legislation which under clause 2 could be suspended by ministerial fiat took the House of Commons alone 786 hours to consider. In Committee, we were able to give the current Bill 44.25 hours, and we had just six hours on Second Reading.

Chris Grayling: Does my hon. Friend agree that it was equally shameful to use the knife in our debates in

[Chris Grayling]

Committee on some of the key parts of the Bill—notably the early stages relating to innovation and earned autonomy, which are the crux of the Bill? At the end of our proceedings, we were awash with time to debate issues in relation to which there was no debate, while in the early stages we had nothing like enough time to devote to the issues in the Bill that really matter.

Mr. Brady: I take issue with the latter part of my hon. Friend's point, because even in the later stages of the Committee when we were debating less controversial matters, although we were moving as quickly as humanly possible—I think that the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough will bear me out—we were barely able to deal with all the amendments that had been grouped together for those later sittings. The effect was even more damaging when the so-called knife was applied in the earlier sittings. It is a matter of record that huge swathes of the Bill could not be debated in Committee.

Mr. George Osborne: I want to make an historical point. My hon. Friend said that we spent more than 40 hours discussing the Bill in Committee. I believe that the House spent more than 40 days in Committee debating Balfour's Education Act. Such things have changed under this Government.

Mr. Brady: That is a perfect illustration of why I am so pleased to have my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) in the neighbouring constituency to my own, and of how much things have improved in that regard since last June.

The effect of the knives in Committee was that we did not conclude our deliberations on clause 11 and we had no debate whatever on clauses 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, or 17. We were allowed a brief discussion on governing bodies under clause 18, but there was no discussion on clauses 19, 20, 21, 22 or 23, which covers federations of schools, all of which are key provisions in the Bill.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Brady: I cannot resist.

Mr. Turner: Does my hon. Friend agree that the problem is perhaps that the Government see the House and its Committees as a legislation machine rather than a scrutiny machine? They regard the most efficient kind of legislation machine as one that pumps through the maximum number of clauses—and, doubtless, regulations—in the minimum amount of time. Those of us who see the role of the House as that of a scrutinising machine view it in terms of how it protects the subject against an over-mighty Executive, ensures that those who work in the public sector are protected—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Gentleman must learn the distinction between an intervention and a mini-speech. He must be much more succinct in an intervention.

Mr. Brady: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making a telling point—a telling point that could have been made at any stage during the last five years. In one sense, however, the Bill goes a stage further, in the sense that it will create a position in which the House of Commons will move on from being a legislative machine to being totally redundant and having no future role in education legislation. I shall not continue with the long list of clauses that we did not discuss in Committee.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): While my hon. Friend is making this point about time, may I ask whether he is aware that 15 or 16 further groups of amendments to this part of the Bill are still on the Order Paper to be considered? What confidence does he have that the House can possibly do justice to that amount of material—some of which is very substantive and controversial—in only one further sitting?

Mr. Brady *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) will not be tempted to pursue that line. We should come back to the terms of the new clause that we are debating.

Mr. Brady: I am most grateful for your protection, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As you know, some more experienced Members of the House may on occasion take advantage of the relative inexperience of others. I am grateful to you for protecting me from my right hon. Friend—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman may be sure that I shall continue to give him the best protection that I can.

Mr. Brady: I am most grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You have also given me the opportunity to move on a little in my consideration of this group of new clauses and amendments.

Mr. Lansley: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Brady: Well, I am trying to move on, but I will take a brief intervention.

Mr. Lansley: My intervention relates to a point that my hon. Friend was making about the extent of the powers that the Government propose to take in clause 2. They are immensely wide-ranging powers to disapply or modify existing education legislation—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are debating new clause 5, and I hope that we can come back to that subject.

Mr. Brady *rose—*

Mr. Lansley: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Brady: I certainly will, so long as my hon. Friend will take note of your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Lansley: Absolutely, and, in this respect, I am following the point that my hon. Friend was making: that new clause 5 seeks to extend to local authorities—as new clause 6 extends to qualifying schools—some of the powers in relation to innovation and earned autonomy that would be available without the Secretary of State's scrutiny. The point that I was trying to make is that the wide-ranging powers that the Secretary of State is seeking to take are on the application of a qualifying body. Is my hon. Friend aware of any intention on the part of the Government to solicit applications from qualifying bodies to secure modifications of legislation of a kind that the Government are seeking?

Mr. Brady: I am not aware of any intention to solicit such applications, but Ministers might wish to make their position clear in that regard when replying to the debate on this group of amendments.

Chris Grayling: Under new clauses 5 and 6, the qualifying body would not have to make an application. It would be able to take the decision in its own right, and the Secretary of State would then have to stop it.

Mr. Brady: My hon. Friend is right. This is where the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough—in new clauses 5 and 6—and our own new clause 10, to which I shall return shortly, seek to shift the balance of this legislation in an important way. A thread runs through the Bill—whether in regard to clauses on exemptions for innovation or on earned autonomy—which suggests that it is up to Ministers to decide when it is appropriate or possible to take such action. The new clauses would make the legislation more permissive by freeing up the whole process and, without suggestions being solicited, schools or other qualifying bodies could make precisely those moves, which is a positive step.

Mr. Cameron: Will my hon. Friend clear up a worrying point that I put to the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough? The hon. Gentleman is lending his support to new clauses 5 and 6, but in both, subsection (3) would give autonomy to governing bodies and LEAs while subsection (4) would give the Secretary of State the opportunity to take it away in many circumstances. For the benefit of Conservative Members, will my hon. Friend describe the areas in which the Secretary of State would want to curtail the freedom of schools and governing bodies in such a way?

Mr. Brady: My hon. Friend makes an intelligent point—the Liberal Democrat new clauses would have that effect, but I make no criticism of the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough. Although I do not necessarily support the new clauses, I have enormous sympathy with their thrust. My hon. Friend might sympathise with the hon. Gentleman and be inclined to give him the benefit of the doubt had he been with us as we sat through the debates in Committee, during which we were ground down by the Government's relentless attempts to regulate and control so that we might occasionally fall into the trap of believing that that ought to be allowed.

Before I move on to new clause 10 and the earned autonomy provisions, I must focus briefly on the extent of the exemptions available for innovation. For the convenience of hon. Members, I shall consider amendment No. 79. The origin of the thinking behind it lies in a debate in Committee about the extent to which Ministers are taking unqualified, untrammelled powers to suspend legislation without exemption.

The hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) may be interested to know that we probed the extent of that freedom by raising with the Minister the hypothetical question whether it would be possible to disapply certain aspects of the Education Act 1996 by removing sections 449 to 462, which prevent maintained schools from charging for places. The Minister was good enough to give confirmation:

> "Theoretically, the hon. Gentleman's worry could be valid, but"—

he was very clear about this; I make no bones about it—

> "I assure him that we would not allow an innovation that would introduce charging or end the right to free education."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee G*, 11 December 2001; c. 90.]

How many hours of debate in the House took place and how much energy, belief and passion were expended in this place to ensure that children in this country have a right to free education? I do not for a moment suggest that the Minister seeks to remove that right, but Members on both sides of the House should be greatly disturbed that the best he could do in response to my question was, "We have no intention of doing it."

8.15 pm

No matter what Members of the House believe about the principle of free, universal education, they will no longer able to rely on it being provided by statute if the Bill becomes law. It will be provided at the whim and discretion of Ministers, which is a matter of grave concern.

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an important point about those pillars of the Bill and I would be interested to hear the views of Liberal Democrat and Labour Back-Bench members of the Committee, but none are present. Does he agree that the specific situation that he has identified effectively shows that the Bill would give this Labour Government and the Secretary of State the power to do certain things—those which would give the hon. Member for Bury, North nightmares—although one might accept that they do not intend to do them?

Mr. Brady: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I can only imagine that Labour and Liberal Democrat Back-Bench members of the Committee expected to debate the red herring amendments on faith schools and were surprised by the change to the programme motion. They must have been lulled into a false sense of security, or perhaps they expected to debate these more central matters another time. They have been confused by what the Government Whips chose to do without giving notice to Members on either side of the House.

Moving on from the point that we established in Committee—the exemption from any provision of education legislation might run as far as allowing maintained schools to introduce fees or charges—we come to amendment No. 79, which raises another concern. I freely admit that we could have tabled a raft of similar amendments, as Ministers seek the power to suspend any provision of education legislation, but amendment No. 79 simply picks on a particularly important aspect of those powers.

I say again that I accept that Ministers may have no immediate desire to allow charging, but unless we accept amendment No. 79 it will be possible for a maintained school to make such an application to a Minister.

[Mr. Brady]

Furthermore, in the spirit of good will, which we have tried to re-establish, my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) described this Minister as a reasonable and honourable man, although his judgment is occasionally lacking in matters of procedure.

I see that we shall now gain the enormous benefit of the wisdom of the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). We look forward to being enlightened, and hearing his views on the powers the Government are taking to obtain exemptions from legislation that potentially allows maintained schools in his constituencies to charge for places.

More relevant to amendment No. 79 is the possibility that the Government may accept an application from a qualifying body for that body to be exempted from section 317 of the Education Act 1996. That section deals with the duties imposed on a governing body or local education authority in relation to pupils with special educational needs. As Members on both sides of the House accept, such pupils need special protection and education that meets whatever their needs may be. They may have autistic spectrum disorders, or physical disabilities. In any event, the 1996 Act currently provides a guarantee—a degree of certainty—that the special needs of a pupil in a maintained school will, as far as is reasonable, be met by the governing body and the local education authority.

I hope that Ministers will give a warm welcome to the amendment, which would give them an opportunity to guarantee the protection of children with special educational needs—not just in the generality of schools or in the specialist colleges whose expansion the Government are announcing, but in schools granted exemptions for purposes of innovation.

It is not beyond the realms of credibility that a school might make a bid for exemption from some requirements relating to special educational needs. It might avoid considerable costs by doing so. It is not far-fetched to imagine that at some point a school, while not saying that it did not want to make any SEN provision, might say that an aspect of such provision placed too heavy a burden on it. At present, Ministers are insisting on retaining the power to disapply that obligation. Amendment No. 79 would have the important effect of presenting such disapplications.

I hope Ministers will not just accept the specific terms of the amendment, and the fact that its aim is right, proper and important, but understand from the two examples given by the Opposition—the first, in Committee, relating to the introduction of charges and the second, on Report, relating to protection for those with special educational needs—that there is real concern about the limitless scope of the powers that they seek.

New clause 10 is particularly important. The theme was established by the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough, who tabled new clauses 5 and 6. New clause 5 seeks to allow a local education authority to innovate without the Secretary of State's permission—although, as my hon. Friends have pointed out, subsection (4) would give the Secretary of State some power to control that freedom. New clause 6 would allow a school to innovate without the Secretary of State's permission, with a similar caveat in subsection (4). I know that the Secretary of State is keen to have powers to control the process, but she is clearly confident that the new clauses will find favour on both sides of the House, as she has not felt it necessary to stay in order to witness that support.

New clause 10 takes the whole issue by the scruff of the neck. It attempts to change the balance. Opposition Members strongly support the move to give schools more autonomy. We believe that they are generally better able than Ministers to run their affairs, raise educational standards and give children the best possible education. In almost all circumstances, schools, heads, teachers and governing bodies should be left to get on with their work with the maximum freedom that is reasonable.

Chris Grayling: The importance of the new clause was highlighted in today's Ofsted report, which says:

> "Problems in the recruitment and retention of suitably qualified teachers have increased; the situation is considerably worse in London than elsewhere.
>
> Teacher shortages are leading to the increased use of temporary supply teachers and the use of permanent teachers to teach subjects in which they are not adequately qualified".

Does my hon. Friend recognise that the freedoms that the new clause would give heads and governing bodies may go some small way to providing the flexibility that would enable them to overcome the recruitment problems which are causing the difficulties highlighted by the chief inspector in the report?

Mr. Brady: My hon. Friend is right and I am grateful for the point that he makes.

To give Ministers credit, they have recognised that there is a severe problem of retention and recruitment in the teaching profession. They know that problems and difficulties are being caused for many schools, not just in the south-east, but in much of the country. They have responded by introducing provisions for earned autonomy—autonomy related to school performance, as they phrase it—but as is typical of their policies as a whole and as is endemic in the Bill they miss the point. They say, "Autonomy is a good thing, schools should be free to make more decisions for themselves—but only when we say so." They bring the whole thing back to the Secretary of State's office. Ministers decide when autonomy is a good thing and when it is not. That is not autonomy; it is central control. That is where the Government increasingly fall down, even when they have some inkling of the right direction in which they should be travelling.

The documents that the Minister gave to Committee members and has now given to other hon. Members to provide some detail of how the Government envisage allowing autonomy in certain circumstances raise more concerns than they settle. Many people have cast doubt on the validity of using free school meals to decide whether a school is performing well or not compared with other schools in its band. The use of the free school meals measure has been widely discredited. Normally Ministers would accept that, but they are so baffled as to how to measure plausibly which schools should be allowed autonomy and which not, that they have fallen back on the free school meals criteria.

Mr. Hoban: May I give my hon. Friend an example of the problem with using free school meals as an indicator of performance? I was talking to the head master of a local secondary school, who pointed out that the take-up rate for free school meals in his school was 6 per cent., but in feeder primary schools it was 9 per cent. Families do not suddenly become richer when their children move from primary to secondary school. The use of a crude school measure such as free school meals seems lamentable.

Mr. Brady: My hon. Friend is right. I will be interested to hear what the Minister's justification is for the use of the free school meals criteria, because Ministers do not normally give credence to that measure of social need in regard to school performance.

The extent to which Ministers have sought to put flesh on the bones of the provision does not merely fail to answer questions, but raises many more issues that need to be settled. The Government have taken an odd approach whereby they claim to believe in autonomy for schools, but then attempt to row back from it and explain how they might interpret when autonomy is appropriate and when it is not. It is an extremely odd provision. New clause 10 would turn the Bill away from the plethora of ill-thought-out draft regulations that Ministers have in mind.

8.30 pm

Mr. Cameron: To be fair, my hon. Friend should put some flesh on the bones of new clause 10, which seeks to give all maintained schools freedom over pay and conditions but then states in subsection (2) that there may be circumstances in which a school will not be eligible for automatic exemption. Surely my hon. Friend should explain the circumstances in which his proposed regulations would apply.

Mr. Brady: Absolutely. I plead guilty and I am pleased to hear my hon. Friend identify an apparent irregularity in the expert drafting of new clause 10. I should point out that I was charitable when he sought to make similar points about the new clauses tabled by the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough. I plead the same defence as I allowed the hon. Gentleman to use.

The Bill gives Ministers total control, discretion and freedom. They can do precisely as they wish. So whatever we attempt in new clauses—even if we allow Ministers reserve powers and trust them in a way in which they do not trust schools—in some circumstances it may be necessary to constrain autonomy or the freedom to innovate.

Mr. Willis: The hon. Gentleman has been generous in his comments. Our respective new clauses reiterate the same principle. We want the Government to set out in regulations, or in new legislation, the conditions in which schools would not get either earned autonomy or the power to innovate. That would be much healthier, as it would cut out a whole raft of bureaucracy involving schools having to apply and then being knocked back. We have all suffered from the whole business of bidding, which is something we want to avoid.

Mr. Brady: The hon. Gentleman is entirely right. Transparency and clarity are crucial to schools that may want to take advantage of the earned autonomy provisions. If we do not have that transparency and clarity, schools will end up wasting more time—which they can ill afford to do—and more of their resources will be taken up with bids and projects which ultimately do not come to fruition, but which they have no earthly way of knowing will not find favour with Ministers.

New clause 10 would improve the Bill as it provides for regulations setting out the circumstances in which automatic exemption would not be appropriate. However there is a more important reason for accepting new clause 10: it would change the burden of proof. At present Ministers assume that schools are guilty until proved innocent. Ministers believe that schools are not capable of managing their own affairs and that it is not reasonable for them to have autonomy except in specific circumstances that Ministers have approved.

New clause 10—I accept that new clauses 5 and 6 take somewhat the same direction—seeks to shift the burden of proof and establish a different premise. If accepted, it would make it clear that we trust schools, head teachers, teachers—whether professional staff or the volunteers who do such important work in making schools function—and governors to do their job. The less Ministers interfere in what such people are doing, and the more freedom and discretion they are given, the better the job that they are likely to do.

Mr. George Osborne: I very much welcome the new clause that my hon. Friend is introducing. In Committee, did the Minister give some idea of take-up by estimating the number of schools or local education authorities that will apply under the unamended clauses? Without such an estimate we should surely err on the side of giving many schools freedom, which is what the new clause would provide.

Mr. Brady: As far as I am aware, the Minister did not estimate the number of schools that are likely to gain exemptions relating to innovation.

Mr. Timms *indicated assent.*

Mr. Brady: The Minister says that I am correct, but he did estimate the number of schools that might initially qualify for earned autonomy. He suggested that an initial figure of 10 per cent. would be expected gradually to increase, although—perhaps reasonably—he was not prepared to predict a timetable for how soon a given percentage would qualify.

Of course, that figure depends greatly on the criteria set out by Ministers in the draft regulations. It is impossible to predict exactly how many would qualify against such an arbitrary yardstick as the free school meal test, which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) said, can differ from school to school, from area to area, and perhaps from year to year. In principle, under this measure Ministers might grant a school so-called earned autonomy in one year because it was in the top 25 per cent. of the free school meal band, but if the number of free school meals subsequently fell because a new factory or business opened nearby and brought new jobs to the area, the band would change and the school—without any change in its performance or the individuals educated there—might no longer qualify. I doubt whether Ministers intend to withdraw earned autonomy in such circumstances, but these rather odd provisions leave open that possibility.

[Mr. Brady]

New clause 10 deals with a matter of principle—the extent to which we in this House are prepared to trust and respect schools, and give them dignity, by accepting that they are better at doing their own job than Ministers are. It would shift the emphasis away from the assumption of Ministers that—at the moment, at least—90 per cent. of schools are not capable of qualifying for earned autonomy, to the assumption that schools are capable of so qualifying, unless there is a reason why they should not.

I am not going to estimate the number of schools that might be expected to qualify for earned autonomy if the new clause were accepted, but if Ministers do not accept it they should reflect on the balance that they are seeking to enshrine in the Bill. Accepting new clause 10 would send the positive message to schools that we want them to have the freedom to flourish. Without new clause 10, the Bill will send the negative message that Ministers do not trust schools to perform, other than in the circumstances that Ministers prescribe.

I therefore commend new clause 10 to the House.

Mr. Lansley: I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I confess that some of the distinctions and definitions in the Bill with which hon. Members have been wrestling are new to me, but I think that I have comprehended them sufficiently to be able to make a small contribution to the debate. I know that other Conservative Members want to participate as well, so I shall not tarry too long.

The new clauses under debate make it clear that there is a commendable desire among Liberal Democrat and Conservative Members to provide that requirements in relation to the curriculum and pay and conditions are lifted from schools, except where specific circumstances mean that those requirements should be reimposed. I understood the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) to say that, with new clause 6, he was thinking in particular about the reimposition of those requirements on schools considered, broadly speaking, to be failing. I suspect that the same is broadly true with the proposals in new clause 10, as set out by my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady), in relation to the earned autonomy provisions.

Mr. Cameron: I was wondering also whether subsection (2) of new clause 10 would be used to exempt failing schools from the freedom suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady). Does my hon. Friend agree that the proposal could be used to exempt schools of a certain size? Many smaller schools, especially smaller primary schools, might not want to have extra freedom. Could not new clause 10 be used in that way?

Mr. Lansley: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. I have wrestled in my area of Cambridgeshire with the extent to which schools seek the devolution of budgets. Secondary schools in Cambridgeshire—in the main, they should properly be described as village colleges—are happy to have delegation of budgets, and will take it on. However, many primary schools have not been as confident about taking on that responsibility. They either want the process to happen in stages, or they want to take on delegated budgets in concert with other schools, in partnership arrangements or under the umbrella of one of the schools to which they feed their pupils.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Does not my hon. Friend agree that it is dangerous to set such hard and fast rules as perhaps were implied by my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady)? Some very small schools were extremely successful as grant-maintained schools. They include the famous school in Cheshire that had more governors than pupils when it became grant maintained.

Mr. Lansley: I will always defer to my hon. Friend in his knowledge of the successes and experiences of schools that used the autonomy available under the grant-maintained scheme. I shall not dwell on that matter, save to say that it is possible, under new clause 10, to have a permissive arrangement by which schools that do not benefit from automatic exemption can opt themselves out of the process, so to speak. However, I suspect that we will soon find that, as schools use autonomy and demonstrate the benefits that accrue from that in terms of raising standards for pupils, other schools in the area will think of going in the same direction. Happily, that is what was increasingly becoming the case with grant-maintained schools.

It seems to me that Conservative Members want to ensure that there is a presumption in favour of a power to innovate for schools, except for those schools whose governance, demonstrated accountability and performance are clearly inadequate when it comes to using that autonomy constructively, and which must therefore be excluded. In other words, do we want to ensure that there is a presumption in favour of autonomy for schools, except for a category of schools that have not demonstrated that there would be reasonable confidence in their communities that they would use that autonomy well? If so, would these new clauses deliver that effectively?

8.45 pm

We have not dwelt much on new clause 5. I have the greatest respect for my local government colleagues. Indeed, as a vice-president of the Local Government Association I declare an interest, and I want, wherever possible, to support the views of local government. When the Minister responds to the debate, I hope that he will repeat what he said on 11 December: where there is to be a substantial use of the powers, it will be done through and in consultation with local education authorities. That point is important for the LGA and its members would be happy for the Minister to reiterate it.

That should not mean that new clause 5 is implemented, however. There is a risk that, by freeing LEAs from the constraint that the Secretary of State must remove any requirement placed on them, LEAs would be able to establish schools and to overturn existing planned infrastructures; for example, if they did not welcome measures taken by a school to take over LEA responsibilities or to implement its own schemes for admission and so forth. That would be undesirable.

The autonomy that we want will be exercised by schools on behalf of their pupils. That is the boundary that we want to set. If LEAs are offered the possibility to exercise that exemption from education legislation on their own behalf, it would be a much wider extension of their powers than we want. The Secretary of State might then have to reimpose limitations on LEAs, as their ability to act autonomously would be far too wide.

Such powers are incompatible with the nature of a local education authority as distinct from a school. An LEA is, in essence, a creature of statute. With the exception of certain recently introduced general duties to the population of the area, people in LEAs—like those throughout local government—know that they are operating within statutory confines. They know where their powers lie; they know what lies within those powers and what is outside them.

In that sense, a school is not a creature of statute. It is a community that may have been established outside statute, but has been brought into the maintained sector because of the funding stream. If we gave an LEA the autonomy proposed in the new clause, it might act in such a way that it became difficult to hold it accountable because it had disapplied its statutory limitations. A school, however, is inherently accountable to its own community.

Mr. Brady: My hon. Friend's point gives me an opportunity to deal with an aspect of new clauses 5 and 6 that I failed to address during my earlier remarks. If we consider the new clauses as a suite—one relating to LEAs and one to schools—it might be reasonable to assume that the power to innovate under new clause 5 related to the LEA own activities rather than to those of schools. However, has my hon. Friend considered that, taken separately, new clause 5 might allow LEAs to take and implement powers with regard to schools in the area without the permission, consent or agreement of those schools?

Mr. Lansley: My hon. Friend is following the same line of thought as me. New clause 5 would enable an LEA to disapply legislation affecting it. In effect, the LEA could take upon itself the power to restructure its funding relationship with all the schools in its area and to change the planning framework. As my hon. Friend made clear, the LEA could restructure its responsibilities for special educational needs and the statementing of pupils. Given the nature of the powers in clause 2 that new clause 5 would vary, the LEA would also have the power to restructure its services and activities in relation to schools and pupils outside its area. In effect, we would create competing authorities.

Competition may be a good thing, but we have not contemplated competition between local education authorities that are free to disapply education legislation and enter into a free-for-all in an urban area. I am not sure that it would be wise to contemplate that on the basis of new clause 5. which seems to contain none of the subsequent safeguards that should be imposed, whereas I feel much less perturbed by new clause 6. Under new clause 6, such freedom would be given to the governing bodies of maintained schools. That would fit the philosophy of many schools, as they were established as self-governing communities, so new clause 6 seems perfectly reasonable.

The issue therefore with new clause 6 is not whether it is right in principle, but whether it is effective, or defective, in practice. That is rather different, and it is where I part company with the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough. Under subsection (4) of new clause 6, with the stroke of the Secretary of State's pen, all the control that the Secretary of State wished to exercise over the power to innovate could be reintroduced, but that could be done in a more damaging way because of its drafting. To prevent schools from using the powers that they would be given under new clause 6, the Secretary of State would probably have to designate many of the requirements imposed under education legislation as a whole.

Under new clause 6, the Secretary of State would not be allowed to designate those requirements imposed under education legislation in relation to a specific subset of schools. It would be sensible, for example, to think of a new form of qualifying school, as is implied in subsequent clauses that we shall be discussing, and apply that to new clause 6.

Mr. Willis: I follow the drift of what the hon. Gentleman says, but does he accept that new clause 10 has the same defects? Unless the Bill stated the ways in which schools would be allowed innovate, we would fall into the same trap. I am trying not to inhibit schools from innovating in the ways that they want to innovate, and I am sure that the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) is also trying not to do that. We do not know how schools will innovate; if we did, we could prescribe much more easily.

Mr. Lansley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I was speaking of two defects in new clause 6, the first of which, as he implies, could be also attributed to new clause 10. Again, under subsection (2) of new clause 10, the Secretary of State could simply reintroduce all the restrictions that might otherwise apply. The second defect in new clause 6 is that the order re-imposing requirements would not discriminate between classes of schools, but there is no such defect in new clause 10. That is important because it links directly to the principle of earned autonomy. As my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West so ably explained, earned autonomy is presumed; it is not the exception.

On the defect by which the Secretary of State could reintroduce all those restrictions with the stroke of a pen, new clause 10 is safer because it is specific about the areas in which earned autonomy would be presumed to be extended to schools. New clause 10 makes it clear that earned autonomy would relate to specific parts of the curriculum and to pay and conditions. By extension, it would be difficult for the Secretary of State, by order, simply to disapply new clause 10. It would be easy for schools then to say, "Why not let us have that freedom and that possibility?"

After the Bill is passed, Ministers will come to use their order-making powers. I hope that they will behave like Ofsted, which is trying to ensure that not only do outstanding schools deliver exceptional results for their pupils, but that the great many schools that are comfortable to be in the middle of the performing range—and do not see the necessity of increasing their performance so that it becomes among the very best—realise that they have the freedoms and autonomy to deliver.

Mr. George Osborne: Does my hon. Friend share my disappointment that Ministers and Government Whips

[Mr. George Osborne]

have spent the last 10 minutes in a huddle, instead of listening to his excellent speech. Is that because, as I suspect, this part of the Bill is receiving more scrutiny than they had hoped?

Mr. Lansley: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West, I have not been a Member that long, but I have been here long enough to realise that to expect Ministers to listen to what Opposition Members are saying is a stretch too far. However, I am glad to see that I have regained the attention of the Minister for School Standards.

If you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will forgive me a tiny digression, I must point out that, as a former civil servant, I recall that, from time to time, what Members say in the House is read, if not by Ministers, by their officials. That can produce some benefit in the subsequent implementation of legislation, often through the use of Ministers' pens, even if their minds are not necessarily wholly engaged. We shall see what happens in this case.

I must sit down in a minute, because I have said nearly all the things that I wanted to say—and a few more. However, I want to endorse the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West about amendment No. 79 by comparison with the amendments tabled by the Liberal Democrats, particularly amendment No. 66 and the amendments that are consequential on it. It seems that the Liberal Democrats are trying to reinsert some protection through amendment No. 66, whereas, in fact, the protection already exists in legislation.

Parliament expressed a specific intention in 1996 in relation to special educational needs. When Parliament has been clear in the past about a particular obligation that it wishes to be fulfilled under all circumstances, it is perfectly reasonable, as my hon. Friend made clear, to endorse such an approach today and not give Ministers the freedom to disapply Parliament's intentions at their whim in the future.

As I explained, I cannot support new clause 5. New clause 6 is defective, and, although some of the criticisms might be applied to new clause 10, they are not sufficiently valid. I therefore have every confidence in supporting new clause 10.

Chris Grayling: This group of new clauses and amendments apply to what I regard as the most important part of the Bill. If the Bill is passed—whether or not as amended by the new clauses tabled by the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) and my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady)—it will have a profound effect on our education system. At least in theory, it will take us back in the direction of the aspirations of the last Conservative Government for grant-maintained schools, and in the direction of those that the Conservative party has subsequently espoused for free schools.

As we have heard tonight, a question remains about the degree to which the Bill—far from delivering the aspirations in it—will take us towards greater centralisation by putting more powers into the hands of the Secretary of State. To that end, I applaud this group of new clauses, even though I find some of the detail of the new clauses extremely difficult to endorse, as they contain particular flaws.

9 pm

New clause 5 extends the power to innovate to a local education authority. It gives it the right to implement an innovative project that it believes will help to raise educational standards achieved by children or adults in its area. A fine-sounding ambition—except that it does not address how the relationship between the LEA and the school would work and how a decision on an innovative project taken by the LEA would work when set against the school's decision to innovate.

Let me clarify that by giving a topical example. If an LEA decides to restructure a school's academic year and move to a system of five and six terms instead of three, what right would schools have to say, "No thanks. This is not something that we want to pursue"? I know that people in education and LEAs are interested in that, but equally schools desire stability. They want an end to the seemingly relentless process of change and to allow the initiatives that are in place to bed down.

What would happen in those circumstances? Would the LEA have the power to impose the new school year on schools in its area or could those schools turn around and say that it is not right for them? I am happy to take an intervention from the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough if he wants to clarify that.

Mr. Willis: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me an opportunity to respond. He makes a valid point. The omission from new clauses 5, 6 and, with respect, new clause 10 is that they do not address the relationship that schools have with their local authority, so it would be necessary to clarify joint arrangements. However, it is not our intention—the hon. Gentleman might have to take my word for this—to make local authorities go back to the old days when they controlled schools. I am sure we all accept that those days have gone. New clause 5 would ensure that innovative projects could be used to raise standards. Inevitably, that would mean working with schools, not ordering them to do things. I would expect the regulations by the Secretary of State—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I know that the hon. Gentleman was invited to intervene, but it still has to be an intervention, not a speech.

Chris Grayling: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for that clarification. I also thank the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough for responding to my comments.

My second concern about new clause 5 relates to subsection (3). It would allow an authority

> "to exempt, relax or modify any innovative project from any requirement imposed by education legislation on the authority."

It is not clear whether that would simply apply to legislation as it relates to the LEA itself or whether the LEA would have the right to intervene to prevent a school from deciding to innovate and exempt itself from a piece of legislation. That point of clarification would be required were the new clause to become law.

My third concern relates to new clauses 5 and 6, which would create areas of conflict between the Secretary of State and a school. In subsection (4) of both new clauses, the hon. Gentleman sets out that

> "The Secretary of State shall by order designate any requirement imposed by education legislation . . . as not subject to exemption, relaxation or modification"

by either the LEA or the governing body of a school. None the less, unless the Secretary of State sets out detailed processes of exemption. there may be regular conflicts between schools that are seeking to innovate and a Secretary of State who, for example, seeks to protect the national curriculum.

Suppose that a school decided to innovate in modern languages and move away from simply offering French and German, the most common languages offered by secondary schools. It would lose those languages from the curriculum and adopt other languages that would give it a distinctive position in its catchment area. It could offer Japanese and Spanish as prime languages in the curriculum rather than the conventional languages. In such a situation, the Secretary of State might conceivably say that she did not want that, then seek to intervene to prevent that innovation.

There would therefore be a conflict between the school and the Secretary of State about what precisely the school could do. I am concerned that new clause 5(4) and new clause 6(4) are too vague about the areas in which the Secretary of the State has the power to intervene and say that something is not acceptable. If we are going to give schools the freedom to innovate, which, undoubtedly Conservative Members would like—I suspect the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough increasingly wants it too—we need to define carefully in legislation which areas are covered; otherwise, schools do not have guidance to decide when they can, and cannot, innovate.

Mr. Lansley: Does my hon. Friend agree that the new clause would make it possible for a school governing body to disapply all its data collection, information and accountability functions? In effect, the Secretary of State would not have to be told about that; she would simply discover that the school governing body had taken that action when the figures stopped coming in or when Ofsted was turned away at the school gates.

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend has highlighted the fact that a school would only discover whether it was allowed to do something when it tried it; the Secretary of State might then have to intervene to say no, which would give rise to conflict.

Conflict could also arise with faith schools, which could use the powers enshrined in new clause 6. It is particularly appropriate to consider faith schools, given the participation of the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough in tabling later new clauses. One could easily envisage a faith school wanting to innovate in a way deemed inappropriate by the Secretary of State. It might wish to restructure the curriculum, change admissions policy, change religious education in the school, and so on. It is conceivable that a school may seek to innovate, then discover that it was in conflict with the Secretary of State who, again, would have to intervene after the event to say, "No, you may not do that."

Mr. Hoban: Is not one problem that, by applying to the Secretary of State for the power to innovate on a case by case basis, a great deal of uncertainty is introduced into the system? For example, the current Secretary of State is very much in favour of faith schools. If, however, she was replaced by the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), he might veto proposals on faith schools, although the right hon. Lady would accept them.

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes a good point which speaks for itself. New clauses 5 and 6 are admirable in their aspirations, but their detail would create too many complexities and problems for the House to accept them in their current form, given that we have a duty to try to produce the most effective and best-quality legislation which works in practice.

I have a particular concern about the way that the two new clauses and the part of the Bill that they seek to enhance would work in relation to admissions procedures. The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough is offering schools greater freedom to choose their own admissions procedure. The Government claim that to some degree schools have that. I recently experienced in my constituency the limitations of the freedom that schools currently enjoy.

Blenheim high school in my constituency, an enormously popular school, has this year been forced to turn away 180 pupils seeking places at that school, despite the fact that only a few months ago the school sought to change its admissions policy to enable a number of those who have been turned away to attend the school. That change to the admissions policy was overturned by the schools adjudicator, following a complaint by the London borough of Sutton, which is controlled by the party of the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough—a decision that I very much regret, because of the difficulty that it is creating for young people in my constituency.

We know that school admissions are a difficult matter. A school might choose to amend its admissions policy not necessarily for any reason related to selection by academic ability, but simply because it wants to reflect a local geographic issue. If the Secretary of State retains the power to intervene and tell the school that it cannot do so, that creates a potential conflict between schools and the Secretary of State.

On new clause 10, I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West for the aspirations that the clause reflects. One of my great disappointments in the Bill and in the Government's handling of education has been the lack of tangible action to address the great disparities in the rewards offered to the education profession in different parts of the country.

Those disparities were clearly shown in the answer to a written question that I tabled this week. I asked the Department what the ratio was between the salary of a newly qualified teacher three years in the job and average house prices in London, Surrey, Yorkshire and Tyne and Wear. The disparities are enormous. Essentially, a teacher who has been in a job for three years on average earnings for that profession can afford to buy the average house in the north-east and in Yorkshire. In London and the south-east the ratio of an average teacher's salary to the average house price is 1:8.

The practical reality is that costs in the south-east of England are making it massively more difficult for our schools to attract teachers. I mentioned the Ofsted report. It is worth dwelling on the comments made about the

[Chris Grayling]

issues dealt with by new clause 10. The report highlights the problems of schools in London, the south-east and other areas where housing costs are high. It states:

> "In all types of school, the situation in London is considerably worse than elsewhere in the country. Vacancy levels in London primary schools in January were 3.3 per cent."

Those are fundamentally difficult problems for schools in London and the south-east. We need tangible action to solve those problems. One way of doing that is to give schools greater flexibility to set different pay and conditions to meet individual recruitment needs. I know about specific cases in which schools needed to bend the rules to bring in teachers, after they had advertised time and again for vacancies to be filled and not received applications.

Mr. Lansley: Is my hon. Friend aware of the work that was done in examining changes to the area cost adjustment in the revenue support grant system, which looked at specific costs, as they are called? Although there are national pay scales, the use of flexibility within those pay scales is already evident in response to local labour market pressures. Does my hon. Friend agree that in addition to what is required under the Bill, there should be allocations of funding to local authorities and to schools to reflect those different costs? For example, it cannot be right for a school in Hertfordshire to receive £277 per pupil more than a school in Cambridgeshire.

9.15 pm

Chris Grayling: I endorse my hon. Friend's comments. I hope that, if the Government accept new clause 10, it will give schools the flexibility to adjust their pay and conditions to meet local recruitment needs. If that happens, the Minister should then go to the Treasury and make the strongest possible representations about support for our education system that reflects the very disparate needs of teachers in different parts of the country. I hope that the Government will help our head teachers to fill the gaps that they currently have great difficulty in filling, remove the need for them to recruit from abroad to such a degree and provide real solutions to a problem that is becoming serious and which the inspectorate said would have an adverse impact on exam results in future years. If we start down that road by implementing a provision such as new clause 10, we will begin to address the issue and to provide our schools with the flexibility in the system that is necessary for tackling the problem.

Amendments Nos. 79, 130 and 131 deal with the importance of special educational needs. In Committee, the Opposition tabled a significant number of amendments merely to clarify the role of schools, governing bodies and LEAs in relation to special educational needs. It was disappointing that the Government systematically rejected them. Amendments Nos. 79, 130 and 131 restate the importance of special educational needs and give the Government the opportunity to change their mind and accept that they could enhance the Bill in relation to SENs and send out to the country a clearer signal about their importance. The amendments would clarify for governing bodies this area of responsibility and the decisions that they cannot take.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is reasonable to go further and say that if the Government do not accept amendments Nos. 130, 131 and 79, they will effectively be demonstrating that they do not give proper attention to special needs and are unwilling to safeguard special needs education in the way in which members of the Committee and the Opposition would wish them to do?

Chris Grayling: I thank my hon. Friend for those comments. She makes the case for the amendments very clearly. There is no reason for the Government to say no to them. If they accept them, they will send out a powerful signal about the importance of SEN provision in our schools and demonstrate that we care about and are committed to the educational interests of children of all abilities, including those with particular needs as well as those with particular abilities. If they reject them, they will be sending out a wholly negative signal on this important matter.

In conclusion, I hope that the Government will accept new clause 10 and amendments Nos. 79, 130 and 131, as they are significant contributions to tackling the financial problems of our country that would also send a clear signal about the importance of special educational needs. I hope that they will accept that the amendments would be an important part of the Bill and should go forth as such from the House.

Mr. Cameron: I rise to speak to new clauses 5, 6 and 10. I have to tell the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) that I have misgivings about new clauses 5 and 6, for reasons that I shall explain. However, like my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), I see a lot of merit in new clause 10.

New clauses 5 and 6 would basically extend the power to promote innovative projects to two groups other than those envisaged in the Bill—LEAs and governing bodies. New clauses 5 and 6 suffer from the problem of push me, pull you, which I mentioned earlier. They give extra freedom with one hand and take it away with the other.

The Bill is a "Whitehall knows best" measure. The first lines of the first chapter demonstrate that by stating:

> "The purpose of this Chapter is to facilitate the implementation by qualifying bodies of innovative projects that may . . . in the opinion of the Secretary of State, contribute to the raising of the educational standards achieved by children in England".

I stress,

> "in the opinion of the Secretary of State".

No one matters except the right hon. Lady. With great respect to the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough, I am not sure whether new clauses 5 and 6 help.

We all support allowing schools to be innovative to improve education. However, it is remarkable that the ability to do that will be at the whim of the Secretary of State. I want to make some detailed points about new clauses 5 and 6.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Does the hon. Gentleman believe that someone else would be better qualified than the Secretary of State to make decisions, or more accountable? Is he one of the people who believes that we should keep politics out of politics?

Mr. Cameron: My hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire beat me to it when he said earlier that schools should have more power to make the decisions. In the Bill, it appears that only the Secretary of State's opinion counts. We should give schools the freedom to decide. New clauses 5, 6 and 10 would partly achieve that, but I am worried that new clauses 5 and 6 confer a power and then take it away.

New clauses 5 and 6 and the Bill deal with innovation, but it is difficult to find a definition in the measure or the explanatory notes. What exactly does the Secretary of State hope that the schools will achieve? Earlier, my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) said that, in Committee, the Minister had described innovation as simply something new.

New clauses 5 and 6 appear to envisage a narrow definition of innovation and innovative projects. New clause 6 describes them as contributing

"to the raising of educational standards achieved by registered pupils at the school."

It should go further. Some projects may benefit future pupils more than current pupils. Is "educational standards" too narrow? Perhaps some schools want to develop projects with other parts of the community. The definition should therefore be wider.

The real problem with new clauses 5 and 6 is the push-me-pull-you element. In new clause 5(3), the local education authority and in new clause 6(3), the governing body

"may resolve to exempt, relax or modify any innovative project"

from education legislation, as the Secretary of State can do under the Bill. That is a laudable objective; schools should have the power to do that. However, in both new clauses, subsections (4) give the power to the Secretary of State

"to designate any requirement imposed by education legislation . . . as not subject to exemption".

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough gives with one hand and allows the Secretary of State to take away with the other.

Mr. Willis: I have listened to the hon. Gentleman with increasing frustration. Is he saying that the Conservative party would allow schools to do exactly what they wanted, including ordering all students to appear nude or beating them with sticks?

Mr. Cameron: Of course not, but when I intervened on the hon. Gentleman and asked him to be more specific about the powers that he would give to the Secretary of State, answer came there none.

New clause 10 is a much better provision. As my hon. Friends the Members for South Cambridgeshire and for Altrincham and Sale, West suggested, it contains a presumption in favour of the freedom to give all maintained schools—except a very small number of them—power over pay and conditions. In Oxfordshire, there is a serious problem with recruiting and retaining good teachers—a problem to which my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) also referred—and the average price of a house in west Oxfordshire last year was £180,000. I am not sure what formula my hon. Friend might apply to that in his work-out, but such issues create huge problems.

Mr. George Osborne: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the purchase of a house by the previous Member for Witney raised the average house price in west Oxfordshire?

Mr. Cameron: My hon. Friend is tempting me to say something that I am sure the occupant of the Chair would not allow. That purchase probably fell in a different year, but that may well have been the case.

Mr. Dobson: Not many teachers could have bought it.

Mr. Cameron: That is true. You could fit a lot of teachers in it, though, if you wanted to. Probably more than enough, in fact.

There is a problem for teachers who need to be able to afford housing in Oxfordshire. New clause 10 would help them, and that is why I shall support my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West when the matter is put to a vote tonight.

Mr. George Osborne: I wish to speak briefly to new clause 10, which has been so ably introduced by my good friend and neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady). I often think that the west of Sale does not get the recognition that it deserves when he is referred to.

There is a welcome recognition in the new clauses and amendments of an important principle, which is that more freedom, more autonomy, and more innovation in our education system is a good thing. The fact that that principle is embodied, albeit inadequately, in an Education Bill introduced by a Labour Government shows just how far the education debate has moved on from the days of Tony Crosland, when Labour Governments wanted to make all schools exactly the same. It also illustrates the progress that Conservative Governments made in establishing the principle that excellence lies in diversity in our education system.

I welcome the principle of freedom and innovation behind the new clauses, and I welcome the fact that that has been accepted by those on the Labour Front Bench; I suspect that such principles do not seep deeply into the Labour Back Benches, but we shall see. My hon. Friends the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West, for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), for Witney (Mr. Cameron) and for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), and the hon. Member for Harrogate—

Mr. Dobson: And Knaresborough.

Mr. Osborne: The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), as the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) reminds me. I am sorry that we have heard from the right hon. Gentleman only in interventions today. Many of us were looking forward to a more lengthy contribution from him. [HON. MEMBERS: "Sit down then!"] Labour Members do not want these clauses to get the scrutiny that they deserve. We saw the shenanigans of the Labour Whips earlier today, and it is a good thing that these important parts of the Bill have indeed had the scrutiny that they deserve.

[Mr. Osborne]

The Government are saying to schools, "We will decide when you can have freedom from central Government, and when you can't." Well, that is no freedom at all. I know that it is new Labour's idea of freedom, but it is not real freedom if the power lies with the Secretary of State. It is, however, completely consistent with the trend that all education legislation introduced by this Government has taken. Everyone involved in education knows exactly what that means; it means more bureaucracy for schools, more form filling and more red tape. Wilmslow high school in my constituency went through a lengthy process of applying for specialist arts status, only to have it refused. That school knows what it is like to go through that process. We can all imagine that a similar range of red tape and form filling will be required for schools applying for innovative status.

9.30 pm

Real freedom involves a presumption in favour of autonomy. Real freedom is embodied in new clause 10. Real freedom is the freedom to innovate, set teachers' pay and conditions, decide the structure of the school day and year and opt out of certain prescriptive elements of the curriculum. There are important exceptions, which are embodied in subsection (2) of the new clause and the amendments exempting special educational needs children, but freedom should be the rule, not the exception. That is why I support our new clause.

Mr. Timms: We have had an extensive debate on the changes. Let me pick up some detailed points. I stress that the proposals on the power to innovate, which new clauses 5 and 6 address, are intended to support innovation generated by those who deliver the education service on the front line. We want LEAs and schools to make proposals, drawing on their expertise, that contribute to higher educational standards. That will be the acid test in deciding whether to accept their proposals. We are confident that that power will contribute to supporting schools and LEAs in making far-reaching changes, but we must bear a number of important principles in mind.

First, under the Bill as drafted, an order would have to be made on all decisions to waive primary legislation, which would mean that everybody knew what the law was, and the absence of such a provision is a significant flaw in the new clauses. Secondly, the proposals contain no mechanism to check the actions of any LEA or governing body, no matter what its record. I was interested in the characteristically courteous rebuke offered by the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) to the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) in reminding him of that problem. Thirdly, no parliamentary process is envisaged. Governing bodies and LEAs would have the power to determine the law in their area across a wide range of provisions with no parliamentary process being observed. Our view is that there should be parliamentary accountability. The new clauses would set that aside.

Mr. Brady: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Timms: I cannot, given the constraints. Let me make progress, if I may.

On earned autonomy, given the nature of the freedoms, we must ensure that they go to schools in the best possible position to use them in the interests of their pupils. Autonomy must be earned; it will not be unconditional. I think that that is right and that, on reflection, the House will think it right too.

Of course, as standards continue to rise over time and as leadership improves, more schools are likely to be in a position to use those additional freedoms. We shall review the criteria in the light of experience with the aim of increasing the number of schools involved, but, in the initial stages, we shall evaluate and learn from the experiences of our best schools. That will help us to consider what further flexibilities and what deregulation will benefit the school system as a whole.

That is the right approach, as it complements the innovation proposals in chapters 1 and 2. It is important for the House to recognise the distinction between the power to innovate in chapter 1 and the proposals on earned autonomy in chapter 2, which have been confused.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Timms: I cannot, given the number of points to which I must respond. I apologise to the hon. Gentleman.

Entirely understandable concern was expressed about special educational needs, so I am grateful to the Members who raised the matter for the chance to reaffirm our commitment to ensure that all schools, including those with earned autonomy, continue to meet in full their obligations to children with special educational needs. Nothing in earned autonomy will in any way change the responsibilities of schools or LEAs with respect to those children. If a child has an LEA statement including particular curricular requirements, for example, those must still be met by the school, whatever curriculum changes it may decide to introduce. I hope that that provides some reassurance on this important matter.

As for the power to innovate and special educational needs, I can give similar reassurances, particularly in response to amendment No. 79. As we have been reminded a couple of times, the purpose of the power set out in clause 1 is to facilitate innovative projects that may contribute to the raising of standards. In the case of proposals that would not raise standards or that would benefit one group at the expense of another, the power could not be used. There is no reason why innovative proposals from schools or LEAs are any less likely to relate to children with special educational needs, and I am sure we all want such pupils to benefit from them. It is important to repeat, however, that proposals will be accepted only if the Secretary of State believes that they are likely to contribute to higher educational standards.

The 1996 Act makes it clear that the school curriculum should be balanced and broadly based, a requirement that is retained in the Bill. The power to make variations relates to the national curriculum, which is only one element of the basic school curriculum.

I hope that, in the short time that I have been given to respond to a very full debate, I have been able to reassure Members. We think it important to provide new avenues for innovation. I hope that, on the basis of my assurances, the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) will feel able to withdraw the motion.

Mr. Willis: I am grateful to the Minister for speeding up his response; I will do likewise.

I accept that new clause 5 does not make clear how it would apply to schools, and I will not press it to a vote. New clause 6, however, establishes a principle on which we clearly disagree with the Government. They want to control the level of autonomy, and to ensure that all schools must apply to the Secretary of State. We believe that they should set parameters whereby all schools can automatically have autonomy.

Adam Price: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willis: No.

One of the flaws in new clause 10 and, indeed, in the Conservatives' arguments is the fact that they want freedom for all schools, but accept that there must be some limits to that freedom. I accept that too, and I think the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) was right to say that the Secretary of State should make the decisions.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 6

POWER OF SCHOOL TO INNOVATE WITHOUT PERMISSION OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE (No. 2)

'(1) This section has effect notwithstanding anything in sections 1 to 4 of this Act.

(2) A maintained school governing body may resolve to implement an innovative project which in the opinion of the governing body contributes to the raising of educational standards achieved by registered pupils at the school.

(3) Subject to subsection (4), the governing body may resolve to exempt, relax or modify any innovative project from any requirement imposed by education legislation on the governing body.

(4) The Secretary of State shall by order designate any requirement imposed by education legislation on a school governing body as not subject to exemption, relaxation or modification by the governing body.'—*[Mr. Willis.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Motion made, and Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 164, Noes 315.

Division No. 156] [9.38 pm

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Doughty, Sue
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Bob Russell and
Mrs. Annette L. Brooke.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin

Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth

Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S

Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris

Pope, Greg
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Speller, Rt Hon John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil

Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Angela Smith and
Mr. Graham Stringer.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Tyler: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you received notice of an intention on the part of any Minister of the Crown to come before the House with a supplementary business statement? As a result of the private notice question, this afternoon's long statement and the incompetent way in which the manuscript amendment was presented to the House, the debate on this very important Bill started a great deal later than even the Government intended. Have you received information that the Government intend to extend debate on the important matters that remain on the Order Paper to another day?

Mr. Speaker: I came to the Chair only 15 minutes ago. No one has approached me since then.

We now come to new clause 10, to be moved formally.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Not moved, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The new clause is not being moved. No one tells me anything.

Further consideration adjourned.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Bill, as amended in the Standing Committee, to be further considered tomorrow.

ESTIMATES

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 145 (Liaison Committee),

That this House agrees with the Report [31st January] of the Liaison Committee.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Question agreed to.

Street Crime

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

9.56 pm

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): In the academic circles that deal with crime, it is understood that there is something of a paradox about fear of crime. That is put most succinctly by Professor Jason Ditton from the university of Sheffield. He states:

> "Most surveys discover that people apparently fear most being a victim of precisely those crimes they are least likely to be the victim of."

He goes on to say:

> "Little old ladies apparently worry excessively about being mugged, but they are the least likely to be mugging victims."

It is generally thought that young men worry the least about being mugged, although they have the highest risk of being a victim of it.

Reading, East is a young constituency. According to the 1991 census, 65.9 per cent. of its population is of working age, which makes it 20th in that league among all the constituencies in the country. With only 14.7 per cent. of the population of pensionable age, it ranks 596th in the league table for population of pensionable age.

The fact that Reading, East is young is emphasised by the fact that 26 per cent. of my constituents—more than a quarter—belong to the 16 to 29 age group. That proportion is the 23rd largest of all constituencies in the country. That is not surprising, given that the House of Commons Library says that Reading, East is home to more than 7,000 of the almost 10,000 full-time students at Reading university.

I am a young MP—I still like to think—representing a young constituency. A large amount of my work is with young people in Reading and Woodley. Just over a year ago, I held a forum and invited thousands of young residents from Reading and Woodley to an evening at a local late-night bar. They even got the first drink free. One of the issues raised with me was crime, particularly crime against young men. However, crime was something everyone was concerned about, with young men being the particular victims.

I have continued to talk to people who came along that night, and to those people who apologised for not being able to come but who had an interest and wanted to talk to me about crime. I have also spoken to other young people who have contacted me subsequently. Crime comes up regularly as an issue of concern during meetings such as I have described. Frequently, crime is something that young people in Reading, East are angry about.

Young people are angry about curtailments on their freedom caused by crime and the fear of crime. People are worried about crime happening in places where I, as a woman, would be happy to walk on my own. Yet places where I feel safe walking on my own are places where young people in Reading often do not like to walk. If they do walk in such areas—and more of them walk than drive—they do not feel safe.

One person who has been the victim of mugging a number of times suffered another mugging on Boxing day. It happened at 9.30 in the evening. He was on a main

[Jane Griffiths]

thoroughfare that is well lit. Even on Boxing day evening, there was a lot of traffic and many people were around. That time, he lost his mobile phone and £4.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

Jane Griffiths: Fortunately, some people living nearby took the young man in, talked to him and helped him to feel confident enough to go out again. Young men who have suffered in that way have had their freedom seriously curtailed. The young man that I described is aged 20 and is more than 6 ft tall.

We hear much about mobile phones and crime. In fact, I was contacted about the debate by a spokesperson for the Mobile Industry Crime Action Forum. I noted what was said, but I believe that more can be done by the manufacturers and by the firms selling air time to make mobile phones less attractive to steal and to find ways to prevent their use by people who have not bought them.

We have also heard much about the decline in sales of mobile phones. One thing that has not been talked about is the impact of crime and the fear of crime on sales. Young women to whom I talk still consider their mobile phones as a fashion accessory. The look and functions are important: having the right phone matters to them. However, the young men to whom I talk do not seek out the newest mobile phones; they make do with a cheap, old-fashioned model. It is less expensive to replace if it is stolen and less desirable to steal. I see them walking along, holding cheap, clunky, old-fashioned phones, as if to say to everyone: "This is the only phone I've got, so it's not worth robbing me". So, not doing more to tackle the problem is actually resulting in depressed sales for the manufacturers.

I have heard time and time again about young people's experience of crime, especially young men's experience of mugging and street crime. The young people of Reading, East have presented me with a large amount of anecdotal evidence and I wanted to find out if any information or figures had been published about the phenomenon.

I found that most of the research and statistics concerned young men as the perpetrators of crime. Little research has been carried out on young men as the victims of crime. That is not especially surprising due to the way that young men are seen by the criminal justice system. Young men, especially groups of young men hanging around without much to do, are the stereotypical cause of fear of crime.

In the Reading with Wokingham police area that covers my constituency, 664 young people between the ages of 10 and 17 offended in the 15 months between October 1999 and December 2000. That is 2.3 per cent. of the population of that age range. A quarter of those offences were committed by young women; less than 1.75 per cent. of young men between 10 and 17 had offended during that period. Of the 664 young people who offended, 16 per cent., or 106, had committed offences against the person. To put that into context, the Reading with Wokingham area covers about 300,000 people.

The youth justice plan for the area states that most of those offences were committed against other young people. Young people who commit crimes do so mostly against other young people.

Obviously the 575 crimes in Reading, East committed by young men are 575 too many, and I support strongly the work of the local youth offending team in reducing such crime. However, I believe strongly that all young men should not be stigmatised because of those who commit crime. Because some young men commit some crimes, it is most important that we should not lose sight of the fact that some young men are the victims of crime, too.

As I said, I was looking for figures and research to get a true picture of crime against young men. In 1979, a study was carried out in two Sheffield schools, but work on young men as the victims of crime only really started in the 1990s, when work in Edinburgh over nine months revealed that half the sample had been victims of assault, threatening behaviour or theft. Follow-up work in Glasgow found that 82 per cent. of a sample of 208 12 to 14-year-olds recalled having been victimised in the previous year.

In 1992, the British crime survey, using a sample of 1,350, found that a third of 12 to 15-year-olds claimed that they had been assaulted at least once, and I want to highlight that fact. That was the first time that that survey had asked about young people being the victims of crime, but I do not recall that gaining much serious news coverage at the time. If an elderly person is attacked, it is front-page news in the local papers, if not the national papers. We can only imagine the outcry if a third of old ladies had suffered from such crime.

The 1998 British crime survey showed that young men aged between 16 and 25 were at the greatest risk of violence. That statistic was repeated in the reports carried out in 2000, and in the early figures released from the 2001 crime survey, although that records a welcome 19 per cent. fall in the number of violent crimes between 1999 and 2000. In particular, I was pleased to read that of the four categories that comprise violent crime—wounding, common assault, robbery and snatch theft—the largest fall, at 34 per cent., was recorded in wounding, which is described as assault resulting in more than trivial injury.

As I said earlier, many young men who have spoken to me have not reported the crime they have suffered, so the figures for reported crime do not reflect the reality; nor do they reflect the extent of the problem facing young men. It is widely accepted that the crime survey, based on a statistically significant survey, is a more reliable guide to true levels of crime. According to that survey, there were 406,000 muggings in the United Kingdom in 1999.

As well as asking about the number of crimes, the survey asks people to rate the incident on a scale from nought to 20. The average score for violence was 6.3, while the average seriousness score for mugging was 7.5—the highest for all violence. The figure for mugging has stayed the same each year. The important part of the survey that relates to violence covers the risk of violence to a person. On average, 4.2 per cent. of adults in England and Wales were the victims of one or more violent crimes. The figure is slightly higher for men at 5.3 per cent., than for women, at 3.3 per cent. However, more than

20 per cent. of men aged 16 to 24 were victims of violence once or more in 1999. A fifth of men aged 16 to 24 were the victims of violence in a year.

I represent the entire centre of Reading and have talked in a previous debate about the growth in nightlife. On the whole, that change is welcome, given the extra jobs that it has created, and there is now much greater choice when going out. Indeed, going out at night in my constituency is safer than it was five or 10 years ago because of the number of people around, but many people say that the increase in nightlife has resulted in increased violence. Everyone involved in the night-time economy, as well as the police, had a part to play in tackling the increase in violence in the town centre that occurred in the two years from April 1992. However, saying that Reading is sloshing in blood just increases the fear of crime and helps no one.

I join my hon. Friends the Members for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) and for Reading, West (Mr. Salter) in the campaign for more police officers on the streets at night. I am pleased that the chief constable of the Thames Valley police has found the money to civilianise 27 posts in Reading this year as part of a pilot scheme. I also congratulate the police authority on taking the decision to increase the authority's budget by £5 million to extend the civilianisation. I look forward to those officers being on the streets of Reading and Woodley.

I referred earlier to someone who had been mugged a number of times and suffered again on Boxing day. That crime, like the others he has suffered, was not reported to the police. That is not an unusual response by young men to that kind of crime. As a result, the police do not know where such crime happens; nor do they find out whether patterns occur at certain places. In fact, they have no record of most of the muggings against my constituents.

The British crime survey shows us that most muggings take place on the street, that 70 per cent. of them involve more than one person, and that in 93 per cent. of cases at least one of the offenders is male. In 40 per cent. of the violent incidents, victims judged that the offender was under the influence of alcohol, but that is least likely for mugging, where the figure is 17 per cent. As the survey says, that is probably a result of the premeditated nature of the offence.

We therefore know that mugging is most likely to involve a group of males in the street, but that knowledge does not get us much further forward. We also know that mugging has been very unlikely to take place in the centre of Reading since the welcome introduction of closed circuit television. However, I have talked to young men in my constituency, and it seems that mugging happens most frequently to young people on radial routes into and out of the centre of Reading and Woodley in the evening and at night.

I would like crime reduction officers from the police to visit young men where they are—in the schools, colleges, offices and the university. I would like those young men to talk about their experiences in Reading of street crime and to talk about the places where it happens and what happens. The aim of that is to try to get young men to understand the importance of reporting street crime and to try to get them to think that people are interested in hearing about what they have experienced. I do not want some young men to get into street crime themselves because they believe that no one takes it seriously. I do not want the victims of street crime to become its perpetrators. I would like information to be collected as intelligence.

I started this debate as a result of the approaches that I had received from young men in Reading, East, and I hope that that remark will not be misconstrued. When they had told me about the levels of crime that they were facing, I was astonished. I must admit that I found it hard to believe that young men in Reading and Woodley could be facing so much violence. I want there to be Government action to tackle this problem for our young men. I want action to be taken to show them that someone cares about what happens to them. Most of all, I want action to show young men in my constituency that, if they get involved, talk to the authorities and engage in dialogue, they can change things. Politics does work.

10.11 pm

The Minister for Criminal Justice, Sentencing and Law Reform (Mr. Keith Bradley): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) on obtaining this debate and on raising such important issues. Her description of Reading, East very much reminded me of my constituency of Manchester, Withington: it contains many students and young people and there is much activity on the streets at night because of the range of facilities that are available. As a Minister and local Member of Parliament, I recognise my hon. Friend's concerns and I welcome the way in which she described the problem to us. I know that the whole House is united in wanting to prevent crime, in wanting offenders to be brought to justice and in wanting to ensure support for victims.

In responding to my hon. Friend's points, I particularly want to focus on what we are doing for victims. But I first want to outline the measures that we are taking to reduce violent crime and to increase public confidence in the criminal justice system. My hon. Friend provided a range of statistics that reinforce the need to tackle these issues.

Increasing confidence is particularly important because, as my hon. Friend has highlighted, far too many crimes go unreported. The 2000 British crime survey revealed that only a quarter of young male victims reported crimes to the police. Those young men accept being a victim as a way of life—as something about which they can do nothing, or in some cases about which they are afraid to do anything. If they are not prepared to report crimes against themselves, it is not surprising that they are unwilling to come forward to make a statement or give evidence when others are victimised. That makes our fight against youth crime all the more difficult. However, it remains one of our key priorities to tackle the problem.

Let me outline some of the many measures that we have implemented across government. First, we have focused on the family, with initiatives such as sure start to improve the life chances of pre-school children.

Secondly, we have focused on factors that can lead to crime, and we are spending £600 million to tackle school truancy and exclusion.

Thirdly, we are tackling deprivation, with the £900 million that we are investing in England's most deprived neighbourhoods where we know that crime and delinquency are particular problems.

[Mr. Keith Bradley]

Fourthly—my hon. Friend mentioned this—we are transforming the youth justice system, with the establishment of the Youth Justice Board and a network of local youth offending teams to co-ordinate efforts against youth crime as never before. I join my hon. Friend in congratulating those teams on the work that they are doing in local areas. They are making a difference and are pulling agencies together as we try to find solutions to the problem.

Fifthly, we are introducing other measures and programmes such as the intensive supervision and surveillance programme, which will focus on the hard core of young offenders and help to tackle youth offending more effectively.

We have also provided substantial investment to address the problem of robbery, most of which, as my hon. Friend rightly explained, is committed by young men against other young men. We have provided the five metropolitan forces with an additional £20 million to develop and assess initiatives. We want them to establish and share good practice with other forces such as the one that covers my hon. Friend's constituency. We have set them the challenging target of reducing street robbery by 14 per cent. by March 2005.

The recent surge in the theft of mobile phones will make that target even more challenging, but that is not just a problem for the police; it concerns us all. We are working with the mobile phone industry to find ways to make phones more secure. We have considered measures that United Kingdom phone operators can take to make stolen phones unusable and therefore worthless. Parents and teachers also need to provide better advice to young people about how they can avoid becoming the victims of such crimes.

When a crime takes place, it is right that there should be a robust sentencing policy. The guidelines issued by the Lord Chief Justice last week related specifically to robbery rather than theft. Robbery is an offence that involves the use of force and, frequently, violence, threats and intimidation. It is a serious offence that deserves a serious punishment.

It is essential, however, that more cases get to court so that magistrates and judges can give appropriate sentences to offenders who appear before them. For that to happen, we obviously depend on victims and witnesses being prepared to trust in the criminal justice process so that they participate in the actions of the court. The sad fact is that most victimised young men have no such trust. Whether consciously or not, they weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of reporting the crime, and nearly three quarters think that it is not worth the bother. If they know the offender, and many do, they fear retaliation. If they have offended previously themselves, and some have, they fear the police will not believe them. They might think they will not receive support as the case progresses, and could be daunted by the prospect of giving evidence in court.

Since we took office, we have implemented a programme of measures which in time should begin to allay those fears. We have more than doubled the grant to the voluntary organisation, Victim Support. The £25 million it now receives annually ensures that it offers a wide range and better quality of service in every part of England and Wales.

The previous Government established a victim and witness support service in the crown courts. From this April, we will have extended that to every magistrates court. Support will be available from the very beginning of the process, and cases will be less likely to fail or collapse.

The police now routinely inform victims when a suspect has been charged, and the Crown Prosecution Service is implementing a system to ensure that it communicates its decisions about cases to victims. With the witness support service, it ensures that the victim receives all the required pre-court support—consistent, of course, with the need to, safeguard a fair hearing or trial. Through the victims personal statement scheme, implemented last October, we have ensured that victims are able to make a written statement outlining the effect of the crime on their lives, which includes an opportunity for them to let the criminal justice agencies know if they fear further victimisation so that effective preventive measures can be put in place.

The package of measures that I have highlighted tonight demonstrate, I hope, the priority that we are giving to tackling crime and supporting victims. It is essential that they feel empowered and not marginalised by the criminal justice process. That is a long-term strategy that depends on every agency working closely together and, in turn, every agency fulfilling its responsibilities to victims. We need to convince the public generally and young male victims in particular that justice can be secured if they take positive and constructive action.

We have made a start, but I have listened carefully to my hon. Friend, and support the need for more police on the streets; the use of CCTV cameras; and her views about the way in which crime reduction officers could be used more effectively in schools and colleges to address young men's fears and problems with the system. My hon. Friend brought those issues home to us effectively tonight. She clearly recognises that work has been done, but we all accept that much more needs to be done if we are to tackle the problem of street crime; people not reporting crime; people not wishing not participate in the criminal justice system; and, in this case, the sad but impressive statistic of the number of young people, particularly men, suffering from the problem of street crime. I welcome the debate, and shall look carefully at my hon. Friend's contribution to see what more can be done to ensure that the problems in Reading, East and throughout the country are addressed more effectively.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-two minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 6 February 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON DEVELOPMENT AGENCY BILL *(BY ORDER)*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second Time on Wednesday 13 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State was asked—

North-West Regeneration

1. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): When he next expects to visit the Government office of the north-west to discuss regeneration of the region. [30883]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche): My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has no immediate plans to visit the Government office of the north-west. He last visited it in September and I visited it in November.

Mr. Winterton: I am sure that the Minister is aware that not even a borough such as Macclesfield, which currently has an unemployment rate of just 1.1 per cent.—and is brilliantly represented—can rest on its laurels. We must look to the future not least because of the tragic announcement of 993 redundancies on the periphery of the constituency by BAE Systems at Woodford. Does the hon. Lady not accept that it is absolutely essential for the future prosperity and economic growth of my area that the regional planning guidance receives an early approval? The matter currently rests with a Minister in another place, Lord Falconer.

Mrs. Roche: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern in this matter. I know that he and other Members of Parliament have taken a great interest in the redundancies, and we extend our sympathies to all those affected. Of course it is right that we need to move as quickly as possible, which is why the Government office and all the other agencies, including the Employment Service, are working hard. It is right that we move ahead with the plan, and we shall do so as soon as we practically can.

Andy Burnham (Leigh): When my hon. Friend next meets representatives of the Government office of the north-west to discuss these issues, will she stress the important role that sport and sports development can play in regenerating deprived communities in the north-west, especially those such as mine which have proved to be the hardest to regenerate and turn round? In particular, will she ask the Government office of the north-west to give whatever support it can to Wigan council's exciting proposals for a new community sports complex and a new stadium and home for Leigh RMI and Leigh Centurions?

Mrs. Roche: I am aware of the interest that my hon. Friend takes in these matters, and I know that he used to play cricket for Lancashire Schoolboys. We can all admire his sporting prowess, from which the Commons team may benefit.

Of course I recognise the part that sport can play in regeneration. I spoke recently to some of the businesses involved in the sports and tourism industry about what can be done. When I next visit the area, I shall be delighted to have such discussions.

Civil Emergencies

2. **Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): Pursuant to his answer of 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 530, on civil emergencies, if he will make a statement on the updating of guidance to local authorities. [30884]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie): The Government have issued guidance to local authorities on the response to a deliberate release of chemical or biological agents. The guidance is under continual review, and the civil contingencies secretariat at the Cabinet Office remains in dialogue with local authorities on the matter.

Mr. Dalyell: What guidance is being given about the horrendous eventuality of smallpox?

Mr. Leslie: Many Members will be aware of the BBC 2 television programme broadcast on that subject yesterday, which described a hypothetical situation. I emphasise that smallpox has been eradicated and that good contingency plans are in place. We have substantial stocks of vaccine but, clearly, their size and location are not in the public domain for security reasons. The Public Health Laboratory Service is always updating its guidance, which is available to GPs on its website, and that guidance has also been sent out by public health directors.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Does the Minister agree that civil emergencies occur for different reasons, be they climatic, medical—as he has described—or terrorist? What consideration has he given to the appointment—or what consideration has he given to talking to the Prime Minister about the appointment—of a Minister, perhaps not a Ministry, who can co-ordinate the activities of different Departments? Does he not accept that appointing a senior civil servant for such a role is not enough?

Mr. Leslie: Last year all Members were sent a letter on the matter by the Home Secretary, who chairs the Civil Contingencies Cabinet Committee. To make sure that we have the generic capability to co-ordinate emergency planning and civil contingencies, the new secretariat has been established at the Cabinet Office to allow us to be flexible and respond as necessary to whatever eventualities may arise.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): What preparations and plans exist for the possibility of a major aircraft failure or collision over central London? That is increasingly possible because of the intensification of the use of Heathrow airport and the aviation industry's wrong demand for an extra runway at Heathrow.

Mr. Leslie: I would not want to open up a discussion on the extra runway, but in terms of risk, new technology is being developed all the time to improve air traffic control. My hon. Friend will know that response and recovery activities fall in the first instance to local authorities and the police. We are ensuring that the tools are available so that those organisations are well placed to cope in the unlikely eventuality of anything happening.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): What preparation has been made for a major offshore incident that could result in a massive oil spill, similar to the Braer disaster or the Sea Empress disaster off the coast of Pembrokeshire? Both reports on those disasters recommended placing a statutory duty on local authorities to deal with offshore oil spillages, but that has still not been put in place. Will the hon. Gentleman promise to introduce that?

Mr. Leslie: I will submit the hon. Gentleman's comment to the emergency planning review that the Cabinet Office is undertaking. The maritime authorities and, indeed, local authorities ensure that we learn lessons from the accidents that occur from time to time. I shall certainly try to give the matter closer consideration.

Rural Policy

3. **Mr. Paul Tyler** (North Cornwall): Which Departments and agencies are involved in the development of rural policy for whose co-ordination his office is responsible. [30886]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State (Mr. John Prescott): I am responsible for the Government office network which provides a strategic presence in the regions for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and, indeed, for the social exclusion unit whose work covers issues of relevance to rural areas.

Mr. Tyler: May I ask the right hon. Gentleman to look again at the written answer given by the Prime Minister last Friday at column 571 in which he describes in detail all the responsibilities of the Deputy Prime Minister? There is no mention of rural affairs or the co-ordination of rural policy. Can the Deputy Prime Minister give a single example of when his intervention has secured an improvement in rural policy since the general election?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The hon. Gentleman seems to have missed the fact that we have established a Department for rural affairs specifically to deal with such matters. Many of the issues that he raises, which he used to refer to the Cabinet Office before the last election, are now dealt with by another Department.

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): The rural White Paper said that we need to have a vibrant living and working countryside and that to achieve that aim a range of essential services needs to be in place in rural areas. I am pleased to say that there are plans to open two new rural post offices in my constituency. Will my right hon. Friend do everything he can to ensure that the work of all relevant Departments is co-ordinated so that our rural communities have those services?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: Many of those issues were highlighted in the rural White Paper, for which I had responsibility in my previous job. We thought that it was important to separate rural areas from urban areas and not to get the two mixed up. We made it clear that special programmes were needed, which we identified in the rural White Paper and which are being carried out by the Department. Many of my hon. Friend's points are being attended to directly by the Department and the relevant Minister.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): The Deputy Prime Minister said today and, indeed, in the past in response to written questions that lead responsibility for rural policy now rests with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. He however, is, responsible for the work of the social exclusion unit. Does he recognise that there are serious problems of social exclusion in many rural areas? Will he specifically ask the social exclusion unit to consider rural policies?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point; it is all the more valid after 18 years of a Tory Administration under whom we saw a doubling of poverty and a decline in bus transportation, the provision of schools and post offices in rural areas. That is why the social exclusion unit has been deliberately designed to look specifically at those problems, which we identify as existing as much in rural areas as they do in urban ones. Indeed, a specific study is under way on transport in rural areas because without an adequate transport system many people in those areas cannot get access to the services that they need. That is why we have increased considerably the amount of transport resources in rural areas, set against the decline that we saw in those 18 years.

Children in Care

4. **Mr. Jonathan Shaw** (Chatham and Aylesford): What research his Department has carried out into the educational attainment of children in care. [30887]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche): The social exclusion unit is investigating what more might be done to raise the educational attainment of children in care. It is currently gathering evidence and undertaking an intensive programme of visits to schools and children's homes. It is also consulting widely with professionals and with children in care.

Mr. Shaw: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. The work of the social exclusion unit has been critical in sending a message to all local government departments that the record of educational attainment of looked-after children has been woeful. It is something for which we all have responsibility, particularly since we gather that 75 per cent. of young people leaving care do so without educational qualifications.

However, there is some good news. In the Medway towns in my constituency, two such young people have been the first to receive bursaries from the local authority to go to university, and there is one more to follow. That is the sort of thing that we want to see—young people who have been in care getting the same as other young people, rather than anything special. I hope that my hon. Friend's Department will continue to monitor carefully the attainment of such young people, so that they get what they deserve, which is nothing less than others get.

Mrs. Roche: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. The record of attainment of educational qualifications among young children in care is woeful, and we all need to take that very seriously. Looked-after children need our absolute commitment, which is why I am delighted that the social exclusion unit is pursuing the matter. I welcome my hon. Friend's news.

Some good practice is on the way. For example, I recently visited Brighton and Hove council to talk to teachers, foster parents and looked-after children. The council's track record of designated teachers is very good.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): What mechanisms are in place to assess the relative success of the social exclusion unit compared with its costs?

Mrs. Roche: The social exclusion unit takes on projects at the direction of the Prime Minister and under the direction of the Deputy Prime Minister. So far, it has had a tremendous success rate. A good example is the meeting of targets on reducing rough sleeping and on reducing teenage pregnancy. Those are extremely good developments. Of course, there are more projects on the way, such as that on transport which my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has already mentioned.

Curry Report

5. **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): Whether the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster made a submission to Sir Donald Curry's report on the future of farming. [30889]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie): No Cabinet Minister made submissions to Sir Donald Curry's commission, as it was established by the Government in the first place.

Mr. Jack: I am sorry that the Minister cannot say that the duchy itself made a submission to the Curry commission, which has produced the most significant report on British food and farming for many years, and offers an important way forward. In the light of its findings and the worries of duchy tenants as they see, for example, investment in more housing and changes in land management arrangements for the estate, what investment will be made in duchy farms in Lancashire to unlock their potential? When will the Minister be able to give the House those details?

Mr. Leslie: I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's recognition of the importance of the commission's findings on the future of farming. The report is full and comprehensive, and aims to make the farming industry more sustainable and profitable. Clearly, many of those issues rest with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Although the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Lord Macdonald, is in another place, I shall certainly ensure that he is made aware of the right hon. Gentleman's questions and comments.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's comments. Is it not important that central and local government take a lead in ensuring that Curry's proposals are advanced? Anything that my hon. Friend and his right hon. Friends can do must only be to our advantage.

Mr. Leslie: Rural affairs cut across all Departments. As Ministers, we all must be aware of rural as well as urban dimensions. The Royal Society study by Sir Brian Follett will provoke discussion on a number of important issues that need to be considered, but I shall ensure that I pass on my hon. Friend's comments to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Special Advisers

6. **Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): What action he has taken to co-ordinate policy on the duties of special advisers among Government Departments. [30891]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie): As recommended by the Committee on Standards in Public Life and the Select Committee on Public Administration, a code of conduct for special advisers is now in place, with duties and responsibilities also set out in a model contract of employment.

Dr. Lewis: We all know what Jo Moore said on 11 September about burying bad news, but since then she has tried unsuccessfully to have a crony appointed as her Department's head of media and, more recently, has succeeded in damaging the Prime Minister by suggesting, heaven forfend, that he regards the trade union movement as wreckers. Is she setting a good example for special advisers in other Departments to follow?

Mr. Leslie: I am worried about the hon. Gentleman's obsession with these matters. On the particular case that he mentioned, there was an open competition for that appointment; somebody else got the job and the Cabinet Secretary cleared the appointment. It is now time to move on.

Tony Wright (Cannock Chase): May I repeat my oft expressed view that the way to see off the Opposition's absurd fixation with special advisers is to move ahead, building on the code that we have already established; introduce the civil service legislation that we promised; set a cap on the number of special advisers; and define their relations with civil servants? That would put a stop to the nonsense that the Opposition keep bringing up.

Mr. Leslie: As I said to the Select Committee on Public Administration last week, we need to make sure that we enshrine certain principles in a code of conduct for special advisers. That code is a new initiative from this Administration and will create more transparency in those areas. We can look at a cap on numbers and we shall want to consult on those matters when any future civil service legislation is introduced.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Does the Minister recognise that it is important that a clear boundary between political advisers and civil servants, who must be politically impartial, is maintained? What action has the First Secretary of State taken to ensure rigorous enforcement of that code in the light of what has happened, and when will the civil service Bill to which the Minister referred be published?

Mr. Leslie: The code of conduct makes plain, as does the ministerial code of conduct, the parameters of special advisers' work and operations. We are working on civil service legislation and will publish it when we are ready to do so. The code of conduct should be welcomed all round; indeed, the Public Administration Committee noted that it was both a welcome step forward and progress that should be acknowledged.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): In the light of the excellent fourth report of the Public Administration Committee, which was published last February, does my hon. Friend intend to take any further action in that respect? In particular, he should take note of the fact that the report says that the official Opposition

> "were unable to give a categorical assurance that its Short Money funding"—

our taxpayers' money—

> "was used exclusively for parliamentary business."

Will he seek a guarantee from those on Opposition Front Bench that in future such assurances will be given?

Mr. Leslie: That is an interesting question. Not many people realise that the Opposition benefited from a threefold increase in the Short money, which goes to support their work—it is purely for parliamentary business, of course, and I am sure that it is true that central office is not propped up by that £3.4 million. I tried to do a bit of research the other day and it seems that in their annual report and accounts, the Tories simply lump Short money with the rest of the income that they generate—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Since the Minister is on the subject of threefold increases, can I point to the threefold increase, from roughly £50 million to just under £150 million, in the Government's spending on advertising through the Central Office of Information? Since the most senior special adviser of them all is Alastair Campbell, how does the Minister justify this morning's reports that Mr. Campbell will get his sticky fingers on taxpayers' money and have direct control over Government advertising?

Mr. Leslie: Another conspiracy theory from the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Central Office of Information undertakes extremely important marketing campaigns—for example, on public health and protection or on recruiting extra doctors and nurses. If he feels that that is money poorly spent, I shall start to worry for him.

Mr. Collins: The Minister is renowned for being a man of his word, so will he give the House a categorical assurance that Mr. Alastair Campbell will not be in any position to give orders to the Central Office of Information as a result of the restructuring, and that any official of the Central Office of Information will be entitled to decline to follow any instruction given by Mr. Alastair Campbell—yes or no?

Mr. Leslie: The Central Office of Information has recently undergone its quinquennial review and the results were published yesterday. Those involved closer working with the Government information and communications services, as well as the strategic communication unit. We must have coherent government, which has a strong corporate strategic management. We must make sure that those recruitment exercises and public health campaigns are undertaken as effectively as possible.

7. **Mr. Crispin Blunt** (Reigate): What his estimate is of the salary bill for special advisers in Government Departments in the financial year 2002–03. [30892]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie): The Government have already announced changes to the pay system for special advisers based on civil service job evaluation. The process of evaluation is not yet finished, so the salary costs for the next financial year will be provided once the exercise is completed.

Mr. Blunt: There's a surprise—that the figures are not available. Will the Minister confirm that part of those salaries is paid to Alastair Campbell? From the hon. Gentleman's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins), he made it clear that the Central Office of Information will be answerable to a political appointee. Does not the hon. Gentleman understand that that is a corruption of government?

Mr. Leslie: Is it not amazing that the hon. Gentleman forgot to mention that he is a former special adviser? That level of masochistic self-loathing in the Conservative party is deeply distressing. The hon. Gentleman should realise that we believe that the Government must be led strongly from the centre, and that we must make sure that we have effective and successful communications campaigns for the benefit of the recipients of public services across the country.

Poverty

8. **Paul Goggins** (Wythenshawe and Sale, East): When he last met representatives of UK poverty organisations. [30893]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State (Mr. John Prescott): On 23 January I met the all-party parliamentary group on poverty. The meeting was attended by, among others, the Poverty Alliance, ATD—Altogether towards Dignity—Fourth World, and the UK Coalition against Poverty. I also gave a keynote speech on 15 January at the Fabian society conference, which was attended by 200 organisations associated with poverty relief. I maintain regular contact with the groups in London and on my visits to other areas of the United Kingdom.

Paul Goggins: The Government have done a great deal to tackle the problem of low income, including the introduction of the minimum income guarantee for pensioners, the minimum wage and the working families tax credit. Does my right hon. Friend agree that poverty is not just about money? It is also about power. What steps is he taking to ensure that people with direct experience of poverty can have a bigger say in the development of Government policy?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: That important point was made by the all-party parliamentary group, the representatives of which come from all parts of the House. The group has made it clear that people who suffer from poverty should be actively involved in advising and in decision making here in the House. That is absolutely right. We have commissioned a report to see how we can improve on that process. Those people want a say in the programmes that we are bringing in to relieve the poverty that they are suffering.

Ministerial Code of Conduct

9. **Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): What plans there are to revise paragraph 122 of the ministerial code of conduct. [30895]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche): None.

Mr. Robathan: The Minister will know that paragraph 122 of the ministerial code forbids financial dealings between Ministers and trade unions. When will the Deputy Prime Minister enforce the ministerial code for himself and end his financial dealings with the RMT, which are worth between £12,000 and £14,000 a year to him?

Mrs. Roche: The hon. Gentleman has been pursuing the matter for some time.

Mr. Robathan: What about the ministerial code?

Mrs. Roche: If the hon. Gentleman refrains from shouting, I will give him his answer. He knows that his question is nonsense. The Select Committee on Standards and Privileges has ruled that there has been no benefit at all. It has also ruled that the code has not been broken. The hon. Gentleman should move on and get a life.

Special Advisers

10. **Norman Baker** (Lewes): If he will make a statement on the accountability of special advisers. [30896]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie): As with all civil servants, special advisers are accountable to Ministers. Ministers are accountable to Parliament.

Norman Baker: That system would work if Ministers answered questions about special advisers. As well as continually blocking questions and refusing information, they do not even stick to the code of conduct introduced by the former right hon. Member for Huntingdon, Mr. Major. That system does not work. Why will the hon. Gentleman not answer questions and ensure that the special advisers are accountable to this House?

Mr. Leslie: We went through all this nonsense yesterday in Westminster Hall, where the hon. Gentleman was pulled up by the Deputy Speaker for his intemperate language. I really think he needs to get a grip.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [30913] **Andy King** (Rugby and Kenilworth): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 6 February.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I will have further such meetings later today.

I am sure that the whole House will join me in wanting to pay our respects on the 50th anniversary of Her Majesty the Queen's accession to the throne.

Andy King: Has my right hon. Friend had time to examine the scientific and medical opinion on the MMR vaccine? Does he agree that, whatever our view, this matter is so important that it must not be allowed to become a political football?

The Prime Minister: I do urge people not to pay attention to what is sometimes called Government advice. The Government are in fact giving advice on the basis of the advice given to them by independent experts. That advice, which is that the MMR vaccine is safe and is best done in combination rather than separate jabs, is supported not only by the Government's independent advisory committee, but by the British Medical Association, the Royal College of Nursing, the Royal College of General Practitioners, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, the Community Practitioners and Health Visitors Association and the Faculty of Public Health Medicine. No fewer than 90 countries around the world use the MMR vaccine, including every major industrialised country, and 500 million doses of the vaccine have been given since 1972. I say to people that the scaremongering—and it is scaremongering—about this vaccine is wrong. Often, such scaremongering does not matter, but in this case it does. If anybody has any doubts, the full evidence is available and can be given to any parent who wants it.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): May I join the Prime Minister in congratulating Her Majesty on the 50th anniversary of her accession?

Will the Prime Minister tell the House whether the number of cancelled operations has risen or fallen since he came to power?

The Prime Minister: It has risen; however—[HON. MEMBERS: "How much?"] It has risen by about 20,000; however, the number of operations as a whole has also risen by more than 500,000; 19 out of 20 operations are done on time; the average waiting time for an operation has fallen since 1997; and, therefore, although it is correct that the number of cancelled operations has risen, if we look at the number of operations as a whole—more than 5.5 million in this country—I think that the national health service has a record to be proud of.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The answer is quite correct: 50 per cent. I have to tell the Prime Minister that that is not just a figure. He talks about the rise in the number of operations done, but the numbers that have been cancelled have risen as well, and that is a real tragedy for those who have to wait. *[Interruption.]* Well, the reality—he may not want to hear this—is that this is not one or two cases, but 80,000 people who have had their operations cancelled on the day when they were expecting to have them. That is a matter of fear and anxiety for 80,000 people—many more than when he came to power. So, as those numbers have risen and 80,000 people have had their operations cancelled, will he now tell us the reason why?

The Prime Minister: As I explained a moment ago, far more operations have been done by the national health service—about 500,000 more. Less than 2 per cent. of operations are cancelled, which should put the matter in perspective. The only answer is indeed to increase the capacity of the health service, including more nurses, doctors and consultants, as well as other staff, and more beds. That is precisely why we are increasing investment in the national health service. The right hon. Gentleman is in favour of cutting that investment. Therefore, whatever the problems of cancelled operations—I say that they should be put in perspective—the remedy that he has, which is to cut that investment, is the wrong remedy. The remedy that we have—invest and reform—is the right one.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Before the Prime Minister talks about what he supposes is our programme, perhaps he will pay attention to the comments of the Institute for Fiscal Studies on his record. It stated:

> "public sector net investment over the five-year period since Labour came into power"

is

> "the lowest figure for any five year period since the Second World War".

The Prime Minister is in government and it is his record. The answer that he did not give to my question is that hospital beds are in short supply because they are being blocked by people who cannot get a care home or nursing home bed. The figure that he did not want to provide is that 40,000—nearly 10 per cent.—fewer care home beds are available since 1997 when he took over.

Age Concern says that the care sector is in crisis. The head of the Registered Nursing Homes Association said that Government policy was to blame. The Government's policies are damaging the NHS. Is not the Prime Minister's real achievement after five years to have increased both the queue to get into hospital and the queue to get out?

The Prime Minister: Public sector investment in the health service has increased under the Government and is continuing to increase. We are roughly the only major industrial country anywhere in the world that is increasing expenditure on health and education as a proportion of national income. Is it the Conservative party's case that we are not spending enough on health and education? When we announced our spending plans, Conservatives called them reckless and irresponsible. We know that the right hon. Gentleman wants to run down the national health service because he does not believe in it. The clearest evidence of that came yesterday, when the Leader of the Opposition said:

> "The health service doesn't serve anybody . . . It doesn't serve doctors or nurses. It doesn't help the people who are treated."

What an insult to the NHS and the people who work in it! Conservatives denigrate the health service because they want to undermine it. We want to increase investment, whereas the right hon. Gentleman would cut it.

Q2. [30914] **Vera Baird** (Redcar): Will my right hon. Friend make representations to the United States authorities about a British national who is currently on death row in Georgia? His name is Tracy Housel and he is severely brain damaged. Although he has been on death row since 1986, his execution date is likely to be set this month. Will my right hon. Friend say what representations he believes he can make? Will he please act quickly, before the date is set?

The Prime Minister: The Foreign Secretary has written to the Governor of Georgia and the state board of pardons and parole, urging them to commute the death sentence to a term of imprisonment. We shall continue to make representations to the state of Georgia. I hope that my hon. Friend understands the position and that we shall continue to make representations on behalf of that individual, who I believe is a joint US-UK national.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): I fully associate Liberal Democrats with the Prime Minister's congratulations to Her Majesty on this special day.

I want to ask the Prime Minister a question of which I have given him prior notice—in the sense that the leader of the Tory party will ask him the same question this time next week. Yesterday, the Labour-dominated Transport Committee described the Government's proposals for the part-privatisation of the London Underground and their claims that it would save £4.5 billion as inadequate and flawed. How does the Prime Minister explain that?

The Prime Minister: I explain it by saying that, of course, the Committee is entitled to its view, but the value-for-money reports are being considered at the moment. They will be published and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions will make a statement about that. The safety case—in so far as that is a point of criticism—is being assessed by the Health and Safety Executive; that is entirely proper. The right hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends must explain—if they oppose the public-private partnership which allows major infrastructure work that is urgently necessary to be done on the London underground—how they would make up the £5 billion shortfall if they took out the private element.

Mr. Kennedy: Everybody in the country knows that the railway system is in a state of chaos, thanks to privatisation. Why do not the Government listen to the majority view of Londoners, and to the advice of the Labour-dominated Transport Committee and decide not to go down the route of part-privatisation for the tube? Should not the Prime Minister swallow his pride and stop this disaster in the making?

The Prime Minister: Let me explain to the right hon. Gentleman again why we believe that this is important. The London underground will remain in the public sector from the time that the tube opens until the time that it closes. The reason that we are engaged in this public-private investment partnership is so that the infrastructure work, which is urgently needed in the tube, can be done. *[Interruption.]* I urge Liberal Democrat Members to listen to the arguments, rather than heckling. If we decide to do this in the old public sector financing way, we will lose the billions of pounds of private investment necessary, and all the evidence is that, if we do it in that way, the work will run over budget and over time. It is important, however difficult the decision may be, to take the right decision for the future. This plan is ready to go; it will get immediate money into the tube; and we are doing it not out of pride but because we believe it to be the right thing to do.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): When my right hon. Friend is preparing his in-flight reading for the next couple of days, would he care to take with him the report on the Chinook crash? I hope that he will look, in particular, at paragraph 174, in which Lord Jauncey and his colleagues unanimously come to the conclusion that

> "the reviewing officers were not justified in finding that negligence on the part of the pilots caused the aircraft to crash."

I realise that the primary response to that will be from the Ministry of Defence, but will the Prime Minister accept that many of us, who have sympathy with the Department in a variety of ways, feel that the Gordian knot of self-interest that surrounds the Department on this issue must be cut through? We look to my right hon. Friend for a better, clearer and fairer understanding of a complex issue that has been dealt with by some of the most distinguished jurists in the other place. They have come up with a conclusion that drives a coach and horses through the views of the—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is obviously right to say that this is a complex issue, although I hope that he would also acknowledge that those who conducted the original inquiry are wise and celebrated people as well, and experts in that particular area. Obviously, we have to study the report, and we shall do that. We shall study its complex technical detail and give a proper response in due course.

Q3. [30915] **Mr. James Gray** (North Wiltshire): Is the Prime Minister aware that some 350 jobs had been lost in the town of Malmesbury before yesterday's devastating news of 820 redundancies as a result of James Dyson moving some of his business to the far east? The Prime Minister will understand that that is appalling news for a town of only 4,500 people. Nationally, 350,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost since the right hon. Gentleman came to power, and manufacturing industry is now officially in recession. Will he accept personal responsibility for this, or will he seek to blame someone else?

The Prime Minister: It would be right, surely, to point out that there have been 1.2 million extra jobs altogether since we came to office. It is correct to say that manufacturing has gone through a difficult time; of course it has. It has done so in many parts of the world, but I believe the best thing for manufacturing is low interest rates, low inflation and a stable economic environment, and that is what manufacturing has. If we were to go back to the policies that the hon. Gentleman used to support under the Conservative Government, which caused massive manufacturing job losses and a huge cut in manufacturing output and investment, that would be the worst thing. Having said that, of course we are deeply disappointed at Mr. Dyson's decision, but that is a decision for his company.

Q4. [30916] **Dr. Desmond Turner** (Brighton, Kemptown): The Prime Minister will be aware that the performance and innovation unit's report on future energy supply is now widely available on the internet, and that it confirms that renewable sources should have a vital and increasing role in the future. [HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."] The UK is uniquely rich in wave and tidal energy sources, but if this potential is to be unlocked, it will require a lead from the Government. [Hon. Members: "Reading."] If this can be given, there is the potential for a new green industry, providing thousands of jobs. Will—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is taking far too long.

The Prime Minister: Over the next three years, we have committed about £260 million in an extensive capital grants programme for renewable energy. We have a target to reach 10 per cent. renewables by 2010. [Hon. Members: "Reading."] *[Laughter.]* There will be a—*[Laughter.]* I am told—*[Laughter.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let the Prime Minister answer.

The Prime Minister: These issues will be further canvassed in the PIU report next week.

Q5. [30917] **Mr. George Osborne** (Tatton): What the Prime Minister just said on the MMR vaccine deals with the world as he wishes it to be, not as it is. The fact is that tens of thousands of parents do not accept his assurances that the vaccine is safe, however good the medical evidence. Instead of calling them scaremongers, should he not give them the choice of three separate vaccinations on the NHS?

The Prime Minister: I really have to say to the hon. Gentleman that the position that the Conservative party has adopted today is, in my view, totally irresponsible. Let me tell him why that is the case. The evidence that I have read out is evidence not just about the importance of the MMR vaccine but about the importance of having it in combination, rather than in separate jabs. Let me just say to the hon. Gentleman that the evidence that that way is better comes from right round the world—not just this country. It comes from 90 different countries. *[Interruption.]* Can I say this to the Opposition? This is important, so let me at least give them the evidence, as that is what people are asking for.

Every single piece of independent research that has been done around the world has found that it is important to have the MMR jab in combination, not separately. Let me inform the House that, most recently, the major US conference, as reported in the American medical journal *Pediatrics*, said that

> "the available evidence does not support the hypothesis that MMR vaccine causes autism or associated disorders."

It went on:

> "Separate administration of measles, mumps and rubella vaccines to children provides no benefit over administration of the combination MMR vaccine and would result in delayed or missed immunisations."

Two further pieces of evidence are important. Between 1994 and 1999, for various reasons, Japan went for separate jabs, rather than the MMR combination. Over that time, when there were no deaths from measles in Britain, there were 85 in Japan. In addition, I point out to the hon. Gentleman that when a previous Government had to face a similar issue in respect of whooping cough, as a result of pressure it was decided not to give the vaccine in the original form. As [illegible] of that, the immunisation programme virtually collapsed. As a result of that, some 100 children died of whooping cough.

This is a serious issue and I simply say to Opposition Members: read the evidence. Incidentally, the press have continually said that we have failed to provide the evidence. The evidence is published on the Department of Health website and it is available for anybody to see. Any parent who writes to the Department of Health can have the evidence, so I urge all Members of the House to have a care as to what we say on this issue, because, genuinely, the safety of children is at risk.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to deny today's story in Newcastle's *The Journal*, which says that he, or his office, has personally intervened in the drafting of the forthcoming regional government White Paper to insist that it contain a clause stating that regional government cannot go ahead without the abolition of the county councils?

The Prime Minister: The regional government White Paper will be published in due course and my hon. Friend will be able to see the proposals that are made there.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): On Sunday the Prime Minister said that the trade unions were "standing in the way of good public services". Does he stand by that?

The Prime Minister: I said that anyone who opposed the necessary reform of public services was standing in the way of improvements necessary for public services. I also said that those who, like the right hon. Gentleman, want to cut essential investment in public services were grossly undermining them.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I think that answer says it all.

The Prime Minister has clearly apologised to the trade unions, as was reported today. He has gone grovelling to them. When the general secretary of the TUC called his comments "juvenile" and "bizarre", was he defending the Conservative party? When Unison issued its big advertisement attacking that, was it defending the Conservative party?

The truth is that the Prime Minister has had to climb down. Let us ask why. Perhaps the Prime Minister can tell us, as leader of the Labour party, how much money the unions gave his party last year.

The Prime Minister: In no shape or form are we giving way on the reform programme in the health service and the education service. [Hon. Members: "How much?"] Well, the amount of money given to the Labour party—thanks to the procedures we introduced—is there for people to see.

It is important that we carry on with the reforms in health, education, transport, and law and order, but the reforms should be matched by investment. I will take on either people like the right hon. Gentleman who want to cut investment, or people in the trade union movement or elsewhere who want to halt the advance of reform. "Invest and reform" is right. Now perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will tell us what his position is.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister took a long time not to answer the question. Let us now give him the answer. The figure is £8 million, in a six-month period last year—and in the case of two unions that are either on strike or about to strike, it is nearly £1.25 million.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am reluctant to interrupt the Leader of the Opposition, but I must tell him that the Prime Minister is here to answer questions as Prime Minister, not as leader of the Labour party. *[Interruption.]* Order. I am talking about the rules of the House, which the House has given me to protect. Perhaps the Leader of the Opposition could ask another question.

Mr. Duncan Smith *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Please allow the Leader of the Opposition to ask his question.

Mr. Duncan Smith: This issue goes right to the heart of the Government. While I fully respect what you say, Mr. Speaker, I must point out—*[Interruption]*—if I may—that it is about what is happening on the railways and in the Post Office. I am simply raising an issue, and asking a question about whether there are links with and reasons for Government policy. I would like to pursue that line if you are agreeable, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps I can ask the question—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Leader of the Opposition is using some ingenuity. Let us see how he puts his question—whether he puts it in another way.

Mr. Duncan Smith *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I will certainly ask the question, Mr. Speaker, but perhaps in a slightly different way.

No wonder the Prime Minister grovels to the trade unions after having attacked them, from one day to the next. The truth is—this is the reality for the present Government, so heavily linked to the trade unions—that five years ago the Prime Minister used to talk about "24 hours to save the health service"; on Monday, it was 24 hours to save his donations. Instead of briefing and retreating, attacking and withdrawing, why does the Prime Minister not cut his links with the strikers and the wreckers?

The Prime Minister: In regard to the actual industrial dispute, we have made it clear that we believe the strike action is totally unjustified and should not take place. In relation to the national health service, however, there is a real issue, as there is in relation to investment in our public services. The strategy of the Conservative party is absolutely clear, and that is why we will not adopt it as a Government—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must ask Members to be seated. Let me also say to the Prime Minister that the policy of the Conservative party is nothing to do with the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: Fortunately, the policy of the Conservative party will never be the policy of this Government, but there is a real issue in respect of public services. What is important is that we end up with the investment and reform that our public services need. They are getting substantial investment over the next few years. In each of these areas, there is a substantial reform programme. As I have said, whether it is those who are opposed to reform, or those who are opposed to investment, we will take both of them on and we will win that battle for our public services.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): Is the Prime Minister aware that tomorrow will see the naming of the 2,500 runners in the Queen's jubilee baton relay, which will effectively launch the run-up to the Commonwealth games in Manchester later this year? Will he join me in congratulating those runners, who literally straddle the world? Every one has been picked because of their contribution to local communities. Will he join me in wishing them every success in launching what will be the most successful multi-sports event in this country for many years?

The Prime Minister: I certainly join my hon. Friend in his congratulations for all those who are organising the Commonwealth games. The Queen's jubilee baton relay will be launched by Her Majesty the Queen at Buckingham palace on 11 March 2002, Commonwealth day, from where it will depart on a tour of some 22 Commonwealth countries before returning to the United Kingdom on 6 June. The baton will then tour the length and breadth of the UK for 50 days before arriving in Manchester for the opening by the Queen of the Commonwealth games on 25 July. I believe that the Commonwealth games will be not just a fantastic success story for the north-west but a great showcase for the country.

Q6. [30918] **Chris Grayling** (Epsom and Ewell): On 19 December at Prime Minister's questions, the Prime Minister said about Railtrack:

"the longer the administrator's work has gone on, the more financial difficulties he has uncovered."—[*Official Report*, 19 December 2001; Vol. 377, c. 288-9.]

On three separate occasions since then, the Railtrack administrator has publicly said that that is not the case. Who is telling the truth?

The Prime Minister: The petition that was presented to the court announced debts of about £1.7 billion, which is exactly why Railtrack was put into administration. The Railtrack administrator will publish the full details of what the debts were at a later time. When that happens, the hon. Gentleman may have to withdraw the implication of his question.

Q7. [30919] **Phil Sawford** (Kettering): Will my right hon. Friend consider visiting Kettering general hospital to look at the new orthopaedic theatre, the new CAT scanner, the £900,000 investment in intensive care and the £1 million plans for a new dermatology unit? Does he agree that, after that massive investment in our health service, the real wreckers are those on the Conservative Benches?

The Prime Minister: I would be delighted to visit my hon. Friend's constituency hospital in Kettering, although preferably not as a patient—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] I think that most of us would like to maintain our good health if we possibly can. What my hon. Friend has described in his constituency could be described in most constituencies up and down the country. There is a massive amount of investment going in. Figures published yesterday on recruitment to the health service show, for example, that we have met the target on the number of nurses in the national health service plan some two years early. I say to my hon. Friends and indeed to Opposition Members that, with the progress over the next few months, I think that people will start to see in their constituencies exactly the same level of investment and change as people already notice in respect of the school system.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Is the Prime Minister aware that on the day of the Twin Towers disaster, there took place in this city an arms trade fair sponsored by the Ministry of Defence? Among the customers at that fair for state-of-the-art weaponry were both sides in the civil war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Would it not be a useful start to the Prime Minister's mission to Africa if he announced that henceforth this country will not sell arms to both sides in African civil wars?

The Prime Minister: I do not know about the particular point that the hon. Gentleman makes, but I will investigate it and write to him. Our arms sales to Africa run at about 1 per cent. of total arms sales, so it is important to put that in context. There are also, incidentally, jobs and industry in this country to consider. Of course it is important to take care who we sell arms to, and we do. The desire of African nations is for the partnership for change in Africa—which covers a whole range of issues, including aid and trade, investment and governance—to be satisfactorily put together for the G8 summit in July, so that the developing and developed world can give Africa the chance that it needs.

Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): The Prime Minister will be aware that, even before the dropping of cluster bombs in Afghanistan, it was one of the most heavily land-mined countries in the world. In fulfilling his pledge not to walk away from that country, will he outline what the Government are doing to help clear land mines there?

The Prime Minister: We are, I think, providing several million pounds for the clearing of mines in Afghanistan. Part of the function of the international security assistance force is precisely to ensure that we give every help to the Afghan authorities in clearing mines from the area. My hon. Friend would be pleasantly surprised by the amount of progress being made there in very difficult circumstances. On the humanitarian side, although there are still real problems as a result of drought, and some instability in certain parts of the country, the World Food Programme now reckons that it is getting more aid into Afghanistan than ever before.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You have just made—perhaps the Prime Minister would listen to this.

Hon. Members: He's off.

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is a point of order before us.

Sir Peter Tapsell: Not for the first time, I wish the Prime Minister bon voyage.

You have just made the interesting and almost theological ruling, Mr. Speaker, that we must in future draw a distinction between the right hon. Gentleman who is now on his way to west Africa in his role as Prime Minister and the right hon. Gentleman in his role as leader of the Labour party. Are we to understand, then, that in future we may no longer question him when the Government's policies, as so often happens now, diverge from those of the Labour party that was elected to support them?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman can always ask questions about the Government's policies. The Prime Minister is here at Prime Minister's Question Time to answer questions regarding his role as Prime Minister, not as leader of the Labour party.

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can we also take it that in future you will use your sound judgment and prevent the Prime Minister from misrepresenting Conservative party policy when in fact he is being questioned about his Government's policies?

Mr. Speaker: I think that I demonstrated that I was able to tell both the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister when they were out of order, and I will continue to do so when necessary.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I hope that it is not another extension of Prime Minister's Question Time.

Chris Grayling: No, it is not, Mr. Speaker. You will have heard me asking the Prime Minister at Question Time about his comments before Christmas. Since—

Mr. Speaker: Order. That sounds like an extension of Prime Minister's Question Time to me.

Chris Grayling: I assure you that it is not, Mr. Speaker. I am really asking this question knowing the importance that hon. Members attach to your judgment as a guardian of the interests of the House. When I have asked the Prime Minister, on two separate occasions, through written questions, to substantiate a comment of his that has been contradicted by someone outside the House, and he refuses to do so, what advice can you give me about how to pursue the matter?

Mr. Speaker: As I have said before, keep persevering.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In questioning the Prime Minister about the discharge of his duties as Prime Minister, is it proper for the House to question him about what influences may have been brought to bear?

Mr. Speaker: I say to the right hon. Lady what I said to the Leader of the Opposition: let us see how the questions are framed, and then I will make a ruling on them.

Education Bill (Programme)(No. 3)

3.34 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Timms): I beg to move,

That, notwithstanding the Order of 23rd January (Education Bill (Programme)(No. 2)), at this day's sitting proceedings on consideration of the Education Bill as amended in the Standing Committee (so far as not previously concluded) shall be brought to a conclusion at Eleven o'clock and proceedings on Third Reading (so far as not previously concluded) shall be brought to a conclusion at midnight.

I am moving this new programme motion with the simple intention of ensuring that there can be an additional two hours of debate on the Education Bill. The Government have consistently offered additional time to debate the Bill, and I am sure that the House will now want to consider the substantial issues raised in the amendments that have been tabled. I hope that we can now move swiftly to debate the Bill, with the benefit of the additional two hours for which the motion provides.

3.35 pm

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): I have no wish to detain the House. We have substantive matters to debate this afternoon and evening. I congratulate the Minister on managing to get the motion on to the Order Paper: that is a refreshing improvement on yesterday's performance.

I also take this opportunity to withdraw something that I said in the heat of the moment last night, when the Government appeared to be in complete chaos. I said that I could not believe that the Government's problems last night were due to monumental incompetence, and that they were in fact due to some forces of malice. Having received further explanation from Ministers, I now wish to withdraw unreservedly the allegation of competence that I made about the Government, as I now understand that the affair was a complete cock-up.

It is refreshing that we have got the two extra hours, not least from the perspective of the Bill's progress through the House, in Committee as well as during yesterday's shambles. It may interest the House to know that, in Committee, consideration of clause 11 was not completed. Clause 12 was not debated at all, and neither were clauses 19 to 24, 28 to 38, 41 to 43, 45 to 48 or 63 to 71. There was no debate on schedules 2 to 4 and 7 to 9.

It is clear that the 44 hours that the Government allowed for consideration in Committee was woefully inadequate for such a serious Bill. Those hon. Members who do not know how serious, important and long lasting the Bill is should read clause 2. That clause gives the Secretary of State—not just this Secretary of State, but her successors as well—the power to suspend clauses from every Education Bill ever passed by the House, including this one. Clause 2 therefore allows the Secretary of State to ignore many of the provisions before us.

The Bill deserves the full consideration that it has not received. The programme motion is welcome in at least a small way. It is plain from what happened yesterday that the Government wanted to move the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) out of prime time, so that what he had to say could be hidden in the dark recesses of the night. We should be grateful to all those who contributed to yesterday's important debate on the matter for the fact that the Government have signally failed in that intention. We should be grateful to them also for the fact that we are about to have today's important debate—a debate, I should point out again, in which I am on the Government's side. In that context, the Government's actions yesterday to try and suspend debate seem especially perverse.

Thanks to the efforts through the usual channels and those who contributed to yesterday's debate, we have managed to obtain a small amount of extra time for consideration of the Bill. For that, the House should be grateful.

3.39 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I endorse everything that the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) has said, and in the interests of brevity I shall not repeat it. However, perhaps we should point out to the Government's mismanagers of the House's business that their efforts yesterday were entirely counterproductive.

I believe that hon. Members from all parties think that this important debate should be in prime time. More attention has been drawn to the matter than would have been the case if the debate had been allowed to proceed last night.

However, Liberal Democrat Members accept that it was mistake rather than mischief that got us into yesterday's ridiculous position. We are grateful to the Government for listening to our plea last night that additional time should be made available to reinstate the two hours that we lost. I hope that we can now proceed with the debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That, notwithstanding the Order of 23rd January (Education Bill (Programme)(No. 2)), at this day's sitting proceedings on consideration of the Education Bill as amended in the Standing Committee (so far as not previously concluded) shall be brought to a conclusion at Eleven o'clock and proceedings on Third Reading (so far as not previously concluded) shall be brought to a conclusion at midnight.

Orders of the Day

Education Bill

[2ND ALLOTTED DAY]

As amended in the Standing Committee, further considered.

New Clause 1

NO REQUIREMENTS OF ATTENDANCE AT A PLACE OF RELIGIOUS WORSHIP

'(1) It shall not be required, as a condition of a pupil being admitted to a maintained school, that:

(a) he must attend or abstain from attending a place of religious worship;

(b) his parents or guardians must attend or abstain from attending a place of religious worship.

(c) the pupil, his parent(s) or guardian(s) belong to any particular faith or denomination.

(2) The local education authority after consultation with the admission forum may by regulation authorise that, notwithstanding (1) a maintained school may admit between 20 per cent. and 75 per cent. of pupils who have a particular faith or denomination.

(3) Where the local education authority is informed that there are insufficient applications to a particular maintained school to fill the available places, the local education authority may after consultation with the admission forum authorise an increase up to 100 per cent. in the numbers of pupils admitted who are of the particular faith or denomination of the maintained school in question.'.—*[Mr. Dobson.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

3.39 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: New clause 2—*Employment etc. of teachers: religious issues*—

'(1) The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (c. 59) is amended as follows.

(2) Section 58 (Appointment and dismissal of certain teachers at schools with a religious character) shall cease to have effect.

(3) Section 59 (Staff at community, secular foundation or voluntary, or special school) is amended by leaving out subsection (1) and inserting—

"(1) This section applies to any maintained school."

(4) Section 60 (Staff at foundation or voluntary school with a religious character) shall cease to have effect.'.

New clause 18—*No requirements of attendance at a place of religious worship (No. 2)*—

'(1) It shall not be required, as a condition of a pupil being admitted to a maintained school, that:

(a) he must attend or abstain from attending a place of religious worship;

(b) his parents or guardians must attend or abstain from attending a place of religious worship;

(c) the pupil, his parent(s) or guardian(s) belong to a particular faith or denomination.

(2) The local education authority after consultation with the admission forum may by regulation authorise that, notwithstanding (1) a maintained school may admit between 20 per cent. and 75 per cent. of pupils who have a particular faith or denomination.

(3) Where the local education authority is informed that there are sufficient applications to a particular maintained school to fill the available places, the local education authority may after consultation with the admission forum authorise an increase up to 100 per cent. in the numbers of pupils admitted who are of the particular faith or denomination of the maintained school in question.

(4) This section shall only have effect in respect of schools established after the coming into force of this Act.'.

Amendment No. 78, in clause 208, page 125, line 14, after "206", insert—

'section (*No requirements of attendance at a place of religious worship (No. 2)*)'.

Mr. Dobson: The new clause was tabled in my name and in the names of a large number of hon. Members, including—albeit at the risk of alienating some of my hon. Friends—that of the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis). Whatever my differences with the hon. Gentleman on other matters, he has been stalwart in the pursuit of a more inclusive approach by religious organisations and religious schools. I was going to say that he had acted despite his known Christian commitment, but perhaps I should say that he has done so because of it.

Although I was baptised and confirmed a member of the Church of England, I am a person of no religious belief whatever, but I was brought up by my Anglican mother and my unbeliever father to respect the religious beliefs of everyone.

The new clause would require all religious schools to admit 25 per cent. of their pupils from families of other faiths or of no faith. That is a measured proposal. New clause 18 would apply that 25 per cent. minimum rule only to new religious schools. It must be recognised that that might be interpreted as discriminating against those religious groups who hope to set up more religious schools—especially the Church of England, with its proposals for 100 extra secondary schools, and people of the Muslim faith and others.

There may be shortcomings in the drafting of our new clauses such that they would not achieve the intentions of their supporters. Indeed, from my experience, there might even be results that we did not want. However, if there is anything wrong with the drafting, it can easily be corrected in the House of Lords. The Government and their draftsmen are obviously good at making changes: on Report, we are dealing with one Government new clause and no fewer than 43 Government amendments. I am sure that we could get some help from them if necessary.

Our proposition is supported by members of the Labour party and the Liberal Democrat party. Furthermore, if those members of the Tory party who have spoken to me face to face were telling the truth—I assume that they were—we also have support from people in the Conservative party. Certainly many teachers, parents and members of religious groups support our proposals—as do many children.

Some of those people would question the very basis of a Church-state relationship in which the taxpayer funds religious schools at all. Money taken from taxpayers of all faiths and of none is handed to various groups who knowingly discriminate against certain children and exclude them on the basis of religion. Those circumstances are unusual. People would agree that if we substituted the words "race" or "colour" for the word "religion", such discrimination would be unacceptable.

[Mr. Dobson]

However, that is a fundamental debate and this is neither the time nor the place to hold it; even if it is the place, it is certainly not the time.

Our proposals respond to current circumstances in which substantial changes are likely to be made and in which there will be a considerable extension of the number of religious schools promoted by religious groups and encouraged by the Government.

The impression has been created that there is something special about religious schools. The White Paper refers to their "distinctive ethos and character". If that ethos and character are indeed distinctive, one would want to promote them only if one believed that they were superior. That impression is sometimes created by those who advocate such schools, and it is resented by teachers, parents and older children in .many non-religious institutions.

3.45 pm

One does not have to go to a religious school to witness the promotion by dedicated staff of the spiritual, moral, social, and cultural well-being of children. It is frequently provided by staff in non-religious schools—by people with a profound belief in their own religious faiths and by people with none. They manage to provide those things in state schools that have no religious element.

To justify those remarks I cite Argyle primary school in King's Cross in my constituency, which is one of the most deprived communities in the country. The Ofsted report described that school's contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural well-being of children as "outstanding in all respects". The nearest mixed state secondary school, South Camden community school, which my own children attended, was described as "very good overall" in those respects in the recent Ofsted report—and that is without the benefit of clergy, although the report did not add that.

The impression is also created that religious schools perform better and get better results. There is no sound evidence for that. If we compare like with like—schools with similar intakes—or if we take differing intakes into account, the performance of schools throughout the country is similar, as has been shown in surveys undertaken not only by liberal and left-wing organisations but by those that are pretty far to the right of the Conservative party. Those surveys show that some religious schools are inclusive and do a brilliant job, some are not inclusive and do a brilliant job, and some are not inclusive and do not do a brilliant job. The same applies, of course, to non-religious schools.

The problem with religious schools is selection. It is not generally a problem with primary schools. Most of those serve their neighbourhood and are inclusive, whatever their religious nature—very few are selective, and that is how it ought to be. The problem arises with secondary schools. Some religious secondary schools are inclusive, but some are not, and as the law stands all of them can if they wish select children from their religious group only. Inevitably, that means the rejection and exclusion of children from families of other faiths and of no faith. I emphasise the latter as it is important, because more than 40 per cent. of the population of England and Wales subscribe to no organised religious belief. They are just as entitled to send their children to the school of their choice as anyone else.

That selection inevitably divides communities is undeniable. We live in a society where many people are concerned about the loss of social cohesion. They want to avoid division and exclusion and promote inclusion. It is inevitable that separate schools promote division. They divide the sheep from the goats—us from them and them from us. It is part of the function of establishing high morale within the school. It promotes an exclusive sense, suggesting, "We are great people in this school. We are not like that school down the road." That is part and parcel of almost any school or organisation. There is rivalry between schools, which can sometimes lead to abuse or the odd fight or unpleasant behaviour.

If we add more and more divisions—on the basis of religion, race, or colour—we will see a geometric, not an arithmetic, progression of such problems.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire) *rose*—.

Mr. Dobson: I will not give way, as many hon. Members wish to speak.

Within the United Kingdom we have had a terrible example of what can happen when most schools in an area are divided on religious grounds: the vile scenes that were seen outside the Holy Cross school in Belfast recently. That behaviour, by those who call themselves loyalists and parade themselves as Protestants, would not have occurred if Protestant children, as well as Catholic children, had gone to the Holy Cross school. I am not suggesting that the situation anywhere in England and Wales is as bad that, and I do not want it to be as bad as that in the future, but there are conurbations where divisions will increase if something is not done to make Church and religious schools more inclusive, or to restrain their spread.

I would be the last person to suggest that social divisions in our cities and conurbations—or in our rural areas, for that matter—are simply the product of the schooling system. That would be absurd. They are clearly to do with housing and employment, but hon. Members on both sides of the House are working to reduce those divisions. The Government have an effective social exclusion unit, which is there to promote integration. If the Government machine is moving in one direction with the policies on housing, jobs, training, and regeneration, it would appear that education is the cuckoo in the nest, moving in the opposite direction.

It is said that everyone wants schools to be inclusive; indeed the Government's Green Paper says:

> "We will support inclusive faith schools".

The briefing kindly provided to the parliamentary Labour party says that the Government's

> "hope is that all faith schools should adopt more inclusive admission policies."

I share the Government's hope, and the Bill is their hope made flesh. The Archbishop of Canterbury, no less, also supports that view. He was reported as saying that Church schools

> "should include some children of other faiths and of no particular faith, as well as . . . of Christian families."

I support that and share his view, which is why we are introducing these proposals. We propose a national minimum of 25 per cent.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): The Church of England briefing that I have seen makes it clear that it does not want such a percentage foisted on it by central diktat.

Mr. Dobson: Well, I was about to come on to that very point. My next note says, "Objections—central diktat." So I commend the hon. Gentleman on following the impeccable logic of my speech, but the concept of central direction would probably not be recognised as wholly alien to the education policies that have been pursued by the Labour Government, whom I strongly support, since 1997, and I want to assist in that process.

There is also an objection to quotas, but the Church of England's own document, which set in train its proposals for 100 new schools, says:

> "This could be achieved either through catchment or quota".

It then adds—I do not like misleading people—

> "as appropriate to local circumstances."

Once again, I agree. We propose a national minimum. Perhaps, in certain circumstances, that national minimum might not be met, and we try our best in our humble new clause to allow for a derogation from the minimum if it cannot be reached for practical reasons.

Our proposals would widen parental choice. They would give every parent in every area the opportunity to apply to every school, with the chance of their children getting into every school.

Mr. McLoughlin: I went to a Catholic primary school and a Catholic secondary school. I should like to ask the right hon. Gentleman one question on his 25 per cent. limit. If someone outside a three-mile area decided that their child should go to a Church of England school or a Catholic school that was more than three miles away from that person, although they did not profess the faith of that faith school, would they qualify for free school transport as they currently do?

Mr. Dobson: It is my understanding that if someone of a particular religious faith wants to send their child to a school of that faith and they live sufficiently far away, they are entitled to free school transport. In fairness—I believe in equality—that would also apply the other way: at least I hope it would.

The problem with the existence of religious schools is that children get rejected because their parents are not of the appropriate faith. That means that those people are not allowed to exercise their choice—the school does the choosing.

Ms Claire Ward (Watford) *rose—*

Helen Jones (Warrington, North) *rose—*

Mr. Dobson: I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones).

Helen Jones: Is not the real problem with my right hon. Friend's new clause—particularly in relation to Catholic schools, which are largely socially inclusive because of their wide catchment areas—that it would create a situation in which 25 per cent. of pupils were being accepted into school on grounds other than their faith? That would create a situation in which those schools became more socially exclusive, not less, because the people who would know how to work the system would be the clued-up parents who understood it.

Mr. Dobson: In those areas in which there are many Roman Catholics, that process already applies even to the Roman Catholics, because the clued-up parents get their children into the Roman Catholic schools that they regard as better than some of the other Roman Catholic schools. The proposition applies to everyone; the new clause would not introduce a novel problem.

The Church of England is proposing to have an additional 100 new secondary schools. Its report makes it clear that that will not be in response to the increase in the number of children. The majority of the new schools will result from existing community schools being taken over. Let us consider the example of a town or neighbourhood in which there are currently two non-religious community schools. All the parents in that area can choose to send their children to one or other of those schools. If one of them becomes a religious foundation, the religious foundation will start turning some children away, and people who are not of the particular faith may have only one option. They will be able to send their child only to the remaining non-religious school. That will reduce choice.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dobson: I should make progress.

A further problem arises from the existence of religious schools and specialist schools. The concept of the specialist religious school is irreconcilable with the concept of parental choice. Let us suppose that a Roman Catholic school becomes a specialist language school, or a Muslim school becomes a specialist mathematics school, or a Church of England school becomes a specialist IT school. Unless people are of the appropriate faith, the new specialist school will not be available to them.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): On the issue of specialist schools, McAuley Catholic comprehensive school in my constituency has just been awarded specialist status in performing arts and design. My understanding is that part of what specialist schools do is to offer a specialism to the wider community. Specialist status is about a community of schools working together to make the most of their assets by sharing them more effectively across the board. Is that not different from the old grant-maintained days when the school community was divided? Specialist status is about diversity, but within a community of schools.

Mr. Dobson: There is something in what my hon. Friend says, but not everything. If someone wants to specialise in whatever is offered by the specialist religious school, the best place to do it is in the school that specialises. The impact on the surrounding area in terms of that specialism is diluted the further away one is from the core school offering such provision.

4 pm

Mrs. Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale): My right hon. Friend knows that we share a common position on some things. Indeed, I was proud to associate to myself with his intervention regarding Islamophobia when we debated the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill. However, I have two concerns about the new clause. First, for Muslims in my constituency, this is the first time they have stood a chance of getting anywhere near parity, and they see the introduction of quotas as discriminatory. Secondly, is it not naive to believe that just because children of different faiths or different colours are in the same school they will integrate? According to the three reports, the problem was the lack of integration in most non-religious state schools in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford.

Mr. Dobson: I believe in equality between religions. The new clause would apply either to all existing and future religious schools or just to future religious schools. People of the Muslim faith might believe that the latter application discriminates against them, and there may be something in that. However, the suggestion that one religion feels a bit upset about the proposal does not mean that we should desist from implementing it.

The Government Chief Whip sent a letter from the Muslim Council of Britain, addressed to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, to a number of hon. Members. Sadly, she did not send it to me, although it mentions my new clause. The council opposes my proposal. I think that the Secretary of State will say that the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church and other groups oppose it, but we have known that all along. I do not think that my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Mrs. Fitzsimons) has advanced the discussion.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): What about the hon. Lady's second point—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Dobson: I am making my speech.

The next objection is that the new clause might mean that children have to be bussed in. Let us suppose that a non-religious school in a particular locality serves the whole neighbourhood. If it becomes a religious school and uses the current admissions policy, it can reject children who live nearby who are not of the appropriate religious faith. So children living nearby would have to be bussed to schools elsewhere that will admit them and, as they travel out of their neighbourhood, they will pass vehicles coming in the other direction bringing religious children to the school in their area. I do not believe that that is a valid objection.

Angela Watkinson *rose*—

Mr. Dobson: Another objection to the amendment is that it sets aside a long-standing arrangement between Church and state. As the parliamentary Labour party briefing said:

> "The effect of this amendment would be to tear up the historic concordat between the state and church that was the foundation of the 1944 Education Act."

That concordat was not set in tablets of stone. It must be as susceptible to change as any other part of the 1944 Act and the settlement. The House has passed no fewer than 42 Education Bills since 1944, many of which amended either the 1944 Act or subsequent Acts. We cannot say that that arrangement is sacrosanct and can never be changed.

Ms Ward: Does my right hon. Friend agree that all those Acts were introduced after a consultation process that involved many of the organisations and parties that would be affected by the proposed changes? In the case of the new clause, however, the very organisations that would be most affected and, indeed, the parents who would wish to send their children to faith schools have not been consulted. They have found out about the proposal through the media and have had little opportunity to make representations to their Member of Parliament or to have a view on the proposed change. That is not consultation with the organisations that count.

Mr. Dobson: I take my hon. Friend back to the start of my speech, when I pointed out that we are not proposing to initiate something but responding to initiatives by others. There has been considerable consultation by the Government and the Church of England. Not all the responses in any way favoured further extension of religious schools.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): I am sorry to disturb the flow of my right hon. Friend's speech, but I should like to respond to the mention of the historic settlement and the lack of consultation. I am not sure how many Members know that the historic settlement of 1944 set up state sponsorship of faith schools, but based on a 50 per cent. state contribution. Since then, the faith contribution has fallen—and it is now proposed that it be 10 per cent. I do not believe that the general taxpayer has been consulted on that.

Mr. Dobson: I admire my hon. Friend's logic, because that was the very next point that I was going to make. The 50:50 split between the Churches and the taxpayer was not set in tablets of stone, and it is now proposed that the split be 90:10, which is a very large difference—a huge amount of extra investment. It has quite rightly been part of the Government's rubric that extra money must be matched by reform. I am proposing the reforms to match the extra funding.

In addition, I do not think that anybody envisaged in 1944 that the Church of England would propose a 25 per cent. increase in the number of its secondary schools, but that is what is being considered. The policy has been entered into without looking at the wider considerations.

Criticisms of our proposals appear to boil down to two: first, that they are an unwarranted, draconian interference, which would cause huge problems and a major upheaval; and secondly, that they are wholly unnecessary because religious schools are already doing what we propose. One or other of those propositions might be true, but both cannot be, and as it happens, I think that they are both wrong.

Angela Watkinson: I am exceedingly grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for finally giving way to me. Does he acknowledge that denominational schools throughout the country are highly successful because of the shared ethos between parents, the school and pupils, and that as a result they are heavily over-subscribed and are already rejecting large numbers of applicants from their own faiths? Demand is the reason for their success. Perhaps in the past they have had a higher proportion of non-denominational children, but as their success has increased, so has the number of pupils from their respective faiths. How can he justify rejecting even larger proportions of applicants from the respective faiths?

Mr. Dobson: The Church of England's proposition is rather like a hydraulic system. It would argue, I think, that it wants 100 extra schools and that those 100 extra schools could take up any displacement that results from the proposals. But in any case, there are plenty of over-subscribed non-religious schools. The situation applies across the board.

The problem is that although most religious schools try to play the game and be inclusive—as I have said, nearly all primary schools do so and quite a number of secondary schools do so too—the ones that do not bring the whole system into disrepute. The ones that are already inclusive would not be much affected by our proposition, and the others would be brought up to scratch.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dobson: No, I really must get on.

It is clear that no one has been very good at bringing such schools up to scratch until now. If all the faiths are saying that they want schools to be inclusive and some schools still are not, clearly there is not the machinery in the faith arrangements for them to do what their diocesan boards and the Muslim equivalents would like them to do. All we are proposing is a national minimum; introducing it should be a function of central Government.

Public opinion is on the side of my proposal. I do not attach much importance to opinion polls; I never have and I never will. However, a recent MORI poll showed a 2:1 majority against expanding faith schools; a 4:1 majority believed that it was right to require them to take in children from other faiths. I have listened to children's views as well. As I am sure my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State can confirm, the Department for Education and Skills conducted, with Save the Children, a consultation on the proposal. Three quarters of the children who took part in that official consultation, about which my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Ms Ward) was asking, thought that faith schools were not a good idea. One said:

> "If you separate everybody, then pupils can't mix together and then racism can happen more often."

There were further comments like that.

I commend my proposals to my right hon. Friend. They have two advantages from a political point of view; they are popular and right, a combination which is not always available to us. My right hon. Friend is a friend, she is honourable, but in this case, I am afraid that she is not right: she is wrong. I urge her to accept our proposal. There may be better ways of introducing of it, and we are happy with that. There should be a minimum of 25 per cent., preferably for all faith schools, not just new ones, which would reduce the divisions in our society.

I return again to my right hon. Friend's briefing, which says:

> "A more effective way to tackle segregation is to encourage children from different communities to meet and engage with each other."

The place where children can best do so is school, and we should promote that. Members sometimes ask in the House, "What will people think in future about we are doing today?" I am not usually in a portentous mode, and try to avoid that sort of thing. However, I will adopt that mode now because if we do not work today—not tomorrow, not in 10 years' time—to counter division and exclusion, we may promote a ghastly society with groups at one another's throats; it would be like "A Clockwork Orange", "Blade Runner" and racism all thrown together, which is an awful thought.

I have now reached an age at which my greatest concern is my grandchildren and the society in which they will grow up. I want them to grow up in a society in which all the groups of our diverse population are at ease with themselves and one another. I want a society with an education system where every child is treasured; where every child learns to value diversity and to respect others; where children can understand the variety of contributions that they all make to our culture and welfare, and understand that they all share in both the potential and the frailty of the human condition. They will learn that best not just by studying the theory, but from day-to-day practical experience with their classmates in their classroom, which is why I have tabled my new clause.

4.15 pm

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): We have just heard a sincere and passionate speech from the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) who, the House knows, holds strong views. But for all his sincerity and passion, he is wrong. He and his Liberal Democrat allies would make education in this country less diverse and worse if they had their way.

I shall turn to the detail of the new clause in a moment.

It is worth making the case for faith schools, which have suffered so much unfair denigration as the issue has been debated over the past few months. I should perhaps declare an interest, as I was educated at a Catholic primary school in Wales, in a small town which, as a port, saw a good deal of immigration, had very mixed communities and suffered absolutely no sign of racial or religious tension. I observed from my own experience that being educated at a Catholic school did not cut anyone off from the wider community.

The right hon. Gentleman made something of the problems in Northern Ireland—the terrible problems surrounding the Holy Cross school. I merely observe that they clearly stem from the wider tensions in Northern Ireland, and that in a normal society, religious schools are a normal part of life.

Apart from my own experience, my support for Church schools is based on the simple, pragmatic observation that the Church school is very often the good school. For many families, in our inner cities particularly, by far the best chance to obtain a top-class education for their children is the local Church school. The right hon. Gentleman may not have had time to read all of yesterday's report by Ofsted on the latest standards and quality of education, on which the Secretary of State made a statement yesterday.

[Mr. Damian Green]

The right hon. Gentleman and the House should know that the Church schools whose ethos he seeks to destroy through new clause 1 performed outstandingly well, according to the chief inspector.

The report lists what it calls particularly successful schools. Of the 210 schools so identified, 82 are Church schools—more than a third. Given that roughly a quarter of schools are Church schools, the right hon. Gentleman will see that they score disproportionately well.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): Does the hon. Gentleman think, or does the Ofsted report suggest, that the achievement of those schools was due to religion or to admissions policy?

Mr. Green: If the hon. Gentleman will be patient, I propose to deal later in my speech with admissions policy and the effects of the proposals of the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras and his supporters on it.

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): Given what the hon. Gentleman has just told the House, would he withdraw his support from faith schools if new information that showed that their performance was not as good as that of other schools became available? Is that the sole criterion that he brings to the debate?

Mr. Green: It is not the sole criterion, but it seems reasonable to introduce into the debate the latest evidence. If Ofsted finds that existing Church schools are doing well, it seems a relevant criterion, which the hon. Gentleman may wish to bear in mind while he considers the evidence. I should say that the figures that I gave were for primary schools. For secondary schools, Ofsted identified 90 particularly successful schools, of which 17 are Church schools, so across the board, the Church schools are doing well.

Mr. Chaytor: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Green: No. The hon. Gentleman has had his chance.

The positive way to deal with the matter is to build on the success of Church schools. The negative way—the way taken by those who tabled the new clauses—is to destroy their ethos. The reason for the existence of many of those schools in our inner cities is closely linked to the history of the Churches in catering for poorer communities and giving them the first leg up the ladder.

I shall concentrate for a moment on the 1,500 Catholic schools, one of which I attended. It is timely for hon. Members of all parties to remember that they were initially set up to provide an education for a mainly underprivileged class, largely of immigrants, who at the time were suffering racism. One hundred and fifty years after those Catholic schools were set up as a priority, we live in a society where, by and large, Catholics are well educated and play an important and successful role in society. That is a success story emanating from the commitment of the bishops and church congregations of the day, and it is continued now by the Catholic Church and other Churches, which rightly attach such importance to education. We achieved that healthier position by providing distinctive education for faith development as well as for other educational needs. That is what other newly arrived groups in our society, including the Muslim community, now seek for themselves.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: On the success of the Catholic community after immigration and up to the present day, would the hon. Gentleman care to compare the success of the Catholic community in Britain with that of the community in France, or even the United States, which is perhaps a better example? Both countries ensure that there is a division between state and religion. They have no state-sponsored religious schools, but that hinders neither the Catholic population nor, apparently, any other people.

Mr. Green: First, the Bill applies to this country, so although the hon. Gentleman raises a fascinating subject, it is not germane to the new clause. Secondly, France was an explicitly Catholic country and became explicitly republican, so it is bizarre to attempt to compare the state of religion there with that of religion in the United Kingdom, as the circumstances are completely different. Of course, the United States was founded as an explicitly secular society in which Catholics form a small minority. Thus, I do not regard the example as especially relevant, even though I am tempted to do so.

It is relevant, however, to draw an analogy in respect of communities that came here in previous centuries and have, through education, come to play a constructive role in the mainstream of society, and deal with the debate to which the hon. Member for Rochdale (Mrs. Fitzsimons) referred: the perceived problems of Muslim communities and schools in this country. I urge hon. Members in all parts of the House who hold strong views about Muslim schools to visit one. I remind them that there are very few maintained Muslim schools in this country; I think that there are four.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): My constituency has one or two schools that are largely Muslim but not Muslim in character. I am worried that, if we start to establish more Muslim schools, they will almost certainly be girls' schools. That is certainly the case in the Bradford area. We will almost certainly not have any boys' schools, because that is the way things are going. I feel that a school should be a microcosm of society and that we are going to fail the children in that respect.

Mr. Green: It is not obvious to me that every school should be a microcosm of the whole of society, as that way lies a complete absence of the diversity that I suspect all hon. Members want in our education system. However, I agree that all schools should transmit the values and ethos of our society. They should pass on those values, including tolerance, respect for diversity and knowledge of our history. That should be—and is—the responsibility of schools, whether they are secular or religious in character. I suspect that the proposition that that should be the basis of education policy will be widely agreed across the Floor of the House.

Let me return to the subject of existing Muslim schools. I recently visited such a school in London. If hon. Members visit it, they will see well-behaved and well-educated children learning the national curriculum with the same textbooks as in any other school. They will see a school that produces rounded children who leave the school gates every day and live in the same world as everyone else in that part of north London. The school itself makes the point that 23 different nationalities are represented among the children's families and that its aim is to produce Muslim children who are British. Those of us who went to schools that produce Catholic or Jewish children who are British should recognise that that is an honourable aim.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): The hon. Gentleman will have read the Cantle report. How will additional faith schools promote inclusion and bind communities together when, in respect of northern cities such as Bradford, Burnley and Oldham, we are told by Cantle, Lord Ouseley and all the other people who have considered them that there is a growth of parallel communities that are distinguished on the grounds of race and religion? Should we not address that issue?

Mr. Green: Any good school prepares its pupils for life.

Mrs. Fitzsimons: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Green: I suspect that I know what the hon. Lady will say. I want her to say it because I believe that she will mention her constituency experience, so I shall give way shortly.

Any good school that prepares its pupils for life will enable them to integrate and be successful members of society. People who feel excluded from wider society because they believe that the education system has failed them are often alienated and fall into divisive ways. I suspect that hon. Members are not divided about the matter. Religious schools do not promote division; if they are good schools, their pupils will successfully integrate into society.

Mrs. Fitzsimons: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that in the three areas about which reports were produced, the minority of schools are religious? The problem is lack of integration in the state sector, in comprehensive schools where the pupils are 100 per cent. of one denomination, or in those that have a mixture of pupils who do not integrate. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there is more integration in some of our Catholic schools because they take more immigrants, especially asylum seekers from Africa who are Catholics? There is therefore a better balance of race in some of our Catholic schools.

Mr. Green: I agree with the hon. Lady, who makes the case eloquently and on the basis of experience. However, some reports talk glibly about problems in northern cities and claim that they are due to Muslim schools. Most of the places where the terrible riots happened do not have maintained Muslim schools. It is therefore wrong to suggest that there is a link; it is a bad argument for those who support the new clause to use.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): As someone who was educated in faith-based schools and chairs the governing body of such a school, I know that the hon. Gentleman's argument about ethos is fundamentally flawed. Some Church schools have 100 per cent. Church admission; others admit 25 per cent. or more pupils who are not Church members. Schools with 25 per cent. of pupils who are not Christian are no less Church of England or Roman Catholic than schools with 100 per cent. Church admission. The argument that the modest proposal of giving a quarter of places to pupils of another denomination or faith would undermine a school's ethos has no basis in fact. It is an insult to the many faith-based schools that already do that, with no detriment to their ethos.

Mr. Green: The hon. Gentleman makes a point about admissions, with which I shall deal shortly. However, I want to finish my comments on Muslim schools.

Like the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, I received a letter from the Muslim Council of Britain. Mine came direct rather than through the Government Chief Whip. Its contents are interesting. It states:

> "The Muslim community agrees that both existing and new faith schools must be inclusive whilst contributing their unique character and ethos to the state system. We also agree with the principle that faith schools should be established where there is support from local communities . . .
>
> The Muslim Council of Britain believes it is right that faith schools deliver an inclusive national curriculum and work in close partnership with other maintained schools to build greater understanding between different religious communities."

That is not an easy task, but it is heartening and sensible that the Muslim Council of Britain has set itself that aim. It should be the goal of every school, religious or secular.

This country has a rigorous inspection regime because all of us, as part of wider society, have the right to know what goes on inside every school. If there is evidence that schools are falling below an acceptable standard, whether in general education or through anything to do with their religious background, remedial measures should be swift and effective.

We value diversity in education. Conservative Members believe that parents know better than politicians what is good for their children. That is a fundamental divide between most Conservative Members and Labour and Liberal Democrat Members. They believe that they know best; we believe that parents know best.

4.30 pm

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): I speak as the parent of a child who attends a school with an intake of approximately 90 per cent. Muslim children. If that school became a Muslim school and did not show a willingness to take non-Muslims, my child would be prevented from attending it. That is already the case with the nearest school to where we live; it is a Catholic school, which my child is excluded from attending. How is the new clause going to prevent schools from becoming as inclusive as the Muslim Council and other faith-based organisations say that they want them to be? Why should schools exclude children such as mine?

Mr. Green: Let me move on to admissions, which hon. Members who are in favour of the new clause go on about. I admired the way in which the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras presented this as a modest proposal. He was no doubt hoping that most people would not have read new clauses 1 or 18. We should be clear what new clause 1 would do. It would not simply affect new Church schools but violently change the ethos of more than 6,000 mainly successful schools that are already operating. The coalition that signed up to this

[Mr. Green]

proposal wants to take the power to tell thousands of schools how they should run their admissions policy, and thinks that it has the right to tell those successful schools to tear up policies that have worked for many years. That is arrogance of the worst kind.

I refer hon. Members to the details of new clause 1. Even in its own terms, it is peculiar. Subsection (1) sets out what I assume to be the right hon. Gentleman's ideal case: a 0 per cent. target for religious admissions. Subsection (2) amends that target to between 20 and 75 per cent.—both completely arbitrary figures, so far as I can see. I was hoping that the right hon. Gentleman would explain why he had chosen those two numbers, but he failed to do so. Subsection (3) throws in the towel altogether and states that a school can have 100 per cent. religious admissions, but only if it cannot fill its places.

Let us be clear about the effect of new clause 1. All those who ask how this would affect admissions should consider this. If a school is unpopular, it can become faith-based. If a school is popular, perhaps because it is faith-based, it will have to have the very reason for its popularity taken away. Frankly, I fail to see how that would improve education. In fact, I suspect that unpopular schools—perhaps those whose rolls are falling because the population in the area is falling—would be the most vulnerable to what the supporters of the new clause are most worried about: being taken over by a religious sect that would try to do something with them of which those hon. Members would disapprove. But those are precisely the schools that the new clause would make most likely to go that way. Even in its own terms, the new clause is therefore defective. If I were against Church schools, I would think that this was a peculiar way to proceed.

Mr. Chaytor: Does the hon. Gentleman believe that the popular schools are over-subscribed because of the quality of the religion or because of their results? Will he tell us how many schools he thinks there are in the country that perform poorly but are over-subscribed entirely because of their religion?

Mr. Green: Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I do not profess to know why millions of parents around the country choose the schools that they do. More to the point, nor do I seek to dictate their choice. That is the fundamental difference between us. Neither I nor the Secretary of State nor anyone else in the House has the wisdom to dictate to parents what type of school they should send their children to. Sadly, the supporters of the new clause think that they have that wisdom; I think that they are wrong.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate) *rose—*

Mr. Dobson *rose—*

Mr. Green: I shall give way to the hon. Lady first.

Glenda Jackson: In effect, the hon. Gentleman is attempting to dictate to parents where they can send their children to school. He is arguing that if a child lived next door to a Catholic, Church of England or Muslim school, but did not practise any of those religions—indeed, they might be an agnostic or an atheist—that child should be denied access to such a school. He is, in effect, dictating to parents.

Mr. Green *indicated dissent.*

Glenda Jackson: It is no good the hon. Gentleman shaking his head. That is exactly what he is doing.

Mr. Green: That is precisely not what I am doing. If I were tabling a new clause that stated that every faith-based school had to take 100 per cent. of its children from its own particular faith, the hon. Lady would have a good point. As it is, I am not suggesting anything of the kind. It is she and those on her side in this debate who are trying to dictate to parents. I am saying that parents should have choice and that schools should have choice.

The right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras says that Church of England schools and schools of all faiths wish to choose that option, but I say that he should not be allowed to dictate to them. He said that a passage in his speech dealt with central diktats, but he did not deal with them. Of course he is trying to put forward central diktats. The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) and her hon. Friends are trying to dictate to parents, not those of us on this side of the argument.

Mr. Kerry Pollard (St. Albans): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Catholic hierarchy in this country advises its schools that up to 10 per cent. of their intake should consist of children of other faiths or no faith at all?

Mr. Green: The hon. Gentleman is right, and his point shoots a hole in the argument made by the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate.

Glenda Jackson: I was arguing not about the Catholic hierarchy, but with the hon. Gentleman's argument that my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) was attempting to dictate to parents. My point, which I proved, is that the hon. Gentleman is attempting to dictate to parents by denying children who live close to a faith-based school but do not practise its religion access to it.

Mr. Green: Let me make the point simply for the hon. Lady. If, as the Catholic hierarchy says, 10 per cent. of the children should come from outside that faith, a child who lives next door to such a school has the chance to attend it. I am not seeking to dictate the ethos of such a school, but the hon. Lady is.

In essence, new clause 18, which is a soft-cop option, says, "We oppose this on principle, but we will start by standing still." Anyone who believes that there would be no further attempts to damage existing Church schools if new clause 18 were accepted is deluding himself. That would be only the first step—

Clive Efford (Eltham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Green: No, I have given way enough.

Such a first step would prove seriously unpopular with recently arrived groups, which would observe that not all religions were treated fairly in this country. Rather than easing tensions between such groups, it would make them worse. There is a very dangerous intent behind new clause 18.

Ms Ward *rose—*

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire) *rose—*

Mr. Green: I have given way enough and other hon. Members want to speak.

The worst argument for these changes was advanced by the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, although the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate also believes in it strongly. The right hon. Gentleman said that parents do not choose such schools, but that the schools, because they are so popular, choose the parents. Let us unpick that argument and see what it means.

There are a certain number of places in such schools, but parents want more, so there are more applications than places. Some of us say that, if there are more applicants than places, perhaps there should be more places to meet the demand. That is a basic democratic demand. Others, such as the right hon. Gentleman, say, "No, selection is so evil that we must eliminate all the places in such schools, so that no one is happy." That is old-fashioned equality of misery—*[Interruption.]* I am delighted to discover, from the noises to my left, that the Liberal Democrats have finally turned into the Labour party circa 1975.

My final message is to the Secretary of State, who will know that the Prime Minister is firmly against the new clause. I take this rare opportunity to agree with the Prime Minister, and I hope and expect that the Secretary of State will have the courage of the Prime Minister's convictions. The new clauses would not improve the education of a single child. On the contrary, they would put at risk the good work done day after day in thousands of schools that serve more than 1 million children. The new clauses are ill-conceived and could be hugely damaging. I hope that the Government and the House reject them.

Paul Goggins (Wythenshawe and Sale, East): I begin by honouring the integrity and solid values of my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). It will soon become clear to the House that he and I fundamentally disagree on this issue, but, however we divide on it, I remain united with him in the aspiration to avoid at all costs the spectre of a society fundamentally divided. His is an honest and honourable view that is evidently shared by at least a sizeable minority of Members of Parliament, who question the role played by faith-based and denominational schools in our society. Some, indeed, would argue that such schools should have no place whatever in our society. That is not my view, but I acknowledge that it is the view of some. I suspect that it is not always a view that they have tested thoroughly with their electorates, although again I except my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, who I am sure is always forthright with his electorate on such issues.

I respect Members' right to hold that opinion and to argue for it. I hope that they, in turn, will accept that any proposal to alter the position of faith schools fundamentally should, as my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Ms Ward) has said, be considered seriously in Parliament only when that proposal has been made widely known, and after the fullest possible consultation. It should not, surely, be contained in a new clause tabled a mere 10 days before Report, which effectively tears up a 60-year agreement between Churches and state that has been honoured by all Governments and is, I believe—irrespective of the MORI poll—still widely supported by the people.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: When my hon. Friend speaks of a minority who may support my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), he may be under a misapprehension. Does he not realise that a Whip is being exercised by the two largest parties, preventing any true expression of the genuine view of the majority?

Paul Goggins: I hear what my hon. Friend says—

Mr. Burnett: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Paul Goggins: I would rather answer my hon. Friend first.

I know how many Members have supported the new clause, and I believe them to constitute a minority, albeit a sizeable one.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): My hon. Friend said that any significant change should happen only after proper consultation. Does he agree that it would be wrong to talk of greatly increasing the number of religiously segregated schools without such consultation?

Paul Goggins: I note what my hon. Friend says, but the Bill does not include that proposal.

I am pleased that many faith schools, especially in our main urban centres, contain a wide social and ethnic mix of pupils. An average of 20 per cent. of pupils in Roman Catholic schools throughout the country are not Roman Catholic. I believe, nevertheless, that it would be a huge mistake to enshrine in law a fixed quota for all faith and denominational schools. In practice, it would mean Jewish children being turned away from Jewish schools, Catholic children being turned away from Catholic schools, and Church of England children being turned away from Church of England schools.

I also believe that the new clause would place a huge bureaucratic burden on local authorities and schools that would have to work out the new procedures. That would detract from the important task of putting as many resources as possible into raising standards in all schools.

Ms Ward: I remind my hon. Friend that we have consulted on increasing the number of faith schools. The issue was contained in the manifesto on which every Labour Member stood in 2001.

Paul Goggins: That is certainly an important point.

Mr. Chaytor: The new clause does not in any way contravene the content of the manifesto. It does not deny the possibility of increasing the number of faith schools; it simply proposes a change in the admissions policy of all faith schools.

Paul Goggins: I agree. The fact remains that the new clause could in practice deny parents the right to send

[Paul Goggins]

their children to the school of their choice because of the 75 per cent. maximum quota. That would utterly change the relationship between Church and state in regard to education. That point of principle has not been put to the British people. It should be put properly and consulted on properly before any decision is taken in Parliament.

4.45 pm

Mr. Chaytor: My hon. Friend's answer did not relate to my intervention. I said that the manifesto on which we fought the election allowed for an increase in the number of faith schools and that nothing in new clause 1 prevents an increase in their number.

Paul Goggins: I will try to say briefly exactly what I said before. We did not put in the manifesto, and we have not consulted on, a proposal to introduce a fundamental change in the relationship between Church and state, which new clause 1 would bring about. That would need to be consulted on fully and it has not been.

It is important to point out that the Bill does not contain any powers to compel faith communities to establish new faith or denominational schools, which would be wrong and impractical. Having said that, I applaud the Government for their action to ensure a level playing between minority faith communities and the other faith communities that I have mentioned, such as the Catholic, Jewish and Church of England communities, which have a long-established tradition of running their own schools. Many minority faith communities already run their own schools in the independent sector. It would be far better if they were in the maintained sector, where they would be required to follow the national curriculum, employ properly qualified teachers and be rigorous in relation to standards of teaching and results.

In the main, parents and children choose faith schools for two reasons. The first is that they wish to ensure that the faith and values that are supported at home are reflected in the teaching, organisation and ethos of the school. That long-standing and legitimate choice would be undermined by the new clause. The second reason, which has been touched on by several hon. Members, is that on the whole faith schools perform well in terms of standards and examination results.

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East): Can my hon. Friend point to an analytical scientific study that demonstrates with ample evidence that faith schools achieve better results than other schools?

Paul Goggins: I am happy to give my hon. Friend evidence of that. There is a separate question: why do faith schools perform better in terms of standards and examination results? I do not make any simplistic assertion. The reasons why faith schools perform better are extremely complex, but the Ofsted report is clear. Last year, the number of pupils who achieved five or more A to C grades at GCSE in Church schools was 7.5 per cent. higher than in schools across the piece. That is the factual evidence that I bring to my hon. Friend's attention.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Paul Goggins: May I continue?

At key stage 2, results in maths and English were on average 7 per cent. better in Church schools than in other schools. That is clear factual evidence. There are several complex reasons as to why that is the case. I believe that it is explained partly by ethos: parents' values and the school's values complement each other. None the less the facts speak for themselves.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Paul Goggins: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford).

Clive Efford: Is my hon. Friend saying that at the faith schools whose results he has cited, entrance is fully comprehensive and absolutely no selection takes place?

Paul Goggins: I admit freely that this is a much more complex issue than—*[Interruption.]* I am saying that I fully agree that the reasons why faith schools perform better are complex; one cannot say just that it is because they are faith schools. None the less, the facts speak for themselves: faith schools' results are more impressive than the average.

Dr. Harris: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that very point?

Paul Goggins: No. We have a relatively short time for debate and I am sure that many hon. Members are waiting to speak.

People choose faith schools because they complement their own faith and values and because they tend to do rather well. I acknowledge that it is unacceptable for parents who simply want to access a higher quality of education to claim falsely that they adhere to a faith or denomination.

Mrs. Ann Cryer: Will my hon. Friend give way on that point?

Paul Goggins: No.

It is understandable when parents do that, but not acceptable. That is why the Government's drive to ensure that high-quality education is available in all schools is so important, so that in academic terms all parents can be happy to send their children to any school. That aspiration can unite all Labour Members, and that—rather than removing the traditional right to attend faith-based schools—is the answer to the abuse of the system.

Glenda Jackson: The hon. Gentleman talks about the infinitely higher standards at faith-based schools. Is he really arguing that the boards of governors of faith-based schools would deny the opportunity of that quality of education to 20 per cent. of their intake because they did not share that faith? I have to be honest: that strikes me as a somewhat irreligious approach to our children.

Paul Goggins: I made the point clearly that, on average, in Roman Catholic schools, for example, 20 per cent. of the children attending are not Catholics. In practice, many religious schools are far more inclusive than some hon. Members have suggested today.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Paul Goggins: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I want to continue with my next point.

One argument for quotas that is urged by supporters of the new clause is that quotas would lead to greater inclusion and integration in places such as Oldham and Bradford. I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) said that. I acknowledge that we need policies to promote inclusion in all our towns and cities, but desirable—indeed, crucial—as those aims are, they would not be delivered by a restriction on school admissions. In practice, it would be a recipe for disaster. Despite what my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras said, I believe that it would mean bussing children in and out of communities, which would do absolutely nothing for social cohesion.

All faith schools—all schools—should demonstrate a practical commitment to inclusion, but that should be done by local agreement, not central determination and diktat. I welcome the fact that the Government are to issue new guidelines to school organisation committees to promote greater inclusion.

A further argument urged by supporters of the new clause is that faith promotes bigotry. They pray in aid, of course, the example of Holy Cross school in Belfast. Along with all Members of the House, I am sure, I condemn the bigots, but it is disingenuous to say that, because of such episodes, all faith schools promote bigotry and should have their position undermined. I do not accept that faith is the enemy of inclusion. Indeed, in my experience some of the best faith schools are outward rather than inward looking, and help their pupils to engage with and understand the wider world around them.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is very often when faith schools can show how religious teaching promotes tolerance, which the scriptures of all the great faiths do, that they can help to challenge the intolerance that people sometimes associate with their faith, because of associated sects and so on? We have seen that in the Muslim and other communities.

Paul Goggins: I believe that to be entirely correct. The challenging of intolerance is not necessarily confined to faith-based schools, but it is something that such schools can do.

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): I taught religious education in a state school, and I know that one can teach inclusion. However, it is difficult for young people to believe in inclusion when it is taught in a school that is exclusive.

Paul Goggins: I hope it is apparent from my remarks that I do not believe that schools should be exclusive in that way. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members may scoff, but I am arguing strongly for schools to be inclusive. However, I also argue that a school's admissions policy and the way in which it organises inclusiveness should be left to that school. Such matters should not be determined in this Chamber, by this House of Parliament, with the results handed down to all schools in all circumstances.

Geraint Davies: On that point, would my hon. Friend prefer the new generation of faith schools to be voluntary controlled rather than voluntary aided?

Paul Goggins: I apologise, but I missed the first part of my hon. Friend's question.

Geraint Davies: We are about to have a new generation of faith schools. Voluntary controlled faith schools have a more open admissions policy, and are supported by the Anglican Church. Would my hon. Friend prefer them to voluntary aided schools, 100 per cent. of whose pupils are of one faith?

Paul Goggins: I want plans and policies to be worked out locally to suit the circumstances of local communities. Faith communities and secular authorities should be involved in the discussions about developing schools and frameworks for education that reflect the needs and aspirations of local communities. We cannot produce such schools by laying down frameworks and quotas in legislation, as that approach would mean that there was no flexibility at local level.

I am determined to finish with no more interventions, and I shall only take a few seconds. I repeat: all schools should, of course, be required to demonstrate a clear commitment to inclusion. However, that cannot be achieved by introducing a quota on admissions that effectively would deny many parents what is a legitimate choice for their children—an education in a faith-based or denominational school.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): First, I am delighted that we are having this debate. The quality of some of the contributions so far has demonstrated the need for it. I also thank the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) for taking up the new clause, and for the measured way in which he introduced the arguments in favour of it.

There are divisions among hon. Members of all parties on this matter, which people approach from different points of view. However, whenever a difficult matter arises in the House, specious arguments are raised to destroy what should be the basis for a good debate. The hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) did himself and his party a disservice by arguing that what is a very small amendment to admissions policy would destroy Church schools.

The counter argument was also made—that many schools have children who are from other faiths or who have no faith at all. Although the Roman Catholic Church, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Muslim Council of Britain have said that they want the proportion of such children in each school to be between 10 and 15 per cent., it has been claimed that diluting the purity of faith schools will cause them to be destroyed suddenly. I do not believe that those two arguments can go together in a sensible way.

5 pm

The right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras mentioned that my personal beliefs were different from his. From that perspective, may I point out that no faith worth its salt could hold that to bring in children from other faiths, or none, would so challenge that faith that it would be destroyed? Any faith that held such a view is not worthy of the title.

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Andrew Turner: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willis: If the hon. Gentlemen will let me finish my point, they can express their excitement.

[Mr. Willis]

We are coming to the heart of the argument. The Churches may be extremely concerned—although I do not believe that they are—that, by including in their schools children of different faiths or of no faith, their whole mission would be destroyed. However, the state should not be wholly funding schools to support a Church's mission. A Church's mission is for the Church itself—it should not be the objective of state funding in our schools.

Mr. Turner: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for not giving way to me earlier as his last few words have revealed the true purpose of the Liberal Democrat/old Labour proposal. Would not the amendment give the local education authority the power to say that a school may not admit more than 25 per cent. Catholic pupils, or 25 per cent. Anglicans, or 25 per cent. Muslims? It is not about admitting only 25 per cent. of pupils from other faiths, but as many as 75 per cent.—at the behest of the local council.

Mr. Willis: The hon. Gentleman always looks at the black side of any proposal. I realise, of course, that at the end of the debate I shall have to be thrown to the lions to be devoured.

If the hon. Gentleman reads the new clause carefully, he will see that it provides for the policy to be agreed locally. The admission forum would have to agree it locally. Indeed, the word "may" appears in the new clause; it is not a directive in that sense. The school's admission forum may decide that the policy is not appropriate in certain circumstances. We cannot be fairer than that.

Mr. Goodman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willis: I shall give way in a moment, as the hon. Gentleman was courteous enough to intervene before I had said three words.

Another argument advanced by both the hon. Member for Ashford and the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale, East (Paul Goggins) is that Church schools are successful because they are Church schools. I fundamentally disagree.

Let us deal with schools that are successful—although I do not actually know what that means. If we define success only by the number of students who achieve five GCSEs at grades A to C or who pass A-levels, I challenge that definition. However, let us use that as one definition of a successful school. It is appalling for any Member of Parliament to claim that such schools are successful, without considering their make-up and without comparing them with schools that the hon. Member for Ashford would consider unsuccessful.

If hon. Members take the trouble to examine the Civitas study and to compare the make-up of schools—their catchment area, the number of pupils taking free school meals and the special educational needs factor—they could make a realistic assessment of the results achieved in different types of school. We must not think that simply because a school is Church of England, Jewish or Muslim it has a divine right to success. That is not the case. Schools are successful because they have good leadership, good teachers and supportive parents.

Mr. Damian Green: The hon. Gentleman wants to change that.

Mr. Willis: No, with respect, I want all children to be able to have access to excellence if it is available. I do not want it to be kept for a certain group of children who happen to have passed a faith test before they go to school. Most of the Church schools that I visit do not want to be exclusive—they want to broaden their boundaries.

Mr. Goodman: Is not my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) right to say that under this clause a local authority could tell a Catholic school that only 21 per cent. of its pupils should be Catholic? Effectively, the clause could destroy the character of a large number of the faith schools that already exist. If that is the aim of those who tabled the clause, should they not be honest enough to admit it to the House?

Mr. Willis: I think that hon. Members on both sides of the House know me reasonably well by now—well enough to realise that if that was what I meant, it is exactly what I would say. That is not the intention and it is not my point of view. On admission forums, it was the previous Government who took away the right of local authorities to determine their admissions policies. Those arrangements are still in place and there has to be an agreement about distribution.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Willis: I wish to make some progress. In an hour's time, I will take more interventions.

The amendment is not an attack on Church schools. If it is portrayed—*[Interruption.]* With respect—

Paul Goggins: I will not take long, as I have spoken for long enough, as I am sure many hon. Members would agree. The hon. Gentleman seemed to be directing a number of his comments at me so I think that I ought to have a right to reply. He seemed to be reinterpreting some of my remarks to the point of making them a complete travesty.

First, many Church schools serve disadvantaged communities—fact. Secondly, faith schools gain better examination results—fact. I said that the reasons were complex, but those are the facts.

Mr. Willis: The hon. Gentleman has put his comments on the record and we will leave it at that.

Mr. Chaytor: *rose—*

Mr. Willis: I will not give way as I wish to make some progress now.

As the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras made clear, this clause is not an attack on Church schools. There are hon. Members who would frankly like such schools to go altogether. They have that point of view and they support the secular society. I do not and that is not Liberal Democrat party policy. I must make that clear.

I recognise the enormous strengths of many Church schools. I have two superb Church schools in my constituency and they practise what I am trying to preach in that their entries are inclusive—they encourage children from other faiths—they have the largest ecumenical sixth form in the United Kingdom and they do tremendous work outside the UK in other areas, in particular, in Northern Ireland. I recognise the great strengths of our Church schools.

What I find unacceptable is that while the majority of Church schools deliberately choose to have inclusive admissions policies—in a Church of England primary school in the constituency of the hon. Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer) 95 per cent. of the pupils are from Muslim backgrounds—a small number of them will not move from the position that they want an exclusive enclave unless legislation encourages them to do so. I think that that answers the hon. Member for Ashford. If the hon. Gentleman is saying that the mission of those schools is so special that they cannot allow anyone to dilute it, I challenge his argument.

Mr. Damian Green: I am glad that we have now got to the heart of the issue. The hon. Gentleman has just admitted that the new clause, which would radically alter the character of 6,000 schools, is intended to deal with a small minority. Is it not up to him to prove why the disproportionate change that he and his hon. Friends are proposing should be accepted? If the measure is aimed at only a small minority of schools, it is wholly disproportionate and dangerous and it puts at risk excellence of education in many schools, in particular in our inner cities.

Mr. Willis: I had thought that a highly intelligent member of the Conservative party was leading on education, but that argument is ridiculous nonsense. The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways; he cannot say that a significant number of schools have open admissions policies and encourage children of other faiths and of no faith and that the proposal will destroy 6,000 schools. Let us remember that the Bill applies only to secondary schools; it will not affect any primary school at all. Again, most hon. Members would recognise that our school system has been built on filling in the gaps since 1870, especially in primary education.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willis: No, I will not give way for a second time because the hon. Gentleman was not nice last time. *[Interruption.]* The argument adduced by the hon. Member for Ashford is not worth serious consideration.

Simon Hughes: I am always nice. Does my hon. Friend accept that his proposal is not only seen as modest by many people, including many in Church schools and the families of those who attend them, but is hugely welcome in communities such as mine, which have mixed-faith backgrounds and where some of the best schools already admit a percentage of pupils who are not from the same faith? The proposal would deal with the terrible system whereby many people suddenly find a faith and start going to church, resurrecting a faith that they have not practised for years, to get their children into a school, and once their children are in, they are never seen in church again. There is a hypocrisy about the current system, which the proposal would begin to get rid of, and an honesty about the proposal, which would be hugely welcomed in most urban communities in England.

Mr. Willis: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that comment, which stands on its own. There is clearly a contradiction in that only 10 per cent. of people in the United Kingdom go to any church at all, yet suddenly there is an overwhelming demand for faith schools. Somehow, those two things do not balance.

Ms Ward: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willis: No. I want to make progress.

The purpose of new clause 1 is very simple. It is intended to deal with admissions policies and the principle of inclusion. The White Paper clearly stated that the intention was to increase the number of faith schools and that, in fact, they should be inclusive in character. I gave evidence to Lord Dearing's commission, and Lord Dearing's report made it clear that the Church of England wanted another 100 schools, but it wanted them to be inclusive.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, who was quoted by the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras made it absolutely clear in an interview that appeared in *The Times Educational Supplement* two and a half weeks ago that he wanted to see Church of England schools that were not 100 per cent. Church of England. That was a positive statement. The Muslim Educational Trust has gone on record as saying that it wants any new school to be inclusive. There is a recognition that inclusion should be at the heart of any expansion of our system.

Although the right hon. Gentleman did not quote the public opinion polls, it is clear from polls published in *The Observer* and *The Times Educational Supplement* and by MORI that the result of every poll is against what the Government are trying to do. I am not against what they are trying to do, per se, but I am trying to moderate it, so that we can ensure that schools are inclusive in their operation.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on the word "moderate"?

Mr. Willis: No, I am aware that other hon. Members want to speak and I do not want to take up too much time.

Mention has been made of Northern Ireland, Oldham, Burnley and Bradford. It is important to address the issues involved rather than sweep them under the carpet. The hon. Member for Ashford is absolutely right. There were no Muslim schools in Bradford. However, the Ouseley report and the Cantle report draw the damning conclusion that children are already educated in segregated communities. Do we want to gold-plate that by making schools single faith as well? If that is the hon. Gentleman's vision—to make sure that children are kept in their place in their communities—it presents a frightening prospect for the future.

5.15 pm

The overwhelming conclusion of children in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley was that they did not want to be educated in single-faith schools. They wanted to be educated as part of a broader community. We must respect those wishes, too.

Mr. Damian Green: The hon. Gentleman is making a travesty of my remarks. To say that I want to impose a single-faith school on anyone is ludicrous. Those of us who are opposed to the new clause are saying that parents should choose. Therefore, if parents do not want single-faith schools, they will not have them. The hon. Gentleman has just admitted that the riots in the northern cities were not caused by single-faith schools, so to pray such events in aid of his argument is absurd.

Mr. Willis: At times, I wish that the hon. Gentleman would listen to my arguments. The Cantle report and the Ouseley report draw the damning conclusions that the way in which children are currently segregated in schools does not provide them with a basis for living in a multicultural society, or with an understanding of each other's cultures and faiths. Although, in my constituency, that does not matter too much, because the Catholic school and the Church of England school work together, have a joint sixth form and are virtually all-white, it matters enormously in Bradford and Oldham, where there are hugely depressed communities.

Before the hon. Gentleman yawns again, may I point out to him that yesterday's Ofsted report contains the damning finding that, although people from ethnic minorities have lived in this country for generations, Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Afro-Caribbean youngsters are performing worse than anyone else. Are we saying that we want to bung most of them into schools that are out of the way, and that that will improve things? I do not believe that at all.

Dr. Kumar: Does not the Ouseley report also reveal that the ethnic loyalties that are built up are cemented by segregation at a primary school level, and, subsequently, at secondary level? We must stop that at that level, otherwise the problem will only escalate further.

Mr. Willis: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. One of the real challenges for education authorities in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford is to take up that challenge in their education systems. I honestly believe that the new clause would go some small way towards recognising that everybody should consider the way in which schooling is organised and admissions policies work, so that we try to encourage a greater mix. Alternatively, as the hon. Member for Ashford wants, the good schools in the good areas will continue to ban children.

That is exactly what happens in Oldham, where Muslim children cannot currently get into the two Church of England schools. I congratulate one of those schools, which last week changed its admissions policy and said that it would deliberately take 15 per cent. of its pupils from non-Church of England backgrounds. That would not have happened without this debate—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members may howl but, in reality, unless we are prepared to confront these issues and have these debates, nothing will change. That is why we are here.

New clause 18 offers an alternative. We intend to divide the House on new clause 1 and new clause 18, which would apply to faith schools that are created after the Bill is enacted. As for that being unfair to Muslim communities, the Church of England wants to create another 100 schools. The Sikh faith also wants new schools and there is a move by the Jewish community to have more Jewish schools. All of those would need to have an admissions policy that provided for a mixed intake. That would be a good thing. I will be happy if new clause 18 at least is accepted and I hope that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, will call my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) to talk to new clause 2.

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Estelle Morris): I join the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) in congratulating my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on the way in which he introduced the debate. On the whole, the tone has been constructive and positive. To a large extent, the debate is welcome. The subject is raised outside the House and it is right that we debate it here. I have no objection to that, although I shall set out why it does not have much to do with the Bill.

I accept that there are things on which the House is united: a deep concern for tolerance and for more cohesive communities; a wish not to see a repeat of the events that occurred in many northern cities last summer; and a deep concern about the nature of the world after 11 September. We also share an awareness that, as we are enriched by rightly becoming a more multiracial and multicultural society, it is more difficult and challenging to teach and encourage tolerance. That is our starting point. I accept that as a given for every hon. Member.

I also accept as a given the fact that most parties are split on the subject, and some may be more divided than others. The divisions are born not out of an adherence to a political party, but out of long-held views that were not taken into account when hon. Members chose which political party to join. Although the debate is to do with politics, I accept and respect the fact that Labour Members can have legitimate views about the role of the Church and of faith and Church schools and still be honourable members of the party who have every right to stand for election on a Labour party manifesto.

Simon Hughes: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Estelle Morris: Yes, but I want to make it clear that I will resist giving way after every other sentence, which has been the nature of the debate so far.

Simon Hughes: In view of the conciliatory tone of the Secretary of State's remarks, will she also accept that there are different views within the hierarchies of faith communities and the faith communities themselves? Bishops of the Church of England take the view expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) and others. Some people, certainly in the Roman Catholic Church and of the Muslim faith, take the view endorsed by the Government.

There are no fixed, certain positions on this. However, the younger generation is overwhelmingly against division by faith. Young people reject it whatever the—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. Interventions must be brief.

Estelle Morris: Any organisation would be strange if it did not have a range of views, but I would not go as far as the hon. Gentleman. The Roman Catholic Church and parts of the Jewish and Muslim faiths think that they keep the faith base in their schools because most of the people who attend them practise that faith. That is not true of the Church of England. Its admissions are far more inclusive. It believes that its faith value base can offer a good education for children of different faiths. I respect those views.

However, like my hon. and good Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale, East (Paul Goggins) and the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green), I am not going to base my arguments against the new clauses on the contention that faith schools are inherently better. My arguments stand whether or not faith schools are at the top of the performance tables. I am not busying myself counting the number of Church of England schools that featured in yesterday's Ofsted list of outstanding schools. I am not arguing against the amendments because faith schools have a higher academic standard. If they do so now, that may change in future, and they may not always have had such standards in the past.

The danger in using such an argument is that one unwittingly gives the impression that unless a school is a faith school, it cannot be a good school. Not a Member of this House feels that; no one feels that. Good schools are good schools whether they are faith schools or not. One way that I approach my job is to celebrate success wherever it occurs, and I never assume that success comes in any one shape, form, colour or creed.

I have always felt that the strength of faith schools for those who have a faith is a shared value base—a sense of purpose, mission and being. That needs to underpin any good school. Interestingly, I first experienced that not when I was a teacher in an inner-city, multiracial, non-faith school, but when I started visiting faith schools in my constituency as a much younger Member of Parliament from 1992. Faith schools find it easier to articulate such commonality.

I am not saying that any school that is not a faith school cannot have common values. Many non-faith schools strive for such values and find them. However, in a Roman Catholic school, there is a natural link between school and Church and home and community, which all of us who are interested in education know is the very foundation of the educational partnership that is good for children. Again, I am not saying that that does not exist outside Church schools. However, I have come to value and appreciate the fact that, for many people, it is easier to find in a faith school.

My argument against the amendments is one of tolerance, which is exactly the argument deployed by those who support the amendments. This debate is not about who is more tolerant; it is about how we go about creating the tolerant society that we want.

Clive Efford: My right hon. Friend is saying that she finds in faith schools a commonality and an ability to promote inclusion and understanding of others. If that is true, surely it would be beneficial to the community as a whole and more in keeping with the ethos of those faith schools if they accepted people outside that faith. That would broaden the benefit.

Estelle Morris: Many do so; 20 per cent. of children in Roman Catholic secondary schools are not of the Christian faith, and many Church of England primary schools, which contribute to the 7,000 total voluntary aided schools, are the only primary school in their village and receive all-comers—everybody who lives there.

Head teachers in Roman Catholic schools in my constituency tell me that the fact that they are committed to admitting pupils by religious faith gives them their commonality and the link between home and Church and school. I do not want to take that away from them. That is what I regard as tolerance. I do not want to deny them the right and the ability, which they have had for a long time, to admit pupils according to faith to achieve the commonality and base that they value.

I am not saying that such commonality cannot be achieved elsewhere. I know, respect and applaud head teachers in inner-city, multiracial schools, which one might argue face more difficulty in establishing a common value base. I do not want to deny a Roman Catholic, a Muslim, a Methodist, or whoever, the ability to create that common value base if that is what they feel makes their school successful.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): My right hon. Friend knows that the admissions policy in most Church schools is built on a lie. She talks about the commonality between the Church and the school. Why, then, do only about 8 per cent. of adults in this country attend church, whereas in America, where there is a separation of Church and state education, the churches are full?

Estelle Morris: People do not have to go to church to say that they belong to a particular faith. For the record, I am a confirmed member of the Church of England but, to be open about it, I do not attend church regularly; I go only at Christmas and for constituency carol services. However, we should not say that people who maintain that they adhere to a faith do so only if they attend church. Some Churches may say that people have to attend church on Sunday to adhere to a faith; I do not accept that argument, and would not want to deny people that right.

5.30 pm

I shall explain what the Bill is about and quickly say why the new clauses and amendments are flawed. My right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras said that their intention is important and that if we really wanted to accept them, we could amend them in the Lords. He said that it was easier to draw up amendments in government and that the number of Government amendments on the amendment paper is an argument for that. The Bill is not about faith schools. Nowhere does it say anything about them; it will not introduce a single additional measure to establish more faith schools. It does not change decision making; it does not change anything; it does nothing to promote more faith schools.

In recent months, the Government have rightly said that we want to promote more faith schools, but we have not taken legislative powers to enable us to do so. We want

[Estelle Morris]

to make a level playing field for existing powers. Prior to 1997, there were only Christian and Jewish voluntary aided schools; there were no Muslim, Sikh or Hindu schools. I shall come on to that later, but it is the reason for the Government saying that we want to promote more faith schools. In meetings with Labour Back Benchers and with the public, I have said, as Secretary of State and on behalf of my whole team, that I am not about to spend one minute of my time or one ounce of energy going out to promote more faith schools. Nor, as Secretary of State, am I likely to take one decision that will encourage more faith schools. However, to my dying day, I will defend the policy of making sure that our legislation can be accessed, without religious or any other kind of prejudice, by every single citizen and every single faith.

That is the nature of our debate. May I make it clear, particularly to Labour Back Benchers, that the Government rightly said in our manifesto that we will encourage faith schools "where parents wish it", and that we want to promote more faith schools? Our starting point is that it cannot be naturally right in a rich multicultural, multi-faith society that only Jews and Christians have managed to get faith-based schools. We would not look at the leadership of the country, find that it did not include many people of Afro-Caribbean and Asian minority faiths, then turn round and say, "They cannot have wanted it". We would say that the structure must work effectively, and it is in that sense that the Government have promoted the wish for more faith schools. I shall draw attention to a particular way in which we have done so in a few minutes.

Mr. Laws: I am grateful for the tone of the Secretary of State's comments, and for the way in which she dealt with faith schools and higher standards. She focused on the issues of choice and freedom, but does she acknowledge that page 37 of the White Paper "Schools—achieving success" says that the Government are seeking a system in which the best schools lead and create pressure for improvement? It says that they will deliver a better system by

"Expanding the number of Beacon schools, faith schools, and City Academies."

The Government have therefore argued that raising standards involves increasing the number of faith schools.

Estelle Morris: The Government have always made it clear that having a mission and, as I said at the outset, a shared value base makes a good school and spurs it on to success. The hon. Gentleman read out a list of schools in the White Paper; their inclusion suggests that schools find that shared mission and shared value in different ways. Some have found it through the specialist school movement, others through the beacon school movement, but some find it through being a faith school. If other schools want to find it through being a faith school, I do not want to deny them that route to a sense of mission and purpose.

Geraint Davies: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Estelle Morris: In a few minutes, when I have made some progress.

There is nothing in the Bill that will make a difference to the current position. I shall tell the House how the decision will be made, as no one has asked about that and it is so important. If members of a faith want to start a new school, they will not come to me or to any of my successors. They will go to the local school organisation committee, on which are represented schools, the local authority, parents, governors and churches, which are likely to be Roman Catholic and Church of England churches.

The committee has a statutory obligation to consult. It will consult and make a decision. It will not ask us in the Department, it will not seek our permission and I will not authorise the decision. It will be nothing to do with me. That is what I mean when I say that we are not giving our energy or our time to promoting more faith schools. I should have thought that the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough would appreciate the fact that we have said to local people, "You decide whether you want to admit to the family of local schools a new school of a voluntary aided nature."

I have emphasised that for two reasons. First, it is important for people to know that the Government do not intend centrally to create, authorise or designate more faith schools. Secondly, and probably more important, I know that people feel—I say this in the most sensitive way—that we have given the green light to members of various faiths who are at the more fundamentalist, more extreme end of their faith. Every faith has such members, and people feel that we have given them the green light to open schools. Whether that happens will be up to the local school organisation committee. Every new school must go through the school organisation committee, where the decision will be taken.

Mr. Willis: Does the right hon. Lady agree that, in the vision that she has rightly set out, one of the defence mechanisms needed against fundamentalism is to ensure that the direction is that schools must be inclusive? That is what we are arguing about today.

Estelle Morris: I agree, but I argue against the idea that the admissions policy is the best or only way to make a school inclusive—that is why I am so against the new clause—and that it solves the problem that the nation faces. That is the thrust of my comments.

Mr. Savidge: My right hon. Friend encapsulates a great problem for many of us who are members of the Labour party and Members of the House. We hear that the Government will encourage more faith-based schools. We do not remember being consulted about that as members of the Labour party, and my right hon. Friend seems to be saying that Members of Parliament will never be able to vote on the issue. Whether or not we increase religious segregation is an important matter, and we ought to have some opportunity to debate it.

Estelle Morris: I am reminded that the subject was in our manifesto, which I quote:

"We will encourage more church and other faith-sponsored schools, where parents wish it."

That is the manifesto on which I stood and on which my hon. Friend stood. *[Interruption.]* I know that the House wants me to read more from the manifesto, but I shall resist the temptation.

Lynne Jones: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Estelle Morris: I shall first say why I believe the new clauses are wrong, then I shall give way to my hon. Friend and fellow Birmingham Member.

Hon. Members should be clear about what they are voting about this evening. New clauses 1 and 18 are roughly similar, as has been said. It is a matter of timing for new schools and old schools. Essentially, the new clauses would prevent schools admitting children according to the faith of the child or the parents. We have spoken at length about giving that power to the LEA and I do not intend to go over that again. Hon. Members will make up their own mind whether they think the local education authority is the right body to exercise that power. The new clause does not state

"in agreement with the local admission forum",

but

"after consultation with the admission forum".

The authority would consult the forum, but would not be obliged to reach agreement with it. Indeed, the LEA could make the decision without the agreement of the admission forum or even the school organisation committee.

I have two other serious concerns about the new clause. First, every single hon. Member knows what an admissions round at primary school transfer is like. My advice bureaux are full of people who did not get their first choice and we all write a lot of letters about such matters. What could happen in the middle of the admissions round? A school that does not reach its quota of faith-based applicants cannot say merely that it will do so next time. It would have to go back to the LEA, which would then have to consult the admission forum. The LEA would have to make a decision for every single school. The matter would then go back to the school, which would have to re-do its admissions round. That would be a disaster.

The new clause would also extend the right for schools to admit by faith. At the moment, the only schools that can admit on that basis are voluntary aided. The new clause would give the local authority the right to authorise any maintained school, whether or not it is voluntary aided, to admit between 20 and 75 per cent. of pupils by faith. Whereas the right to admit by faith currently belongs to 7,000 voluntary aided schools, the new clause could make it belong to 24,000 maintained schools.

Mr. Dobson: My right hon. Friend may recall that when I introduced the new clauses, I said that it was quite possible that they were faulty—*[Laughter.]* They might be almost as faulty as the Bill, which requires 43 Government amendments on Report and will, no doubt, require an abundance of further amendments in the House of Lords. She should not try to foot-fault us, because she has the ability to do something next time there is a set or even a match.

Estelle Morris: I take my right hon. Friend's point, but it is very dangerous for politicians to table amendments and then say in the middle of the debate, "When you vote, don't for a minute think that you're voting on the amendment that is printed in black and white in front of you; we really didn't mean that, so please vote on something else." My affection for my right hon. Friend knows no bounds, but in terms of persuading people to take the risk that he proposes, I thought that he would want to get as many hon. Members as possible to vote for the new clause but in effect, he has just said, "Blimey, don't so many of you vote for it that it's passed, as it's not what I want to do."

Mr. Lansley: I should declare an interest, as both my eldest daughters attend a Church of England school. I am entirely with the Secretary of State in her arguments about wanting to leave those schools free to set their own admissions arrangements. Does she agree, however, that if we leave schools with that right, it is important that they exercise it openly and transparently? They should ensure not only that the arrangements are inclusive wherever possible, while meeting parental preferences, but that the appeals system for admissions, whose amendment we are considering, is independent, so that the admissions criteria for Church of England schools are not operated by a cosy club in ways that lack proper integrity.

Estelle Morris: There are schools in each of the sectors that do not operate their admissions policies as openly as they should. It is not the thrust of my argument to say that Church schools do everything well. As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, there are some that have an admissions policy that must be skewed—indeed, we have seen examples—to get the sort of intake that they achieve. I do not defend such practices, but I urge us not to judge the whole system on that basis.

Lynne Jones: I shall support the new clause, but I am interested in whether my right hon. Friend is willing to consider delegating the matters with which it deals to the local schools forums.

Estelle Morris: No. One of the arguments against the new clause is that it does not provide for local consultation and would give power to the local education authority without agreement. I do not want to accept the new clauses, and I would not accept them if they were amended to provide for delegation to local school forums.

5.45 pm

I want to explain my main reason for rejecting the new clauses. If they were accepted, we would stand less chance of attracting faith schools that are currently in the independent sector to the maintained sector. The number of pupils who are educated in faith schools in the independent sector has risen significantly in the past year. Paragraph 393 of the Ofsted report states:

"The number of pupils being educated in Muslim independent schools has increased by 40 per cent . . . in Jewish schools numbers are up by a quarter to nearly 9,000; and in evangelical Christian schools they have risen by around a fifth".

Since 1997, the Labour Government have admitted 13 non-Christian schools to the maintained sector. All but four were transferred from the independent sector. Those four were two Jewish primary schools in Hertfordshire, a Jewish primary school in Redbridge and a Greek Orthodox school in Croydon. The Sikh schools and the Muslim schools were all transferred from the independent sector.

[Estelle Morris]

I shall put my cards on the table. I want these schools to be in the maintained sector rather than the independent sector. I want them to be in the framework of accountability and their performance data to be placed in the public domain, as happens in the maintained sector. We do not all agree about that, but it is a strong argument. I also want faith schools to have to make available to their pupils the equal opportunities for boys and girls that schools in the maintained sector are obliged to provide. That is vital.

If we accept the new clause, I believe that an independent school that has to decide between remaining in the independent sector and being able to admit according to faith, on the one hand, and joining the maintained sector and running the risk of being instructed by an LEA that it can admit only 20 per cent. by faith—I accept that that is an extreme example—on the other, would remain in the independent sector. That would be a loss. Such a school would not close or cease to exist; its pupils would not transfer to multiracial, multicultural schools where, as if by fluke or magic, we have managed to get a good balance of colour, creed and race.

Forty per cent. more Muslim children attended independent schools this year because they had no choice. They wanted a faith-based education and they had to go to the independent sector because we had not made such provision in the maintained sector. It does not matter what I or any hon. Member thinks about what we would do for our children. In a multicultural age, when we show tolerance, I have no answer for a black constituent in Yardley, or someone in inner-city Nechells or Aston who asks, "How come if you're a Christian or a Jew you can exercise a right to voluntary aided, faith-based education, but if you're a Muslim or a Sikh, you can't?" If parents want faith-based schools, I want to make them available in the maintained sector. I therefore object to the new clauses in the name of tolerance, although, ironically, they were tabled in its name.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: I respect the sincere views of my right hon. Friend. She speculated about why people choose the independent sector and she suggested that they do that because the option of faith-based state schools is not available. However, many Muslim children who grow up in inner-city areas find that they are not allowed to attend the faith-based school—of whatever Book—that they wish to join because it does not admit anyone who is not, for example, Catholic or Church of England. That is an equally valid reason for choosing the independent sector.

Estelle Morris: That point has been made by a number of hon. Members; it is a truism. I am not sure whether the argument has been put forward today—I have certainly heard it in the many debates that I have had about faith-based schools—that it would be terrible to exclude a child because it had brown hair. Of course that is the case. Life is never quite as simple as that, though. In defending the right of a Church or a faith to admit by faith, as I do, I entirely accept that the reverse of that principle is that someone may not be admitted to the school next door to their house because they are of a different faith. I would be silly to argue that that was not so.

Politics, like life, is always about weighing up someone's rights against someone else's freedoms. Those hon. Members who support new clause 1 have weighed up those rights and freedoms and come down on the side of giving the person living next to the Catholic school the right to go there, no matter what. I have come down on the side of giving the right to the Church to select by faith. I do not disparage the view of those hon. Members. I do not say that my view is better, but it is the view of the Government at the moment.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Estelle Morris: I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies).

Geraint Davies: Will my right hon. Friend accept that there is an opportunity for new faith-based schools to be voluntary controlled, rather than voluntary aided? This would combine the opportunity for inclusion with the delivery of a religious ethos. Indeed, 40 per cent. of Anglican secondary schools already work in this way. Will my right hon. Friend at least contemplate encouraging faith-based schools to be voluntary controlled rather than 100 per cent. voluntary aided?

Estelle Morris: If they want to do that, fine, but I am not going to force them to do so. That is the main thrust of the point that I am making. What would happen in those circumstances—I know that the Local Government Association supports this view—is that the admissions criteria would change, as my hon. Friend rightly suggests. I have been speaking for far too long already, but the one thing that I hope to get over is that I defend a school's right to admit by faith to maintain the value base of that school.

I welcome the fact that the Church of England has an inclusive admissions policy. Inclusivity is essential and, as I said earlier, it does not always have to be achieved through an admissions policy. I am not standing here being critical of the fact that Roman Catholic schools, Muslim schools, Sikh schools—or whatever—have achieved inclusivity. I am not going to force them to do so, but I welcome schools that have achieved inclusivity either through an admissions policy or through other arrangements.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Estelle Morris: I want to make some progress, but I may give way later.

If we were to adopt new clause 1, we would be in real difficulty. I can quite understand the arguments. The inner-city school at which I taught for 18 years was multicultural; I think it was 70 or 80 per cent. non-white. Many of the schools in Birmingham are 99.8 or 99.9 per cent. Muslim, but they are not faith-based schools. The problem with new clause 1 is that it does not tackle any problems that might exist.

There are many all-Muslim schools in Birmingham that are brilliant schools. I do not want anybody to think that I am critical of them. They are little gems; they are good schools that give a good quality of education to their children. But we cannot start from the premise that we have an education system in which schools are all-Muslim, for example. Let us not forget that the reverse of that is illustrated in leafy Solihull, which abuts my constituency, and where the schools are 100 per cent. white and Christian. Do those schools present the same problem as the 100 per cent. Muslim schools? We have heard less talk about them than we have about the 100 per cent. Muslim schools. *[Interruption.]* I am not saying that this has been suggested by hon. Members who have spoken today, but nationally—people have come to talk to me about this—some people have shown far more concern about Muslim faith schools than they have ever shown about Christian or Jewish faith schools. I am not attributing such sentiments to any of my colleagues, but some people in our country have voiced those views.

Under new clause 1, we would have to change the intake of all maintained non-faith-based schools that happened to be 100 per cent. Muslim. I do not know how we would do that. Would we bus children in? Would there be a black/white quota in a maintained school that was not a voluntary faith school? Once hon. Members go down the road of trying to get a school to admit children of more than one faith, they are out of the argument about faith-based schools and into something far more complex.

Glenda Jackson: I am having difficulty following this part of my right hon. Friend's argument. There is nothing in the new clause that would preclude the possibility of a faith-based school having an admissions policy. The only addition that we would like is that 20 per cent. of the intake should be either from another faith or from no faith. No one is attempting to reduce the autonomy of faith-based schools, but we are concerned that too much exclusivity can lead to real divisions in society.

Estelle Morris: With great respect to my hon. Friend, another provision in the new clause would mean that a school could find itself being allowed to take in only 25 per cent. of children from its own faith. It does not matter what I think; what the Churches say to me is that if they were reduced to that 25 per cent. point, they would feel that their commonality—the essence of what they feel their Church is all about—would go. If Church schools have an inclusive admissions policy, that is great, and I am not prepared to take that away from them, because that is how they feel.

Mrs. Fitzsimons: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the main flaw in new clause 1 is that it suggests that the use of selection criteria is a way of creating inclusivity? Many schools in my right hon. Friend's constituency and in mine do not have any religious basis; none the less, 100 per cent. of their pupils are drawn from a single denomination or religion. The question of inclusivity is about the practice in those schools, rather than the religion or the selection process.

Estelle Morris: I agree with my hon. Friend. I have been really worried about the debate on these issues over the last few months. What happened in Oldham and Bradford last summer was terrible. This is our nation, and every one of us wants far more cohesion than we have ever seen before. Every hon. Member with a multiracial constituency in a multiracial city goes home at the weekend and worries about the things that they hear, and about the lack of cohesiveness there.

My worry is that there are real issues out there about social cohesion; we, as a nation, have to face up to some very difficult issues. This is about fragmented communities, and about whole streets in which there is a feeling of alienation from what—whether we like it or not—is the majority culture. My fear is that the debate since last summer has not been about that. I say this guardedly, but the debate has been more about faith schools than about social cohesion. Let us not make faith schools the scapegoats for the lack of cohesion in some of our cities.

If we want to tackle this problem, we must address issues of urban development, housing allocation policy, employment and sheer racial discrimination. An Asian family in my outer-ring white constituency told me that they wanted to move back to Small Heath because they do not feel at home in my constituency. These issues are so complex. There is an argument to be had, and I would never say that schools do not have a role to play. They have a key role, but getting rid of faith schools will not solve the problems that I know Parliament wants to solve; it is about more than that. Please let us not make the admissions policies of faith-based schools the scapegoats for all the ills of what should be a multicultural society.

I want to tell the House how the school system should progress. This is a tougher job than one of fiddling about with admissions policies. This is about saying to children growing up in a very complex world, in which they have to experience all the pushes and pulls, that they should be proud of their historic culture and community, although that can sometimes vie with that of the nation in which they liv[illegible]

There is a tribal instinct in all of us to be a little bit chauvinistic, although we want to encourage flexibility. We see all the competitiveness between different nations, groups and communities. Against that background, we have to teach tolerance to our children. It is more difficult for this generation of teachers, and for us as a generation of politicians, to teach that tolerance and flexibility in a society that is, by nature, more multicultural, but we have to do it. It will be a hard slog and I do not have all the answers.

All the factors that I have mentioned are involved, including citizenship on the national curriculum. I am immensely proud of that Government initiative, which will be available to everybody from September 2002. Regardless of whether the school is a faith school, we must ask teachers to find ways to let children mix. While the children are learning art, sport, music or drama together, regardless of whether the school is in a cluster or a partnership, teachers must provide an inclusive education. This debate must be about more than a child being able to say, "I am in a school that is only 20 per cent. Roman Catholic because of its admissions policy, so I know that I am tolerant." The challenge that faces us as a nation is much more than simply changing admissions policy.

6 pm

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Estelle Morris: No, I want to make progress.

For all those reasons, I do not support the new clause. In such a sensitive area, change must be secured by agreement. Even if the new clause were accepted, it would

[Estelle Morris]

not have the agreement of the Roman Catholic Church or many minority faith Churches, although I sense that it would have the agreement of the Church of England. We would be accepting a new clause that flies in the face of the wishes of certain major religions in this country, without consultation and without plans being published. No manifesto, Green Paper or White Paper has made such provision.

The concordat afforded by the Education Act 1944 is important to me. I know that it is not set in stone, but if someone wants to change it, they should do so properly by putting forward their plans and reasons, and discussing such change. They should consider the real nature of the problems and confront the challenges that we face. With the greatest respect, they should not go for the easiest solution, which is to change in name the admissions arrangements of a faith school and pretend that we have conquered some of the real dilemmas that we face.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Estelle Morris: No.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Estelle Morris: If I give way to the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), I will have to give way to many other hon. Members.

I have no less respect for my colleagues at the end of this debate than I have had throughout it. Ours is an honourable difference of opinion. If, in the name of inclusion, we accept the new clause, we shall make some people feel more excluded. In the name of tolerance, we would take away a freedom for Churches that has existed in this country for centuries. In the name of cohesion, we would ensure that some schools remained in the independent sector, rather than joining the family of schools in the maintained sector. This has been an incredibly constructive debate, but, for all those reasons, I trust that the House will not support the new clause.

Mr. Andrew Turner: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak so early in the debate, and I begin by nailing an inaccuracy that has been perpetrated throughout—that we are discussing a 25 per cent. new clause. It is a 100 per cent. new clause that would make it unlawful for any school to admit a pupil on the grounds of attendance at religious worship by the child or his parents or the faith of the child or his parents. Schools would have to secure local education authority approval to admit not only 25, 50 or 75 per cent. of children on the basis of religious faith, but even a single child.

It is misleading—not deliberately so, but misleading none the less—for the proponents of the new clause continually to suggest that all that is required is that such schools be 25 per cent. inclusive. If hon. Members were representatives of the Church of England or the Roman Catholic or Muslim faiths, would they go to the trouble of setting up a school if they were not sure that they were permitted to admit pupils of their faith?

I and the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), who is no longer in his place, know that many Church schools are inclusive. Some are perhaps 10, 15 or 20 per cent. inclusive—indeed, Church of England primary schools in villages in my constituency are 100 per cent. inclusive—but that does not solve the problem of those who want to set up new schools. If, in so doing, they are to invest time, energy and enthusiasm, and the pennies of the poor, they will want a guarantee that they may provide for people of their faith, as well as for those of others.

It was interesting to listen to the remarks made by the Secretary of State and, from the Liberal Democrat Benches, by the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough. The right hon. Lady used the phrase "their schools", but the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris), who is also no longer is his place, said that they are not "their" schools, but our schools. The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough said that a few hon. Members want every faith school swept away. The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon nodded vigorously at that assertion. Let us be absolutely clear: there are hon. Members, some of whom sit on the Liberal Democrat Benches, who want to end not only exclusivity in Church schools, but Church schools altogether.

Mr. Gummer: Is not a key issue in the debate Britain's remarkable concordat, which—unlike in most countries—enables faith schools and non-faith schools to work together in the maintained sector? The Secretary of State argues that that is unique and remarkable. To overthrow it because of some passing thought is a very serious step to take, given how successful we have been.

Mr. Turner: My right hon. Friend is right, with a single and important exception. For the Liberal Democrats, that is no passing thought, but a long-standing hostility to Church involvement in education in this country.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: I am tempted to ask the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) on what basis he concludes that our support system for Church-based schools is uniquely successful and that those of all other countries with political systems similar to our own are not.

Mr. Turner: It is clear that there is a great divide between this country and many others, such as the United States of America. In the US, those who wish to be educated in the Roman faith have to attend an independent school—the equivalent of a non-maintained school—because that country has only secular schools. We are very fortunate to have Church schools within the state, so, to put it bluntly, one does not have to be wealthy to attend a Church school.

Glenda Jackson: The hon. Gentleman says that "we" enjoy such benefits, but we as a nation do not, because children can be excluded.

Mr. Gummer: That is a silly point.

Mr. Turner: I hear what my right hon. Friend says, but I shall take the point seriously. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) will allow me, I will take her point seriously. Some people wish to establish schools for the benefit of adherents to their own faith. I believe, as I think many others do, that if those people are to incur the trouble, expense and commitment of their time involved, it must be in order to benefit the whole country, not just those fortunate enough to gain admission.

Glenda Jackson: It was established earlier that 90 per cent. of the costs were met by taxpayers. I do not know where the "pennies of the poor" come in.

Mr. Turner: They come in by meeting the other 10 per cent., and they have met a great deal more in the past.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): As the non-religious father of a child at a Church of England school, may I ask whether the hon. Gentleman is taking account of the Education Act 1944 when referring to Protestant and Catholic schools? Following 11 September, Oldham, Bradford and the social disintegration in certain cities last year, many Labour Members fear that if we allow a big expansion of faith schools they will be seen as places in which to hide—that, rather than being part of a socially inclusive policy, they will be places where people barricade themselves inside the school gates, beyond the mainstream of society. Surely that is exactly what we do not want.

Mr. Turner: I have a great deal of respect for the hon. Gentleman's view, but I did not hear him use the words "Muslim" and "Sikh". I wonder whether he is one of those referred to by the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) who have mentioned the possibility of Muslim and Sikh schools. I suspect that that is the hidden fear of some, mostly not Members of Parliament, who oppose the extension of faith schools.

Mr. Allen: My worry is that those who are probably at the greatest risk of social exclusion will not be included in mainstream schools.

Mr. Turner: That is exactly why I support proposals to include schools of all faiths in the body of maintained schools.

I was talking about the Liberal Democrats' long-standing hostility to the involvement of the Church in education. In Committee, the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough said that he had

> "a fundamental objection to the state paying for the promulgation of a faith within a school . . . We should not be encouraging schools to be run for faiths, but promoting the coming together of faiths."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee G*, 10 January 2002; c. 340-1.]

That is the hon. Gentleman's view, and it seems to be the view of the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon, whom I think I heard say "Yes, yes." Nevertheless, those who adhere strongly to a faith, and indeed many who adhere less strongly, want their children to be brought up in that faith. Why should they not have that opportunity?

Mr. Laws: I know that the hon. Gentleman, like me, has not been a Member for long, but surely he is experienced enough, and sufficiently well versed in political issues, to know that the new clause is supported by many Liberal Democrats who are strongly committed to religion and to religion in schools. That is because they are concerned about the liberty of those whom the line that he is taking would exclude from good schools.

6.15 pm

Mr. Turner: Of course I accept that, but I take a different view, and unlike the Secretary of State in her response to those whose views are different from hers, I think that I am right and that the hon. Gentleman is wrong.

The trouble is that the new clause and the speeches—especially that of the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough—say different things. I do not decry what was said by the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras. That speech, however, suggested that this was a modest, even moderate proposal that would allow no more than a tweaking of the admissions policies of a minority of schools that currently accept 100 per cent. of pupils from the same faith. That is not the case. The new clause would have a much deeper more dangerous consequence: anyone who runs a faith school now—not to mention anyone proposing to establish one in the future—would have to obtain approval from the local authority before being legally entitled to admit a single child on the basis of the faith involved. That is what subsection (1) means.

I do not know whether supporters of the new clause envisage the establishment of bin Laden academies throughout the country, with the approval of school organisation committees or otherwise; but I do not think that the admission of pupils from other faiths would make such schools less fundamentalist, because I do not think that those from other faiths would apply for admission to schools with those unacceptable characteristics. The new clause is directed at, and would damage, the sensible, moderate, involved Church schools that are so successful in our community. For that reason, it should be resoundingly defeated.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner). He may not have been here for long, but he made an excellent speech. I also congratulate the Secretary of State. It is said that the best speeches come from the heart; she certainly spoke from the heart, but she also spoke with a deep knowledge of and commitment to the subject.

As Second Church Estates Commissioner, I want to put the Church of England's view. The Church has an historical partnership with the Government, and with local education authorities. The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) mentioned that, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) referred to the concordat of 1944. The Church is concerned for the quality of education in all schools, and remains committed to providing education in line with its historical tradition, in all parts of society including areas of need.

The vast majority of the Church of England's 4,700 schools are neighbourhood schools serving their local communities. The Church welcomes opportunities for other faith communities to sponsor schools in the maintained sector, and believes that those too should be inclusive. It therefore believes that it has a distinctive contribution to make to the nation's education.

Parental demand for places in Church schools is high. Many of the secondary schools are over-subscribed. Last year, there were on average 1.6 applications for each year 7 place.

Kevin Brennan: Whatever sympathy one may have with the philosophy behind the new clause, might it not

[Kevin Brennan]

have an unintended practical consequence? Might not popular Church schools be forced to take on people who do not belong to the faith in question while, in effect, excluding those who do but who come from less well-off backgrounds, who would be creamed off by the comprehensive sector?

Mr. Bell: The world is full of the law of the unintended consequence, and I think that the new clause falls into that category.

The heavy demand for places has resulted in some Church secondary schools' having an exclusively Christian intake, but the Church has adopted a national policy of seeking to ensure that all Church schools admit children from other faiths and from no faith. That is to enrich the educational experience of all the pupils, whatever their background.

Developing more Church of England secondary schools will help to ease the overall pressure on places and promote greater inclusivity. In that context, the Church is committed to providing an education on the basis of faith that creates the opportunity for a genuine encounter between different faith groups. Its approach is different from that of schools that do not have a distinctly religious character.

For those reasons, the Church would resist the imposition of a percentage quota of children to be admitted for diversity in new religious schools. A quota, be it 20 per cent. or some other figure, is too prescriptive. It may not be realistic in areas where the make-up of the local community does not support such a quota.

Mr. Chaytor: The Church of England would resist a specific percentage quota but given its commitment to open Church schools to pupils of other faiths or of no faith, would it be prepared to accept a band within which pupils of other faiths could be admitted?

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question. However, we are dealing with this Bill and these new clauses, and my comments are directed to them.

The proposal for a quota fails to address the more widespread issue of how communities can become segregated as a result of housing policies or demography, an issue that relates as much to community schools as to schools with a religious character.

Lord Dearing's report entitled, "The Way Ahead: Church of England Schools in the New Millennium" referred to an appropriate balance in admissions policy between open and foundation places. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred in depth to admissions policy and admissions officers. It is a matter for local government, not for national prescription.

For those reasons I ask the House to reject the new clauses and the amendment.

Mr. Gummer: The Secretary of State for Education and Skills was right when she referred to the historic compromise that is the basis on which our schools operate. It is important for the House to understand that for many people the religious content of education is the most important part of education. It may be that some do not believe that it is. I have been fortunate enough to be able to afford to choose the schools to which my children went. They went there because of the centrality of the faith that was taught there. It would be deeply intolerant to say that that choice should be available only to the faithful who are well off enough to make that choice. It is because I believe that that is a proper part of a tolerant society that I want to speak against the new clause.

It is clear that for some hon. Members the only good is a particular kind of multiculturalism and multiracialism—a system that ensures that no one shows any difference from anyone else. I can understand that, but I beg them to accept that for others that is not the paradigm. Many of us believe that people who are secure within their own faith find it easier to reach out to very different people than do those who are insecure in their background and faith. There are very good examples of that. Some of the greatest proponents of tolerance in intolerant societies have had the strongest adherence to their faith.

An important point was made by one Labour Member, who pointed out that by the accident of geography many schools almost end up being exclusively of one faith. Would it not be odd if we allowed schools that were faith based by accident, but excluded schools that were faith based on purpose? Schools that are faith based on purpose often seek to use their faith to extend an understanding of the brotherhood of man through an acceptance of the fatherhood of God. Those schools can often do more than any other in a community to extend the very tolerance that we seek.

To say that it is not acceptable to have a faith-based school is fundamentally contrary to the freedom that we have had in this country for centuries. It says to the whole nation that it is not proper for those with an income below what is required to pay for the education of their children to hold their faith so dearly that they want it to be the basis of that education. I find that a most intolerant position. I know that it upsets the hon. Member for Camden but she must understand that many of us feel that her position is the intolerant one, not ours. We are asking people to be allowed to have a choice even though they are not very rich. That should appeal to her, rather than cause her to object.

Glenda Jackson: The right hon. Gentleman is as ill informed about the name of my constituency as he is about religious history in this country. I represent the seat of Hampstead and Highgate. Many Catholic educational foundations in this country had to provide their own education facilities for children because the prevailing Church of England view at that time was that they should be excluded from British society. Therefore, the argument that religion always informs and enlarges human understanding and is pledged to the greater brotherhood of man is wrong. That is by no means the history of religion in this country.

Mr. Gummer: The fact that I referred to the hon. Lady's constituency by the borough in which it is situated is not an entirely wicked thing to do. Her partial view of history runs totally against the fact that all major social advance in this country has been carried through by those who have been motivated by their religious faith. To deny the influence of Wilberforce, to attack Salisbury, to say that the Churches have not had a fundamental levelling effect shows her ignorance of history. I would not like to have been responsible for her education.

This country is what it is because of the witness of men and women of faith. They have upheld the concept of the brotherhood of man because of their belief in the fatherhood of God. To deny children the right to go to a school where that is the central tenet upon which all depends is a very sad denial of freedom.

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood) *rose—*

Glenda Jackson *rose—*

Mr. Gummer: I give way to the hon. Lady because she is particularly determined to get in.

Glenda Jackson: I do not accuse the right hon. Gentleman of wickedness, but he certainly does not need me to point out his overweening arrogance. Does he really claim that the advancement of the human situation is entirely and exclusively due to those who have practised a particular religious faith? That is clearly absurd and discounts the extraordinary cruelties and incredible prejudices that have been exercised in the name of various religions. It seems that his argument for the fundamental excellence of a religious education is as ill founded as his knowledge of the name of my constituency.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order.

Glenda Jackson: Short interventions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Lady for that, although I was not intending to make that particular point. I wanted to say that there is a danger of language getting into excess, and it would be better to calm it down.

6.30 pm

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Lady rightly says that many people do many things in the name of religion that we would not support. I merely said that many of the major changes in this country of which she would approve were effected by people whose motivation came from their faith. To deny that is to deny a fundamental element in British history.

Mr. Goodman: Is not what the hon. Lady said a confirmation that, as some of us claimed earlier, the motivation of some of those behind the new clause is an apparent hatred of faith schools and of religion?

Mr. Gummer: I departed from my usual emollient way of speaking precisely to flush that out. I know perfectly well why so many of those who will vote for the new clause will do so: not from the moderate, reasonable motives set out by the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras or because they want to give a little bit of help to the difficult areas where inclusiveness is awkward, but in pursuance of their long-standing hatred of those who stand for something that they believe so deeply that they consider it the centre of their lives, want it to be the centre of their children's lives and do not want to exclude from it those who cannot afford to pay to make that choice.

Mr. Berry: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Simon Hughes: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: I really ought to give way to a Liberal.

Simon Hughes: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that others will vote for the new clauses who share his faith, if not his denomination, and his view that there should be a right to have faith schools, but believe that it is wrong that any faith school should be able to insist that all its pupils be of its particular faith. That is a perfectly reasonable and moderate view.

Mr. Gummer: It would be a perfectly reasonable position if it were not an exclusive one, but the hon. Gentleman is proposing not that some schools should be faith-based and admit a range of members of other faiths but that it should be illegal for a maintained school to have a fully faith-based intake. That, to me, is intolerance. One of the sadnesses is that the Liberal party has a three-line Whip on this. *[Interruption.]* As I understand it, the Liberals are under strong pressure to vote for the new clause—I put it as delicately as I can. That is a most illiberal proceeding from a party that once believed that people should be allowed to choose for themselves and not be bossed about by a lot of politicians deciding what is best for them.

Simon Hughes: This is a real debate. The difference between us is that, for many of us, the experience is that people have not been able to have that choice, because schools have chosen to exclude people of other faiths who want to attend them. All we are asking is that, if there is not a situation in which all the places are taken up—which is covered elsewhere in the new clauses—schools that take money from the state should be required to admit some pupils from faiths or denominations other than their own.

Mr. Gummer: But the hon. Gentleman cannot say that and still deny that he wants to have a society in which no school may choose both to be part of the maintained sector and to have 100 per cent. of pupils from its own faith. I call that intolerant. It is divisive and unacceptable. The hon. Gentleman is insisting that his view of what is best should prevail against the view of, for example, the Roman Catholic Church or most Muslims.

Mr. Berry: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: No. The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) made a reasonable point and I want to explain to him why I think it is very serious. First, he is setting his view against that of very large sections of law-abiding and reasonable people who want the opposite. Secondly, whether he likes it or not, he is excluding from the experience of a faith-based school all those whose parents cannot afford to pay for it. To me, that is intolerant, too.

Ian Lucas: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Berry: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willis: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: No, I will not give way to any of the hon. Gentlemen, because the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey intervened in a very courteous way and I want to explain to him the third reason why I

[Mr. Gummer]

feel that he is wrong. He is wrong because he is suggesting that we should not have wider rather than narrower choice in our society. I want people to have more choices, so although I do not like the fact that some children go to schools where there is no religious education at all, I have to accept that if people really want to make that choice, they must be able to do so. The hon. Gentleman must not therefore say that those of us for whom faith is the most important thing in life and education cannot choose it for our children unless we can pay for it.

Mr. Burnett: I strongly support the thrust of the right hon. Gentleman's arguments. I hope he will agree that it is also true that to foist an arbitrary quota of 25 per cent. on schools is in any event utterly inappropriate in certain localities.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman must be right, but it is also inappropriate for another reason: it applies a mechanistic system in place of choice. The trouble with choice is that it means trusting people. "Trust the people" was a very famous phrase. We have to trust the people to make decisions for their own children. I happen to believe that parents should do that, and that, as far as is humanly possible, we should do nothing to take that choice away.

I find it very odd that something that for many parents is the most important part of that choice should be restricted, and especially by a House that contains a predominance of people who do not take that view. This is a real issue. In a world in which the majority do not much care about these matters, it is an important part of democracy to give freedom of choice to those who do. It is part of the reticence of democracy that becomes more important when the vast majority think differently.

Mr. Willis: How does the right hon. Gentleman square that position with the fact that, for all the years when he was in the Government—and indeed the Cabinet—they consistently denied the Muslim faith the right to have its own schools?

Mr. Gummer: That is a travesty of what happened, and although I did a lot of jobs in government, I never had a job in an Education Department. If the hon. Gentleman had ever done any of those jobs, he would understand how these issues are decided. Moreover, if it would have been better to do that in the past, it must surely be wrong to say that in the future we should stop it. If he is saying that we should have done it earlier, why is he supporting the new clause, which would prevent it?

I recognise that there is a real problem when a particular faith has less connection with the historical fabric of a society, when we are trying to create a multicultural society. We know that. It is foolish to pretend that that is not so, but we have to take the risk. I am afraid that that is one of those things we have to do.

If Muslim parents want their children to go to a Muslim school, I do not believe it right for any of us to say that they may not, yet that is what the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras wants to do. [*Interuption*] It is no good the right hon. Gentleman accusing people of repenting when he will not allow Muslims to have all-faith schools. It is perfectly reasonable—

Mr. Dobson: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: No, I wish to—[HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] I shall be happy to give way when I have finished my point. In that way, the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras will be able to put his point with the sharpness for which he is known.

If Muslims are to have choice, they must be able to choose the school that they think that they want. We must not say that they can have a Muslim school, but that 25 per cent. of its pupils must be non-Muslim. That is not what Muslims are asking for. They are asking for faith-based schools that are 100 per cent. Muslim. In a free society, they must be able to have that.

Mr. Dobson: For a start, the right hon. Gentleman is wrong. Had he bothered to read some of the letters that have been sent, he would have realised that Muslim representative organisations want their schools to be inclusive. They do not necessarily want them to be 100 per cent. Muslim.

It sticks in the craw to listen to any Tory talk about giving Muslims the opportunity to have Muslim schools. There was not the faintest chance of that happening when the Tories were in government. The opportunity for them to have such schools has arisen only since this Labour Government came to office. We are saying that we want equality, and that we want all religious schools to be willing to accept 20 or 25 per cent. of pupils from other faiths, and from no faiths. That sort of proposal is a function of central Government from which we should not resile.

The right hon. Gentleman must remember that the famous concordat of 1944 was based on the 50:50 contribution—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman is going to excess with his intervention. That is quite enough.

Mr. Gummer: The right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras protests too much. Some Muslim organisations want to have the sort of mix that he describes, but others do not. The right hon. Gentleman says that he has the right—and I believe that he thinks he has the duty—to tell Muslims what they shall have. I am saying merely that I believe in a free society, and that people should be able to make this choice for themselves.

The real difficulty for me is that the party that is most against centralisation—the party that is always talking about local choice and that always wants decisions to be made at the lowest level possible—is busy saying that the one decision that people cannot make concerns the matter that for some people is the most important thing in life. That matter is the religious nature of the school to which they send their children.

People do not have to go to faith schools, and parents do not have to make the choice to send their children to such schools. If too few parents make that choice, faith schools will not be available. We suggest that people should be allowed to choose in big matters, not merely in small ones. There is an attitude to choice that suggests that it should be peripheral. I believe that people should be able to make choices about the important things in life. For some people, religious education is the most important thing in life, and so the choice for them is very important.

Kevin Brennan: Would the right hon. Gentleman extend his belief in freedom of choice to allowing people to set up a humanist school, in which there would be no religious worship or daily service?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman knows that many schools behave in that way, even if they do not adopt that name. A school in my constituency is exactly as he describes. I do not agree with it, but I support its right to make the choice that it has made. Indeed, I had to fight the Government to prevent it from being closed down. That was because the Government did not like the progressive form of education that it was offering. The hon. Gentleman therefore cannot teach me anything on that issue.

Simon Hughes: I plead with the right hon. Gentleman to be careful, as he has slipped occasionally into criticising those who support the new clauses. The new clause proposes only limited admission control; it has nothing to do with any argument about the right to found schools of any faith. No hon. Member has argued that there should not be a right to found faith schools. There may be a debate about that, but it has not taken place today, and it is not part of the case being set out by the proponents of the new clauses.

6.45 pm

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman kindly brings us back to the key point in the debate—that choice should not be partial. It is not for him to say, "We will allow you choice, but only within the parameters that we consider decent."

Those who oppose the new clause are saying something different. We are saying that the glory of a tolerant society is that individuals can make choices that are extraordinary and huge. They can choose about big things that really matter, and which make a difference.

When I stood up for Summerhill school in my constituency, I was able to say to the then Secretary of State for Education and Employment, who is now Secretary of State for the Home Department, that although I did not like the school, that I would not send a child of mine to it and that I did not like the way it ran its education, I was willing to fight to the death for its right to teach in the way that it did. I was also willing to fight for its right to exclude people who wanted to choose a different kind of education.

Why should that choice be available only to those rich enough to pay for it? That is grossly unfair. Does the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey want the proposals to be extended to those who pay for their education? If not, his position is very peculiar. It is that only the poor shall be forced to go to schools with the mix proposed in the new clause, and that the rich will be excluded from that requirement.

That seems to me to be wholly intolerant, and reminds me of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, which wanted to suppress vice among those with an income of less than £500 a year. The new clause would achieve something similar, as it would suppress faith schools for those who are not rich enough to pay. The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey is being even less liberal than I thought him to be.

It is interesting that the party with the most liberal name should have become the party with the least liberal policies. Liberal Democrat Members think it is wicked to consider abortion wrong, and they now think it wicked to suggest that 100 per cent. of pupils at a faith school should be of one faith.

Mr. Laws: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. I have been trying to avoid being provoked by him for some 20 minutes, but matters have reached a critical point.

Liberal Democrat Members of course understand the argument about choice presented by the right hon. Gentleman. However, is not his a rather short-sighted and partial view of choice? Let us assume that a new faith school has been built in a town in the right hon. Gentleman's constituency, and that it has just gone to faith status. Let us assume, too, that a child who went through the primary system with his friends now wants to go on to the new school, which is only 30 yards down the road from where he lives. In my scenario, the school is of high quality, but the child is prevented from going to the school that he prefers, with his friends, because that school will not take any pupils who do not belong to the faith that it represents. What would the right hon. Gentleman say to that child and his parents when they came to see him at his constituency advice centre?

Mr. Gummer: First, I have had to help a number of my constituents with regard to choice of schools. In my area, it is often true that not everyone is able to go to the school of first choice. Sometimes, I have to tell Roman Catholic children who cannot go to the Roman Catholic school that there is not enough space. The new clause, therefore, will not resolve that problem.

Secondly, I find it difficult to believe that propinquity is so important that it overshadows people's right to decide the nature of the school that they want to run. I do not understand why the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) does not accept that it is right for people to be able to make such choices. The choices that are made by people might upset the hon. Gentleman, or me. For example, some schools in my constituency do not, in my view, honour the faith status with which they were endowed. They have become so inclusive that it is difficult to tell the difference between them and schools with no faith base. I am sorry about that, but that is a decision for those schools to make. I have to accept that, if I want the right to make choices as I want, others must be able to do the same.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for finally giving way to the pressure to interrupt me, because I want to tell him that the danger to tolerance comes when those who would be tolerant are asked to accept something that they themselves do not like and do not want. We are in danger of becoming a society that is tolerant of everything that we accept but that is unwilling to be tolerant of things that are inimical to us.

I recognise the damage and the danger. That is why I have changed my mind about several social and moral issues. I used to believe that we should be much less

[Mr. Gummer]

tolerant of activities and actions of which I disapproved. I do not believe that now. I have come to that conclusion because we are in significant danger of having a cosy tolerance within limits, whereas we need the difficult tolerance of allowing people to make big choices that really matter and which for them are central and basic and which we must defend.

Mrs. Mahon: I speak in support of the new clause introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) because I want to put children and their education for the future at the centre of our lives. The most important thing we can do is to help them to live together in understanding—not segregated and attending different schools. We shall then have a more cohesive and decent society.

I also want to speak up for the 40 per cent. of people who admit to no religion. By and large, they have been excluded from the debate until now—and possibly from our manifesto.

I am the child of humanist, socialist parents. I went to a Church primary school because it was the only school in the village, so I had early experience of how it feels to be treated differently in school—because my parents were different. For many, many years I was quite intolerant of Church schools.

I then went through another phase. Like the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), I have found that I changed my mind as I went through life. However, during the past 10 or 15 years, I have turned back to my other views.

In 1989, the UK signed up to the United Nations convention on the rights of the child, which states:

> "The child shall have the right to freedom of expression: this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds."

That is a strong basis for education.

Like the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, I want a level playing field, but perhaps mine would be different: I want all our schools to be secular. Newfoundland has just got rid of its Church schools. That is a good thing and will enhance integration. I realise that that course is not possible for us, but my right hon. Friend's proposals will help us to progress to greater integration.

I challenge the notion that religion is a precondition for morality. It is not. A child brought up without religion can be a moral human being who knows the difference between right and wrong. We must challenge the notion that religion and morality are necessarily the same.

My experience of life shows me that many agnostics, atheists and humanists are often more tolerant than religious people. Many of my non-believer friends do not believe in capital punishment and do not want to drop bombs on civilians. However, I have many friends who are Christian or Muslim or from other faiths who hold the opposite view. We should not assume that just because people are religious they are superior to us. If we extend the number of faith schools, we are making the assumption that their religion makes them superior.

I want to address the argument that faith schools have a reputation for delivering better education—especially in the secondary sector. There is selection in faith schools: by their very nature they select. By selecting, they cream off pupils. They take less than their share of deprived children and more than their share of children from middle-class backgrounds.

I am from Halifax. I went through the whole saga of the Ridings school. Anyone who wants to study selection should go to Halifax. At the top of the pyramid are two grammar schools which select. Then there are two opted-out Church schools which also select. We are left with two secondary modern schools and the Ridings school. That is how selection works.

Angela Watkinson: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Mahon: No, the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal took up an enormous amount of time and I want to speak briefly.

In October, I tabled an early-day motion, which was signed by about 80 hon. Members, pointing out that faith schools are not only about selection but about the exclusion of children.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras touched on another issue that I want to raise. I want to sing the praises of teachers in community schools. Their moral values are no less than those of someone who opts to teach in a religious school. We should praise those teachers for their teaching about humanity and human values. When they talk about inclusivity, we should praise them—not denigrate them.

I have three more points. First, more faith schools will be damaging to racial and religious relations. About 8 per cent. of the people of Halifax are Muslim: not one of them has asked me to support them in setting up a separate Muslim school. I have held many discussions with them about education. Like all immigrant populations, they realise that education is the way to get on and to achieve integration. They are trying to better themselves and their children through education. I have never been asked for a Muslim school in Halifax and I am pleased about that. Incidentally, we were not consulted about the inclusion of the manifesto commitment on faith schools so I did not feel that I had to defend it during the general election.

I ask hon. Members to read Lord Ouseley's report: "Community Pride not Prejudice, Bradford Vision 2001". The report was commissioned before the Bradford riots and was published just after they took place. It asked several questions, one of which was:

> "Why is community fragmentation along social, cultural, ethnic and religious lines occurring in the Bradford District?"

The conclusion was that the answer lies partly in education.

The young people of Bradford spoke for themselves about what had gone wrong. They complained that there was polarisation of communities along racial, ethnic and religious lines; that there was limited or non-existent interaction between schools; and that there was "virtual apartheid" in many secondary schools.

In his conclusion, Lord Ouseley noted:

> "What was most inspiring was the great desire among young people for better education, more social and cultural integration . . . Young people realise that being taught in religious ghettos is not a good preparation for life in a multi-cultural society."

Those are the words and conclusions of those young people. They are not mine. Why cannot we listen to those voices?

Mr. Andrew Turner *rose—*

Mrs. Mahon: The hon. Gentleman has already spoken.

Mr. Savidge: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Mahon: I have already said that I would not take interventions. I have almost finished my speech.

My second point is about Northern Ireland. We cannot smooth over it and pretend that it does not exist. Anyone who witnessed little girls running the gauntlet of hatred as they tried to go to school—some of them for the first time—must reflect on the wisdom of segregation based on faith. We cannot ignore that problem.

My third point relates to the Cantle report, which makes it clear that separate education leads to lack of cohesion and integration. The report notes:

> "The development of more faith-based schools may, in some cases, lead to an increase in mono-cultural schools."

Of course it will. It says that it will be a big problem for the future, so it is irresponsible to promote the idea any more. Faith schools are a big mistake.

7 pm

I recognise that I am in a minority in the House in saying that I want secular education in all our schools. Obviously, we will not get it with the new clauses and the amendment. Faith schools are about division and I have had personal experience of that. They are also about selection. They encourage parents to lie about attendance at church. Only 8 per cent. of adults attend church in this country. People who do not agree with faith schools and do not want any more of them often ask me why the rest of us should pay to indoctrinate children in only one religion when our churches are empty. They ask why the churches are not doing their job. If their religion is so good, let them fill the churches.

Religious schools discriminate against everyone who is not of their faith. I disagree with the letter sent to the Secretary of State from the Muslim Council of Britain. The letter makes my point for me. It states that the council does not mind including a few children of different faiths, provided that they operate within a Muslim ethos. That will exclude any other ethos and it will not produce the healthy, well-educated and well-balanced child of the future. It will lead to more divisions.

I will support the new clause in the Lobby. I urge the Prime Minister to listen to this debate and to those of us who have spoken against having more faith schools. Let him, for once, listen to us, especially after 11 September. The last thing that we want is more division and segregation in society.

Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, a well respected journalist and Muslim, recently wrote these words of wisdom. She said that many people think that

> "traditional multiculturalists believe that equity means that funding Church of England, Roman Catholic and Jewish schools must also mean state funding for Muslim and Hindu schools where there is sufficient demand . . . we need a different approach—to fairly represent the society we live in without breaking it up further into minority groups aided and abetted by the State."

She is completely against state funding for religious schools, saying

> "there should not be state funding for state schools of any religion".

I totally agree.

In my life, I have gone on a journey through various points of view, some based on my early experiences, but in the past 10 years I have come to believe that in 2002 we must try to work towards a secular state education system that is bothered about education and not indoctrination.

Mr. Goodman: I speak largely on behalf of my Muslim constituents in High Wycombe, who are a disadvantaged community whose views should be heard with respect. My Muslim constituents have told me—before the election and since—that they see Church of England and Catholic schools in the Wycombe area, but no Islamic schools. Whoever they may have voted for at the election, most of them want a Muslim or an all-girls school in the constituency.

The Bill would make it easier for faith schools to be established. The Secretary of State was careful to say that that was not the intention, but it is none the less clear that that would be the effect. What effect would the new clause have on the desires of my constituents? Subsection (2) is the most important part of the clause. It makes it clear that in the last resort, even though it is "after consultation", the local education authority

> "may by regulation authorise"—

"authorise" is the key word—

> "that . . . a maintained school may admit between 20 per cent. and 75 per cent. of pupils who have a particular faith or denomination."

I am not sure why those figures are given. Those who have supported the new clause did not explain them, but perhaps we may learn the reason in due course.

Mr. Willis: Perhaps I may help the hon. Gentleman. The new clause was drafted to include percentages recommended in the Cantle report.

Mr. Goodman: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for clearing that up at least. *[Interruption.]* I think that my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) is saying that that is still not an explanation. He may be right, but I want to return to the new clause.

If my Muslim constituents had a school that was maintained on the same basis as a Roman Catholic or Church of England school, under the new clause the local authority could in the last resort say that only 20 per cent. of its pupils could be Muslim. In the eyes of my constituents, a school with only 20 per cent. Muslim pupils would not be a Muslim school. I appreciate that Church of England schools are different, but my constituents are not thinking of those schools.

I fully accept what the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) said about his motives in introducing the clause. He said that he was not carrying on any vendetta against faith schools. However, the most important thing about the clause is its effect and I believe that in many parts of the country local authorities would tell people who wanted to set up a Muslim school, "We're sorry, but only 20 per cent. of your pupils can be Muslims." I may wrong, but I believe that to be the case.

[Mr. Goodman]

My Muslim constituents do not oppose Church of England or Roman Catholic faith schools. They are happy that they are there. Were they following this debate closely and I hope that some of them will—

Mr. Dobson: Is it the case that some of the hon. Gentleman's Muslim constituents would like to go to schools of other religions?

Mr. Goodman: Some of them do go to such schools. If the right hon. Gentleman is asking me what my constituents want, the majority of my Muslim constituents—this includes the majority of those who voted for the Labour party at the election as well as those who voted for me—want a Muslim school.

The new clause would affect not only any future faith schools but those that exist at present. It simply states that "after consultation" the local authority could authorise those percentages in "a maintained school". That must mean any maintained school and not merely any such school that might be established.

Mr. Laws: I appreciate the careful and well-argued way in which the hon. Gentleman is developing his case. How much flexibility does he believe his constituents should have to determine the character of schools, both existing and new, in his area? Would he be willing for them to determine not only the religious nature of the school but whether it should take boys and girls or one sex only? Would he be willing to give his constituents any further powers or impose any further constraints on them as to the type of individuals or nationalities that might be accepted?

Mr. Goodman: I made it clear to my future constituents at the election that I would be happy to have either an Islamic or a girls' school in Wycombe. I would not want 100 per cent. of the pupils in a Muslim school to be Muslim, but that is my personal view. I should like members of other faiths to be taken as a mix, but the important factor is what parents want and schools can manage, rather than what I as a politician lay down by diktat to my constituents. That is how the Conservative party's view is rather different from that of the Liberal Democrat party. If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I want to return to new clause 1.

The principal point is that, under new clause 1, local authorities could tell existing faith schools that only 20 per cent. of their pupils could come from their religion. As I say, some Church of England schools would have no difficulty with that, but existing Roman Catholic and some Church of England and existing other religious schools would be placed in great difficulty by new clause 1. That is the key point.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): To illustrate that point, I have a child at the London Oratory school and also a child at Our Lady of Victories school, both of which are in central London. Both schools are hugely over-subscribed and, sadly, have to exclude many Catholics. If new clause 1 were accepted, even more Catholics would be excluded from those schools and would have to go to schools that did not share their values. That would be unfair on those children and their parents, would it not?

Mr. Goodman: My understanding of new clause 1 is not exactly that that would happen, but my hon. Friend is certainly right to say that it could happen. Throughout the country, many pupils and parents would be adversely affected in exactly the way that he describes.

For those reasons, I urge the House to reject the new clause. There is some clumsiness in its drafting. If I understood the Secretary of State correctly, under the new clause, if some religious fanatics happened to take over a local authority, they could insist, by diktat, that a maintained school should become a faith school. Those hon. Members who support new clause 1 have been somewhat careless, even though one of them is a former Secretary of State, but I shall leave that matter aside. In conclusion, there is no substantial motive to vote for the new clause, and I hope that the House will overwhelmingly reject it.

Mr. Piara S. Khabra (Ealing, Southall): I represent a constituency where a large number of people from many different faiths live. I was born in India, and I have the experience of being a pupil in religious schools. I am not happy about the concept. I do not hold any religious views, but it is not a good concept. This is an interesting debate, and I have listened to many hon. Members speak about faith education and religious schools, but they have mostly talked about Christian or Muslim schools; not much has been said about the large Hindu and Sikh communities. I find from personal experience that there is not much support in the Sikh and Hindu communities for faith schools.

I am able to support many of the good things in the Bill. We have taken enormous strides in improving the provision of primary education since 1997. I am delighted that the Government are willing to put the necessary investment into education. It is with those improvements in mind that I broadly support the Bill, as it seeks to shift the focus to secondary school education. A frequently heard complaint—which, as a teacher, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills no doubt understands—is that schools and individual teachers often find the current legislation restrictive. That is the reason why I welcome the recurring theme of flexibility in the Bill.

I believe that teachers will welcome reform that removes imposed initiatives that can result in excessive work loads, and instead allows the freedom to create a less prescriptive curriculum framework. Although the Bill sets down the core and foundation subjects for key stage 4, it will allow changes to cater for the need to respond to the future shape of the post-14 curriculum.

7.15 pm

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but I must remind him that we are debating the new clause, not the Bill in general. He must confine his remarks to the new clause.

Mr. Khabra: I was about to come to new clause 1, but I wanted to assure the Minister that I support the Bill. However, one aspect of policy that I do not feel able to applaud is the support for the expansion of faith schools, which troubles me greatly. I have a certain amount of sympathy for those who are seeking to address the admissions policy of faith schools.

I will set aside for the moment the more philosophical arguments put forward, including the thought-provoking ones outlined by Richard Dawkins in his open letter to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. First and foremost, the research does not seem to support the confidence in expanding faith schools as a means of improving standards.

The Conservative think tank Civitas, which one might have expected to support the expansion of the role of the Church in education in fact argued in its report, "Faith and Education", that

"Church schools are not as good as the Government thinks."

The work by John Marks, director of the Civitas education unit, calls into question an automatic policy of expanding Church schools, pointing out that standards in faith schools are inconsistent, and I tend to agree with him.

Church schools may or may not intentionally select middle-class pupils, but they tend to end up with fewer children from poor families. A recent study carried out in Wales concluded that, when the different levels of free school meal entitlements had been taken into account, differences in performance between Church and other schools

"were not statistically significant".

The key to improving standards is surely to consider the nature of the teachings used in schools, rather than the faith-based element of any establishment.

Even if the empirical evidence on results did not throw into question the desire to expand faith schools, the possibly damaging effects outside the classroom should give pause for thought. I am not suggesting that all faith schools encourage segregation, and I am aware that there are some notably good faith establishments in the country, but the fact is that we do not live in a single-faith country, never mind a single-faith world. In my opinion, the policy will be divisive and will risk bringing down education standards in many areas. Furthermore, it is likely to cause social friction between and within communities.

Mr. Savidge: I should like to cite the experience north of the border, where Aberdeen is the only one of the four big cities that has integrated schools; the others have religious segregation. Aberdeen does not suffer from the religious discrimination, division and dissention that can still sadly blight the life of Scotland.

Mr. Khabra: I fully agree with my hon. Friend's view. A large part of who we are—our views, our aspirations and, unfortunately, our prejudice—is formed in childhood. Prejudice is more often than not due to ignorance, and faith schools are likely to create more ignorance among children who are not able to think for themselves; nor are their parents.

Dr. Kumar: Does my hon. Friend agree that the way in which the multicultural and multiracial society has progressed over the past 30 or 40 years has been a great achievement? We have made society more harmonious. The creation of faith schools is likely to lead to segregation and not to the integration that has been the hallmark of our society. Does he agree that there are serious dangers with faith schools?

Mr. Khabra: I fully agree with my hon. Friend. Ethnic minority children, in particular, have achieved greater success in education when they have gone to integrated schools. I came to this country in 1959. In the late 1960s, the National Front mounted a campaign to have ethnic minority children taught in segregated schools, but the advantages of integrated education for those children are great. In a segregated school—whether we call it a faith school or not—100 per cent. of the children will be from an ethnic minority community, and they will not receive the education that they should receive and that would enable them to fit into society when they finish their education. That is the great danger for ethnic minority children.

Faith schools will not provide an opportunity for children of many different faiths to work together, learn together and live together. Under the Conservative Government, schools were able to opt out of public control, and I remember that the official policy of the Labour party was to oppose opting out. I do not understand why the Labour party's policy has changed in favour of more private provision of education. We were against private education in principle, and I do not believe that people from poor families will benefit even from faith-based schools.

Education should remain the responsibility of the local education authorities and should not be handed over to private interests that are sometimes dominated by religious extremists. We might think that faith-based schools will be able to provide similar opportunities to children from other faiths, but that will not happen for ethnic minority children. We are trying to compare the current situation with what happened a century or two ago when Christian and Jewish schools were established. The situation is completely different now and we should not fall into the trap of accepting this new idea of faith schools.

We should pursue a pluralistic and secular approach to education. Religious schools will intentionally encourage people towards particular religious beliefs. Have we not learned enough from the madrassah schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan? Have we not learned from the attacks of 11 September in New York and Washington? We are following a dangerous path and I hope that hon. Members, and the Minister in particular, will reconsider their position and take this opportunity to amend the Bill.

Faith schools will lead to children having less tolerance for children of other faiths. Such schools have the mission to provide education to the children of their faith and they are not directed towards achieving the standards of education that we need in a modern society and a modern economy.

Ms Ward: Surely my hon. Friend accepts that the legislation introduced by the Government and reinforced by the Bill, which he said he supports, will maintain high standards. The fact that a school is a faith school and promotes a certain faith—whatever it may be—will not diminish the quality of education that it provides. Surely he cannot suggest that it would.

Mr. Khabra: I am not sure about that. The Bill will extend the provisions to other faiths and there will be

[Mr. Khabra]

more faith schools. Many applications will be made and it is a tragedy that money from public funds will support such schools. My hon. Friend does not know what will happen. She presumes that standards will be maintained, but I do not agree with her.

Ms Ward: It is not a presumption. The standards that have been set and enforced by the Government are designed solely to ensure that all schools of whatever faith offer a high quality of education. We cannot use arguments about standards to oppose faith schools or the expansion and extension of them.

Mr. Khabra: I do not agree with my hon. Friend. I seriously doubt whether the new faith schools will be able to maintain the standards that we expect.

If schools are based on religion, why should they not support the ideas of a certain faith? That is what they are meant for. They will teach more religion, and what teachers will they employ? We will not be able to control the religious fanatics who might teach in such schools.

Caroline Flint: Does my hon. Friend agree that however a school constitutes itself—whether as a faith school or not—it will be covered by legislative requirements concerning Ofsted, equal opportunities, the national curriculum and health and safety? Legislation spreads to all schools in all communities and applies to how they are run and how they meet the needs of children. Legislation applies to all schools, including any new faith schools.

Mr. Khabra: Although my hon. Friend suggests that many restrictions will be placed on the new faith schools, supervisors will not be present in the school at all times to monitor those—the mullahs or others—who teach religion. Such schools will not necessarily stick to the rules and regulations required by the law.

Mr. Willis: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) is entirely wrong? In its provisions for powers to innovate, the Bill will allow schools to disapply the national curriculum and every other piece of legislation that they want to disapply so that they can carry out what they think is right. That will give those schools exactly the opportunities that he has described.

Mr. Khabra: I agree with the hon. Gentleman.

As I said, why should faith schools not support the ideas of a certain faith? However, that will lead to an increase in segregated education, and that is a reactionary move that is particularly damaging to the interests of ethnic minority children. Inspectors' reports show that Hindu and Sikh children do better than the Muslim children who are taught in segregated schools. That is because communities with more liberal ideas about education are more interested in obtaining a good education for their children.

7.30 pm

If we provide an opportunity for religious people to have their own schools, we cannot stop them teaching what they want about their faith to their children. Such schools will lead to segregated education, which will damage the interests of ethnic minority children. There is a provision for state schools to give a religious education. They can provide whatever religious education a child might need, so why do we need more faith schools? There is no need for schools to be run or owned by a religious organisation.

The idea of a faith school is a reactionary one. It has the capacity to hinder the progress of the good education that is suited to modern society, the economy and possibly even scientific progress. In some American schools, topics such as evolution cannot be taught, are sidelined or are wholly dismissed. I hope that we never reach that stage. There is always an opportunity in faith schools and private schools to ignore what is required by the law. The national curriculum might mean that they have to teach certain subjects, but they might not be inclined to put their best efforts into that if it is contrary to everything that their faith tells them to believe.

We do not have to look as far as the dreadful attacks on New York and Washington to see the dangers of prejudice and the misunderstanding between cultures. We need only to look at the reports on last summer's riots in the north of England or the dreadful scenes in Northern Ireland where children were verbally abused or spat at on the way to school. Have we learned nothing from that experience?

Opinions were expressed after the Bradford riots that segregated schools can be a prime cause of racial hatred. It was also suggested that communities were fragmenting along racial, cultural and faith lines and that segregation in schools is one indicator of that trend. I am usually inclined to argue on the side of parental choice, and of course I would argue in favour of parents choosing to send their children to whatever school they like. If parents want to send their children to faith schools, and the demand is certainly there, some may ask why such schools should not be allowed. I believe that when society as a whole is at risk of being damaged, questions need to be asked. The danger of division through intolerance is an adequate ground for objecting to the provision in the Bill.

There is much to commend in the Bill and it is a shame that such worthy ideas as devolving more powers to head teachers have been overshadowed by the discussion and comment on faith schools. Like many other hon. Members, I am concerned about the idea of extending faith schools. Schools and religion are too uncomfortable a mix and the Government should not involve themselves in such a way.

Dr. Evan Harris: I want to speak to new clause 2. It has rightly been selected and has important implications. I support the purposes of new clause 1 and new clause 18, which the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) eloquently addressed. In particular, I want to pay tribute to the contribution by the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon), whose powerful points I support. Although I concur with much of what the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Khabra) said, I cannot join him in praising the Bill. I think that he had to get that comment in to excuse his views to Members on his Front Bench. Indeed, I also agree with the sentiments put so clearly by the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East (Dr. Kumar) in his intervention.

I am especially pleased that the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall referred to the views of Professor Richard Dawkins. He is my constituent and, like me, an honorary associate of the National Secular Society, which I want to declare as an interest. I am grateful to the NSS for advice on the issues covered by new clause 2.

Kevin Brennan: As a member of the National Secular Society, does the hon. Gentleman find it odd that he secured his place for today's debate by using a prayer card?

Dr. Harris: I am not sure that I am guilty of that, because the prayer card is in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey). I have views on the use of Prayers to obtain a seat, but I do not want to try the patience of the Chair, so I shall stick to new clause 2.

Hon. Members may not be aware of what the new clause is about. It would repeal sections in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. They are not set out in the Bill, so it is useful to clarify what it would do. It would repeal sections 58 and 60. The former states:

"Where the number of the teaching staff of a school to which this subsection applies"—

basically, religious schools—

"is more than two, the teaching staff shall include persons who—

(a) are selected for their fitness and competence to give such religious education as is required in accordance with arrangements . . . for religious education in accordance with the school's trust deed or with the tenets of the school's specified religion or religious denomination, and

(b) are specifically appointed to do so."

It is curious that there is a provision on our statute book to ensure that certain teachers are appointed and promoted on the basis of their ability to teach religion according to the religion of the school in which they teach. Religious education is supposed to be non-denominational, non-directional and non-proselytising. It is not clear why the reserved teacher status is necessary. Surely when we teach subjects, including religious education, in any school, we want the best teacher for that syllabus.

Section 60 has even worse implications. Subsection 5 states:

"If the school is a voluntary aided school"—

a religious school—

"(a) preference may be given, in connection with the appointment, remuneration or promotion of teachers at the school"—

that is, the hiring or firing—

"to persons—

(i) whose religious opinions are in accordance with the tenets of the religion or religious denomination specified in relation to the school under section 69(4), or

(ii) who attend religious worship in accordance with those tenets"—

in their spare time, presumably—

"or (iii) who give, or are willing to give, religious education at the school in accordance with those tenets; and

(b) regard may be had, in connection with the termination of the employment of any teacher at the school"—

the sacking of a teacher—

"to any conduct on his part which is incompatible with the precepts, or with the upholding of the tenets, of the religion or religious denomination so specified."

It does not require a teacher to act illegally, unlawfully, or inappropriately, or to breach of the norms of a teacher's employment contract; a teacher just needs to be outwith the tenets of that religion. That relates to what maths teachers, French teachers and science teachers do within the law in their spare time if that goes against the tenets of the religious controllers of voluntary-controlled or voluntary-aided schools.

New clause 2 would eliminate those sections of the 1998 Act. It is necessary for three reasons. First, the sections unlawfully discriminate against employees on religious grounds. Secondly, they militate against the best interests of pupils because they sacrifice best teachers to the ones deemed religiously appropriate. Thirdly, they are unnecessary in the context of the exemptions provided in the European Union employment directive due to be introduced by December 2003.

I should like to set out why I feel that the provisions, and especially section 60, which the new clause would repeal, are discriminatory. Section 60 allows for employees, as it happens, in the state sector, who are funded by taxpayers' money—salaries are 100 per cent. funded by the taxpayer; the 10 or 15 per cent. contribution from the Church is for capital costs—to be discriminated against on the grounds either of religion or of perfectly lawful, appropriate behaviour that goes against the tenets of the religion concerned.

We do not need to go too deeply into that, but some people will be aware that certain religious organisations have very strong views about the inappropriateness of homosexuality—a practice that is lawful and private and none of an employer's business. The exemption under the EU framework directive could make it legal for a school to invoke section 60(5) in order to terminate the employment of such teachers. Indeed, teachers currently work in that danger.

The provisions are also discriminatory in that teachers of faith can teach anywhere. They can apply for any job in any school—religious and non-religious—but a secular or atheist teacher cannot teach in some schools and is therefore deprived of certain opportunities. The legislation in effect gives the small number of teachers who teach from a religious perspective privileged access to a large number—100,000-odd—of publicly funded jobs. That number would become even larger if more faith schools emerged from the Government's proposals. That amounts to institutionalised discrimination, as there is no counterbalancing body of community schools where teachers who are not committed to some faith are favoured over teachers who are religious. I am not of course advocating achieving equality by spreading discrimination.

The job prospects of many excellent teachers who are non-believers in any religion are therefore reduced, and the disadvantage that they will suffer may increase with every new faith school that is opened. With such a high proportion of teaching posts—as well as, perhaps, new teaching posts—concentrated in faith schools, it is possible that teachers in some localities, especially rural ones, will have difficulty in obtaining employment unless they are or claim to be of the requisite faith.

Secondly, the provisions militate against the best interests of pupils because what matters to the education of our children is having the best teacher at that subject and not the church attendance of a teacher. How religious

[Dr. Harris]

in any school does one need to be to teach mathematics, French or science? Does one need a working knowledge of Genesis to teach geology? I will go no further than to say that I doubt that that is a requirement.

Given that there is such a short supply of teachers—and, I would imagine, a specific shortage of faith-based teachers given the small proportion of the population who are members of the Church of England, for example—there is a worry that teachers who are not as good as others will be appointed, especially if the number of faith schools increases.

Angela Watkinson: Let us imagine that the new clause is agreed and denominational schools are obliged to accept applications from anybody, irrespective of faith. Supposing that of those interviewed the best person for the job happened to share the school's faith. How do you then—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady must use parliamentary language. When she says "you", she is addressing the Chair and not the hon. Gentleman.

Angela Watkinson: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. How does the hon. Gentleman think that the school could be protected from challenge by applicants who are unsuccessful and do not share the school's faith?

Dr. Evan Harris: I am asking that a situation obtain which obtains in every other circumstance—in the state sector, certainly. One would hope that under the provisions of the EU employment directive, which I hope the hon. Lady's party supports, although I think it is still considering it, appointments could be challenged in an employment tribunal. Clearly, the school might consider it a bonus if the best candidate were also of the same faith, but I am arguing that the best candidate should not be rejected and that a good teacher should not be sacked or overlooked for promotion simply because of their beliefs or whether they attend church or mosque in their private time. The provisions are inappropriate and I cannot understand how they can be defended.

7.45 pm

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): I have listened to the hon. Gentleman's remarks about teachers in faith schools. I do not know whether he has attended a faith school. I have, and I know from experience that teachers at that school were a combination of those who supported that faith and those who did not support it—some were practising Catholics, others were not. The school's duty was to balance the needs of supporting and sustaining the religious faith of its pupils with achieving the best examination results—as well as other factors. Does the hon. Gentleman not think that the new clause relates to a very narrow example of how faith works in schools? There are much broader issues, which he seems to have ignored so far in his speech.

Dr. Harris: The hon. Gentleman has fallen into the same trap as the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) in arguing that the job of a religious school is to promote its religion. As I understand it, the job of religious schools is to promote an ethos and not a particular religion. That point was made eloquently in Committee by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough, whom the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner), who is no longer in his place, quoted. I believe that one can promote an ethos without determining what teachers do in their spare time with regard to their private religious beliefs.

There is a worry, as far as the Dearing committee's proposals for the Church of England's expansion are concerned, that there are not sufficient Christian teachers. Church of England schools constitute about one quarter of all schools, but Church of England membership, among which one might imagine the majority of Christian teachers in Church of England schools might count themselves, represents only 3 per cent. of the population. Some teachers in community schools will be members of the Church of England, so that reduces the pool even further.

The education officer of the Church of England London diocese has admitted publicly in the *Church Times* that it is unrealistic to expect to fill staff vacancies in Church schools by relying on practising Anglicans or even any Christians. Indeed, a Roman Catholic school has had to appoint its first non-Roman Catholic head. There are other examples, which I shall not go into, of concerns among the religions community that the position is unsustainable.

My third objection to the proposals is that they are unnecessary given the exemptions in the EU framework directive, which will come into force by December 2003. Effectively, it bans discrimination in employment on the grounds of religion, age, sexual orientation and disability. It is due to be brought into force in this country by that date, in terms of religion at least, and the Cabinet Office and the Department of Trade and Industry are consulting on how to do that. Some occupational exemptions are relevant and those should provide the protection that hon. Members might feel is required for certain posts in schools. The directive states that discrimination

> "on a characteristic related to any of the grounds referred to in Article 1 shall not constitute discrimination where, by reason of the nature of the particular occupational activities concerned or of the context in which they are carried out, such a characteristics constitutes a genuine and determining occupational requirement, provided that the objective is legitimate and the requirement is proportional."

One must ask whether teaching mathematics in a state school would lead to a genuine and determining occupational requirement to go to church on Sunday in one's spare time or whether what one really needs is someone who is good at teaching maths.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman refer the Tory party, whose members are sitting alongside him, to the American constitution, which states:

> "No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust in the United States."

If that is true of the United States, which is regarded as a liberal and democratic regime, why cannot it be true in this country?

Dr. Harris: I leave that question on the record for those who oppose the new clause to answer.

In the directive, the second occupational exemption to the general rule against discrimination states:

> "Member states may maintain national legislation in force at the date of the adoption of this Directive or provide for future legislation . . . in the case of occupational activities within churches and other public or private organisations the ethos of which is based on religion or belief, a difference of treatment based on a person's religion or belief shall not constitute discrimination where, by reason of the nature of these activities or of the context in which they are carried out, a person's religion or belief constitute a genuine, legitimate and justified occupational requirement, having regard to the organisation's ethos . . .
>
> Provided that its provisions are otherwise complied with, this Directive shall thus not prejudice the right of churches and other public or private organisations, the ethos of which is based on religion or belief, acting in conformity with national constitutions and laws, to require individuals working for them to act in good faith and with loyalty to the organisation's ethos."

That exemption renders unnecessary the stringent provisions of section 60 of the School Standards and Framework Act, which deals with people being hired, fired and overlooked for promotion on the grounds of lawful and appropriate private activity. I hope that I have convinced hon. Members that sections 58 and 60 are not required in the context of those occupational exemptions.

Mr. Savidge: May I illustrate the hon. Gentleman's point with a historical anecdote from 1860, when Aberdeen was not quite as religiously tolerant as it is now? We eventually combined our two religious universities; one was Presbyterian, the other Episcopalian. We sacked the professor of physics because he was thought to have the wrong theological views on infralapsarianism or supralapsarianism; he was James Clerk Maxwell.

Dr. Harris: That is a fascinating historical example of the sort of thing that may arise. I worry that an expansion of faith schools, particularly in communities where strong religious views are held, may lead to more peril for employees. I am concerned about the Government's view of the EU framework directive. Paragraph 13.12 of their consultation document states:

> "a religious organisation may be able to demonstrate that it is a genuine requirement that all staff—not just senior staff or people with a proselytising function—should belong to the religion concerned, so as to ensure the preservation of the organisation's particular ethos."

I am concerned that, under section 60, no caretaker's job is safe in a religious school if it is felt that, to maintain the ethos, everyone employed by the school is required to be of a certain religion.

I have heard nothing about new clause 2 from the Secretary of State, so I urge the Minister, when he replies to the debate, either to provide reassurance or to try to justify the strong provision of section 60 against the need for freedom of belief, freedom of activity and freedom of thought.

Ms Ward: I start by declaring that I am a product of the faith school system. I was educated at numerous Catholic primary schools and a Catholic convent school. I find incredibly offensive the suggestion of some hon. Members that people who attend faith schools, whatever their faith, whether Catholic, Anglican or anything else, leave school prejudiced, intolerant and unable to accept or understand the views of others. My experience and that of many people who have attended faith schools and Catholic schools is that, when we left the school gates, we returned home to a community. We lived in a street and played with the local kids who might, or might not, have gone to the same school, followed the same religion and decided to go to the same church. As children, we got involved in a range of extra-curricular activities and mixed with children of different faiths, nationalities and backgrounds. It is wrong to believe that our faith schools create intolerant communities.

Mr. Willis: I take great offence at the hon. Lady's remarks, as, I am sure, does every other Member who has spoken in our debate. Not once have I heard a Member make the points that she says we have made; quite the opposite. Most hon. Members, and certainly those who tabled the new clause, want faith schools to extend their boundaries and open up to others. That is exactly the opposite of her point, and I hope that she withdraws her remarks.

Ms Ward: I certainly do not intend to, as I believe that those who argue for the dilution of faith schools are arguing that there is something wrong with people who are products of the faith school system. Unfortunately, my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Khabra) is not in the Chamber, but he referred to prejudice and intolerance; I take great exception to that, and I know that others will too.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Does the hon. Lady share my experience, which is that faith schools, particularly in London, tend to have an ethnic and religious mix, provide a tolerant and open society within the school and do a much better job of educating children about the diversity of religious beliefs on the planet than non-faith schools?

Ms Ward: I agree. My experience of Catholic schooling is that one of course receives an education based on religion, but one also gains an understanding of other religions—perhaps not in the same depth, but the opportunity exists. We should take the opportunity to encourage faith schools, not just to educate children in their own religion, but to create and promote tolerance and understanding. However, in doing so, we should not weaken the faith school system. New clauses 1 and 18 seek to weaken the status of faith schools.

I listened carefully to the views of Members who have spoken, and accept that some do not support faith schools and wish that we did not have them. If times were different, and if history could be rewritten, perhaps we would not have faith schools in a wholly secular society. However, we are where we are. Historically, we have had schools of faith, but unfortunately schools of limited faiths. Now we have an opportunity to do something about that.

Mr. Colin Challen (Morley and Rothwell): I am one of those who would like a secular schooling system. As a

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secularist, I accept and respect other people's views and beliefs. Surely, it is the role of the state as a secular entity to ensure that all those views and beliefs are protected? Perhaps we can only achieve that through legislation.

Ms Ward: I respect my hon. Friend's views, and respect people who follow different faiths. However, he has a choice; he, or anyone in his position, can decide not to send their children to a school with a particular faith or denomination—*[Interruption.]* I am afraid that I disagree with hon. Members who argue against that; in the vast majority of cases, and certainly in secondary education, people can choose not to send their children to certain schools.

8 pm

We have already heard this evening that where a primary school is the only rural primary school in the area, and may be a Church of England school, it opens its doors and welcomes children from all faiths and no faith. I see no reason why that should change; it should be encouraged wherever possible. However, I strongly object to the idea that that should be written into the Bill, and that there should be a quota. We have heard much about the figure of 25 per cent., but under new clauses 1 and 18 the figure need not be 25 per cent. The percentage of pupils of a particular faith at a faith school could range between 20 and 75 per cent. It would be determined by the local admission authority with only consultation rather than by agreement. That would be wrong.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: I am not sure what the position is in my hon. Friend's constituency, but does she not recognise that there are inner-city constituencies in which it is normal to find that a Church school, particularly a Roman Catholic school, is almost entirely white, and that because of the area in which it is situated, the neighbouring school is largely Asian and black. That situation is neither desirable nor sustainable.

Ms Ward: My hon. Friend may well be right about the circumstances of those schools, but in many cases that is not dictated by the fact that one is a faith school. Schools may have a catchment area or, in the case of primary schools, an intake based on the area that they serve. The local community may be predominantly white or Asian, as is the case in some parts of the country.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Following the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones), I have looked around the Chamber and I cannot see any hon. Member who represents a more characteristically inner-city constituency than I do. I have a considerable number of faith schools, of which many are Roman Catholic or Church of England. They are not all white, as he characterised them. Although the level of education in my constituency is good and getting better, parents of all religions fight to get their children into the faith schools because they are known to be of a very high standard.

Ms Ward: I agree with my right hon. Friend. We know that in many cases the faith schools have a strong ethos, which is attractive to parents. They also, but not exclusively, produce very good results. My right hon. Friend is right to point out that such schools are not exclusively white. In my community, the Catholic schools have children of Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and Irish origin, and children from India, where Catholicism is one of the fastest-growing religions.

I do not believe that faith schools are wrong to have a strong ethos. That encourages people to want to attend and, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State so articulately said, it encourages a common bond among those who attend the school. We should encourage such an ethos, but we should also encourage faith schools to diversify and work closely with other schools—schools of other faiths and of no faith. I would encourage faith schools that consider it appropriate in the areas that they serve to increase the intake of children of other faiths or no faith. I hope that the guidance from the Government will encourage opportunities for schools to work together.

If new clause 18 were introduced, fewer independent schools in the faith sector would decide to move into the maintained sector, because the provision that would restrict the number of pupils of a particular faith in the faith school concerned to 75 per cent., or even 20 or 25 per cent., would not encourage them to do so.

Many parents who believe strongly that their child should be educated in a faith school but who cannot get their child into a faith school in the maintained sector in their own community feel forced to go to the private sector. Many of them cannot afford to do so. We should not continue to discriminate against parents who feel so strongly about their faith by failing to encourage independent faith schools to come into the maintained sector.

We should expand the number of faith schools right across the alternative, ethnic and minority faiths that exist in the United Kingdom. I have a significant Muslim community in Watford. I know that over the years there have been many representations from some within the community who want a school that clearly reflects their faith. I also know that there are alternative views, and I respect that. People should have the choice. If the demand exists for a Muslim school in Watford, the local community must decide. We must have the opportunity to discuss the matter as a community, but we will not have such an opportunity if there are not more faith schools in the maintained sector.

Kevin Brennan: On equality and people from less well-off backgrounds getting into faith schools, does my hon. Friend agree that somebody who supports a secular and comprehensive system should vote against the clause, as it would institutionalise the creaming off by faith schools of the most talented pupils in our comprehensive schools, and probably exclude the children of the faith of the school from the poorest backgrounds?

Ms Ward: I did not say at the outset that I supported secular education. I said that had we been in a different position many centuries ago, we might not have the faith school system that we have now, and that there are those who believe that we should have had a secular system.

Finally, I want to raise the issue of Hindu schools in the context of new clause 18. At present, we have no Hindu schools—none in the maintained sector, and as far as I am aware, none in the independent sector, despite a considerable demand for the establishment of one in part of north-west and north London. If a Hindu school decided that it wished to be a maintained school, Hinduism would be the only mainstream religion to be discriminated against by the 75 per cent. quota introduced by new clause 18. Every other religion that has been discussed this evening—Catholic, Church of England, Muslim, Jewish, Sikh and Greek Orthodox—already has at least one school in the maintained system. If new clause 18 were introduced, the Hindus could challenge it on the ground of discrimination, as theirs would be the only religion to be faced with a quota system for its schools. I would be interested to hear how my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) would deal with that situation.

Mr. Dobson: If my hon. Friend has been listening to the debate, she will know that the Church of England proposes the establishment of 100 additional secondary schools to which new clause 18 would apply, so I do not think that she can single out the Hindus. As far as I can see, she is erecting a problem that does not exist. So far, I have not heard from anyone from any Hindu group who wants a Hindu school. Every Hindu group with which I have had connections has said that it does not want a Hindu school and is happy with the system as it is.

Ms Ward: I can tell my right hon. Friend that that is not the case and that representations are being made for a Hindu school. I accept that the more Muslim and Sikh schools that exist in the maintained sector, the more that demand will grow, but none the less, the demand is already there. My right hon. Friend referred to the 100 additional Church of England schools, but he misses my point, which is that the Church of England already has schools in the maintained sector, while the Hindu religion has no such schools. If it decided to enter the maintained sector, it would be the only mainstream religion to be discriminated against in terms of the whole of its religious education being controlled by a quota of a maximum of 75 per cent. I believe that that would be open to challenge in the courts.

You will not be surprised to hear, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I do not support new clauses 1 and 18. I believe that it is right that we should extend the opportunities for an increase in the number of faith schools to more religions and that they should be encouraged by the Government's guidelines to work closely with other schools of faith and no faith, in the belief that religions promote in society the basics of good citizenship, values and standards. Of course, that is not to say that that is exclusive or that those who do not follow a faith do not have those values, but I believe that those are the core elements of all our main religions in this country and that it is for the good of our society that we see those values extended and promoted.

Mr. Hoban: It will perhaps come as no surprise that I concur with much of what the hon. Member for Watford (Ms Ward) has said, as she and I had a similar education. It was not exactly the same, however, as although we both attended Catholic primary schools, I attended not a Catholic convent but a Catholic comprehensive school.

We have heard many hon. Members refer to the ethos of a school, and I want to spend some time talking about the nature of that ethos in the context of the new clauses. The ethos of a school is not something that one can bottle, sell and spray in a new school. An ethos is created by the people who participate in the school—the teachers, pupils, parents and management—and by the curriculum that they follow. I feel that the new clause ignores the importance of creating an ethos that comes from the pupils who are admitted and the values to which they subscribe. A school's ethos depends on the shared set of values of the people who participate in what it does.

8.15 pm

I am not sure that a school can have the ethos of a faith school if it admits only 20 per cent. of its pupils on the basis of the faith that they share. I do not believe that that is possible. Some schools may decide that they can create the ethos of a Church or other faith school while accepting such a low proportion of pupils from a particular faith. However, it is important that it is the responsibility of the school and its parents to decide the appropriate mixture of admissions. I do not believe that it is the responsibility of Members of Parliament to tell schools how they should develop the religious composition of their pupil intake. Nor indeed—I refer back to the speech of the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris)—should we tell schools how to appoint or select their teachers on the basis of faith. For a school to be a genuine faith school, it must not be merely a brand with no brand values. We need to ensure that the values of those who participate in the school reinforce the values of the faith that it is meant to represent.

That is why it is right for us to oppose new clause 1 and allow schools the right to develop their own character to reflect the faith that they are there to work alongside. The Secretary of State described very well the situation of a Catholic school in terms of the relationship between the school, its pupils, the Church and the community. That characterisation illustrates the point well, as there is a mutually sustaining relationship between a faith school and the community that it serves.

I object to new clause 18 because, in particular, I do not think that it is right to deny to Hindus, Sikhs or Muslims the right to set up schools that support their faiths. It is wrong simply to draw a line in the sand, as the new clause proposes, and prevent people in those religions from setting up schools that have the right to determine their admissions policies and characters. Indeed, as somebody who has benefited from a faith school and a faith education, I find that proposal especially offensive. We should allow other religions to set up schools. New clause 18 would do nothing to promote the equality of esteem in which we should hold all religions—it would simply reinforce the status quo and not address the concerns that hon. Members who support the new clauses have so far expressed.

I should like to pick up on some of the comments about inclusivity and the assertion that faith schools are not inclusive. Faith schools can improve inclusivity in other ways than by changing their admissions policy. Recently, I spoke to a group of Muslims in my constituency who would like a Muslim school to serve the people of south-east Hampshire, although they recognise that to be inclusive, they would have to reach out to other faith groups and promote dialogue on moral and religious issues so that both parties to that dialogue could

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understand the values of others. I believe that that would create a great deal of the tolerance and understanding that we need in the aftermath of the events of 11 September.

Mr. Berry: Does not the hon. Gentleman feel that that dialogue would be much more productive and much easier within the same school?

Mr. Hoban: I accept that there is a point to that argument, but somebody who is confident in their own religion and has been educated within it will have a much stronger position—a position that allows one to argue from a point of view not of hostility, but of informed comment and discussion—than they would gain in a school of no faith at all.

Chris Grayling: Does my hon. Friend agree that the comments that we have just heard display a lack of comprehension of the strength that faith schools can bring to the understanding of different religions? My experience is that faith schools are better than any others at building cross-religious understanding, but I think that there is a lack of understanding of that point in the Chamber.

Mr. Hoban: Indeed. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that comment. I met the Muslim community in my constituency as part of an evening in Ramadan to which a canon from the Anglican cathedral in Portsmouth had been invited to discuss interfaith issues. Those discussions do not tend to take place in a local pub or café. On the occasion that I mentioned, they happened during a meeting of a religious group in an exclusive place. By demonstrating that they could start a dialogue in the Jamaat, Muslims showed that they could also do that in their schools. I therefore do not accept the point made by the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry).

Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): I simply want to attest to the fact that the perception of Catholic and other Church schools is sometimes wrong. I attended Catholic schools and I studied many different religions as well as Karl Marx and his manifesto. I was encouraged to do that, and I have ended up on the Liberal Democrat Benches. Such an education did not therefore do me much harm.

Mr. Hoban: I shall leave others to ponder the long-term effects of the hon. Gentleman's education.

Mr. Berry: The hon. Gentleman asserts that interfaith dialogue is easier between two faith schools, but not a shred of evidence has been produced to support that. It is a great insult to the majority of non-faith maintained schools that promote interfaith dialogue to suggest that they cannot do that as well as faith schools.

Mr. Hoban: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point but I am not yet convinced by it. Those who speak with confidence about their faith can enter into dialogue more comfortably than those who have no deep understanding of a faith. I accept that some non-faith schools promote a dialogue. The original point was that faith schools can be exclusive, but faith schools can be inclusive by encouraging dialogue between different faith schools.

Mr. Burnett: I agree with the thrust of the hon. Gentleman's remarks. Does he agree that the new clauses discriminate against faith schools, but not non-faith schools? The central tenets of the faiths that we have discussed today are understanding, co-operation, generosity and tolerance.

Mr. Hoban: The hon. Gentleman is right. Faith schools can be shown to be inclusive because the faiths share the values that he mentioned. They can be inclusive by reaching out to other faith schools.

Let us consider social inclusivity. The Catholic school that I attended was in Durham. Its catchment area was more socially inclusive than that of the nearest state comprehensive school, which served a predominantly middle-class area. My Catholic comprehensive school served not only the centre of Durham but the former coalfield communities around the city. Although faith schools may have a single religion, they admit pupils of other religions and can be socially inclusive.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Another example of a faith school that has a wide catchment area is the London Oratory, which accepts pupils from all over London.

Mr. Hoban: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding me of that. My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) said that his children attended that faith school. I understand that its catchment area covers children who do not live far from here. Faith schools' catchment areas can be incredibly wide and attract pupils from diverse backgrounds.

Mr. Challen: Does not that comment support new clause 1? If faith schools can attract such diversity, they will have no problem in achieving a target of 25 per cent.

Mr. Hoban: What happens when faith schools are oversubscribed? That applies to many of them. If the new clause was accepted, many more parents who want their children to attend a faith school would be disappointed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman) made a thoughtful speech and referred to circumstances in which a local education authority could be taken over by religious fanatics who would change the character of the schools. Perhaps many of us believe that that is far-fetched.

Chris Grayling: They might even go Labour.

Mr. Hoban: My hon. Friend must know what was in my mind. I know of a local education authority that would probably want to use new clause 1 to change the character of schools. Southampton city council is along the coast from my constituency. An article that was conveniently timed to coincide with Christmas stated that the manifesto that Labour councillors were due to draw up would oppose Church schools

"as a matter of socialist principle."

They could use new clause 1 to effect their policy and significantly change the character of the 11 existing Church of England and Catholic schools in Southampton by implementing the rule in new clause 1 to allow only 20 per cent. of pupils to be selected on the basis of their faith.

A genuine threat exists to the many Church schools. I have shown that through the example of Southampton's Labour city council. I also fear for Church schools in areas that the Liberal Democrats control if new clause 1 is accepted. With honourable exceptions, many Liberal Democrat Members have opposed allowing Church schools to define their character.

Angela Watkinson: Does my hon. Friend agree that Labour Members who have expressed anxiety about the intolerance of one religion towards another demonstrate intolerance of religion per se?

Mr. Hoban: I am grateful for that point. I do not want to probe too deeply the motives of the hon. Members who have tabled the new clauses and spoken in favour of them. Perhaps they show an intolerance of others' views that they have not so far expressed openly.

New clause 1 puts faith schools at risk. New clause 18 would preserve the status quo and prevent those of other faiths who wished to set up new faith schools from doing that. It would also prevent the expansion of Church of England secondary schools.

New clause 1—together with new clause 2, about which the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon spoke earlier—is aimed at changing significantly the ethos of faith schools and interfering in how they are run, but it is not the role of Parliament to tell schools how they should admit pupils and select staff.

8.30 pm

Geraint Davies: I share the concern of my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) that more and more purely selective faith schools could lead to social segregation, intolerance and a distortion in local education choice. In my constituency, there are examples of people who have had to move house to move away from a faith school because they have no faith, to be near to one of the better schools. That happens in any case, but the more faith schools we have, the more such distortions will occur.

I recognise the need to balance the right of schools to have their own separate identity and ethos—if there is local demand for that—with the choice for local children in terms of access to the best schools. I represent a multicultural constituency, and it is not apparent to me, by any stretch of the imagination, that local Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs or, indeed, Christians want their own schools. Religious people often do not want religious schools; they might, however, want schools that simply have a leading ethos—a Christian ethos, for instance—rather than an overwhelming, 100 per cent. religious environment.

The key issue that I want to bring to the debate is the distinction between two categories of faith schools. It is a distinction that has not been brought out so far, and it is critical to the shaping of the social and educational future of this country. The two types of faith school available are those that are voluntary aided and those that are voluntary controlled. I have already tried to make this point in interventions on the Secretary of State and other of my hon. Friends.

I shall outline the difference between the two types of school. In voluntary-aided faith schools, the governing body is controlled by the relevant religion, the governors are the employers of the teachers, and the diocese or religion can dictate 100 per cent. preference in terms of selection. In exchange for that, it has to pay 15 per cent. towards the capital costs of the school, although that will subsequently be reduced to 10 per cent. Nearly all Catholic secondary schools are voluntary aided. In the Anglican tradition, nearly 60 per cent. of Church of England secondary schools and 20 per cent. of primary schools are voluntary aided.

In contrast, we have the voluntary controlled faith schools. I believe that, in promoting more and more faith schools, the Government should introduce regulations—or at least issue guidance—to demonstrate that they would prefer faith schools to be voluntary controlled. In such schools, there is a clear religious ethos—they are faith schools—and a number of governors are of the religion in question. That religion is also represented on the appointments panel, so that the head teacher and senior staff reflect the religion and ethos of the school.

The admissions policy of voluntary-controlled schools, however, does not require the intake to be 100 per cent. based on their religion. Instead, it reflects the normal local education authority procedure. That means that such schools reflect the community that they serve. In a largely Muslim community, for example, the majority of children in such a school might be Muslim. Through natural migration and parental choice, individual schools can develop a religious leadership and ethos without it being completely of one type—in many cases, that means one racial type as well as one religious type. About 40 per cent. of Church of England secondary schools are voluntary controlled. They welcome children of other denominations, but their leadership is clearly Church of England. Eighty per cent. of Church of England primary schools are voluntary controlled, rather than voluntary aided.

The plan for the extra 100 faith schools must embrace other denominations, and if they were voluntary controlled, the Churches would take a leading role in running them while allowing them to remain accessible to local children. In the example given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, he mentioned a village in which there were two secular schools. He said that if that were changed to one secular school and one faith school, that would reduce the choice available to local children, in that only one school would be available to them if they did not support that faith.

However, if the faith school in that example were voluntary controlled, as opposed to voluntary aided, that would not be the case. Local people could use either school, because there would be open access. However, in such a scenario, members of the community with that faith would naturally migrate to the school that denominated itself religious with open access, and that leadership would be reflected in those who chose to apply. Anyone could apply, but, in practice, the same choices would remain and such problems would not arise. They would arise, however, in a voluntary-aided school.

The distinction between voluntary-aided and voluntary-controlled schools is critical to the shape of education choices and possible social segregation. Many of my constituents, be they Christian, Hindu or of another denomination, might want to attend a school that has a religious ethos, but is not overwhelmingly religious. For example, some 90 per cent. of students in a voluntary-controlled Church of England school in Tower Hamlets, of which the Bishop of Blackburn's wife happens to be the head, are Muslim.

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That shows that the complexion of faith schools can alter through demographic change in the local catchment area. The students of that school are clearly happy to attend, and it is no surprise that the Bishop of Blackburn takes the Anglican view that the Government should introduce regulations to prevent 100 per cent. religious preference in any given school. There is support for Anglican schools as well as support for more general inclusion.

Hon. Members have referred to the difficulties in Oldham and Bradford. Oldham has a voluntary-aided Anglican school that is 100 per cent. Anglican and 100 per cent. white, but Bradford does not. In Bradford, the issue is housing segregation. There are complicated problems, which relate to segregation and society, and it is too simplistic to say that they all derive from the schooling system, but, given the congruence of faith and ethnicity in schools, the segregation of schoolchildren clearly does not always help communities to gel.

On voluntary control versus voluntary aid, no particular demand exists for a big increase in the number of voluntary-controlled Catholic schools. The demand comes from Anglicans, who have asked for an extra 100—they are happy with the principle of voluntary control.

I press the Government to signal strongly that, in welcoming new faith schools, they have a clear preference for voluntary-controlled schools. Such a system would preserve status: it would not change all-Catholic schools or, for that matter, any others, given that we are discussing new schools. It would enable Anglicans to do what they want, ensure local access for local people to the school of their choice and enable Sikhs and Hindus, for example, to attend Muslim schools alongside Christians. It would also enable the establishment of new Muslim schools and schools of other religious traditions.

Mr. Hoban: I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman's arguments for some 10 minutes. Is he for or against the new clause?

Geraint Davies: My position is clear. The Government should state a preference for voluntary-controlled schools, which offer completely open access, rather than voluntary-aided schools. That is the way forward. I do not support the new clause. I fear that we are in danger of manufacturing artificially defined quotas that in time will not reflect local demand that will change as the ethnicity and demography of communities change. Whatever figure is chosen—50 per cent., 20 per cent., 70 per cent.—may become the wrong figure as a result of such change.

I am making what could be seen as a much more radical suggestion. I suggest that a school should reflect the community that it serves—that, while having a religious leadership, it should allow admission according to the normal conditions of local education authorities. Such an arrangement would give a child living next door to a school whose religion he or she did not share a good chance of going there.

It is clear from this debate, and from the wider debate in the country, that the problem we are discussing is enormous and prompts enormous concern. Some may think that examples drawn from Bradford, Burnley or Northern Ireland are not relevant, but we all know that they have some bearing on our discussion. The Government could accommodate ethos, culture, religious leadership and new faith schools without requiring everyone to belong to one faith, which would inevitably lead to discrimination at the margin.

The Government should regulate to make such schools voluntarily controlled, or at least signal by means of guidance their support for the establishment of schools on that basis where there is local demand. If schools end up representing one faith 100 per cent., that is fine. One of the deficiencies of the new clause is its failure to provide for the possibility of growth and contraction of that proportion according to local demand.

As has been pointed out, Lord Denning has said that the Church of England wants more inclusion in the 100 new faith schools. The Muslim Education Trust and the Archbishop of Canterbury want it as well, and the MORI poll implies that others want the same. There should be a balance. Religions should have the right to establish new faith schools if there is local demand, but children should have the right to choose between local schools.

The Government should make it clear that voluntary control is the preferred option. After all, our children's education will shape the society of the future. I feel that we should celebrate Britain as a community of communities by establishing more faith schools, but also making them voluntary controlled.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I support the aims of the new clause, but profoundly disagree with the proposals for compulsion and quota, which strike me as both inappropriate and, probably, counterproductive. I expect that I am among a minority of Liberal Democrats who do not support the proposal in its current form.

I ought to make my position clear. Many have opposed the new clause from a religious standpoint, but I do not. My background is extremely eclectic. I was born a Baptist, went to Methodist Sunday school, converted to Quakerism, married a Roman Catholic and, in a spirit of British compromise, brought up my children as Anglicans and sent them to a non-denominational school. My late wife was Indian as well as Catholic, and most of my in-laws are Hindus. I therefore hold no brief for any particular denomination. Indeed, my background has encouraged my belief in the virtues of inclusivity, provided it is achieved in the right way.

I was given a good example on Tuesday night, when I was invited to give prizes at a local Catholic secondary school for girls. It is an independent school, so the Bill does not apply to it, but the principle is the same. Although the school's ethos was clearly Catholic, many of the girls receiving prizes were Hindus and Sikhs. The head of the science department, sitting on the platform, was a Muslim lady—as was advertised by her shawl and headscarf—and was clearly proud of that background.

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It was clear that that school believed in inclusiveness and actively promoted it. It worked because the Church, the priests and the nuns who were there believed in it. Such a system could not be made to work in an environment where compulsion and obligation applied.

Two specific issues have reverberated in this debate. One relates to what freedom of choice is in this environment. The point has been made in several effective interventions that there is no absolute principle of freedom of choice, because when one person exercises their freedom of choice to go to a denominational school, if the school is over-subscribed, that may subtract from the freedom of choice of someone else. However, those two freedoms are not the same; they are not symmetrical. They are different in seriousness.

It is a major commitment to send a child to a religious school, particularly as we live in a highly secular society. Often, parents have a strong wish to send their child to such a school. One cannot compare that with the sense of grievance that an atheist may feel because their child cannot get into the Catholic school next door.

As an MP, I have yet to encounter a non-believer who has a grievance because their child cannot attend a religious school. If people did have that grievance, I am sure that I would know about it. My constituency is very education-conscious. It is at the top of the Government's league tables. On the top of the top of the league tables are the denominational schools. People care passionately about schooling. I am sure that if people had that grievance they would have come to me. However, I am aware of the strong wish of people of faith to send their children to denominational schools in Twickenham. As it happens, my council, which is a Liberal Democrat council, provides additional Catholic and Anglican schools under the private finance initiative to enable that choice to be made.

The issue of freedom of choice is complex. Absolute fundamentalist principles cannot be applied to it, but it is important and it works in favour of the faith schools system.

The second issue is divisiveness. Perhaps in a London suburb, one does not experience religious conflict in the way one does in a northern mill town, but I draw on another example. If any city in Britain approximates to the conditions of Northern Ireland it is Glasgow. I lived there for some years. I was active in political life and in the big debate there about the future of faith schools.

Many people argued in similar terms to those of the new clause. They said that faith schools should be phased out or diluted. They were afraid of divisions in society. I lived in Glasgow when the Northern Ireland troubles were starting. People argued that unless we got rid of faith schools, blood would run in the streets of the city.

At first sight, those people had a compelling case. The city was divided 50:50—there were Catholic and non-denominational schools. There is a lot of intolerance. I have been to lots of old firm games. At the end where Union jacks are waved, one can listen to religious ditties on the sex life of the Pope for several hours, which are designed to offend the people at the other end of the ground. Indeed the religion that is taught is far from liberal. My late wife taught in a Catholic comprehensive. She was regularly reprimanded for trying to introduce Cromwell and Karl Marx to the history curriculum, and told to stick to the saints. It was not a liberal tradition that was at stake.

None the less, many of the predictions did not materialise. There has been no religious violence in Glasgow in the wake of the Irish troubles—London has experienced such violence. It has not happened in Glasgow for a good reason: in many ways it is a very integrated society. People are integrated through residential accommodation, work and personal relationships, and there is no tangible sectarian divide.

I was initially critical of the faith schools, but I came to believe that they perform an extremely important social function. As the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) said, they have provided a valuable mechanism for social inclusion. The Irish immigrant working class found a way, through the city's faith schools—I believe that the same is true of Liverpool and other cities—of getting into the professions and becoming part of society. Many of the arguments about social division are unfounded.

Dr. Kumar: The hon. Gentleman eloquently argues the case for faith schools in Glasgow, but there we are talking about one religion, Christianity, so the gap is not so wide. Now we have to think about Muslim schools, Sikh schools, Hindu schools—not one religion, but several. The gap between those is much wider. My fear is that, given what is happening in some parts of northern England, there is a danger of segregation, rather than the partial integration that he describes in Glasgow.

Dr. Cable: There is clearly a division. The hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones) made the point several times that religious division can combine with racial division, and that would worry me, too, because I believe in racial equality and integration. If the issue is race, it is not only a Muslim/white issue, because there is racial segregation between black and white Christians.

Do those who believe in applying quotas in a denominational context also believe in applying them in a racial one, simply to reduce racial segregation? In countries where that has happened, notably the United States—it has also happened in India in relation to caste—it has generated an enormous amount of hatred and resentment, and the use of prescription has been wholly counterproductive.

Caroline Flint: I attended St. Mary's Church of England school in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. Following his point about racial segregation, does he agree that there is a danger, given the events in the north-west last summer, in treating faith schools exclusively as the problem, while ignoring all the other issues to do with people's confidence about their cultural identity and religion; and that in our multicultural society we should place value on all people's cultural faiths and beliefs and not only those that have dominated this country for so many centuries? Is it not important to consider the wider issues about why dissent between ethnic groups within communities occurs, rather than blaming faith and faith schools in a knee-jerk reaction?

Dr. Cable: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. We were enjoined earlier on not to draw international comparisons, but there is an interesting comparison between this country and France, which has very alienated, segregated Muslim minorities in very large groups, even though the schooling system has been entirely based on secular French republican principles. The problems there have nothing to do with how the school system is configured.

The hon. Lady made a very penetrating intervention a few minutes ago when she said that many of the objectives of the supporters of the new clause could be better achieved in other ways. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) corrected her in part, but it is certainly the case that there are many different ways in which the state or LEAs,

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through the inspectorate, control of the curriculum, and requirements for teacher training and qualifications, can exercise influence over the quality of schools. That is a much better way of dealing with the problems.

The Government are very inventive in generating new categories of schools and rewarding them with status and money. Perhaps in areas where segregation is developing to a dangerous extent in the school system, they could pilot a scheme whereby a faith school that is particularly inclusive could be recognised and rewarded in a positive way. That approach would be much more likely to succeed than one that is based on coercion and quota.

Clive Efford: I rise to support the new clauses tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). In doing so, I want to make my position clear. Some hon. Members have been disingenuous in suggesting that those who support the new clauses are against faith schools. I am not against faith schools. I spent my early school years in a Catholic school.

I was brought up as a Catholic and, although I have no faith now, I also spent some time as a governor of a Catholic school in my constituency. I was able to provide a great deal of help and assistance to the school in that period. I was pleased to do so, and would be pleased to help again in the future, if the occasion arose.

Some of the interventions in the debate seem to me to have missed the point. The debate is about the education provided by faith schools, not faith itself. When people exercise choice and send their children to faith schools, they do so after considering the quality of the education offered by the school, not only the faith to which it belongs. Some very well-heeled individuals bus their children halfway across London to faith schools. They do not do that, in the first instance, because the schools are religious. They do it because the performance of the schools in question is very high. We must bear that in mind during this discussion.

We have been told that a 25 per cent. quota for faith schools would undermine the ethos of those schools. In an intervention, we were told that the Catholic authorities recommend that 10 per cent. of pupils in Catholic schools should come from non-Catholic or non-religious backgrounds. If the faiths are making it clear that they would accept and welcome pupils from different backgrounds, why should we stand in their way? How can we argue that that is against the ethos of those schools?

Mr. Goodman: Does not the hon. Gentleman appreciate that, for many faith schools, there is a difference between taking 10 per cent. of pupils from different backgrounds, and the much larger proportion—up to 80 per cent., if I read new clause 1 rightly—that is being proposed? In the first instance, the proportion of non-faith children would be a small minority, but some faith schools would not be able to maintain their ethos with minority intakes that are much larger.

Clive Efford: The new clauses propose that a consultation process be held if the proportion involved goes beyond 25 per cent. Local accountability is a factor, and a point that has been overlooked throughout this debate is that LEAs are accountable to their local communities.

If an LEA or a school organisation committee acts outside the interests of a faith school or of the community that it represents, people will be able to take account of that in future elections. They will be able to make representations through the faith schools, which also belong to the school organisation committees, to ensure that local accountability is preserved when decisions are taken. I therefore do not think that the fears described by the hon. Gentleman are well founded.

We have heard that religious schools perform better than other schools. I see no evidence for that contention. Some excellent religious schools perform extremely well, but yesterday's Ofsted report stated that the 25 per cent. of all schools that are religious-based make up 30 per cent. of the top-performing schools.

I do not suggest for a moment that the secondary school of which I was one of the governors adheres to the policy, but all hon. Members know that selection takes place in many religious schools. Sometimes it takes place before pupils arrive at the door of the school applying for a place. The selection takes place in the churches and religious institutes where the priest—or whoever it might be—gives a pupil a supporting statement to prove that that child is a practising member of the congregation, and that application is being made for attendance at a school on that basis.

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Selection is clearly a factor in the performance of those schools. I reject the idea that, if those schools were to take 25 per cent. of their pupils from the general community around them, it would affect or undermine their performance. I do not accept that. The schools that I know about, which are very good and provide an excellent education for their pupils, would not be threatened by the requirement that they take 25 per cent. of pupils who are not of their denomination.

The issue of choice has been raised. What we have heard constantly from hon. Members who oppose the new clauses shows that choice means exclusion. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) asked how much choice there is for parents and children who live near a denominational school, but who do not share that denomination. Where is their choice? They can only choose a school outside their community because they are excluded from the nearest school. That is not choice.

If we really supported choice, we should support the new clauses. They would let parents decide whether they want to send their child to a faith school or to another school. It would then be for the education authority to determine whether the 25 per cent. quota should apply if there were not enough applicants.

Mr. Hoban: There has been much debate about choice and the geographical proximity of the pupil to the school. Does the hon. Gentleman think that parents in my constituency, who want their child to attend a Catholic school, for example, are denied choice by virtue of the fact that the nearest Catholic secondary school is either 10 miles down the road in Portsmouth or 10 miles down the road in Southampton?

Clive Efford: I am not clear about the hon. Gentleman's point. If people do not live close to a school of the denomination of their choice, perhaps their choice should be whether they move closer to the school.

If someone is part of a community, but the nearest school is not of their denomination and applies 100 per cent. religiosity in its entrance policy, that person is excluded from their local school. That is not choice—it is the prevention of choice.

Caroline Flint: The issue of parental choice is difficult. I have many cases—I am sure that my hon. Friend does, too—of people who apply to their local school, which is non-denominational but still oversubscribed, so the LEA tells them that their children must attend their second or third choice. Arguments about choice are difficult—they also apply to the non-denominational sector: children cannot attend their closest school under the current arrangements.

Clive Efford: I fully accept that point. My education authority is bordered by one that applies selection in many of its secondary schools, so the problem is acute for me. Many parents turn up at my surgery at the time of secondary transfer because they have not been given their first choice. The child has taken what we call the "Bexley test" and has failed to get into the school they want, so they come back to my area. Those parents have a perception of the quality of the education their child will receive. That is the point of my argument. When schools are oversubscribed—whether or not they are religious—it is because of the quality of the education they offer, not because of their faith.

I realise that the debate has gone on for a long time and many of the issues that I raised have been touched on before, but I have one brief point to make. I represent a community that has been ravaged by racism. I represent the constituency of Eltham, where Stephen Lawrence was murdered, and I am extremely concerned as to the direction we are taking as regards segregation in our schools.

I organise a community group which meets regularly. We discuss racism and we tackle the local authority, the education authority and others on what they are doing to challenge it—especially among young people. When some school inspectors attended our meeting, they told us that in many parts of my constituency—as in many inner-city areas—there are exclusively white communities, and almost no ethnic minority pupils in the schools.

One of the problems was the children's lack of experience of people of other faiths or ethnic minority groups because they were not mixing with such people on a day-to-day basis. The terms that they use for people of other races and their attitude towards them is affected because they do not come across people from different backgrounds in their daily lives. By encouraging more faith schools without encouraging more integration, we would be pouring petrol on the problem.

My local education authority has done much to deal with the problem and I commend it for that. I do not want the Bill to put into reverse that excellent work, albeit for the best of intentions. That is why I will support the new clause.

Mr. Leigh: First, I apologise for not attending the earlier part of this debate. I had to chair a Committee Upstairs. I wanted to speak because I feel strongly about this subject.

This is a difficult issue and I hesitated before speaking as there are many shades to the argument. I always try to reach out to Labour Back Benchers, but I must make an admission that may not make me very popular with many of them. I am a middle-class resident of Westminster and Member of Parliament who sends his child across two boroughs to the London Oratory. I also send a child across another borough boundary—

Clive Efford: Will the hon. Gentleman give way.

Mr. Leigh: I have hardly started, but I will.

Clive Efford: Does the hon. Gentleman send his child to the London Oratory because of religion or because of the quality of the education there?

Mr. Leigh: In these debates, it is important to speak not only in the abstract but from personal experience. Speeches that I have heard in this Chamber over the years have been all the better for being spoken from personal experience. I am trying not to make a debating point but to share my personal experiences as a parent who cares passionately about the education of his children and who, because of the nature of his job, has to live in central London.

Most state schools in central London are simply unacceptable. That is the honest truth that we have to face. It is not a comfortable point of view, but one must be honest about this and middle-class parents—in fact, all parents in central London—fight to get their children into Church schools. It is distressing to attend parents' meetings, as I have done at Our Lady of Victories, Lady Margaret's, which is a Church of England school—I did not manage to get my daughter into that school—and the London Oratory, and to see literally hundreds of people of all types from all social classes who are desperate to get their children into the schools. We must ask ourselves why.

I have talked to many teachers and head teachers at those schools. A terrible burden is placed on them every year when they have to reject many excellent children. These are not just middle-class people trying to cheat the system but people from all social classes, and they have one thing in common: they want the best for their children. They are fighting to get them into the Church schools and they cannot. That is the problem.

Why are those Church schools so good? There is huge objective evidence to show that they are good. *The Times Educational Supplement* survey showed that one in four of the best schools in the country is a Church school. We know that they are over-subscribed, but they are good. They are so good because of their ethos, which is based on discipline, traditional standards and, yes, on religion. It is based on all those things that parents are so desperate for, so they fight to get their children into those schools.

The right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) is sincere about what he wants. As one parent to another I must tell him that the Catholic schools in central London, which are what I know about, are already hugely over-subscribed by Catholics. Many sincere, religious people cannot get their children into them. They are turned away, which is deeply upsetting. Their children have to go to secular schools or to schools

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that do not share their values. If new clause 1 is passed, many more of them would be turned away. That is simply unfair. For that reason, if for no other, I cannot support it.

Mr. Challen: Does not the hon. Gentleman believe in market forces and the possibility that if there is too much demand, capacity will rise to meet it?

Mr. Leigh: Church primary schools in central London, or schools such as the London Oratory, cannot expand; physically, there is no room. They are hugely over-subscribed by people who share that faith.

Brian Cotter *rose—*

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Leigh: No.

It has been said that a lot of the parents with children at those schools are insincere. It is true that some people will deliberately go to Our Lady of Victories church, Kensington high street, Sunday after Sunday, although they are not very religious, and make themselves known to the priest because they know that that is how they get their children into a really good primary school. However, those hon. Members who support new clause 1 should accept that there are many sincere people who want a religious ethos for their children. They have a fundamental right of freedom of association. If they want to send their children to a school with a strong Catholic, Jewish or Church of England ethos, they should be allowed to do so.

Brian Cotter: I want to add to what the hon. Gentleman says and to correct it a little. It is not only middle-class families who look for schools with an ethos and discipline. I refer to a council estate in Weston-super-Mare where people are very disadvantaged. I was surprised, but they are determined to get their children into a school where prayers are said in the mornings. Lots of people, not just the middle class, seek the ethos and discipline that may be found in Church schools, but may also be found elsewhere.

Mr. Leigh: That is the point that I am trying to make. I should have thought that Labour Members would be especially anxious to have schools with a broad social mix and that they would want schools in central London and the inner cities to which people of all types want to send their children.

From my experience, schools such as Our Lady of Victories primary school have a complete social mix. There are people from the poorest families, immigrant families and many people on very low incomes, and people who have recently come to this country from Portugal, Spain, Latin America and all over Europe. There is a great mix of languages. The school is not based in a posh, suburban area. It is not based in the middle of Twickenham, which is a desirable area. I make no criticism of the constituency of the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable). It is in the middle of London, and it draws its children from every social class. Some of those people face tremendous difficulties, but they fight to get their children into that school because of its ethos. The right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras is sincere, but if new clause 1 were passed, the ethos of that school would be so watered down that that beacon of light, which attracts people from all classes from all over London, could be put out. I know that he does not want that to happen, but that is what he is in danger of doing.

Mr. Goodman: My hon. Friend is speaking in a personal and honest way. Does he agree that a large number of parents who do not believe in any particular religion want their children to be brought up in a context of absolute values? It would be wrong for any hon. Member to sneer at them as hypocrites for wanting that; they are entitled to our respect, as he says.

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend is right. There are genuinely religious people who want their children to go to religious schools. There are people who may not be religious but who want to send their children to schools were people believe in the absolute values to which my hon. Friend refers, and they should not be sneered at.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): The hon. Gentleman seems directly to contradict the rest of his argument. If he is saying that there are people who do not have any particular religious beliefs but who desperately want their children to go to a faith school because of its ethos, the only way he can achieve that is by voting for new clause 1.

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Gentleman has entirely misunderstood my argument. The reason why many Church schools in otherwise difficult areas are so over-subscribed is their religious ethos. Although many of the people who are trying to get their children into those schools may not be religious, they respect the ethos that has created them. The real danger of the new clause is that many schools in those difficult areas would start to lose that ethos. That may not happen in all cases, but it may happen in enough cases to make us pause and worry. One should not try to destroy the best. One must allow the best to continue, and try to bring others on behind them. I passionately believe in that.

9.15 pm

We are perhaps not being honest with ourselves in this debate. There is no doubt that many Church of England schools and Catholic schools, which have been around for a long time, are inclusive. They are deeply embedded in the culture and history of our country and are not narrow-minded. People are tripping carefully around a subtext to this debate, because it is a highly sensitive issue—the problem of Muslim schools. People are not being entirely honest about that. I am happy with the thought of Muslim schools. However, those who want to set up Muslim schools must be as determined as those who run Jewish, Catholic and Church of England schools to be part of the wider community. Those who wish to set up Muslim schools must not force their children into a tiny, religiously based community in which they are cut off from people of other religions. I sincerely mean it when I say that that does not happen in Catholic schools.

Glenda Jackson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Leigh: I know that the hon. Lady feels strongly about this issue, but what I have described does not happen in the Catholic schools and Church of England schools that I know. Their teachers are careful to talk to their pupils about other religions, to be fair and not to be dismissive about others' beliefs, and to make sure that their pupils are part of the wider community.

Glenda Jackson: The hon. Gentleman was arguing that the strength of the established religious schools would disappear if the new clause were passed and a mere 20 per cent. of non-religious children or children of different religions entered them. He is now arguing entirely the opposite case with regard to the possible creation of Muslim schools—that they cannot be exclusive with regard to children who do not share their religion.

Mr. Leigh: I was not saying that at all. If someone wants to set up a school with 100 per cent. Muslim pupils, that is a fundamental right of freedom of association. We should not deny people that right just because they want to be in the maintained sector. People have a right to set up schools with an ethos in which they believe—there should be a range of schools in the maintained sector as in the independent sector—and we should not deny Muslims such a right. I am simply trying to make the point that, when such schools are set up—I have no doubt that they will be—they should be aware of the vital importance, despite being 100 per cent. Muslim, of integrating with the rest of the community. That is a point with which I hope nobody in the House should disagree.

Dr. Kumar: Did the hon. Gentleman believe in setting up Muslim schools when the Conservative party was in government?

Mr. Leigh: I am trying to deal with this point seriously and be fair to all sides. Personally, I have had a worry about Muslim schools for many years, for the reasons that I have been talking about. On the one hand, people have the right to have schools—freedom of association is a fundamental right—but can we be absolutely sure, once the school has been set up, that it will ensure that its pupils are aware of the history of the nation and of the wider community? We have been assured in this debate that times have moved on, that we have a mature democracy, and that people who want to create such schools will do precisely that. I am happy with that. I am simply saying that we should leave the schools that we have alone. Do not mess them around or impose quotas on them. Let parents and teachers get on with running the schools that they want. However, once we have those schools, let us ensure that they are aware of their wider responsibilities.

Mr. Chaytor: After nearly six hours of debate it is difficult to bring anything new to the arguments but I shall do my best.

I support the amendments but in the full knowledge that the subject is complex. The passionate debate and the heated views of hon. Members on both sides of the House has demonstrated that. My right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) and the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) have done the House and the country a service by confronting the issue. It is not merely about the technicality of school admissions policies, but about the much deeper and profounder issues of social exclusion, the cohesiveness of our society—our urban areas in particular—and the fundamental relationship between the Church and the state. No matter what happens tonight, the debate will continue and expand. I look forward to a much broader debate on the constitutional issue of the relationship between the Church and the state in the months ahead.

Like many hon. Members, I am religiously neutral. I was brought up in a Methodist family and married a Catholic. I have been an atheist and I am probably now a humanist. Who knows where I will be in 10 years' time? I am not sure whether that is a confession or a declaration of interest, but hon. Members have started from their personal point of view.

Although I am religiously neutral, I will defend to the last the right of people who hold religious views to express them and bring their children up within that philosophy. Religion plays no significant part in my life, but I recognise its overwhelming significance in our cultural history. That is why I take the point made by the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) when he defined the liberal society as one in which people can tolerate the views of those they find intolerant.

Mr. Challen: Opposition Members said that many Labour Members hate religion. Perhaps they think that those who support the new clause are atheists. Will my hon. Friend accept my assurance that it is possible to be an atheist and to admire religion? It is even possible to be an atheist and to study it, as I chose to do when I went to university.

Mr. Chaytor: My hon. Friend makes an important point.

I want to deal with the arguments against the amendments. Some hon. Members have accused them of disparaging all religion. That is manifestly not true. Others have criticised them for wanting to put an end to religious schools or to block the development of more religious schools. That is obviously not true. Some people laid the blame on religious schools for the riots in Burnley, Oldham and Bradford. Clearly there is a relationship, but it is not entirely causal. We need to sweep away the social and cultural issues that have come into the argument and concentrate on education.

I declare an interest because of the many religious schools in my constituency. There is a private Muslim school, a state Anglican school, a state Catholic school and many Church of England and Catholic primary schools, and one of the Church of England primary schools has an overwhelming majority of Muslim pupils. There is thus a diversity of experience in my constituency. I pay tribute to the leadership and the teachers of all those schools. Some of them perform extremely well and are hugely popular with parents; others have serious difficulties.

The pattern of achievement in religious schools is hugely varied, especially in primary schools. In the secondary sector, the GCSE A to C point score may well be slightly higher overall for religious schools, but we cannot give any credence to the significance of the GCSE point score of any school without also looking at the proportion of children with statements and of children on free school meals that the school takes. In the secondary

[Mr. Chaytor]

sector, Church of England and Catholic schools take a significantly smaller proportion of children on free school meals and those with statements than conventional state schools, so we must set any comment about results in the context of intake.

My support for new clause 1 is based on the educational impact of existing Church schools. I take very much to heart the comments of the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh). I accept that in some parts of the country there is tremendous pressure to get into religious schools, because many parents deem the alternative unacceptable. I sympathise with parents in that predicament, but the point is that that in itself cannot be allowed to continue. It is almost as if the hon. Gentleman and others support the status quo as somehow acceptable. The overwhelming majority of Labour Members do not find the current structure acceptable, because the privileges of the minority are obtained to the disadvantage of the majority. The structures must change.

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): The hon. Gentleman reminds me of my own experience. I went to a Church of England cathedral school, which had a very diverse pupil population—there were pupils from all social groups. Obviously, it was predominantly Christian, but there were Jewish and Catholic pupils. It was a great grammar school and had a tremendous ethos—it still does. Unfortunately, it was forced to go private because it was so concerned to maintain its ethos and not have it watered down. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that that is not a case of the privileges of the minority being won at the expense of the majority, but of opportunities being closed off, and that there could be many circumstances in which the consequence would be the same? Now one can go to that school only if one has the money to do so.

Mr. Chaytor: The hon. Gentleman is opening up an argument that is probably more relevant to the next but one set of amendments, which deals specifically with selection. I do not want at this stage to go into the history or ending of direct grant grammar schools; suffice it to say that if the hon. Gentleman is arguing that there was a loss of educational opportunity for the majority when direct grant grammar schools and other schools such as cathedral schools went private in the 1970s, I ask him to consider the levels of achievement of children between 1970 and 2000. He will find that, as the system of comprehensive education has developed year on year, so the levels of achievement have increased. That could not have happened in the days when cathedral or direct grant grammar schools were in the state system.

I want to move the argument on. I cannot accept the view of the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) that the freedom to choose for one set of parents is quite separate from the loss of choice of another set of parents. The importance of freedom of choice is paramount to the extent that it does not impinge on the denial of somebody else's freedom of choice. That to me is the heart of the issue. On any analysis of the structure of secondary education—it is important that we draw the distinction between the operation of faith schools in the primary and secondary sectors—the crux of the matter is that one persons' freedom of choice is another person's denial of choice. The existing structure of faith schools is the central cog in that mechanism. Those are my objections.

There are issues concerning selection, admissions policy, dubious practices and lack of transparency in the way certain faith schools recruit their pupils. There are questions about the role of parents and whether pupils are admitted because of their parents rather than their inherent aptitude, ability, suitability or character. We could spend a lot of time discussing all that, but it would be a distraction.

9.30 pm

To return to achievement in faith schools, it is true that there are many high-performing faith schools with strong academic results. However, if we look at their achievement in promulgating faith, it can be argued that they have been a disaster. As those schools have become more entrenched in our secondary school system, the number of practising Christians has declined year on year. Passionate supporters of faith schools must consider carefully the fact that the amendments would strengthen the role of religion by making it more inclusive.

Some long-standing members of the Church of England who were brought up in its faith and culture are almost in denial about the faith crisis in Christianity. The situation in the Isle of Wight, Gainsborough and Suffolk, Coastal may be different from that in the textile towns of east Lancashire and west Yorkshire. However, I urge hon. Members to look at what happens in most of our urban areas on Sunday, and consider how many people choose to practise their faith on Sunday and how many choose to go to the hypermarket. That is a central issue; the current structure of faith schools has served to undermine the credibility of the religious values that they wish to propagate.

Mr. Goodman: Is the hon. Gentleman arguing that most faith schools would be made stronger if local authorities insisted, as the amendments allow, that they reduce the proportion of pupils of that faith?

Mr. Chaytor: I am arguing that most faith schools would be stronger and that the faith itself would gain strength and wider support if the schools were more exclusive and less inclusive—[HON. MEMBERS: "It is the other way around."] I am grateful for the correction. The various practices in admissions procedures, in which hypocrisy is entrenched, are part of the reason for the growing cynicism about religion in our society. I am neutral on religion. I do not oppose my party manifesto, which calls for an extension of faith schools; I am content to support diversity of school management. If it is a choice between Arthur Andersen and the Church of England, I go for the Church of England every time—*[Interruption.]* No, it is not a close-run thing; I would certainly choose the Church of England.

In our debate, we have not separated out the Church's different educational roles; we have not separated its role as propagandist, with which I am extremely uncomfortable, from its role as simple contractor, with which I am content. Again, I cite the Church of England school in my constituency, where a majority of pupils are Muslim. There are many similar examples across the country. I am happy for the Church of England, the Catholic Church, the Jewish religion, Methodism and the Muslim faith to manage and run a school, as long as their prime focus is the delivery of high-quality education, not simply the promulgation of the faith.

My argument, which I do not think has been put this evening, is that for those who believe in Church schools, there is an advantage in supporting the new clause, because it can strengthen the role of Church schools. I ask them to consider seriously what has happened to the levels of membership of their religion over the past quarter of a century.

I was surprised to find that the Labour party manifesto included a reference to encouraging 100 new faith schools. I do not suppose that I was the only one who was surprised by that, but I am not opposed to it, as long as all religions have an equal chance of taking on the responsibility of running a school. Given that there is not an enormous number of confirmed Christians out there, waiting to go to Church of England schools, it is inevitable that if there are to be 100 new Church of England schools, unless the proportion of hypocrites in the population increases dramatically, those schools will have 20 per cent. or more pupils who are not practising Christians.

In one sense, the reality of Christianity in the country and the commitment in the manifesto make the substance of the new clause inevitable. However, if there were any attempt to develop 100 new Anglican schools, 100 new Catholic schools, 100 new Muslim schools, and 100 new Sikh schools, there would be serious consequences for social cohesion. I suspect that the vast majority of hon. Members would be extremely uncomfortable if those schools were entirely restricted to the members of that faith.

The new clause is the only way in which the Labour party manifesto can be implemented without serious social consequences. There is a choice for the Government: to crash ahead with the expansion of exclusive faith schools, with the consequences that we are all concerned about, or to go into reverse and try to hold back the tide and stifle the expansion of state schools, which would be a denial of what was said in the manifesto. The new clause is complementary to the manifesto, because it is the only way in which the pledge to encourage more faith schools can be satisfactorily implemented.

Mr. Rendel: I draw the attention of the House to a personal experience of mine, following the example of the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh). Some years ago I was lucky enough to be asked to become part of the audience during the recording of a version of the "Question Time" television programme.

On the panel that evening there were four members, of whom one was a Member of the House and a member of the Social Democratic and Labour party. As a result, there was some discussion of the Irish situation. After the panel had expressed their initial views, members of the audience were asked to give theirs. I suggested that perhaps it was time that we thought of desegregating the schools in Northern Ireland. I believed then that the fact that the two communities—the two faiths—were to a large extent being educated separately was one of the reasons why so many young people in Northern Ireland at that time were being brought up to think of members of the other community as the enemy, to be hated and to be opposed in everything that they did.

I am sad to have to tell the House that the response of the members of the panel to those few remarks was that although they accepted the general point that desegregation of the schools in Northern Ireland would in the long term introduce a much happier community in that sad country, it would simply take too long. There was no way that they could go with that policy because they needed to alter the situation and to bring peace and happiness back to that country in a much shorter time than changes to the education system could achieve.

That was 20 to 25 years ago. During that time, a whole generation of young people have grown up in Northern Ireland still with that same segregated system. We can see today some of the results. It is one of the great sadnesses of my adult life—I am sure that the same is true of many hon. Members—that so many young people in Northern Ireland from both communities have been shot or bombed since that time and, indeed, that the same has happened to a number of people on this side of the Irish sea. The amount of wealth and opportunity that has been wasted by the continuation of that struggle is a great sadness to us all. If we could only have found a way of avoiding it at the time, even if it had taken a generation to do so, would it not have been better to start so many years ago and to have a better situation now?

I believe that we have a duty to ensure that our schools include a wide variety of faiths where that is possible. As has often been said from the Liberal Democrat Benches, we have nothing against faith schools—there is no reason why we should not have schools that are run by and based on a faith—but I think that it is important that we should include members of different faiths in each of those schools, in order to ensure that people do not grow up in the sort of bigoted way that has, sadly, so often prevailed in Northern Ireland. I do not accept the Secretary of State's argument that we can simply introduce one or two lessons a week in civics, politics or democracy—or whatever one wants to call it—and thereby teach young people tolerance in the way that they can be taught tolerance out of their own experience, if they grow up with members of other faiths and communities, where they can come to learn that the humanity that binds us all together is so much greater and more important than the divide between different religions and communities.

Glenda Jackson: I rise briefly, essentially to rebut the arguments that have emanated from the Opposition Benches stating that the reason why my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) and the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) tabled the new clause is based on some sort of hatred of religion and that those of us who support their proposals share that hatred. Nothing could be further from the truth.

May I give the House the benefit of some of my personal experience? I went to a Church of England infant and junior school and can clearly remember when the moment in the day came for a Church of England religious observance. We all went to those schools; they were the only ones in the small place where I lived. At the time of day to which I refer, children who were of a Catholic or Jewish faith or of no faith at all were allowed to leave the room. We were often extremely envious of them, because they could play and we had to pray. I do not think, however, that that necessarily marked our attitude to them as human beings.

Hampstead and Highgate has a large number of faith-based schools, certainly in the primary sector. Without exception, they are committed to inclusivity. I

[Glenda Jackson]

have one faith-based school where I think that 56 different languages are spoken. I do not think that anybody ever bothers to ask the children what their religion is. All that that school is concerned with, like all the primary schools in my constituency, is ensuring that every child has the best possible education. I have one faith-based secondary school in my constituency, and yet all the secondary schools there are over-subscribed. Where I have difficulty in understanding why my own Government have problems with accepting the new clause is that—

David Maclean (Penrith and The Border) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 87, Noes 405.

Division No. 157] **[9.44 pm**

AYES

Allen, Richard
Austin, John
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bennett, Andrew
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Bruce, Malcolm
Burstow, Paul
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Caton, Martin
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Efford, Clive
Flynn, Paul
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Hermon, Lady
Hinchliffe, David
Holmes, Paul
Hopkins, Kelvin
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Laws, David
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
McCafferty, Chris
McDonnell, John
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mullin, Chris
Oaten, Mark
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam
Prosser, Gwyn
Rendel, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sedgemore, Brian
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Steinberg, Gerry
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tyler, Paul
Wareing, Robert N
Webb, Steve
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jon Owen Jones and
Tom Brake.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baird, Vera
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Bell, Stuart
Bellingham, Henry
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Blunt, Crispin
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Cameron, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cash, William
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles
(Norwich S)
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Collins, Tim
Connarty, Michael
Conway, Derek
Cooper, Yvette
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cran, James
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack
(Copeland)
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dobbin, Jim
Dodds, Nigel
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fabricant, Michael
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John

Grieve, Dominic
Grogan, John
Gummer, Rt H[illegible]n
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hammond, Philip
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Healey, John
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Hepburn, Stephen
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hoban, Mark
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Horam, John
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Key, Robert
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lammy, David
Lansley, Andrew
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leigh, Edward
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Letwin, Oliver
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Luff, Peter
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Malins, Humfrey
Mann, John
Maples, John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marlow, Eric
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Moss, Malcolm
Mudie, George
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norman, Archie
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
O'Hara, Edward
Organ, Diana
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Ottaway, Richard
Owen, Albert
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Palmer, Dr Nick
Paterson, Owen
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickles, Eric
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prisk, Mark
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Randall, John
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruffley, David
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sawford, Phil
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Singh, Marsha
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soames, Nicholas
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steen, Anthony
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Streeter, Gary
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Vaz, Keith
Viggers, Peter
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and
Mr. Ian Pearson.

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 18

NO REQUIREMENTS OF ATTENDANCE AT A PLACE OF RELIGIOUS WORSHIP (No. 2)

'(1) It shall not be required, as a condition of a pupil being admitted to a maintained school, that:

(a) he must attend or abstain from attending a place of religious worship;

(b) his parents or guardians must attend or abstain from attending a place of religious worship;

(c) the pupil, his parent(s) or guardian(s) belong to a particular faith or denomination.

(2) The local education authority after consultation with the admission forum may by regulation authorise that, notwithstanding (1) a maintained school may admit between 20 per cent. and 75 per cent. of pupils who have a particular faith or denomination.

(3) Where the local education authority is informed that there are sufficient applications to a particular maintained school to fill the available places, the local education authority may after consultation with the admission forum authorise an increase up to 100 per cent. in the numbers of pupils admitted who are of the particular faith or denomination of the maintained school in question.

(4) This section shall only have effect in respect of schools established after the coming into force of this Act.'.—*[Mr. Willis.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Motion made, and Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 86, Noes 409.

Division No. 158] **[9.58 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bennett, Andrew
Best, Harold
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Bruce, Malcolm
Burstow, Paul
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clwyd, Ann
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Efford, Clive
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hermon, Lady
Hinchliffe, David
Holmes, Paul
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Laws, David
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
McCafferty, Chris
McDonnell, John
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mullin, Chris
Oaten, Mark
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam
Prosser, Gwyn
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sedgemore, Brian
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Steinberg, Gerry
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tyler, Paul
Wareing, Robert N
Webb, Steve
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jon Owen Jones and
Tom Brake.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baird, Vera
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Bell, Stuart
Bellingham, Henry
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Blunt, Crispin
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Cameron, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cash, William
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles
(Norwich S)
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Collins, Tim
Connarty, Michael
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cran, James
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack
(Copeland)
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dobbin, Jim
Dodds, Nigel
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fabricant, Michael
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Grogan, John
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hammond, Philip
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Hawkins, Nick

Heald, Oliver
Healey, John
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hoban, Mark
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Horam, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Key, Robert
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lammy, David
Lansley, Andrew
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leigh, Edward
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Letwin, Oliver
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luff, Peter
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Malins, Humfrey
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Maples, John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Moss, Malcolm
Mudie, George
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norman, Archie
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
O'Hara, Edward
Organ, Diana
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Ottaway, Richard
Owen, Albert
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Palmer, Dr Nick
Paterson, Owen
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickles, Eric
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prisk, Mark
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Randall, John
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rooney, Terry
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Ernie
Ruffley, David
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sawford, Phil
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Sheridan, Jim
Simmonds, Mark
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Singh, Marsha
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soames, Nicholas
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steen, Anthony
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Streeter, Gary
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Vaz, Keith
Viggers, Peter
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and
Mr. Ian Pearson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The House is now in an impossible position. With less than an hour to go, by my calculation, we still have 16 groups of amendments to consider, including eight new clauses, 35 Government amendments and about 70 other amendments. While we have been considering this very important Bill, Government Members have taken up almost 200 minutes, as opposed to 160 minutes for the Opposition. How can we tell the world that we have considered the Bill properly when so pathetically little time is left? May I, through you, ask the Government—there is still time for them to do this—either to allow us tonight to sit for as long as is necessary to do justice to the Bill, or failing that, to give us more time to consider it on another occasion, so that we can do our job properly?

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Would you be prepared to

[Sir Patrick Cormack]

consider a manuscript amendment? There are precedents for that. It seems to me that this is a mockery of parliamentary democracy. This is an extremely important Bill, and unless we do something, many issues of real significance will not be discussed at all. I could have a manuscript amendment with you within two minutes. I hope that you will be prepared to accept it.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me respond to the points that have been made.

Under the present circumstances, the answer to whether I can accept a manuscript amendment is no.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Why?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am just about to say why, if the hon. Lady will let me. The House has agreed a programme motion, and I am a servant of the House, so I must abide by that decision. That is the good reason why I cannot accept a manuscript amendment. We must proceed with the agreed programme.

I can also tell the shadow Leader of the House that he has made his point and put these matters on the record. However, there is nothing that I can do to intervene in these matters. I think that the right hon. Gentleman raised the point of order originally to put certain matters on the record.

10.15 pm

Mr. Forth: No.

Mr. Speaker: Then, as far as I am concerned, it was not a point of order.

Mr. Kaufman: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Could you ask the Clerks to bring forward the record of the occasion when the Single European Act was guillotined through the House of Commons in 1985? The hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) voted for that legislation to be guillotined through in far less time than has been allocated to this Bill.

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps I could ask the Clerks for that information, but I will not, because we have a programme motion before us.

Mr. McLoughlin: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is it really a point of order?

Mr. McLoughlin: I seek clarification from the Chair. You said that you could not accept a manuscript amendment because there was a programme motion. I am somewhat confused, therefore, about how the occupant of the Chair yesterday was able to accept a manuscript amendment, given that there was a programme motion before the House. Is there one rule for the Government and another for the Opposition?

Mr. Speaker: No. I am even-handed in these matters, and I can tell the hon. Gentleman that this House has agreed to a programme motion.

Mr. McLoughlin: What about yesterday?

Mr. Speaker: Well, today is another day. This House has agreed to a—*[Interruption.]* Order. Please allow me to speak. There is a programme motion before us, and we must go through the procedure of that motion.

Chris Grayling: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I advise the hon. Gentleman that he is eating into the time available. There has been a complaint that there is not enough time allowed by the programme motion, and yet the hon. Gentleman is eating into it.

Chris Grayling: I simply seek clarification from the Chair, Mr. Speaker. A number of the clauses that are due to come up in the remainder of the debate were not debated in Committee, and I fear that there may not be time to debate them tonight. Can you clarify the status of those clauses as a result of that?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for me.

Sir Patrick Cormack: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not going to continue along these lines.

Sir Patrick Cormack: No, Mr. Speaker, I was going to ask you two things. First, I was going to ask you to remind the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) that sinners can come to repentance. Secondly, I was going to ask whether you would be kind enough to refer the whole question of programme motions to the Select Committee on Procedure, because the present situation is manifestly unsatisfactory. Would you at least undertake to do that?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has long experience of the House, and he knows that it is within his power to bring these matters before the Procedure Committee. There is no need for me to do that.

Mr. Forth: On a different point of order, Mr. Speaker. Now that the Leader of the House is with us—and I am delighted to see him in his place—will you extend to him the courtesy of allowing him to let us have the Government's thoughts on where we now find ourselves? Is the Leader of the House prepared to use his legendary ingenuity to find ways in which we can debate the Bill properly? As you rightly pointed out to the House, Mr. Speaker, a programme motion is in operation. However, the events of yesterday were not dissimilar to the circumstances prevailing today. Will you allow the Leader of the House the latitude to present to the House—and to you—a solution to the problem that we face?

Mr. Speaker: The House has agreed a programme motion. I would not encourage the Leader of the House to come forward and interfere with that motion.

New Clause 3

MODIFICATION OF EMPLOYMENT LAW

'(1) In section 81 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 as amended by Schedule 21 to this Act there is added at the end of sub-section (1) "or as he considers necessary to ensure that persons employed to work in schools to whom those provisions apply have the benefit of the rights conferred by school enactments as if the governing bodies of those schools were their employers."

(2) In Paragraph 3 of the Education (Modification of Enactments Relating to Employment) Order 1999 S.I. 1999/2256. There is added

(a)after sub-paragraph (1)(e)

"(f) in the case of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 references to a relevant transfer includes transfers from one governing body to another

(b) in the Schedule "Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1991.".'—*[Mr. Willis.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Willis: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: New clause 20—*Responsibilities for the National Assembly for Wales*—

'Any reference made to the Secretary of State in relation to responsibility for teachers pay and conditions shall be taken to mean the National Assembly for Wales when these functions are exercised in Wales.'.

Amendment No. 90, in clause 35, page 21, line 38, at end insert—

'only in those circumstances in which a school has been designated as a "failing school" or when inspection has highlighted serious concerns about the leadership or governance of the school.'.

Government amendments Nos. 31 and 32.

Mr. Willis: Before I speak to new clause 3, I must tell the House that the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) wishes to speak to new clause 20. I understand that, with the leave of the House, he wishes to call a Division on that new clause.

New clause 3 is a small but important provision that would affect a significant number of members of the teaching staffs of schools that could be involved in a closure or merger. At present, if two community schools were closed to be merged as a single school, TUPE would not apply. Both sets of staff would be made redundant and would thus be assimilated in the new school, or have to apply for jobs there.

However, if one of the schools was voluntary aided, meaning that its staff were employed by the school's governors rather than by the local education authority, its staff would be covered by the TUPE regulations, while the group of staff in the controlled school would have no rights under those regulations. That is clearly unjust.

In fact, it is so unjust that a case was brought by the National Union of Teachers—Askew *v.* the London borough of Ealing—in the Court of Appeal. The judgment was simple: the judge said that what had happened was not unlawful under current legislation, but made clear the necessity for the Government to change the law to give all teachers—of whatever school—the same rights under TUPE.

I hope that the Government will give the new clause a positive response, as it aims to give all teachers—whether in community schools, voluntary-aided schools or any school maintained by the state—exactly the same rights as regards employment, redundancy and transfer of undertaking. *[Interruption.]* Although Conservative Members do not seem interested in the employment rights of individual teachers, I hope that they understand the importance of ensuring that all teaching staff have that protection.

When the Secretary of State was approached about a change to the law, there was an understanding that the Education Bill would include changes to the TUPE arrangements, thus affording protection for teachers in situations such as I described. I do not intend to put new clause 3 to a vote; I seek only an assurance from the Government that they will deal with the problem. If the new clause is flawed, they could table an amendment in another place before the Bill completes its passage.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): I support new clause 20, tabled in my name and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) and other hon. Friends. It is not a wreckers' amendment but a reformers' amendment—very much in the spirit of the Bill. In its provisions for Wales, the Bill would allow Wales to follow its own course and to devise an education policy that meets its needs.

In previous debates, I have been generous about the Bill and indeed about education policy in Wales. When I described Wales as a left-wing teachers' utopia, I did not realise how prescient I had been until I read in the *Western Mail* this morning that the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning in the Welsh Assembly, Jane Davidson, is to sign a memorandum of understanding

"committing Wales and Cuba to work together in the field of education".

That is not so much a case of "They shall not pass" as of "They shall pass"—in ever higher numbers and with better grades.

Wales does well from the Bill. We welcomed many of its provisions, especially its sweeping enabling powers. There is one omission, however. The part of the Bill that deals with teachers' pay and conditions introduces a new framework for the determination of teachers' pay. We have tabled the new clause to close the lacuna in the devolution of education policy. All the clauses in that part of the Bill are devolved, but a veto is effectively being placed on the National Assembly for Wales as regards teachers' pay and conditions. I have yet to hear a convincing argument from Ministers as to why powers over pay and conditions should not be devolved.

Ian Lucas: Will the hon. Gentleman accept from me as a Member who represents a border seat within Wales, that different terms and conditions for teachers in Wales and in England would act to the detriment of recruitment that benefits Welsh children?

Adam Price: I would understand the hon. Gentleman's argument if it were not for the fact that it is built into the logic of the Bill that a local, decentralised system of pay agreement is to be allowed. There will certainly be no uniformity within England. We are also well aware that devolution of the power over pay and conditions would

[Adam Price]

allow us to ratchet pay and conditions up. In Scotland, the McCrone Committee proposal that teachers' work loads should be cut considerably, their pay improved considerably and their conditions improved has been implemented in the Scottish teachers' agreement. That is why we need the devolution of that power—so that we in Wales can have the same standards as are being introduced in Scotland.

If the Government are not prepared to take that step in one go, they could make arrangements to allow greater consultation with the School Teachers' Review Body. Clause 115 gives the Secretary of State alone the power to appoint members of the STRB. Why is there not a seat for a representative appointed by the National Assembly for Wales? Clause 117 allows the Secretary of State

> "to submit evidence and make representations".

Why is the Assembly, which has its own distinctive education policy, not allowed to do so?

Clause 117 also lists relevant bodies that must be consulted by the STRB in coming to its conclusions. The list includes local education authorities and school governing bodies, but it does not include the National Assembly for Wales, which is responsible for education policy. It is disgraceful that the Assembly will be connected with the STRB only by virtue of the fact that the Secretary of State must consult the Assembly. There is no requirement on the Secretary of State to pass the views of the Assembly on to the STRB.

The STRB stated in its most recent report, which was published a few weeks ago, that it was well aware of the views in Wales. It states:

> "We consider that it is still possible"—

despite the views of teaching bodies in Wales—

> "at present for one Review Body to make recommendations covering both England and Wales. In the future, much will depend upon the extent to which policies between England and Wales diverge".

They have diverged massively in the Bill. Surely it is not the responsibility of the voluntary members of the STRB to decide whether Wales should have a separate review body; it is for this House to decide and that is why we tabled our new clause.

In Committee, the Under-Secretary of State for Wales pointed out that the Scottish situation is different because Scotland has a separate education system. In Wales, the curriculum, the inspection system, financing, governance and organisation of schools are all separate. The only thing that remains conjoined is teachers' pay and conditions.

The continued yoking together of pay and conditions in England and Wales does not make sense if we are serious about allowing a genuinely distinctive policy. The Government have said that they are in favour of allowing divergence and distinctiveness in education policy. If we are to have a fully comprehensive education policy in Wales, in both senses of the word, we need devolution of the power over pay and conditions as well.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): As we continue with the pretence of scrutinising the Bill, I am keen that we should have an opportunity to vote on some of the later new clauses, which are of enormous importance to hon. Members on both sides of the House and to many people outside, although apparently not to the Government, who are not prepared to give us the time to deal with them adequately. I shall therefore be brief in speaking to amendment No. 90.

10.30 pm

Amendment. No 90 would limit the Secretary of State's power to interfere in staffing decisions in foundation and voluntary-aided schools. It is a simple amendment that would limit the Secretary of State's powers under the Bill to failing schools or schools where people are concerned about leadership. It would protect the status of foundation and voluntary-aided schools as the employers of their staff and their independence in taking those decisions. I want to hear the Minister's response, although I do not intend to press the new clause to a Division. I hope that we shall make rapid progress so that we can, at least briefly, deal with some of the other important new clauses.

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Timms): I wish to speak to Government amendment No. 31. Under clause 118, our intention is to define the term "school teacher" to ensure that all those working in schools who are currently legally covered by pay and conditions orders continue to be so covered. Without the amendment, it might be argued that head teachers would not be covered, so there is a need to include them separately, as under the amendment.

I also wish to speak to Government amendment No. 32. The hon. Members for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) and for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) raised this matter in Committee. I undertook then to reflect on whether a specific requirement for consultation on orders made under clause 121(4)(a) should be incorporated into the primary legislation. Amendment No. 32 secures that, and I believe that it meets hon. Members' concerns in full, so I hope that they will welcome it.

New clause 3 contains some technical flaws, but the principle behind it is clear. It is intended to modify the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981, so that they apply to school staff involved in all transfers between maintained schools, whether or not a transfer between different employers is involved. TUPE should certainly cover transfers of undertaking between different employers, but it is unnecessary to go further than that to cover transfers or reorganisations between schools where the employer remains the same.

I wish to say two things to help the House and the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough. First, the current arrangements for dismissals in community, voluntary controlled and community special schools, which are set out in schedule 16 to the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, require employing local education authorities to terminate the contracts of employees where their governing bodies have made determinations that they should cease to work at their schools. That requirement ensures that the employing LEA does not have to consider, in line with normal employers' duties, alternative employment options elsewhere in the authority area, including inquiries with other schools or services, in attempting to avoid redundancies. I understand the concern about that arrangement.

The provisions of schedule 16 will be moved to staffing regulations under clause 34. We shall consult on the content of those regulations. In doing so, we shall give attention to the drafting of the staff dismissal provision, so that governing bodies will be required to give LEAs notice of impending redundancies. We shall make it clear that LEAs will be subject to the same duties as they are for their other staff and have to consider alternatives to redundancies before resorting to terminating contracts. That will be a significant change in the regulations, which will, in part, meet the concern expressed by the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough.

Secondly, I will give further thought to the doubt that now surrounds some transfers of staff to and from maintained schools, following the Askew judgment. That judgment was clear, but its terms and explanation raised some questions. The Bill may already clarify the employment position sufficiently to ease the problem, but I am prepared to consider it further.

I must say to the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) that it was a great disappointment to Government members of the Committee that its Conservative members consistently declined to take up the extra time that we were keen to offer. Evening after evening, we offered additional time so that we could scrutinise the Bill further, but our offers were repeatedly declined.

Amendment No. 90 would leave foundation voluntary-aided and foundation special schools to their own devices in deciding their arrangements for staffing. I accept that it is a probing amendment, but it does not provide a sensible way to proceed on such an important issue. The staffing of schools accounts for the greatest cost by far of their funding and it is important that resources are managed and spent wisely in accordance with good practice and appropriate professional advice. The regulations and statutory guidance on staffing provisions, which the amendment seeks to disapply, will ensure consistency, a basic level of good practice and appropriate professional advice. Details of the likely content of the staffing regulations have already been provided to members of the Committee and they are now in the Library of the House.

It is important that all schools are subject to those arrangements to ensure that matters are handled appropriately and consistently. In particular, suddenly applying the arrangements in the way that the amendment envisages when schools fall into failure would not make much difference in the short term, and it is help in the short term that failing schools need most. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that it is better to have arrangements that help schools avoid falling into failure in the first place. That is what we envisage.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas) made an important point about new clause 20. It seeks to devolve teachers' pay and conditions to the National Assembly for Wales. We have not had any request for that to be done either from the Assembly or from the trade unions for the reasons that he gave.

Kevin Brennan: Does my hon. Friend not find it strange that the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price), who is a member of Plaid Cymru, should seek to introduce in this House something that the National Assembly has not requested? Is that not a peculiar position to take for someone who is supposed to be in favour of devolution?

Mr. Timms: My hon. Friend makes an entirely proper point. I agree with him. A similar point was made by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Wales in Committee.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Timms: No, because I need to make progress.

The Committee debated the arrangements for teachers' pay in Wales on a probing amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West. I reiterate that the question of whether teachers' pay in Wales should be a devolved matter was settled in the devolution arrangements made under the Government of Wales Act 1998 and the subsequent transfer of functions orders. Responsibility for teachers' pay and conditions was not transferred to the Assembly.

The establishment of a new School Teachers' Review Body for Wales, which would probably need to be provided for if we were to accept new clause 20 in principle, might have a marginal impact on the work load of the existing STRB for England and Wales, but it would of course create a substantial new work load and increased running costs for the Assembly. No doubt, for that and other reasons, the Assembly has shown no desire to determine teachers' pay in Wales under its own pay machinery.

Adam Price: Will the Minister consider giving the Assembly the right to submit its representations to the STRB under the terms of the Bill?

Mr. Timms: The STRB currently consults the Secretary of State and that position was settled in the Government of Wales Act 1998. I do not think that there is any case—in fact, there has been no such call from the Assembly or the trade unions—for those arrangements to be changed.

On that basis, I hope that the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough will feel able to withdraw his new clause and that the House will accept the Government amendments.

Mr. Willis: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 4

SELECTION BY APTITUDE

'(1) The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (c. 59) is amended as follows.

(2) Clause 99 (General restriction on selection by ability or aptitude) is amended by leaving out subsection (4)(b).

(3) Clause 102 (Permitted Selection: aptitude for particular subjects.) shall cease to have effect.'.—*[Mr. Willis.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Willis: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: New clause 8—*Grammar schools: Access to parental ballots and information*—

'(1) The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (c. 59) is amended as follows—

(2) In section 105(2) procedure for deciding whether grammar schools should retain selective admission arrangements, paragraphs (b) and (c) are omitted.

(3) Section 106(1) (eligibility of parents to request or vote in a ballot) is amended by inserting "primary" before "schools".

(4) In section 106 subsection (2) is omitted.

(5) Section 106(3)(a) (proportion of parents required to request a ballot) is amended by leaving out "20" and inserting "5".

(6) Section 106(3) paragraph (b) is omitted.

(7) Section 107(3) (information provision by the authority or body on intentions or proposals following a successful petition) is amended by leaving out subsection (c) and inserting—

> "(c) a statement by the authority or body on intentions or proposals for a non-selective education system which may include information on options, costs and planning assumptions in the event of such a result.".'.

New clause 9—*Permitted selection: aptitude for particular subjects*—

'The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 is amended by omitting section 102.'.

New clause 12—*Restrictions relating to petitions and ballots*—

'After section 106 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 there is inserted—

"106A Restrictions relating to petitions and ballots

Where a petition of parents has been initiated, or a ballot held, and no change to admissions arrangements has been agreed, no further ballot may take place within a period of six years from the initiation of the petition.".'.

Mr. Willis: New clause 4 is simple and, if the Minister readily agrees to it, we will not need to divide the House. However, the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) might want to press new clause 12 to a vote.

Before the Labour party came to power in 1997, it made a strong commitment to the British people in the run-up to the general election. Several hon. Members, including the Prime Minister and the then shadow Education Secretary, the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), stated that selection would not be extended under a Labour Government. We expected them to move swiftly and directly to end selection in our schools.

Nothing happened in 1997, but in 1998 the Government introduced their first major education Bill, which became the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. We eagerly went through that to identify the clauses that would end selection in schools. There was, however, no mention of selection other than the introduction of ballots for grammar schools. The Conservatives opposed that because they thought that it was a tortuous way of getting rid of grammar schools. My hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) and I opposed ballots because we thought that they would be a bureaucratic nightmare and that no one would meet the conditions. Indeed, there has been only one ballot, for Ripon grammar school, which was so heavily rigged—

Mr. Brady: Ha!

Mr. Willis: Let me explain why. Half the people who could vote had their children in private schools where they were being groomed for the 11-plus so that they could get into the grammar school. All the kids who went to the state local schools could not get in because of the kids from the private schools. The ballot was lost and a significant amount of money was wasted. Those were the rules of engagement.

Mr. Brady: The hon. Gentleman knows that we oppose new clause 4. As I want to press new clause 12 to a vote, perhaps we can find some common ground. Does he agree that the ballot arrangements caused the remaining grammar schools immense uncertainty? In areas such as Trafford, which I represent, or Kent, where my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) has his constituency, attempts have been made to close those schools. That happened last year and it is happening again. Although there is not the requisite number to trigger a ballot, the process causes schools enormous uncertainty, which is an intolerable burden. I hope that when we press for a vote on new clause 12, the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues will support us in relieving schools of that burden.

Mr. Willis: I cannot promise the hon. Gentleman so much co-operation, but I am sure that he will feel able to support us when we call for a vote on new clause 4, in which case we will consider carefully what he said.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Willis: Perhaps that degree of co-operation is not fully established.

10.45 pm

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the best way to draw a line under the matter would be to change the regulations, so that in places such as Kent we can have the ballot, and once and for all put an end to this mess and get rid of the corrosive evil that is selective education?

Mr. Willis: Of course when the hon. Gentleman fought a general election for the first time in 1997 he expected a Labour Government to do exactly that. Indeed, our party still believes that democratically elected local authorities—which I do not believe the Government intend yet to abolish, although they may do so before the end of this Parliament—should be able to make such decisions. Sadly, of course, that is not so. Until we start to return power and democracy to local people through local government, we will not be able to meet those aspirations.

Dr. Ladyman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way again?

Mr. Willis: I am sorry, but I will not give way again because I know that the hon. Members for Altrincham and Sale, West and for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) want to speak.

I apologise for digressing a little. I do not want to table a new clause that would get rid of grammar schools. All I want to get rid of with new clause 4 is what the Government introduced in the School Standards and Framework Act.

We were promised no selection, but instead of dealing with grammar schools, the Government said that they wanted to introduce more selection, not by ability but by aptitude. The debate was tortuous. The then Minister for Schools Standards tried to persuade the Committee and the House that there was a significant difference between the two, but we were never able to see it. Someone thought that it was better to have the ability to fly a plane than the aptitude for doing so, but I could not work out the difference if it crashed. In reality, the Government wanted to allow 10 per cent. of students in specialist schools—that was their new idea—to be selected by aptitude.

I am glad that the Secretary of State has returned to her place.

Estelle Morris: Just for you.

Mr. Willis: I know that it is just for me.

The right hon. Lady has often said, "The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough doth protest too much because most schools have not used the 10 per cent. aptitude provision but ignored it, and that proves the case." I say to her that we have a golden opportunity. Schools do not want the aptitude provision. Only 7 per cent. of schools have used it, and most of them were selecting before. As we have heard—I will not reopen the debate—schools are selecting by faith.

The new clause would simply get rid of the whole business of selecting by aptitude. The right hon. Lady knows that such selection is nonsense, as does the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West. If the Government are to introduce selection, they should at least have the guts to make it by ability. If not, let us get rid of the nonsense. I ask the House to support new clause 4.

Mr. Brady: I am delighted to have the opportunity, however brief, to speak to new clause 12. The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) has made clear his opposition to the remaining grammar schools. At least he has always been both clear and consistent in that. The Government have been clear in their opposition to the remaining grammar schools but not always consistent. They seem to move to and fro on the issue.

We have not only had the celebrated instance to which the hon. Gentleman referred of the then shadow Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), saying, "Read my lips: no selection by exam or interview." The Government appear to have reneged on that as they have developed a belief that selection by ability or aptitude in some circumstances can be a route to raising standards in schools.

The latest twist and turn in the process came just before Christmas when, on 7 December, in an article on the front page of *The Times* under the headline "Labour ends its 30-year war against grammars", we read:

> "Labour will declare an historic truce with grammar schools today after two generations spent trying to abolish selective education."

The article continues:

> "Less than four years after the Government gave parents the power to abolish the remaining grammar schools and ruled out the creation of any more, Stephen Timms, the School Standards Minister, will trumpet plans to harness their expertise. Allocating £500,000 to link schools in 28 areas of England, Mr. Timms will say: 'The time of a "one-size-fits-all" approach to secondary education has long gone. We now have a mature understanding of the benefits of a diverse system, tailored to meet the needs of every pupil in every town.'"

We welcomed that enormously. The article also says:

> "Tony Blair has consistently stated his opposition to selection. He once told head teachers that he knew people had been scarred for life by rejection at the age of 11"—

an obvious reference to his Deputy. There was some concern in the article, but its gist was welcome: the Government, after being ideologically hostile to the remaining grammar schools, had come around to accepting that they are excellent schools which provide opportunity for children in the communities that they serve.

I am proud to represent one of those communities. I am delighted that one of the partnerships between grammar schools and other parts of the maintained sector in which the Government have recently invested is based partly in my constituency. Altrincham grammar school for girls, the sister school of the school which I attended, is, as the Secretary of State will know, in partnership with her old school, the nearby Whalley Range high school. That is a welcome initiative. If Members will forgive a brief indulgence, I shall point out that the right hon. Lady frequently visits her old school to make announcements and promote Government policy, so perhaps I can ask her to join me on a visit to its partner, Altrincham grammar school for girls. Together we could explore the great advantages of grammar schools in spreading best practice to other parts of the maintained sector.

Dr. Ladyman: The hon. Gentleman has talked about diversity. What sort of diversity is there in my constituency, where we have no comprehensives? We have the two sides of the selective coin—grammar schools and secondary moderns. Where is the choice for my constituents?

Mr. Brady: We support Government policy in that area. I hope that, as has been the case in my constituency, the hon. Gentleman's constituency increasingly has a blend of grammar schools, specialist schools and others; I hope that there would be few schools which offered no choice or advantages to his constituents. We welcome the increasing diversity of schools.

Chris Grayling: Would my hon. Friend explain to Government Members that grammar schools select children from all walks of life and all backgrounds, and are genuinely socially inclusive? Comprehensive schools tend to use the system of selection by estate agent, which cannot be fair to pupils in his constituency and elsewhere.

Mr. Brady: My hon. Friend is right, and I am acutely aware of the problem. If my old school, Altrincham grammar school for boys, had been a comprehensive when I was a boy, I would not have fallen within its catchment area; eligibility would have been limited to the most affluent parts of my constituency.

I do not wish to detain the House on parochial matters. The vital fact is that we, like the Government, recognise the excellent work that grammar schools are doing.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Does my hon. Friend realise that even if he wished to detain the House, he cannot do

[Sir Patrick Cormack]

so for more than seven minutes, so he may not succeed in developing his argument and will not touch on any other issue? Does he not agree that that is a total disregard of Parliament and what it ought to stand for?

Mr. Brady: I agree. If my hon. Friend had had the misfortune to witness the Government's mismanagement of the Committee stage, he would be even more outraged than he rightly is now.

Mr. Chaytor *rose—*

Mr. Brady: I shall give way in a moment; I fear that the hon. Gentleman may be a convert to the cause of grammar schools, as the Government appear to be. We, like the Government, recognise the important job that grammar schools in the maintained sector do so well. The latest research published a few months ago by the National Foundation for Educational Research demonstrated the great strengths of the grammar schools in achieving better performance up to GCSE level for middle-ability children and up to key stage 3. I know that the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) recognises that.

Mr. Chaytor: Acknowledging that the benefits of a mature understanding of diversity have been conferred upon us all, does the hon. Gentleman accept, with reference to his earlier point about insecurity related to selective systems, that he should support my new clause 8, which would make it easier for a ballot to take place, whereby the issue could be settled for a number of years? As long as it is more difficult for a ballot to take place, the axe is always hanging over the school. It would help his cause and provide stability and security if the ballot could take place and the issue could be settled.

Mr. Brady: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, as he leads me to the central point of new clause 12, which involves stability and how best we can remove the threat that hangs over the remaining grammar schools—a threat that can arise every year. Even when there is no real will in a community to dispose of the grammar schools, it is possible for a small group of parents, frequently politically motivated, to initiate a petition. As soon as that happens, the schools are under threat. An enormous amount of effort is diverted from the educational priorities of the schools. The time of staff, governors and parents and fund-raising efforts are taken up not with helping the school but with fighting misguided attempts to abolish it.

That is why new clause 12 seeks to provide that once a petition has been initiated, or a ballot has been initiated or taken place, there will be a period of six years during which no further petition can be initiated. That is vital for thousands of children who attend grammar schools. It is essential that they have a period of grace during which their education can proceed without their school being faced with uncertainty and threatened with closure. The importance of the six-year period is that if a child starts at a grammar school in a year in which a threat is faced by the school, he can proceed through the remaining six years of what is likely to be a seven-year period at the school, without further threats to the school. New clause 12 provides the stability that the hon. Member for Bury, North described and I hope that he will support it.

Mr. Chaytor *rose—*

Mr. Brady: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman and I have very little time. I cannot give way now.

The new clause would protect our existing grammar schools from repeated threats of closure, giving them stability and allowing them to thrive without being under constant threat. It would not do away with the ballot process, but it would improve life for grammar schools and the children whom they serve. That is why I hope that we will have an opportunity to press new clause 12 to a Division. This is a matter of the utmost importance to many thousands of people outside the House, and it will be of great concern to them if the House does not have an opportunity to divide on such an important matter.

Sadly, as a result of the Government's intransigence and incompetence, we have not had the opportunity properly to debate the new clauses and amendments relating to selection by aptitude and ability. I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends and hon. Members on the Liberal Benches to support the new clause. I hope that the Government will take advantage of the opportunity to make real what they claim is the end of their hostility to the remaining grammar schools, and prove that they recognise the value of our grammar schools by giving them a chance to flourish and grow as they should be able to do.

Mr. Chaytor: The arguments of the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) depend absolutely on the implementation of new clause 8, which I tabled. Unless a ballot takes place, there will be no point in specifying that six years must—

It being Eleven o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [this day].*

The House divided: Ayes 62, Noes 420.

Division No. 159] **[11 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bennett, Andrew
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clwyd, Ann
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Doughty, Sue
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Hinchliffe, David
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Illsley, Eric
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Laws, David
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
McDonnell, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice

Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Price, Adam
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sedgemore, Brian
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Wareing, Robert N
Webb, Steve
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Sir Robert Smith and
Paul Holmes.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Austin, John
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Bellingham, Henry
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Borrow, David
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Cameron, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cash, William
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Coaker, Vernon
Cohen, Harry
Collins, Tim
Connarty, Michael
Conway, Derek
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cousins, Jim
Cran, James
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curry, Rt Hon David
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Dodds, Nigel
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flight, Howard
Flint, Caroline
Flook, Adrian
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
Garnier, Edward
Gerrard, Neil
Gibb, Nick
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Grogan, John
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hammond, Philip
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Healey, John
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hoban, Mark
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Horam, John
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Key, Robert
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lammy, David
Lansley, Andrew
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leigh, Edward
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Letwin, Oliver
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Liddell–Gr[illegible]nger, Ian
Lidingt[illegible]
Lilley, [illegible] Hon Peter
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luff, Peter
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Malins, Humfrey
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Maples, John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael

Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Moss, Malcolm
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norman, Archie
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Organ, Diana
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Ottaway. Richard
Owen, Albert
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Palmer, Dr Nick
Paterson, Owen
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickles, Eric
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prisk, Mark
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Randall, John
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rooney, Terry
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Ernie
Ruddock, Joan
Ruffley, David
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian

Sheridan, Jim
Simmonds, Mark
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soames, Nicholas
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Streeter, Gary
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
  (Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Wooles, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*

Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ian Pearson and
Mr. Fraser Kemp.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Simon Thomas: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. No doubt you are now considering whether we have time to put new clause 20 to a vote. Would it be in order for me to ask you, when making that consideration, to take into account the fact that it would have the support of three of the parties represented in this Parliament? The new clause relates only to Wales. Thirty-two of the clauses in the Bill relate only to Wales, and 31 relate only to England. We did not have the opportunity to debate the matters relating to Wales in Standing Committee because there was not one Welsh Opposition Member on the Committee. Will you take that into consideration when deciding whether we have time to vote on new clause 20?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Any question of a vote on new clause 20 would arise only after we have dealt with new clause 12. I am afraid that I cannot offer the hon. Gentleman any succour.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *then proceeded to put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

New Clause 12

RESTRICTIONS RELATING TO PETITIONS AND BALLOTS

'After section 106 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 there is inserted—

"106A Restrictions relating to petitions and ballots

Where a petition of parents has been initiated, or a ballot held, and no change to admissions arrangements has been agreed, no further ballot may take place within a period of six years from the initiation of the petition.".'.—*[Mr. Damian Green.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Motion made, and Question put, That the clause be added to the Bill:—

The House divided: Ayes 184, Noes 293.

Division No. 160] **[11.15 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin

Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
  (NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
  (Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian

Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Doughty, Sue
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Charles Hendry and Mr. Peter Atkinson.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cousins, Jim
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Khabra, Piara S

Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and
Mr. Ian Pearson.

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 16

FURTHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION: HAZARDOUS MATERIAL, &C.

'(1) The Secretary of State may by regulations require the governing body of a further education institution in England to prevent the use in the institution of specified equipment or specified materials without the approval of the Secretary of State.

(2) The Secretary of State may specify equipment or materials under this section only if he thinks the equipment or materials might endanger a person's health or safety.

(3) The National Assembly for Wales may by regulations require the governing body of a further education institution in Wales to prevent the use in the institution of specified equipment or specified materials without the approval of the Assembly.

(4) The National Assembly for Wales may specify equipment or materials under this section only if it thinks the equipment or materials might endanger a person's health or safety.

(5) In this section "further education institution" means an institution within the further education sector.'.—*[Mr. Timms.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

Question put, That the remaining Government amendments be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 291, Noes 178.

Division No. 161] [11.28 pm

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles
(Norwich S)
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cousins, Jim
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet

Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marlow, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
  (Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ian Pearson and
Mr. Fraser Kemp.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
  (NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
  (Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Doughty, Sue
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick

Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wills, Phil
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Charles Hendry and
Mr. Julian Brazier.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Order for Third Reading read.

11.39 pm

Estelle Morris: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I shall be brief, as I want to give one hon. Member from each of the main Opposition parties time to speak. It is a pleasure for me to begin this debate, but I shall start by offering some thanks to my ministerial team—my hon. Friends the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, the Minister for School Standards and the Under-Secretary of State for Wales—who took the Bill through Standing Committee. I wish to thank also those Officers of the House who, as ever, have helped and guided us, and my officials in the Department.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Estelle Morris: Very well.

Sir Patrick Cormack: The right hon. Lady says that she feels pleasure. Should not she feel shame that the Bill has not been properly discussed in this place?

Estelle Morris: That is a pity. I was just about to thank Opposition Members for—from time to time—engaging in constructive and enjoyable debate. I was not a member of the Standing Committee, but I was told that on several occasions Opposition Members were offered the opportunity to sit later in the evening, but that on every occasion they chose not to do so.

Mr. Brady: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Estelle Morris: I shall in a moment.

There have been two days during which to debate the Bill—one of which was extended this evening. To a large extent, the Opposition's use of that time was determined by them. I sat through debate on a string of amendments last night. The Opposition had the choice—

Mr. McLoughlin: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. How can the Secretary of State get away with misleading the House in such a vile way—*[Interruption.]*—when the fact is—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would wish to choose his words more carefully.

Mr. McLoughlin: How can the Secretary of State equate what she says with what actually happened today, when the Government spent 198 minutes on a motion and the Opposition Chief Whip had to move the closure so that we could begin to make a little progress? It is outrageous for the right hon. Lady to say what she is saying.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I understand the hon. Gentleman's feelings on the matter, but it is a matter for debate not for the Chair.

Estelle Morris: The Bill is about children out there—

Mr. Brady *rose*—

Estelle Morris: Those children deserve a good standard of education in our schools—[HON. MEMBERS: "Give way!"] I am not giving way. If hon. Gentlemen will shut up, I shall give the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) time to respond, but the more I have to give way, the less time there will be for the debate.

The Bill is important. It builds on the success of the past four years of Labour Government. It means that we can build on the successes in primary education, recognised by the Ofsted annual report yesterday and the PISA—programme for international student assessment—report published at the end of last year.

The Bill recognises that we have a hugely accountable schools service. We know where our strengths lie and the Bill allows us to use our time and energy to provide greater support for those schools that are failing, and to free up the school system so that schools can be the initiators of reform. We have an accountable system and, in coming years, I look forward to being able to build on our success, working on the ideas that come from our best teachers, our best school leaders and our strongest local education authorities so that they lead the next generation of educational reform.

I am also delighted that we have taken powers in the Bill to free up the curriculum, especially for 14 to 19-year-olds. In future months, I look forward to debates in the House about better opportunities for the many who have failed in the past.

In essence, the measure will ensure that every child who attends a school in this country has the opportunity to succeed and flourish; to build on their talents; and to be taught in well-led schools by teachers who are well trained, with the chance of professional development. During the past four years, we have made tremendous progress. That progress is recognised not only by Labour Members, but by parents throughout the country.

I have every confidence that the Bill provides the measures that we need to ensure that we deliver what we are concerned about—not counting up the number of minutes of Members' speeches, but making sure that our teachers and school leaders have the tools to do the job.

I commend the Bill to the House.

11.44 pm

Mr. Damian Green: On Second Reading, the Bill was opposed not only by Conservative Members but by nearly everyone else in education, because it concentrates on structures not standards. It will do nothing much to improve the standard of education.

The Bill has not been improved by the parliamentary process, despite the efforts of Members of all the Opposition parties in Committee, because of the Government's contempt for the House and their attempt to deny debate at every stage.

What the Secretary of State said about the Standing Committee is a travesty of the truth. What happened in Committee was that, apart from imposing too strict a guillotine on the entire timetable, the Government also imposed intermediate guillotines, which ensured that there was not enough time for debating every controversial clause in the Bill.

That is how the Government behaved in Committee and they have continued to behave as outrageously on Report. Today, 17 groups of amendments were on the amendment paper. We have dealt with three of those groups and we finished with the first group only because the Opposition Chief Whip moved a closure. The Government were happy and prepared to spend the entire day and night discussing one group of amendments, leaving many important issues entirely undebated.

The Government will also know that, partly because we have not been able to have a vote on a matter of particular interest to Welsh Members, which was also not debated in Committee, the entire part of the Bill dealing with Wales—a significant part—has not been discussed at any stage in this House. That is a complete insult.

We must now invite another place to consider how well this House has done its duty. At least the Government have failed so far in their plans completely to emasculate their lordships House as well, so we can still invite their lordships to do their job fully and thoroughly, not least because of the areas that we have failed to debate tonight, which cover an enormous range of policies that are deeply important to schools, parents and teachers.

We have not discussed the Government's proposals on sixth forms or schools' powers to form companies—a radical and revolutionary proposal that the Government welcome and that everyone agrees is one of the most important changes to affect our schools—*[Interruption.]* The Government seem to think that it is funny that we have not debated it. Also, we did not debate the governance and financing of maintained schools, schools forums or admissions policy. If the Government do not think that admissions policy is important to every parent, they are even more out of touch than I thought. We have not discussed the proposals on school organisation, which would allow the setting up of academies and other new schools.

Finally, we have not discussed the curriculum, although a huge number of amendments were tabled that would change it. Nothing could be more at the heart of our school system than what is taught and learned in our schools.

The Government have failed to allow any proper discussion in the House and it is a disgrace. The Secretary of State should realise that in the long run this is not just a parliamentary matter. Clearly, it is serious that the House is held in contempt by the Executive of the day, but it is more than a parliamentary matter. It will affect everyone in the country. We will be piling up problems for our schools and their teachers and pupils because the House will be passing bad and inadequate law.

Mr. Key: Does my hon. Friend also agree that schools are dreading the regulatory impact of much of the legislation. What really matters to head teachers and parents in my constituency is, for example, the impact of the decriminalisation of cannabis on the sixth form life of their schools. We have not even discussed that tonight.

Mr. Green: The Government could have given the House the opportunity to debate that and many other important measures. They have deliberately failed to do so. The tests that the House and the country will set the Bill are: will it encourage a single extra teacher to stay in the profession; will it cut the red tape that is driving teachers out of our class rooms; and will it improve discipline in our schools? The answer to all those questions is a very clear no.

Conservative Members would have welcomed moves to give more freedom to schools to improve standards. In our period in office, we gave schools those freedoms. Those are the freedoms that this Government have taken away. The Bill will increase the centralisation of our education system. Every important decision will have to go across the desk of the Secretary of State. That is not the way to run a modern, flexible education system.

Apart from the fact that the Bill is another turn of the ratchet in making Parliament irrelevant, we now know that not only are the Government holding this House in

[Mr. Green]

contempt tonight, but that they propose to do so through the institutions of the Bill. The fact is that the Bill will take away the power of the House to pass primary legislation on important details. The Government will deal with all important details by secondary legislation. They have amply shown their contempt for the House, and the Bill shows that even further.

The Bill was inadequate on Second Reading, and the Government have conspired to ensure that the House cannot fulfil its function of improving it. For the sake of our schools, we must ask the Members of another place to do their best to reduce the damage. The Bill was inadequate; it is still inadequate, and I invite those hon. Members from all parties who care about our schools and our children's education to reject it.

11.50 pm

Ian Lucas: An important aspect of the Bill is the introduction of citizenship as a foundation subject. That goes to the heart of the Government's agenda to involve children in these institutions and in society generally. However, I am concerned about a matter that specially relates to Wales. Citizenship is not included as a foundation subject in the national curriculum for Wales. That is a matter of concern, and I should like to flag it up briefly now, because the National Assembly for Wales has the power to incorporate citizenship under the Bill and by the powers that have been devolved to the Assembly. It is important that the Assembly buys into the concept of citizenship and educates our children about our institutions and their duties in society. It is unfortunate that that issue has not been considered in as much detail as it ought to have been. It is important that the Assembly closely considers the issue, and I hope that it will introduce the measures that apply in England.

11.52 pm

Mr. Willis: It is interesting that the hon. Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas) has had to raise an issue on Third Reading that, frankly, should have been raised in Committee, but we were not able to discuss it then.

The great sadness for me now is that we were promised in the Green Paper and the White Paper that the Bill would revolutionise secondary education. We were told that this would be the big reform of secondary education, but what we have is a hollow sham of a Bill. At the end of Second Reading, the debates in Committee and, I presume, Third Reading, we still do not know what it actually means.

In reality, all hon. Members should recognise the fact that this is the first Education Bill that establishes a national system of education, controlled and ordered by the Secretary of State. She will have all the powers necessary to do whatever she wants in future. However, a Labour Government will not always be in power—a Liberal Democrat Government soon will be—and the powers that the Secretary of State will be given under the Bill can be used not in a benign way, but in a pernicious way by other Governments in future.

When we finish with the Bill tonight, all hon. Members who served on the Standing Committee and were involved in the debates on Report will know that the Bill's character will be determined by regulation and secondary legislation. That is the heart of the Bill, and most people will know nothing about it until it starts to appear on head teachers' desks in the form of regulations produced by the Department for Education and Skills.

The Bill will totally bypass local education authorities. Perhaps Conservative Members think that a good idea—that is a fair point, which they can make—but the Secretary of State has further neutered the powers of LEAs. They are not allowed to innovate; all they have to do is facilitate. Powers over their budgets have been taken from them and the Secretary of State can determine what they spend on their schools. What is the point of having local authorities involved if the Secretary of State can dictate from the centre what schools will do, how and when they will do it and how much they will have to spend?

The Bill promises greater diversity. There will be greater diversity—that is correct—but it will be diversity without equality. By the end of this Parliament, 50 per cent. of our schools will be specialist schools, but 50 per cent. of them will not be. They will be something else—presumably still "bog standard" in the Government's terms. That disastrous slur has never been removed.

Schools will obtain more autonomy, but only those 10 per cent. that the Secretary of State believes should get it. Schools will have greater powers to innovate, but they will not be the schools that need to innovate the most. Only the ones that the Secretary of State chooses will be able to innovate. There will be academies, but the House does not know what form they will take. Companies will be able to run schools and those companies can be traded on the stock market. We know that, but we do not know what else is involved.

This is a sham of a Bill of which the Secretary of State should be ashamed. Liberal Democrats will certainly vote against its Third Reading.

11.56 pm

Adam Price: If democracy in England has been poorly served by the way in which the Government have dealt with the Bill, democracy in Wales has been utterly failed. Education has always been at the heart of our concerns in Wales, because we have always had a historical commitment to state education as a means of personal and collective advancement.

On the whole of Report, we had just six minutes to deal with the clauses relating to Wales. More clauses relate to Wales than there are clauses relating to England, but we did not have a vote on the issues that affect Wales. The Minister also misrepresented the views of the trade unions in Wales on the devolution of pay and conditions. That was absolutely scandalous. We heard from the Secretary of State for Health the other week that he did not "do" Wales. The virus of Taffism has now apparently spread to the Department for Education and Skills.

We are glad that there are enabling powers in the Bill that will allow us to reject new Labour's policies for education in Wales: no to naming and shaming of schools; no to specialist schools; no to school league tables; no to privatisation. I look forward to the day when we have a Government in the Assembly who will use those enabling powers to give us a policy that is made in Wales for the people of Wales and that will drive up standards for the people of Wales.

11.57 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack: The Secretary of State has taken to herself powers that many tyrants have not had. As a result of the Bill, she will be able to dictate. As the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) accurately pointed out, we shall have to wait for the orders and we shall have little chance to discuss them. In fact, by diktat, the Secretary of State will impose things on schools.

Anyone who is truly concerned about the quality of education in this country and who has a real concern for parliamentary democracy should leave the House tonight thoroughly ashamed at the way in which the Bill has been steamrollered through by an intolerant, arrogant and appalling Government who do not really care for the quality of education and who do not have a single care for the quality of legislation.

These proceedings have been an affront to the democratic dignity of everyone of our constituents in whichever constituency we represent on whatever side of the House. No Labour Member can go back with pride to his constituents and say, "We have discussed education; we have improved the Bill; and we have put through the House a Bill that has received proper scrutiny, examination and a thorough discussion so that it will raise standards for you. We can explain why." Labour Members have voted like zombies; they have a supported a Bill that has not been properly examined; they should be ashamed of themselves.

11.59 pm

Mr. Gummer: What is going to be taught in the citizenship classes about the democratic system of the House? How will the Secretary of State explain that we did not discuss the key issues of the Bill? How will citizenship be taught by a Government who hate the House of Commons and give us no chance to discuss the issues? A generation has been betrayed by the Secretary of State and the Government. She is establishing a series of classes in every one of which children will learn of the shame of tonight, of the shame of the Secretary of State and of the shame of the Government.

11.59 pm

Chris Grayling: Head teachers want a measure that will reduce bureaucracy, ease teachers' work loads and sort out the problems of discipline in the classroom. The Bill will do none of those—

It being Twelve o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [this day].*

The House divided: Ayes 287, Noes 179.

Division No. 162] **[12 midnight**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
  (Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
  (Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles
  (Norwich S)
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cousins, Jim
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
  (B'ham Hodge H)
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McIsaac, Shona

McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Speller, Rt Hon John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dan Norris and
Mrs. Anne McGuire.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Doughty, Sue
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
François, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David

Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Charles Hendry and
Dr. Julian Lewis.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

That the draft Industrial Training Levy (Construction Board) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 17th January, be approved.

That the draft Industrial Training Levy (Engineering Construction Board) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 17th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Hill.]*

Question agreed to.

Southend General Hospital

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Hill.]*

12.12 am

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): My apologies to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears), for raising the subject at this late hour, but I think that you know that it is not my fault.

This debate is about the future of the South Essex cancer network and the Southend cancer care centre, and the scope of the treatment and surgery that they provide. I hope to obtain assurances from the Minister that the 1 million patient rule will not be applied indiscriminately, thereby reducing the scope of treatment at the hospital and undermining the centre's success.

The cancer centre deals with patients from a population of about 680,000, which is represented by four MPs. On the basis of comments made at a meeting with the Southend Hospital NHS Trust and consultants on Monday, which was arranged by hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess), we are united in our views. I hope that, following my short speech, it will be possible for my hon. Friend and my hon. Friends the Members for Castle Point (Bob Spink) and for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) to speak; the Minister has kindly agreed, subject to your approval, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so long as she has good time to reply.

The Minister is subjected to many complaints about the health service, as were the previous Government. I hope that she will be reassured to learn that the service provided by the cancer centre is of a very high standard, is greatly appreciated by the community, and is very successful according to published figures. She will know that while other centres in the region do not, according to the Southend consultants, publish figures, Southend tables, compared with those of regions which do publish figures, show that our centre has a high achievement record, both for routine treatments and for involvement in research. What is the problem? Of course, there is no threat to the centre itself, as the Minister confirmed in a written answer, and there is no immediate threat to the treatment of the more common cancers like lung, breast and colorectal, which make up about 50 per cent. of cases. However, other areas of treatment, such as upper gastro-intestinal, head and neck, haematology, urology, and possibly gynaecology, could be subject to transfer to hospitals as far away as Ipswich, Colchester and London.

What is the basis of the 1 million rule, particularly when it is not applied to sparsely populated areas, where 500,000 is accepted? The argument is that the larger centres will be more successful, on the basis of what is called best evidence. If the evidence shows that Southend is already successful by comparison with other centres, would it not be reasonable to leave the service as it is?

The second argument is that for some cancers such as gastric and oesophageal, the operations should be carried out by surgeons with a sufficiently high number of such procedures for a meaningful audit of outcomes, and the guidance quotes a figure of at least 10 per year. In the case of the South Essex cancer network, however, there are approximately 80 such resections every year, which is well above many of the networks with a population of 1 million.

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

I hope that the Minister will also consider the impact on the needs of other patients if specialist surgeons are removed to other centres. I could quote many examples, but if we take the case of benign upper gastro-intestinal conditions, and if we remove the two accredited upper GI surgeons from South Essex, a specialty in which there is an acute shortage, how can we be expected to transfer cases to other networks that do not have the capacity to take on extra work?

We have been told that Professor Richards, the national cancer director, has been given the task of reviewing the South Essex situation. I am in no doubt that when he sees the stature and success of the centre, he will wish to help us. The crucial question is whether he has an instruction from the Department to implement the 1 million rule as far as possible.

My hope and that of my colleagues, and the hope of all who work in the hospital, is that the Minister will state clearly and unambiguously this evening that as the centre has achieved success and clinical excellence, the region and the national cancer director will be permitted to recommend that it should be allowed to continue, and thereby to maintain the superb service and safeguard patients from long journeys to other centres.

I know that the Minister continually hears constituency arguments making the case that the situation in one constituency is splendid, but I hope that she will accept that in this case there is a genuine, strong and compelling argument. If something is working well, it is to the benefit of society and all the people in the community if we let well alone.

12.17 am

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): Communities are invariably fiercely loyal to their hospitals. In that regard, Southend is no exception. For that reason, I was horrified when Southend hospital was given a one-star rating. Under no criterion was that justified. It is well known that local residents have the highest regard for the hard-working staff at Southend hospital and the wonderful service that they offer. In particular, the cancer service is first class. If the Minister cares to consider the outcomes at Southend compared with others, they are well above the average.

Having looked at the cancer plan, I understand why the Government were minded to draw up the plan. I applaud it. Following the meeting which my three colleagues and I had at Southend hospital on Monday, we have a number of genuine concerns, which we ask the Minister to consider. As she knows, although the hospital is situated in the constituency that I represent, it also serves the constituents of my three colleagues. Unfortunately, since anxiety was raised among the general public—it had nothing to do with local Members of Parliament—there has been an outpouring of concern.

I was delighted that the Secretary of State for Health decided to write a personal letter to the editor of the *Evening Echo*. That was much appreciated. However, the letter raised a number of concerns. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor) said, under the auspices of the new cancer taskforce led by Professor Mike Richards, the reference to areas of 1 million inhabitants is particularly worrying. Certainly, as far as local residents are concerned, we have a first-class service. The argument that the cancers are minor and that their treatment should take place in other parts of the country would be very distressing to people in an area that is populated by a higher proportion of elderly people than other parts of the country. I ask the Minister to consider that important factor.

As we have a first-class service and that is what the Government want, why change it? Monday's meeting was very productive and educated us on a number of issues. It was not biased at all. It demonstrated that, with a new consultant having been appointed at Southend hospital, some concern has already been expressed about morale generally, because it is argued that if the rarer cancers were taken away from the hospital, there would unfortunately be a knock-on effect.

I say very gently to the Minister that this is a warning shot across the bows. Local people will not just stand idly by and let their service be reduced in any way below the excellent standard that we currently have. I ask her to consider very carefully the pleas that my hon. Friends and I are making.

12.21 am

Bob Spink (Castle Point): I am very grateful to be given the opportunity to contribute to this debate.

Castle Point people value very highly the cancer services at Southend hospital. Today, I questioned Professor Richards, the cancer tsar, in the Select Committee on Science and Technology, in an evidence session on cancer care and research. He was very well briefed and knew about the situation in Southend. It will be interesting to read the transcript of that exchange. I made a couple of notes. He said:

> "I am absolutely confirming that Southend will be retained as a cancer centre."

I suppose that that is the case to some degree, and certainly for the more common cancers. We are grateful for that undertaking, which was extracted by my hon. Friends the Members for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor) and for Southend, West (Mr. Amess). However, Professor Richards went on to explain that some patients with less common cancers who need surgery would get better outcomes if they were treated in specialist centres. He quoted much evidence from around the world to illustrate that point. We all know that if we had a child with one of these rare cancers, we would not want them to go to just any hospital, even if it was local. We would want them to go to the very best hospital where they would get the best outcome. We are approaching this matter in a very grown-up manner.

The cancer tsar also said that Southend hospital cancer centre was "excellent". Residents and staff at the hospital are grateful for that acknowledgement, as the hospital really is excellent. He said that he would liaise with the eastern regional office to ensure that we get the best possible solution for local people. That is all we can ask from the Minister. I am delighted to see that she is giving her time tonight to listen to us.

Finally, the *Evening Echo*, and the two Southend MPs in particular, as well as my hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois), have done a very great community service in drawing attention to the problem and in getting the undertakings that we have so far been given. Castle Point people are indeed indebted to them.

12.24 am

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor) on securing this debate, which is of great importance to residents throughout south-east Essex. I thank him and other speakers for allowing me to make a quick contribution.

As I have only a short time, I shall concentrate what might be called the thin-end-of-the-wedge issue. If the Government decide to transfer some specialist cancer operations from Southend, perhaps to Ipswich, because Southend is said to lack a catchment area of 1 million patients, what will prevent them, after establishing that precedent, from deciding that other sorts of operations should be done elsewhere?

If several services are moved, it could be argued that the remainder of the services may as well be moved because Southend does not have a catchment area of 1 million. That anxiety has been raised with me by my constituents and people in surrounding areas. I should be grateful if the Minister gave us assurances on that.

My constituents in Rayleigh want the service to be preserved mainly as it is. So do I. Southend hospital's record on cancer treatment is excellent. The service is not broken, so I implore the Minister not to fix it.

12.25 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I congratulate the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor) on securing an important debate. Approximately eight times the usual number of hon. Members for Adjournment debates are in the Chamber, and I stress that quality as well as quantity is present. I know that the hon. Gentleman recently tabled a parliamentary question on the matter and that he has pursued it assiduously. Much local concern has been expressed in the local media. My hon. Friends the Members for Basildon (Angela Smith) and for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) have raised the matter with me and sought assurances about the future of the service.

Before I deal with the specific issues in Southend, I should like to place them in the context of the cancer plan, which hon. Members have mentioned, and the continuing work to improve services throughout the country. I shall then explain the effects on Southend. It is wrong to view the matter in isolation; the thrust of the cancer plan is about setting up networks in which people work collaboratively rather than in isolation.

The hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) made a responsible contribution. He acknowledged the tensions between excellence and access and talked about getting the balance right between services that are close to home and those that are in specialist centres. We all want our constituents to have access to the best services for treating especially complex illnesses.

The contribution of the hon. Member for Castle Point was in marked contrast to that of the hon. Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois), who failed to grasp the issue. We are not considering removing services or salami-slicing, but improvements. In the past, our record on cancer has not been wonderful, but it is now improving dramatically, although we have some way to go before we achieve the same outcomes as other European countries. There is no question of reducing the services that are available to local people.

It is now widely accepted that the national health service has been underfunded for decades. That means that it has had too few staff and inadequate facilities, which have not been organised into specialist cancer treatment services of the kind that exist in the rest of Europe. Our outcomes have therefore been poorer than those of many other countries.

People have not had the necessary support through preventive care; patients have had to wait too long for diagnosis and treatment. If we are honest, they have not always received the treatment, care and support that they have a right to expect.

The cancer plan was published only a year ago; we should reflect on the outstanding progress that has been made in that time. The plan sets out a managed way forward. We need more nurses, doctors and, crucially, more radiographers. We also need more equipment. Most of the vital equipment was old and needed replacement. We also needed to ensure that new drugs were available to everybody who could benefit from them.

The cancer plan is backed by the biggest ever increase in funding for cancer services. This year, an extra £280 million is available to improve cancer services; next year, a further £127 million will be available. By 2003–04, the NHS will get £570 million a year more for cancer services than it received last year when we published the cancer plan. I do not think that anybody—Opposition Members or anyone else—could doubt that this represents a massive prioritisation for tackling cancer.

But the cancer plan is not just about money. It is also about putting in place the systems, changes, clinicians and specialist teams to work together to ensure that the new investment results in improved outcomes for patients, which is what we are all interested in.

Treatment also needs to be available much faster. All too often, waiting times have been far too long. The cancer plan sets new targets to cut waiting times, and just over 91 per cent. of people with suspected cancer were seen by a specialist within two weeks of being urgently referred by their GP between July and September 2001. That is a tremendous increase, but, again, it is not quite enough. We want to do much more.

We need more staff and more training. By the end of 2001–02, we expect to increase the number of cancer consultants by 428 compared with 1999. That means that we are on target to reach the cancer plan aim of nearly 1,000 extra cancer consultants by 2006, which represents a tremendous investment but also perhaps illustrates what a low base we were working from before the cancer plan was put into place.

We also need better palliative care, and the new opportunities fund is helping us to ensure that we have more consistent funding for adult hospices, for which funding is variable up and down the country. We also need more modern equipment, and we now have a programme to upgrade equipment. In total, approximately 25 per cent. of MRI scanners, 35 per cent. of CT scanners and 20 per cent. of linear accelerators now in use in the NHS are new since January 2000. There is an awful lot of new equipment now in place in the health service.

Hon. Members have described how these policies are becoming evident in Southend, and it is good to know that the people of Southend and the surrounding area are so appreciative of the improvements. It is particularly

[Ms Hazel Blears]

good to hear hon. Members' praise for the staff involved in the service, and that they feel that the service is providing excellent care for their constituents.

Hon. Members asked about guidance. I will respond first to the question about the rationale behind setting a network population of 1 million people, and its application with particular reference to Southend and upper gastro-intestinal cancers, which was the specific issue raised. One of the essential features of improving cancer outcomes in this country has been the move to create specialist diagnostic and treatment centres, in which teams of oncologists, surgeons, physicians, specialist nurses, radiologists, pathologists and many others can collectively diagnose and treat the various types of tumour. This is not simply about surgeons but about the whole diagnostic and treatment team coming together to share ideas and good practice.

The teams are being developed within 34 cancer networks throughout the country. They typically serve populations of between 1 million and 2 million people; South Essex is one of the smallest networks, with just 680,000 people. Each cancer network has a cancer centre at its core. There is good evidence to show that specialist teams such as those that I have described produce better results. We have lagged behind Europe on outcomes.

The expert advisory group recommended that a cancer centre should normally serve a population of more than 1 million. When there is a need to consider geographical constraints to ensure a balanced service, however, a population base of two thirds of a million should be considered an absolute minimum. Following the publication of the expert advisory group report, further guidance on individual tumour types has been, and is still being, developed.

Networks have now almost completed the task of implementing the guidance issued on the common cancers. Over the past few years, they have created specialist teams for breast, lung and colorectal cancers. Sadly, these cancers are quite common, but that means that the numbers of patients being seen are substantial enough to warrant the creation of such centres in most district general hospitals.

We are now moving on to develop guidance based on the care of patients with the less common cancers—for example, gynaecological, upper gastro-intestinal, urological, head and neck, and haematological cancers. Because patient numbers are, thankfully, smaller, it will not be possible to provide large multi-disciplinary teams and equipment in each local hospital. Most people would accept that that is common sense.

In relation to the gastro-oesophageal cancers to which hon. Members have referred, the picture in this country is poor. We do not compare well with Europe and average five-year survival for gastric cancer is 12 per cent. against 20 per cent. for the average European patient. That represents a tragic and avoidable loss of life for many patients.

Most studies show that hospitals dealing with large numbers of patients have the best outcomes. Although surgeons are key to that, they are only part of the multi-disciplinary team. Guidance issued in early 2001 to centres that care for patients with upper gastro-intestinal cancers recommended that they serve a minimum population of 1 million and, for pancreatic surgery, 2 million to 4 million. A population of 1 million normally generates about 280 oesophageal and gastric cancers, and radical surgery is appropriate for about 100 patients.

That is the minimum appropriate to improving outcomes and the policy was recently endorsed by the council of the Association of Upper Gastrointestinal Surgeons, so the argument for creating specialist centres is compelling. Retaining small units without proper specialist teams is not an option if we want to improve outcomes for patients.

I want to deal with how all those national initiatives have been applied in Southend, whose hospital is part of the South Essex cancer network, which is one of five such networks in the Eastern region, but one of the smallest in the country. Clinicians across Southend, Basildon and Thurrock have a long tradition of working closely together to deliver good quality cancer care to patients, and the wider community values the holistic care that it receives from the services.

The cancer network recently celebrated its sixth birthday. Its achievements have also been celebrated and delivery of good care for common cancers is well advanced. The care is of extremely good quality and I thank all the clinicians involved for delivering those very high standards.

From time to time, officials review the composition of cancer networks to ensure that they are developing appropriately in accordance with the plan. South Essex was reviewed in 1999 and 2001, and concern was registered about it being very small. There is anxiety that, as it moves on to consider the less common cancers, it might have difficulty supporting an increasing number of specialist teams. It might also have difficulty attracting the high calibre of clinical specialist required. On its own, it might find it more difficult to fund staff and specialist equipment from its per capita income, so high-quality clinical collaboration with other networks must be developed.

It has been recognised that we perhaps have to think more creatively and apply innovative approaches to achieving specialist teams among a small population base. That is exactly the work that Professor Mike Richards is undertaking with colleagues and clinicians in the area. It is not beyond our wit to find a solution that retains the very best of the high quality care that Southend provides for people of the neighbourhood as well as access to specialist teams. We can have the best of both worlds: we can ensure that care is provided close to home where appropriate and that work with neighbouring clinicians is undertaken to establish a wider network or a series of joint networks that co-operate to achieve the outcomes that people rightly want when they deal with more complex cancers.

South Essex has two accredited surgeons towards the overall team and they are treating cases that used to be treated in London or not at all. We do not yet have the figures on outcomes, because it takes at least five years to measure the five-year survival rate. We shall monitor the figures carefully, however, and we look forward to seeing the outcomes produced by the surgeons involved.

There is a regional group in place and it is working on the issues involved with setting up the collaborative networks, such as using ultra-sound in diagnosis to achieve best outcomes. That requires not just state-of-the-art equipment, but a specialist radiologist who would probably have been trained on that equipment in the United States. There is a great deal of development work to be done in the South Essex network. Again, that may be better served by collaboration with other networks in the Eastern region so as to achieve best advantage.

The approach of trying to work with neighbouring networks has been endorsed by Professor Richards, by the surgeons' accrediting body, and by the body responsible for setting national cancer standards. I have every confidence that the managers and clinicians involved will find a way to solve the admittedly difficult problem of developing a gastro-oesophageal centre while conforming with best advice, and will be able to make recommendations.

Let me confirm beyond all doubt that rumours circulating in the press that the Southend cancer centre was due to close are not true. Such a closure has never been on the agenda. The matter was raised with me by Councillor Jennifer Howlett from Castle Point, who was very concerned. I am delighted to reassure her and, indeed, the local community that the centre will not close. Moreover, the fact that we are considering ways of providing good services to deal with the more specialised cancers does not mean for a moment that we will reduce the services available to local people. Such scaremongering is unhelpful: it makes vulnerable people feel insecure when they or their relations are ill and need quality treatment.

We want cancer services to be improved. That will require new investment, but it will also require change to ensure that we drive up our standards. Members have said, "If the system ain't broke, don't fix it." But we do not want change for its own sake; we want change because we know that people are entitled to better outcomes. For many years, our outcomes have not been comparable with those in other countries. It is time that we secured the investment and reform to ensure that our constituents have the best possible services, and I hope that those services will be available in Southend for many years.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eighteen minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 7 February 2002

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF LONDON (WARD ELECTIONS) BILL (*By Order*)

Order read for further consideration, as amended by the Chairman of Way and Means.

To be further considered on Thursday 14 February.

MERSEY TUNNELS BILL (*By Order*)

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Tuesday 12 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Young People (Consultation)

1. **David Wright** (Telford): What steps the Government have taken to consult young people about the policies of her Department. [31400]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Ivan Lewis): We are building on existing good practice to integrate young people's involvement in all our activities and, by doing so, implementing the Government's core principles on participation published last November in "Learning to Listen". The development of the Connexions service is an excellent example of how a new service can engage with young people.

David Wright: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Last week I visited Madeley Court school in my constituency which has a school council and two student representatives on the governing body. Does he agree that that is a good mechanism for consultation on education policy nationally and on the policies of the governing body of that school?

Mr. Lewis: I agree with my hon. Friend. That is an innovative approach to the involvement of young people and I congratulate the head teachers and governors on involving young people in that way. We are becoming increasingly conscious—certainly I am as the first Minister for Young People and Learning—of the importance of listening to young people and talking to them about policies that have an impact on their everyday lives. It is important that they are involved in the design, development and evaluation of services.

At a national level, we are keen to consult young people in a way that they have not been consulted before. For example, when we published our White Paper, we held a consultation day with children and young people. When we produce our proposals on 14 to 19 reforms in the near future, the document will be specifically aimed at young people and we will hold consultation events with them. As we develop new services and evaluate existing ones, it is important that we involve young people.

Mr. Charles Hendry (Wealden): What discussions has the Minister had with members of the Youth Parliament about his Department's policies? Will he confirm that all members of the Youth Parliament have been invited to the Department to meet Ministers and officials? What are his plans to ensure continuing dialogue with members of the Youth Parliament and how will he keep in touch with them to give them feedback on the discussions?

Mr. Lewis: We have a high regard for the contribution that the UK Youth Parliament makes in linking politics, Government and young people together. The hon. Gentleman might be aware that the children and young people's unit has been in dialogue with representatives of the UK Youth Parliament. Deliberations are under way on the level of future Government support for the activities of the Youth Parliament.

As for discussions with the Department for Education and Skills, many young people who have been involved in the UK Youth Parliament have told me about the benefits of that, both locally and when it meets at a national level. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that every Member of the House has a responsibility to re-engage young people with politics and the political process. One of the biggest dangers to democracy is that far too many young people do not think that deliberations in this House and politics in general are relevant to their everyday lives. The UK Youth Parliament plays an important part in dealing with that.

Mr. Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): It is right to engage young people in consultation because it is mutually beneficial for the school and the young people, and helps the school to run smoothly. However, does my hon. Friend agree that practice varies enormously? Although some young people enjoy that benefit and like being at school, some schools are not so committed to the practice. Will he comment on strengthening guidelines to encourage schools to engage young people so that they can benefit in the way that he described?

Mr. Lewis: I agree that practice is patchy. Some schools are good at involving young people and are committed to the concept, but others are not. We do not think it appropriate to introduce statute on that policy at the moment, but we should spread good practice guidance and make it clear that in principle the Government support the idea of school councils and other ways to engage young people at school level. We have a long way to go, and we need to build on existing good practice and commitment.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): I agree with a lot of what the Minister said: consultation with young people is important. He will know from consulting school councils and others that their greatest current concern is the disastrous failure of the exam system in the Edexcel fiasco. The Secretary of State has given Edexcel one month to prove that this summer's exams will not fall into chaos. Do the Government have a contingency plan if Edexcel does not satisfy the Department, and if so, what is it?

Mr. Lewis: The Government's reaction to the difficulties at Edexcel was immediate, rapid and decisive. We insisted that the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority carry out an audit of the difficulties that emerged at the examinations board last summer—that report has recently been published—and the quality assurance person at the QCA has been put into Edexcel to improve practice. We believe that lessons have been learned from the difficulties of recent months, which undoubtedly affected too many young people, and that systems are now in place to ensure that the improvements that we expect at Edexcel are delivered in time for the summer exams.

Mr. Green: That is an extraordinary reply. We are in the middle of the one-month period of investigation, but the Minister is apparently entirely confident. Either the one-month exercise is a sham, or the Government have no plan B and the exams will go ahead under Edexcel even if Edexcel fails the one-month test. Which is it?

Mr. Lewis: It is irresponsible of the hon. Gentleman to undermine confidence in this country's examinations system. Although the situation at Edexcel is serious in terms of the small number of young people affected by it, the vast majority of young people have every reason to have confidence in the examinations system because they have not been affected by the problems at Edexcel in the past. We have every confidence that the robust quality assurance systems that we have put in place and the interventions of the QCA and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will ensure that this summer the examinations system will run as we expect it to.

Private Finance Initiative

2. **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): If she will make a statement on the PFI in schools. [31401]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (John Healey): There are 38 signed PFI projects involving almost 500 schools with a value of more than £1 billion. A further £1 billion has been allocated to projects in various stages of development. The Government have increased the amount of PFI credits for schools from £35 million in 1997-98 to a planned £850 million in 2003-04.

Mr. Chapman: Does my hon. Friend agree that in public services, it is critical that the quality of service that people need is put in place, rather than the means of its financing or provision? In three schools in my constituency, PFI work is about to commence that will provide them with new classrooms—in one case to replace 14 mobile classrooms—and new facilities that would otherwise not have been provided, or not have been provided on the same scale or in the same time frame.

John Healey: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. I am glad to hear about the three schools in his constituency, which are among nine in the authority area that are to benefit from the scheme. The programme has already started and is running on time for completion in December this year. He is right that teachers and pupils will have good-quality buildings maintained to good-quality standards. He mentioned the added value that that can bring. Wirral local education authority officials told my officials that even at the current high levels of Government capital investment through public routes, it would have taken 15 years to reach by conventional means the same state that the PFI contract will deliver for the nine schools in the area.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I welcome the fact that after many years of frozen capital spending, my local authority, which is Liberal-Democrat controlled, is working with the Department to build new primary schools in my constituency. However, does the Minister acknowledge that PFI funding is more expensive than conventional public borrowing? Will he explain whether the extra cost will be borne by the improved and expanded schools, or will it be spread across the whole LEA and so be borne by other schools as well?

John Healey: If the hon. Gentleman's authority has put in a bid for a PFI project, it is one of the more than 100 out of 150 LEAs to have done so. That demonstrates the interest in that form of additional financing of capital investment. As for cost, he will know that PFI projects can proceed only if they can demonstrate value for money over conventional means of funding. My hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman) spoke of a project in his LEA area that will deliver a 9 per cent. lower cost for the programme. Furthermore, payments begin only when services start. Teachers, pupils and schools get new buildings with guaranteed higher maintenance standards.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Many of our constituents deserve new-build in the education system, some of which is 20 years overdue in my constituency. I welcome the PFI work and seek an assurance from my hon. Friend that despite carping from certain quarters, he will not back off from the programme, which provides a sensible way of putting capital into schools in our most deprived communities.

John Healey: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. PFI is a means to raise additional resources to improve school buildings and to deliver better and more cost-effective public services. Of course, it can also free head teachers and teachers from the business of maintaining and managing buildings, allowing them to concentrate more on standards, education and their students. Despite the carping that my hon. Friend mentioned, it is increasingly popular with schools and local education authorities. Last year's bidding round was oversubscribed by 3:1, the current one by 4:1.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): The Minister will know that I strongly support the genuine transfer of risk to private bodies, but can he tell us the difference between shifting the Government's debt into public-private partnerships and Enron's accounting methods to shift its debt and hide it in offshore partnerships?

John Healey: The right hon. Gentleman does the PFI programme in schools a serious disservice in trying to make such links. There is no connection or comparison whatever with the methods that that company employed. He is right about shifting the balance of risk, which is key to PFI contracts and the ability to deliver value for money and cost reductions. Shifted risks include risks that the private sector bears in upfront costs until buildings are completed, and risks associated with serious systems and buildings failure during the contract, which is why many local authorities and schools regard the arrangement as a valuable way of bringing new capital finance into the school system.

School/Further Education Links

3. **Joan Ryan** (Enfield, North): What plans she has to encourage further links between schools and further education colleges. [31402]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Ivan Lewis): The Learning and Skills Council is working closely with local education authorities, schools and colleges to secure effective links. Area-based inspections promote collaboration to support a wide range of local provision. We are providing £38 million to promote increased flexibility in the curriculum for 14 to 16-year-olds.

Joan Ryan: I thank my hon. Friend for his answer. Both further education colleges in my constituency, Capel Manor college and Enfield college, are conscious of the importance of such links. As he mentioned, funding will be a key issue. The ability to deliver pre-vocational and vocational education is connected to the need to harmonise funding between the FE sector and sixth-form colleges. The FE sector has welcomed the Government's commitment to pursue such harmonisation. Can my hon. Friend say more about the time scale?

Mr. Lewis: My hon. Friend can inform the two colleges in her constituency that they will find out on 15 February whether their bids have been successful. I confirm that the Government are committed to the principle of convergence and believe that it has to happen. I give her a cast-iron guarantee that the issue of convergence will be considered in the spending review.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): Does the Minister agree that transport is a key issue in getting good contact between FE and schools, especially in rural areas? Does he agree that the Education Act 1996, which allows local authorities to opt out of providing free transport for over-16s, either to schools or FE colleges, must be changed? Does he condemn Labour-controlled Northumberland LEA, which has just introduced a charging policy for all students going to schools or colleges after the age of 16? Does that not fly in the face of his comments about better co-operation between schools and colleges?

Mr. Lewis: I agree that transport is important, particularly in rural areas, as I have discovered from visiting some of those communities. That is the No. 1 issue, especially for young people, in terms of potential isolation and continuing study. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Government have introduced education maintenance allowances, which at present are available in only 30 per cent. of the country. Early evidence on EMAs is that participation brings significant benefits. Many young people are using that additional money to pay for transport costs. The Connexions card that we are introducing in September will provide reductions for young people in the cost of transport.

As for the responsibility of local authorities and passenger transport authorities, the hon. Gentleman served on the Committee that considered the Education Bill. That clarified and made more transparent the way in which local education authorities and passenger transport bodies must work together to ensure that it is clear who is responsible, and that the resources allocated are used specifically to support young people staying in learning post-16.

Derek Twigg (Halton): After my hon. Friend has visited my constituency tomorrow, he may be so impressed that he will want to return to see the excellent collaboration between Halton college of further education and Widnes and Runcorn sixth form college, which has resulted in a new shared Runcorn campus being built. Although collaboration between schools is important, does he agree that to provide the best possible service to people in post-16 education, collaboration between sixth form colleges and further education colleges is just as essential?

Mr. Lewis: I agree, and I look forward to meeting my hon. Friend in his constituency tomorrow. Co-operation is particularly important in the context of a new 14 to 19 phase of education. The challenge is to achieve seamless collaboration between schools, sixth form colleges, FE colleges, training providers and employers. We need an approach that integrates the various institutions that impact on young people's lives, so that we provide them with the best opportunities and incentives to stay in learning and training.

Individual Learning Accounts

4. **Mr. Mark Simmonds** (Boston and Skegness): What measures she will take to ensure that the lack of quality assurance that led to fraudulent use of ILAs is not reproduced in successor schemes. [31403]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (John Healey): Quality assurance methods will be built into the successor scheme to individual learning accounts. A range of options will be explored as we develop the new programme.

Mr. Simmonds: Does the Minister agree that the lack of quality assurance and monitoring structures in the ILA scheme led directly to a scandalous and probably fraudulent abuse of taxpayers' money? There has also been a shocking and detrimental impact on service providers and recipients, and a terrible impact on people who benefited from ILAs.

John Healey: The hon. Gentleman is right to the extent that the picture is complex. It is increasingly clear that the lack of quality control measures contributed to the problems experienced by the ILA scheme. There is widespread agreement that pre-registration checks of learning providers need to be strengthened. We will draw the lessons of the ILA scheme. That will help us to set appropriate quality control measures for a future programme. However, I caution him about the need to balance greater protection for the public purse with simplicity for the learner and limited bureaucracy for the provider.

Jeff Ennis (Barnsley, East and Mexborough): When does my hon. Friend anticipate announcing the successor to ILAs, and what role does he envisage for local learning and skills councils in the successor scheme?

John Healey: My hon. Friend, who serves on the Select Committee on Education and Skills, will acknowledge that the ILA scheme was innovative and important in many respects, but there are important lessons for us to learn. We are undertaking a consultation with all learning providers under the scheme, with partners who have an interest in the future of the programme, and with learners who opened ILA accounts. I know that he will find this frustrating, but it is too soon to say with certainty when we will be able to relaunch the scheme. Above all, there is a need to get to the bottom of what went wrong before we can make sensible decisions about the shape of the programme for the future.

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): Is it not clear that the Government were warned about the likelihood of fraud in the system as early as summer 2000? What does the Minister have to say to my constituent Stephen Good, a legitimate ILA provider who has had to place his property on the market because of the Government's incompetence and complacency? When will he be told when his situation will be rectified?

John Healey: In the preparation of the ILA scheme and its introduction in autumn 2000, we had discussions with a wide range of partners. We had to strike a balance in the design between control and quality assurance methods and a non-bureaucratic system that was easy for the learner and the provider. With hindsight, as I acknowledged in response to the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds), it is clear that the quality assurance arrangements were simply not good enough. That part of the system will be stronger for the future scheme. A small number of unscrupulous learning providers undermined and abused the scheme. I take the constituent of the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman) to be a legitimate provider who, like many others, made much of the scheme to benefit a range of learners across the board.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): Does my hon. Friend agree that the glee shown by Opposition Members—*[Interruption.]* There is perhaps synthetic anger too, but is not their attitude symptomatic of the reasons why the public service cannot be innovative? We did the same when we were in opposition, so I am not making a cheap party political point. The individual learning account was a superb and innovative scheme that put purchasing power—Opposition Members should be pleased about this—in the hands of the individual learner, thereby giving them the power to shape the content of their learning. I share my hon. Friend's dismay about the administrative problems and urge him—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman's question is far too long.

John Healey: I do not want to underestimate the scale or nature of the problems, including those that we are unearthing in our investigations. My right hon. Friend is right that the scheme was important and innovative and put power in the hands of learners for the first time. That is part of the reason why the scheme in its short life encouraged new learners and people who were returning to learning for the first time. It is also part of the reason why one in six of those who used ILAs had no previous qualifications and why one in four had not done any learning in the previous year. He may not be aware that the Learning and Skills Council agrees with his analysis and in yesterday's Select Committee hearing described the ILA as the single most successful attempt to attract new learners.

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): Is it not the case that the simplicity and innovation of the scheme went so far as to ensure that the only criteria that the learning provider had to offer the contractor to gain access to Government money were a name, address and telephone number, and details of the bank account where the cash was to be sent? No other validation whatever was required. Is not the story very simple? The Government set up the ILA scheme and were warned about possible abuses, but ignored those warnings. They encouraged new providers into the market, but when the abuses became so obvious that they could not be ignored, they announced a date for the closure of the scheme. Then they brought forward even that date, prematurely ending the scheme and closing it overnight, leaving millions of pounds owed to providers and breaking faith with thousands of students who expected to go on courses. They also caused job losses, company failures and a disastrous loss of confidence in decent adult education initiatives. Can he hazard a guess as to whom the public hold responsible for this scandal, and will he meet some of the learning providers face to face, so that he can explain to them precisely what he intends to do about it?

John Healey: I have met learning providers face to face. Officials in the Department are in constant contact with them and, as I explained to the hon. Member for

Boston and Skegness, we are undertaking extensive consultation to draw on their experience to help us to design the future scheme. The hon. Gentleman is right about the registration of learning providers: it was registration, and it was clear from the outset that it was not a quality assurance stamp of approval from the Government on either the provision or the provider. As I have explained, that is something that we will have to change in a successor scheme.

On the decision that we very regrettably had to make to bring forward the closure of the scheme from 7 December to 23 November, it must be becoming increasingly clear to the hon. Gentleman that not to have taken that decision with immediate effect would have risked substantial loss of public funds. That was the reason that we took the decision, and that is why it was the right decision to take at that time.

GCSEs

5. **Dr. Stephen Ladyman** (South Thanet): What recent assessment she has made of the performance at GCSE of *(a)* pupils at grammar schools and *(b)* their equivalent intellectual cohort in comprehensive schools. [31404]

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Timms): The Department has not made a recent assessment. An assessment carried out two years ago showed a modest advantage to comprehensive schools.

Dr. Ladyman: I have to confess that I am baffled. As my hon. Friend said, the assessment done by the Department a couple of years ago showed an advantage to comprehensive schools. A wide range of academic research now shows a consistent pattern of comprehensive education out-performing selective education. When a clear, consistent pattern illustrates that selective education is failing our children, why will the Government not face up to their responsibility to deal with those local education authorities that are entirely selective? Will the Minister again consider my suggestion, which is now supported by people campaigning for as well as against grammar schools, that an independent inquiry be held into the corrosive effects of selective education?

Mr. Timms: The academic debate on this subject still rages. The Government's position is that we do not favour selection by ability at the age of 11; there will be no new grammar schools under this Government. I understand my hon. Friend's concern about these arrangements, particularly in Kent. In the White Paper, we set the target that by 2004 at least 20 per cent. of pupils in every school should achieve five good GCSEs, rising to 25 per cent. by 2006. A total of 372 schools did not achieve the 25 per cent. target last summer; 28 of those were in Kent. Clearly, extensive work will need to be done with those schools in Kent to achieve the targets, with support from my Department. That is where I urge my hon. Friend and the many others who are concerned about these issues to focus their attention.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Are five good GCSE grades today the equivalent to five GCE O-levels of grade C and above in the past? To what extent has improvement in overall examination results been assessed as due to grade inflation over the years?

Mr. Timms: That is certainly not the explanation. We have careful, thorough quality control procedures in place to ensure that standards are maintained. There is indeed broad comparability between the levels to which the hon. Gentleman referred. Teachers, schools and pupils have worked very hard, and that is the reason that we have hit the target of at least 50 per cent. of our young people getting five good GCSEs a year ahead of our deadline. That is down to the hard work and success of schools.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): I welcome my hon. Friend the Minister's reaffirmation of the Government's opposition to selection by ability at the age of 11. But, in view of the endemic divisiveness, administrative chaos and waste of potential that are inherent in all the selective systems—let us remember that they exist in almost a quarter of our local authorities—is there not now an overwhelming argument for a national inquiry into the impact of selection on those children who are not selected?

Mr. Timms: Our priorities should be clearly focused on raising standards across the entire secondary system. It is clear from the exchange that we have just had that we are succeeding in that. In the case of existing grammar schools, we believe that parents should be able to determine locally whether the arrangements should continue.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): The Minister seems somewhat confused. On one side, he says that he wants standards raised, whereas, on the other, he ignores the way in which standards can be raised. It was a pleasure to see the Secretary of State, Ministers and most Labour Members, including the hon. Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman), joining us in the Lobby last night and voting to defend grammar schools. Perhaps I can help the Minister with his research. Has he not seen the National Foundation for Educational Research survey on the impact of selection on pupil performance? It says that

> "within the middle ability range, young people in grammar schools perform significantly better than those in comprehensives".

That is very clear. Will the Minister admit to the hon. Member for South Thanet, once and for all, that he is wrong that selective education is a "corrosive evil"? It is not; it is one way to raise standards for huge numbers of pupils across the country. Will the Minister accept that, and will he defend grammar schools?

Mr. Timms: The hon. Lady is a little confused. The votes last night were about faith schools, not grammar schools. The assessment made a couple of years ago indicated an advantage to comprehensive schools, but I am aware that the debate rages. She should support comprehensive schools and encourage rising standards across the entire secondary system, as we are doing. The evidence is clear that we are succeeding.

Mr. Bill Rammell (Harlow): Is it not the case that numerous surveys have proved that children do not perform better in grammar schools? Is that not the fundamental question that we must face? Does not the

Conservative party's obsessive interest in pursuing selective education fail to take account of the number of children who would lose out through a selective system because they would go to second-class and lower-quality schools?

Mr. Timms: Let me draw my hon. Friend's attention to the assessment made a couple of years ago. Research on all 15-year-olds in grammar schools in a particular area found that 96.4 per cent. of those youngsters achieved five good GCSEs. A second group included the top 25 per cent. of 15-year-olds in comprehensives, and 100 per cent. achieved five good GCSE grades.

School Autonomy

6. **Richard Younger-Ross** (Teignbridge): If her Department will consult on regulations to give successful schools greater autonomy. [31405]

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Timms): Yes, we shall. I anticipate that the consultation will take place later this year. We set out our thinking in a policy statement that was provided to members of the Education Bill Standing Committee and placed in the Library of the House.

Richard Younger-Ross: I thank the Minister for his response. If greater autonomy is seen to be good, will it not benefit all schools? Are not struggling schools often those that require greater flexibility? Will he assure the House that there will be greater flexibility and less Government interference?

Mr. Timms: There certainly will be greater autonomy as a result of the measures agreed by the House when the Education Bill was considered on Report yesterday. We are developing our policy of intervening in inverse proportion to success. When a school is successful in terms of its achievement at assessment and in its leadership, we want to increase the autonomy available to it, because we can be confident that it will use that extra freedom to raise standards.

What we want, and what the Bill will make possible, is for our best schools to lead the next wave of education reform. Of course, under the separate power to innovate, which is also in the Bill, it will be possible for other schools to make proposals to help them raise standards. However, they will not have the same automatic entitlement that is available to our best schools, for the reasons that I have explained.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): I served in Committee on the Education Bill and was pleased to support it. As my hon. Friend knows, specialist schools are also part of innovation in our children's education. Will he consider the regulations on funding, because unfortunately Rossington high school, which is seeking specialist school status, has been turned down, not because of its bid but because, in a coal-mining area, we do not have the companies on our doorstep to fund it? The parish council has agreed to put some money in, but the regulations prevent it. Will he look into that?

Mr. Timms: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the valuable contribution of specialist schools in raising standards. I understand the concerns about sponsorship. That is why we support the Technology Colleges Trust in working with schools to help them raise the sponsorship that they need.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Is the Minister aware that there is great rejoicing in King's Lynn over news that Park high school is to receive specialist technology status? If he comes to that school, he will be very welcome indeed, and they may even unveil a picture of him in the assembly hall. However, is he aware that St. Clement's high school has had its bid turned down for the third time, even though in 2000 people from the school were invited to No. 10 because it was one of the most improving schools in the country? If he goes to that school, they will probably burn an effigy of him. Will he come up to west Norfolk and visit the two schools in the near future?

Mr. Timms: I was aware of the rejoicing in King's Lynn, because the hon. Gentleman told me about it. There will be rejoicing in all the nearly 150 schools that gained specialist status in this round. Schools have to go through a very rigorous process to attain specialist status, and many have to apply two, three or more times before succeeding, but the process is a very valuable one in helping them to raise their standards and develop strong plans for future improvement. I think that, on reflection, the hon Gentleman would support that.

Professional Qualifications (Access)

7. **Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough): If she will make a statement on schemes to improve access to professional qualifications in *(a)* health and *(b)* education for people working in low-paid jobs in those fields. [31406]

The Minister for Lifelong Learning (Margaret Hodge): Good progress is being made in both health and education to extend access and opportunity to individuals to gain professional qualifications. We have several initiatives in place and we are developing more. For instance, in the national health service, low-paid staff can receive £150 towards work-related training. In education, we are developing a new qualifications framework; we have foundation degrees in place; and we are funding a range of pilot projects to discover better work-based routes for gaining professional qualifications.

Fiona Mactaggart: A few days ago, I gave 117 teaching assistants in the Slough education action zone certificates for training courses that they had been on. Many of them would be capable of gaining professional qualifications, including qualified teacher status. What action will my hon. Friend's Department take to help areas such as mine that have a teacher shortage and have some very talented people who lack education qualifications to work in their schools? We need to provide a ladder of qualifications to give us in the end the teachers we so seriously need.

Margaret Hodge: First, I congratulate those people to whom my hon. Friend gave those certificates. That is the important first step in the progression, perhaps finally towards a career as a teacher. We have a whole range of ladders—I call them climbing frames, because people can go across as well as up—to develop and progress within one's career. The fact that we now have nearly 100,000 teaching assistants working through local education authorities gives those people the opportunity to progress.

There are many innovative examples that I could share with the House. Let me cite just one: Lancashire LEA has 130 teaching assistants this year who will get their qualifications to become teachers and will work in the primary sector, and it is now seeing how it can extend those opportunities to people in the secondary sector.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Does the Minister accept that many low-paid workers can supplement their incomes by learning, for example, aromatherapy, which is taught in my constituency, or perhaps herbal medicine, or reiki—channelled energy—which is becoming increasingly popular? Will she ensure that there are joined-up discussions with the Department of Health to ensure that some of those courses get help? Will she remind the Secretary of State that there are 50,000 complementary practitioners in Britain wanting to work in the health service?

Margaret Hodge: We have frequent discussions with the Department of Health about training opportunities, and we are working closely with that Department to create opportunities through the NHS university, which will develop over time. I share the hon. Gentleman's view that, also over time, we should bring complementary medicines into the health service.

Overseas Students

8. **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff, West): What recent discussions she has had with the university sector about standards in the awarding of degrees by UK universities to students studying overseas; and if she will make a statement. [31407]

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Estelle Morris): My Department has regular discussions with the sector about the standard of UK degrees. For courses delivered overseas, universities should abide by the Quality Assurance Agency's code of practice on the academic management of collaborative programmes.

Kevin Brennan: Does my right hon. Friend share my concern that there may be a temptation for some universities, in an understandable desire to improve their financial position, to skimp a little on standards for overseas degrees? Does she share my particular concern that the monitoring of standards may not be good enough for some degrees being taught in foreign languages overseas? Will she agree to keep a close eye on the situation and ensure that degrees from British universities are of as high a standard when they are awarded to students overseas as they are in the UK?

Estelle Morris: I would share my hon. Friend's concern if we did not have the Quality Assurance Agency, which is responsible for monitoring standards. I agree with him that it is essential that standards are monitored, and where there is a franchise arrangement, and the place of learning is some distance from the parent organisation, we will always ensure that standards are maintained. I must say to my hon. Friend that it is right for universities in the UK to offer their courses abroad—that is the nature of the world in which we live—and I am immensely proud of how popular many UK university courses are abroad. I do take my hon. Friend's point, and the work of the QAA is vital for standards.

Higher Education (Wales)

9. **Adam Price** (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): What plans she has to implement the National Assembly for Wales's proposals for the restructuring of higher education in Wales. [31408]

The Minister for Lifelong Learning (Margaret Hodge): Policy on higher education in Wales is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales. I understand that the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning in the Assembly will shortly make a response to the recent policy review of higher education, in the form of a 10-year strategy for higher education in Wales.

Adam Price: I thank the Minister for her reply, but I am puzzled by it—and also by the quotation in *The Western Mail* from the departmental spokesman, who said:

> "There is no possibility at all of any legislation"

to implement the proposals of the National Assembly's higher education review. That is the most important review of higher education in Wales since the establishment of the university of Wales, and we are constantly told that the knowledge base is vital to the economic future of areas such as Wales, yet the Department also tells us that there is no legislative time for the National Assembly's proposals. Does the Minister not agree that decisions on the future of higher education should be made in Wales, and will she give the Assembly the directive powers over the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales that it has asked for?

Margaret Hodge: The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning in Wales has not asked us to extend any powers, because she has not yet responded to the consultation paper that has been under consideration in Wales. If and when she does, and if and when she asks us for additional powers, we will consider the request. I must also point out that almost half of Welsh undergraduates study in English higher education institutions.

Performance and Innovation Unit

10. **Mr. Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield): What steps she is taking to improve the co-ordination of her Department with the performance and innovation unit. [31409]

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Estelle Morris): Officials and Ministers in our Department are in regular contact with the performance and innovation unit about its current and future work programme. When specific PIU projects relate to departmental policy, both Ministers and officials have close working relationships with the PIU. For example, the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (John Healey), who has responsibility for adult skills, was sponsor Minister for the recently published PIU report on adult skills.

Mr. Sheerman: My right hon. Friend will know that the Select Committee's job is to track the Executive and hold them to account. Can she help us to gain access to more information about what is happening in the PIU and in No. 10 generally, because increasingly we see decisions being made, influence being exercised and policy being formed in places that we have not been able to reach through the traditional Select Committee methods? Can my right hon. Friend help us, even by telling us in detail what education policy groups are meeting and working on those subjects in the PIU and through other avenues in No. 10?

Estelle Morris: With the greatest respect, if my hon. Friend is having difficulty securing information in his capacity as Chairman of the Education and Skills Committee, that is a matter for him, not for me. My Department has close working relationships with units, organisations and other Departments throughout Whitehall. At the end of the day, we are in the same Government and we follow the same policies, but I should make it absolutely clear that my Ministers and I take decisions on education and skills. Responsibility and accountability rest with us.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

The Solicitor-General was asked—

Crown Prosecutions (North Yorkshire)

35. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): How many successful Crown prosecutions there were in North Yorkshire between *(a)* 1 January and 31 December 2000 and *(b)* 1 January and 31 December 2001. [31435]

The Solicitor-General (Ms Harriet Harman): In 2000, there were 12,000 cases in North Yorkshire, of which 98 per cent. resulted in convictions, and in 2001 there were 11,000 cases, of which 99 per cent. resulted in convictions. As the hon. Lady knows, some cases do not make it to trial, but North Yorkshire's discontinuance rate is lower than the national average.

Miss McIntosh: I thank the Solicitor-General for her reply. Will she take this opportunity to join me in congratulating the North Yorkshire Crown Prosecution Service on its excellent recent report? Does she share my concern that the figures that she quoted do not reflect the fact that reported crimes in the year ending March 2001 totalled more than 51,000? There is a large discrepancy between reported crimes and successful prosecutions.

The Solicitor-General: I am sure that the hon. Lady's congratulations to North Yorkshire's chief crown prosecutor, Rob Turnbull, and his team will be warmly received. They have done a good job, received a good inspectorate report and their figures are good. In particular, they have reduced to 51 the number of days that it takes to bring a young offender to justice.

The hon. Lady raises the wider point of what happens before a case reaches the CPS, whether such a case is investigated by the police once reported and whether evidence is sufficient to proceed to prosecution. In North Yorkshire, there is a good, co-operative relationship, which the inspectorate described as better than elsewhere in the country. Co-operation between the CPS and the police has ensured that, if there is proper evidence, cases can be brought. However, it is clear that the Home Office and the Lord Chancellor's Department—indeed, the Government as a whole—are concerned that there should not be crimes for which no offender is brought to justice.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): Can the Solicitor-General say approximately how frequently such prosecutions were contracted out to solicitors and barristers in private practice in North Yorkshire during that period? Will she tell us—not just in respect of North Yorkshire but, more importantly, generally—how her Department ensures that costs charged to it by solicitors and barristers in private practice are competitive, reasonable and provide good value for public money?

The Solicitor-General: I do not have the exact figures, either for North Yorkshire or nationally, but I will provide the hon. Gentleman with them. He makes a very important point, but there are certain principles that we want to adhere to. In instructing agents, outside solicitors or barristers, the CPS must be fair to the public purse, but the relationship between the defence and the prosecution must also be fair. We do not want a well resourced prosecution facing down an under-resourced defence, or vice versa.

Furthermore, I hope that, for positive rather than negative reasons, there will be fewer instructed independent counsel and private solicitors in future. I want CPS staff to act as designated caseworkers, bringing their own cases on the Crown's behalf to the magistrates court, and CPS lawyers to act as High Court advocates, bringing their own cases in the Crown court. The CPS is taking forward that initiative, but, as I said, I shall provide the hon. Gentleman with the detailed figures that he has requested.

Manslaughter

36. **Vera Baird** (Redcar): If she will give guidance to the Crown Prosecution Service on charging manslaughter where people have killed partners who have inflicted grave domestic violence on them. [31436]

The Solicitor-General: I am not planning to give guidance to the CPS on charging manslaughter where people have killed partners who have inflicted grave domestic violence on them. The CPS will always consider the full background circumstances of a case when deciding whether the charge should be murder or manslaughter, including whether the defendant has acted under provocation or with diminished responsibility. I am working closely with the CPS to ensure the vigorous prosecution of domestic violence.

Vera Baird: Will my right hon. and learned Friend accept that a practical problem follows on from the failure to give that advice to prosecutors as yet? I am obliged for her answer, which reveals that things may change. The problem is that women who kill as a consequence of domestic violence are often acting in self-defence. Although they may appear to use excessive force, it is because the ferocity of an earlier attack has put them in great fear. Of course, that issue must be tried by a jury. Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that jurors rarely try domestic violence cases in which the charge is murder because judges permit a woman who has killed in the heat of the moment under pressure to plead guilty to provocation manslaughter—a plea that she must take or run the risk of the life sentence that follows murder—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question is far too long and, when I stand, the hon. Lady should be seated.

The Solicitor-General: My hon. Friend raises some important and difficult issues. It is true to say that there is continuous consideration of those issues. We want to get it right and there are no easy answers. As she knows, each case has to be judged on the basis of the individual circumstances. Of course, we want to be sure that prosecutors study all the background to the case and have all the information. In the case that she raises, prevention is better than cure and we do not want domestically violent husbands to be murdered by their wives; we want them to be prosecuted, or we want the violence to be prevented in the first place.

Civil Service Pension Scheme

37. **Lynne Jones** (Birmingham, Selly Oak): If she has made an assessment of the risk of the Government facing legal action under the Human Rights Act 1998 over the civil service pension scheme. [31437]

The Solicitor-General: I am afraid that I cannot answer my hon. Friend's question without breaching the long-established Attorney-General's convention that neither whether the law officers have advised, nor if they have what the advice was, is revealed outside Government.

Lynne Jones: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for that answer. I live in hope, which will probably not be realised, that in the answer to my supplementary question she may shed more light on Government thinking. She will be aware that the majority of private pension schemes extend benefits to unmarried partners, that Members of Parliament have voted to extend benefits to their partners and that, later this year, the civil service pension scheme will change to recognise unmarried partners. In view of those developments, does she agree that the Government are vulnerable to challenge from teachers, doctors, nurses, police officers and members of the armed forces in long-term unmarried partnerships who are denied benefits for their partners?

The Solicitor-General: My hon. Friend has raised some important matters, but they are policy issues for the Cabinet Office. She then worked her way back to asking me the original question about legal advice, which I cannot answer except to say that, as regards the Human Rights Act, all Departments and Ministers are very concerned that all their actions should comply with the European convention. To the extent that we can, we assist them in doing that. It is not only secrecy that prevents me answering that question; there is a line of accountability which ends with the deciding Ministers and not the advising Ministers. In this respect, the Law Officers are advising Ministers, not decision makers. We are the deciding Ministers on the other issues about which I have been asked and we are fully accountable to the House.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Is the Solicitor-General prepared to accept some advice from a Conservative Front Bencher on the question of the Human Rights Act, bearing it in mind that I want to be helpful? If there is a problem with the civil service scheme, is she aware that in the recent case of R *v.* the Secretary of State for the Home Department, ex parte Simms, Lord Hoffmann made it crystal clear that if Parliament chose to do so, it could legislate contrary to the fundamental principles in the European convention on human rights, providing the actions taken by Parliament were clear and unambiguous? The option is there. Will she pass that advice on to Ministers?

The Solicitor-General: I will draw Ministers' attention to the *Hansard* containing the hon. Gentleman's comments, but in an ingenious and, as we would expect, complicated way he has asked the same question as was asked earlier on what our legal advice is. He has given me his advice, for which I thank him, and hon. Members and Ministers will read it. *[Interruption.]* As the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), points out, he has given it for free, which is welcome, but I cannot answer that point. I cannot engage in a discussion about the Human Rights Act's application to this particular point of policy. He will have to get one of his colleagues to ask the Minister with policy responsibility at the Cabinet Office.

Nationality, Immigration and Asylum

12.31 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): With permission, Mr. Speaker I wish to make a statement on nationality, immigration and asylum.

Last October I informed the House of the new strategic direction for that crucial area. Today I am publishing a White Paper to be followed by legislation in this Session.

Significant progress has already been made. The first induction centre was opened on 22 January in Dover. Registration cards were launched last week and are now being issued to new asylum seekers. We have launched the highly skilled migrant programme. New border security controls are in place, following my announcement on 19 September. As of last week, asylum seekers are no longer being held in prison. I confirm that vouchers will be replaced by cash by the autumn, together with action against fraud and the development of a more robust, faster and efficient system.

The White Paper takes forward our agenda by offering an holistic and comprehensive approach to nationality, managed immigration and asylum that recognises the inter-relationship of each element in the system. No longer will we treat asylum seekers in isolation or fail to recognise that there must be alterative routes to entry into this country.

Our policies must command trust, confidence and respect from the wider community. The British people demand coherence in policy and efficiency in administration.

Our starting point has been the development of a sense of belonging and community. Confidence in our identity and citizenship allows us to welcome those who come to the UK as refugees or legal migrants more readily.

I confirm that, to give new meaning and value to the acquisition of British nationality, we will introduce a number of key reforms: there will be new light-touch arrangements to ensure that those who take on nationality have the language skills and basic knowledge of our society that are needed to contribute fully; there will be ceremonies at which the confirmation of citizenship can be celebrated; and we will modernise the oath of allegiance to provide new wording to make clear the fundamental rights and duties of citizenship. That will be a citizenship pledge.

The White Paper sets out the routes by which men and women can work legitimately in this country. In today's global economy, that is crucial both to our competitiveness and prosperity.

My new proposals include the development of routes for seasonal or short-term casual working; consultation on reform to the working holidaymakers scheme to make it less restrictive; and enabling students graduating in the UK to switch into the work permit scheme.

This White Paper sets out an end-to-end revision of the asylum system. The new process will track and support asylum seekers from induction, through reporting and accommodation, to removal or integration.

Work has started on the new trial accommodation centres which will be mandatory for those designated asylum seekers who are claiming public support. The centres will offer education, health care and legal and interpreting services. Opportunities for volunteering and other purposeful activities will also be available, as will appropriate language support.

For those refused asylum, secure removal centres will enable us to protect the integrity of the system through early removal. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] It is nice to have the support of the Opposition in such large numbers. I hope that the consensus continues.

Without an agreed and legitimate route for asylum seekers to enter this country, it has been inevitable that men and women desperate to seek refuge would put their lives at risk. That is why I am announcing today that we will set up the new gateway for those seeking to settle in Britain. This will be operated under the auspices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Legitimate refugees who come via this gateway will no longer have to attempt a hazardous journey across the channel. This will be a major step in regularising legitimate entry alongside our managed economic migration programme.

In addition, to secure a robust foundation on which we can build, I intend to undertake a full comprehensive audit of existing asylum claimants. Longstanding cases will receive urgent attention.

The White Paper also sets out substantial changes to the whole asylum appeals process. Far too many appeals and judicial reviews are designed to delay and frustrate. I am therefore announcing today that we will simplify the one-stop appeals process; set closure dates for appeal hearings to stop multiple adjournments; and make the Immigration Appeal Tribunal a superior court of record.

In addition, we will increase the capacity of the adjudication system by 50 per cent., to a total of 6,000 a month, during the course of this year; and we will expand the number of removal places to 4,000.

I can also confirm that I intend to close Campsfield House. This outdated centre is no longer appropriate in the 21st century. These places will be transferred to the new high-standard removal centres.

My reforms will protect fundamental rights, stop abuse of the system, and enable more effective administration and processing of claims. Those working in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate will be able to do their job more effectively, and I expect both greater productivity and efficiency.

Let us be in no doubt. We need to reduce the pull factor by clamping down on both clandestine entry and illegal working.

The Proceeds of Crime Bill will ensure that we can seize the assets of criminals involved in smuggling and trafficking people. In addition, the maximum penalty for those facilitating illegal entry will be raised to 14 years.

I can also announce that we will legislate to tackle trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation. That will be a stepping stone to more wide-ranging legislation dealing with sexual exploitation. In addition, together with our European and international partners, we will introduce tougher border controls and step up action.

A high-level steering group of business and trade union leaders will be established to take forward proposals to tackle illegal working; and, as I announced on Tuesday, we intend to launch a consultation on entitlement cards to be published in the spring or early summer. I want to avoid misunderstanding: should such a card be agreed, failure to carry it would not be a criminal offence. That should allay fears as regards stop and search.

Alongside those measures, we will act against the worrying practice of fraudulent marriages. We will increase the probationary period from one to two years; consult on a new non-switching provision to prevent people from applying to remain in the United Kingdom on the basis of marriage, after entering through a different category; and encourage communities with a culture of arranged marriages to look to those already resident in the United Kingdom.

Finally, I know that the rules on family visitor visas have been a cause of great concern to hon. Members. I have an open mind on how best to improve the system—not least for those seeking urgent entry on occasions such as bereavement. The Government would thus welcome ideas on how best to provide guarantees or bonds. That might be undertaken not simply by individuals or families, but by the provision of a community bond. I realise that we have to get that right, so I encourage positive suggestions on the best way to proceed.

Our future social cohesion, economic prosperity and integrity depend on how well we rise to the global challenge of mass migration, communication and flight from persecution. We have a history of trade and migration that has brought us wealth and prosperity over the centuries.

Nevertheless, building trust and confidence to secure the support of the British people is essential. By doing that, we can create a country that is open to skills and enterprise, but not to exploitation. This is a Britain with a balanced approach to nationality and migration—a country of which all of us can be proud.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I thank the Home Secretary for his usual courtesy in letting us see the statement and the White Paper in advance.

Some months ago, when the Home Secretary first made a statement about his proposals for changing the UK's asylum arrangements, I responded that the aim of the Conservative party—like that of the Government—is to see the establishment of an asylum system that is humane, effective and fair; that rapidly provides a safe home for the innocent victims of persecution; and that, at the same time, prevents the asylum system being misused as a means of evading our immigration rules. I have since reiterated that position, and I re-state it today. We welcome unreservedly the fact that the Home Secretary is genuinely trying to make those joint aims a reality.

May I gently urge that, in future, when the Home Secretary has such interesting and important proposals, he restrain himself—if that is humanly possible—from using partial leaks of his White Papers to the media as a way of announcing the proposals? I recognise the temptation, but the interests of rational debate in this country will be best served in the long run if we are all able to discuss the full statement that we have all heard on the basis of a White Paper that at least some of us have had the opportunity to read.

When the Home Secretary made his initial statement, many questions were necessarily left unanswered. Some of them have been answered in the White Paper. We welcome the increase in the capacity of the adjudication system; the new UNHCR gateway—a massive improvement—and the news in the White Paper that there will be health care and interpretation facilities in the accommodation centres.

At least at a first reading, however, some of the questions remain unanswered. It is not clear in the White Paper whether the accommodation centres will, in practice, normally provide legal assistance on site, still less whether decision makers and adjudicators will be available on the spot. We remain uncertain whether the residence requirement set out in paragraph 4.37 of the White Paper will really be enforceable on the basis of entitlement to benefits, given the fact that many asylum seekers do not take up benefits in any case. Will the Home Secretary undertake to let us have those critical details by the time that we come to debate the Bill?

In the months since the initial statement, we—like the Home Secretary and his ministerial team—have had time to reflect on the causes of the shambles that he has gallantly admitted to having inherited from his predecessor, the current Foreign Secretary.

As the Home Secretary will recognise from our recent debates, we are persuaded that a significant part of the problem faced by hard-working officials arises from the sheer weight of numbers, which is in part generated by the disproportion between the share of the burden borne by the UK and the share of the burden borne by France.

I hope that the Home Secretary will take this further opportunity to state a commitment to achieving the closure of Sangatte; a renegotiated bilateral agreement with France when that becomes possible—to take the right hon. Gentleman's point—after the French elections; and in due course, as he says in the White Paper, the replacement of the Dublin convention with some meaningful and effective arrangement for distributing the burden fairly around the EU and other European countries. Will the Home Secretary accept that, in the absence of such changes on the international front, it is highly unlikely that he will achieve the fulfilment of his, and of our, ambitions?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): He's the Home Secretary's puppy.

Mr. Letwin: The hon. Gentleman chunters happily that I am the Home Secretary's puppet. That is presumably because he cannot understand the possibility that, as a matter of fact, there could be agreement about sensible measures and constructive opposition.

Turning from asylum to the related issue of economic migration, we note with interest the more detailed proposals, contained in the White Paper, to increase the rate of permitted economic migration. We join the Home Secretary, I hesitate to tell the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), in believing that, in a crowded island, there are environmental and social reasons for limiting the rate of immigration, but we join the Home Secretary also in the acknowledgment that the British economy and British society have much to gain from a controlled inflow of talented and energetic people who seek to better their circumstances by setting to work and engaging as entrepreneurs in our society. We strongly welcome the Home Secretary's moves towards ensuring that all those entering the country as migrants should be proficient in English and should acquire an early understanding of our constitutional arrangements.

[Mr. Letwin]

We will look carefully and constructively at the details of the proposals put forward in the White Paper for the amendment of the immigration rules, and we anticipate an interesting and fruitful debate when the Bill comes before the House.

Although no one can doubt the work that has gone into the White Paper, will the Home Secretary agree that the proposals, both on asylum and on immigration, will ultimately be judged not by the nobility of the aspirations that they undoubtedly represent, but by their effectiveness in practice?

Can the Home Secretary tell us what targets and criteria he will now establish to enable the House to hold him to account two or three years hence? What does he expect then to be the speed with which asylum claims are processed? What does he regard as the then tolerable backlog? With what speed does he expect removals, where those are necessary, then to occur?

If the Home Secretary is willing to address the remaining practical questions relating to his measures, and if he is willing to state clearly what results his measures are designed to achieve, I believe that he will have the backing of the whole House in seeking to bring order out of his predecessor's chaos.

Mr. Skinner: Come on David, stroke him!

Mr. Blunkett: I will do my own stroking in my own time.

I warmly welcome the approach of the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) on behalf of the official Opposition. I do hope that, despite continuing disagreements about particular detail, this will herald a new beginning in this country of not using asylum as a political football and not enabling the National Front and the British National party to make mischief with it. We all seek, and I accept that the hon. Gentleman seeks, to find solutions that balance the needs of this country and those who seek asylum and those of the British people and the confidence and security that they demand.

I take the little rap across the knuckles about what may or may not have emerged. I heard the hon. Gentleman—albeit for 20 seconds—on the "Today" programme this morning, so he was quite willing to respond, and I read with interest his *Daily Express* article before he came to the House on Monday, so we are all a little guilty of wanting to ensure the widest possible debate.

Yes, legal advice will be available in the accommodation centres. Yes, we will seek to provide a coherent way in which the adjudication process can be organised around the centres, which will speed the operation, cut the enormous cost of travel and the dislocation that occurs when appeals are cancelled by the Immigration Appellate Authority, not simply by the lawyers who represent those appellants. We will link the reporting centres—often mobile reporting centres—across the country, so that we can track and know where people live and where they are. In fact, entitlement to the new cash benefit will be dependent on them adhering to those facilities.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the shambles. The shambles was inherited by my predecessor in May 1997—the shambles of the Siemens contract, which did not work badly; it did not work at all. There was the failure to introduce computerised fingerprinting, which we dealt with at the end of October, and the failure to have a system that balanced nationality and immigration with asylum. I pay tribute again to the work done by my predecessor and by the then Minister of State with responsibility for immigration, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), who worked very hard, including on developing the concept of economic migration.

Let us examine the international position and France. We talked about that on Monday, and the hon. Gentleman raises the issue again today. I explain, once again, that tolerated illegal presence in France is undoubtedly a problem. I cannot deal with that problem bilaterally in the months ahead, but the development of Dublin II in the European Union must address and overcome that problem. If we can do that alongside international moves in relation to border controls and while tackling head on, through economic development, the causes of economic migration and persecution in the source region—my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development is doing just that with the Chancellor—and by overcoming unacceptable regimes, as we have done in Afghanistan, we will reduce the flow of those who seek a better or safer life in other parts of the globe.

Finally, we welcome economic migration, but it will need to be controlled, and we will be able to achieve that more readily through the new routes that have been explained today. The hon. Gentleman asked me about a judgment of my performance and, by implication, that of those who work for and on behalf of the Home Office. I will, of course, hold them to account, and I will be held to account by Parliament. I shall set out in the [illegible] the way in which we will have legislative dates for implementation. Of course, I will have to negotiate further resources with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, and therefore targets, such as those in the spending review this summer, will be determined at that date. But I am painfully aware that, if I am still in the job in three years' time, it will be me and no one else who will have to answer for the competence, effectiveness and activity of the service.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House will know that I have to protect the business of the House, so I appeal to hon. Members that, when they question the Home Secretary, they should ask one question, and one question alone.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): May I ask the Home Secretary about language restrictions on older people? Home Office records will show that Dr. Louis Pirouet of the Refugee Council, the late Dr. Max Perutz, who died yesterday, and I went to see Home Office officials on that very point. Will my right hon. Friend reflect on the restrictions that might be imposed on those who are genuine refugees but who are too old to start learning a language?

Mr. Blunkett: I hope that I can put my hon. Friend's mind at rest by stressing that we are talking about people who are seeking naturalisation—citizenship. Although, as I stressed on Radio 5, it is important not to exclude spouses or older women from language tuition, which has been the case because such tuition is currently not free for spouses, I accept my hon. Friend's point and will reflect on it as it relates to naturalisation. There is no problem with those seeking refugee status and wishing to remain here.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): On behalf of the Liberal Democrats, I, too, welcome the White Paper and intend to make a constructive, and I hope positive, response. An holistic attitude to the interlinked issues will give us a better chance of getting things right this time compared with the hash made by Governments in the past nine years, once under a Labour Administration and twice under the Conservatives. I look forward to working on the details so that we get them right in the consultation period before legislation is introduced.

On citizenship, we welcome a preparation process, a pledge and a ceremony of citizenship. Will the Home Secretary confirm that he is open to proper and full consultation so that we get those right and obtain the agreement of the maximum the number of people to those steps in the process?

On asylum seekers, what are the implications in the White Paper for the number of people who will be in accommodation or induction centres, and how does that compare with those who will remain in dispersal programmes? What will the Home Secretary do to ensure that we get the decisions right in the first place so that they are not turned down on technical, as opposed to substantive, reasons, as is often the case? Are we going to reduce the huge number of people in detention to about the European Union average? Will those in detention have a right to apply for bail? Presumably judicial review will remain even though the system has changed. Will significant extra resources be available and will a target on the backlog be set?

Finally, in relation to migrants and asylum seekers, the Home Secretary will know that we greatly welcome the existence of legitimate routes from outside the country. Does he have a timetable according to which those are likely to be in place and any idea of the numbers? Will everyone in that position be given advice and support so that they can consider properly whether they will be accepted as asylum seekers rather than as economic migrants before they make an application for one or the other?

Mr. Blunkett: In view of your strictures, Mr. Speaker, and not because I cannot remember the questions, I shall write to the hon. Gentleman. On the hon. Gentleman's most salient questions, let me say this. Everyone who is interested in the development of citizenship and language must be fully consulted; bail will continue to be available; and no restrictions will exist other than those that I set out in the White Paper in relation to judicial review. At this stage, we are not setting a target figure for the gateway. We need to ensure that we build up from what will inevitably be a low base.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): I welcome the reconsideration of financial bonds for visitors, as will my constituents.

On the health care of people who enter the country, especially from those regions with poor immunisation records, I note that the accommodation centres will provide health care. What steps is the Home Secretary taking to deal with those who do not require public support and who will not, therefore, go through accommodation centres? What interim measures does he plan to introduce to encourage people to contact primary care authorities now for immunisation?

Mr. Blunkett: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her question. All people who come from outside the country and claim asylum will have to appear at, and work through, the new induction centres. As we build those up rapidly during the course of the year, we will undertake health checks and carry out immunisation if appropriate.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): The White Paper makes it clear that the Government continue to regard Oakington immigration reception centre in my constituency as a key element of the processing of asylum applications, yet the Home Secretary will have known since October that Oakington is to be the site of a new settlement of housing development and must therefore close by 2004. Why does the White Paper make no reference to what is intended to be a centre for fast-track applications for asylum? What is to happen to the Oakington centre? If the service is to be relocated elsewhere, why cannot that be done more quickly, to one of the accommodation centres that are to be established?

Mr. Blunkett: The programme of 3,000 places in accommodation centres—to answer a previous question—which must be trialled initially is separate from the matter to be judged in the Lords in the spring, which is the challenge to the operation of Oakington. I understand the hon. Gentleman's concerns, but I have two years in which to relocate Oakington, whereas I have three months in which to win the case on the operation of the principle.

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North): I welcome much of what my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has said this afternoon. I shall respond to his invitation regarding the family visitor process. Will he say anything today about the review of the fees for appeals in respect of family visitor applications?

Mr. Blunkett: Those fees have been a cause of concern to many hon. Members, including my hon. Friend. I am aware that the review indicates that they cause not only administrative inconvenience, but considerable distress to those involved. I am therefore minded to abolish them.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): I welcome what the Home Secretary has said today, especially about asylum seekers no longer being kept in prison and his announcement about Campsfield House. Will he say a little more about the accommodation centres and how they will link with induction centres and removal centres? What is to be secure and what is not?

Mr. Blunkett: Those seeking asylum will spend a short spell in induction centres. That will gradually reduce dispersals to bed and breakfast and other accommodation of that sort, which will alleviate pressure on local communities at those sites. Accommodation centres are the next stage—they must first be trialled, of course—of the full provision that I described in my statement. They will be open centres: people will be free to come and go,

[Mr. Blunkett]

provided they are present in the evening and are registered and people know what is happening. Removal centres will bite only when people have been refused leave to remain and have gone through the appeals process. They will enable us to operate the removals process much more effectively. Expanding the number of places to 4,000 will enable us to manage the process sensibly. In the removal centres, security will be paramount.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Much that is in the White Paper will be welcome, especially the news that asylum seekers will no longer be held in prison and that the hated voucher scheme is on the way out. No reasonable person will object to the notion that citizenship brings with it responsibilities as well as rights. As regards the deportation of failed asylum seekers, especially when children are involved, has my right hon. Friend considered introducing a modest resettlement grant, so that we do not dump destitute families with children at airports on the other side of the world?

Mr. Blunkett: I am very sympathetic to ensuring that we get that right. One of the reasons why removal has, throughout the ages and for Governments of all persuasions in other countries, been so difficult is that often the family has been in the country for a considerable period. Working with the International Organisation for Migration and others to get the process right makes sense in terms of both voluntary resettlement and returns, and those removed through removal centres. I promise my hon. Friend that we shall examine this closely, and that the Department for International Development will be involved.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): Does the Home Secretary accept that a weakness of the White Paper is its failure to address the removal of failed asylum seekers? Even under his proposals, we are talking about fewer than one in three failed asylum seekers being returned. Why does he not go for 100 per cent. of failed asylum seekers being sent back to where they came from?

Mr. Blunkett: Why does the hon. Gentleman remind me of Alan B'stard's friend Piers? He did yesterday, and he does again today.

There is a really sensitive and important issue: how do we accelerate the removal of those who are already here and have gone through the system, as opposed to how we operate the new system, whereby people will be placed in removal centres and it will be possible to remove 100 per cent. of those who have gone through the new process? The sensitivities concern the fact that we do not wish to tear neighbourhoods, communities and different ethnic cultures apart in the process. Otherwise, we could send the police out en masse, collect people, stick them on planes and send them away; there has to be a balance. If I can get 100 per cent. of those who should not be here through the new system and out of the country, I will, but I would welcome a bit more sensitivity and help from people such as the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): I welcome what my right hon. Friend said about providing a gateway for asylum seekers to make applications from other countries under the auspices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Does he agree, however, that people will still make applications in this country, having arrived here by other means, or because the circumstances in their country of origin have changed? Does he accept that under the United Nations convention on refugees—the foundation of international law on asylum—we cannot simply regard those people as illegitimate applicants and those who come through the gateway as legitimate applicants?

Mr. Blunkett: First, we will accept asylum claims from those who present themselves and prove that they have a legitimate case, whether or not they have come through the gateway. Indeed, under the convention, we have an obligation to do so, which we will fulfil.

We must consider putting a time limit on older cases—those before 2 October 2000—in which, having tried to get asylum, people then make a claim based on human rights. If we can get that right, we can try to make sense of a system that is otherwise disabled by people taking one route but then switching to another.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): I particularly welcome many of the compassionate proposals that the Home Secretary outlined to the House. Will he give more details on the way in which he intends to stop the exploitation of children brought into the country for the sex trade, and tackle the disgrace of young British Asian women being forced into arranged marriages against their will?

Mr. Blunkett: So that there is no misunderstanding, let us be clear about the difference between forced marriages and arranged marriages, which are agreed. Forced marriages are utterly unacceptable; the communities that operate arranged marriages are clear about that, and I pay tribute to community leaders who have taken action to make the tradition more secure.

We must address the need to increase the penalties and take much more decisive action when children are checked as they come into the country—highlighted, of course, by the tragic Climbié case—not simply under immigration and asylum legislation, but under the sexual offences issues that I shall introduce in the next parliamentary Session as part of the reform of the legal and criminal justice system.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): I welcome above all the Home Secretary's determination to bring more efficiency to the administration of the system; without efficiency, there will not be fairness. He referred to marriages and the no-switching rule, where there is obvious conflict between efficiency and fairness. People who are in the country as students or visitors and get married here often do not return home to apply for permission to enter as a spouse because of long queues in their countries of origin; the delay in getting here may mean that they do not witness the birth of their child or that their family cannot be financed here. In his review of the process, will my right hon. Friend take all those factors into account to ensure that people in genuine marriages can look after their spouses in Britain?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes. I will examine in detail the issues raised. Perhaps I ought to have made it clear, although in a statement one must be concise, that we are referring to those who enter on visitor and other visas under six months, and who do so knowing that they intend to switch. It is unfair on those who are using the system legitimately; it slows down the system for them. That is why we need to examine the matter urgently.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): May I say on behalf of Plaid Cymru and the Scottish national party that there is much in the White Paper for us to study? We in Plaid Cymru and the SNP will look with interest at the short statement of what it means to be British on page 34. That might be useful. I refer the Home Secretary to the answer that he gave me on Monday regarding language. What consideration has been given to the implications for the use of language as an occupational qualification in some circumstances?

Mr. Blunkett: I promise the hon. Gentleman that there is no question of being Welsh and not being British or, as I said on Monday, of the Welsh language not being included—or Gaelic, Mr. Speaker. I need to get this right. I shall simply duck the last part of the question, which is designed to embroil me with the Assembly as regards the necessity of the Welsh language in some jobs and some professions. I have enough on my plate today.

Mr. Iain Coleman (Hammersmith and Fulham): Given that previous ministerial statements indicated that the anticipated average time in an attendance centre could be up to six months, and given that a number of individuals and organisations, including the chief executive of the Children's Society, have expressed grave concern about children being taken out of or not being in mainstream education for such a long period, will my right hon. Friend reassure us that the complex and diverse needs of the children of asylum seekers will be met, and give us some details of the likely arrangements for that?

Mr. Blunkett: I will happily write to my hon. Friend, and I will place the letter in the Library so that hon. Members can see the substantive answer. Clearly, on the top of one question, I cannot answer all that. I should make it clear that there is a big difference between what happens in the accommodation centres and the time spent in removal centres. Accommodation centres are an alternative to the haphazard dispersal of youngsters, often into unsatisfactory accommodation, and often not getting them into school quickly. The provision of education—tailored, I hope, to particular regional languages—will be a gain, not a detriment to the well-being of those children. In any case, the entire operation that I spelled out today—the seamless approach from induction through to integration or removal—is designed to speed up the process. God forbid that anyone should be in an accommodation centre for six months. The process needs to be speeded up. If we can get that right, my hon. Friend's fears will be overcome.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): The Home Secretary will have noted that much of his statement was warmly received on the Conservative Benches. Is he completely satisfied with the security arrangements at the various French ports of exit, and does he feel that it would be useful to persuade our French friends to have more British personnel involved?

Mr. Blunkett: I am glad to say that the French welcomed the additional immigration officers and security at Coquelles. As I spelled out on Monday, I cannot guarantee that security is 100 per cent., but over the past six months there have been enormous improvements at the rail freight terminal and at ports. The reduction from 808 people in July to 32 in December coming through clandestinely is an indication of the progress that has been made.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Home Secretary say a bit more about the accommodation centres—where they will be situated, how much it will cost to run them and what element of compulsion there will be for the people inside them? Will his prediction that people will spend no more than six months in these centres be enshrined in regulation, or is there a danger that the centres will become long-term ghettos where asylum seekers are stuck while the system is incapable of dealing effectively and efficiently with their applications?

Mr. Blunkett: Asylum seekers will not be any more stuck—to use my hon. Friend's phraseology—than they are at the moment in terms of the accommodation that they have been assigned under the asylum support system. I cannot give a guarantee that a requirement will be built into law that nobody should be in the centres for more than six months. I can only endeavour to change completely the efficiency and administration of the system, so that no one, whether they are in an accommodation centre or in existing dispersal, finds themselves waiting for an inordinate and unacceptable time. I can assure him that the intention is to provide help and support. People will not be held or restricted in accommodation centres. They will not be imprisoned or confined, but they will be expected—as will the reporting centres—to ensure that we know where they are. If they are claiming support, they must be given an option in respect of whether to get support in an accommodation centre. We cannot compel people to take accommodation, food, board, lodging, education and health care, but we can offer them those things if support is what they seek.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): May I invite the Home Secretary to apply the same decent, democratic and compassionate values that he showed in his statement to the proposal to site one of the asylum and accommodation centres at a remote, rural location in my constituency—Throckmorton airfield? Does he think that it is right that the Government should assert Crown immunity and introduce urgent provisions to override the democratic planning process, which has already ruled out on environmental grounds any development on the land? Does he think that it is right to locate asylum seekers, as he intends to do, immediately between the county's only landfill site and the burial site of 130,000 foot and mouth-diseased carcases? What message does that decision risk sending about the Government's attitude to asylum seekers?

Mr. Blunkett: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's undoubted concern for the well-being of the asylum community. Of course, I shall bear it in mind, but let me make it clear that we have made no decision on the sites. We have initially identified eight, one of which is already deemed unsuitable. We have a competitive exercise that has to include the normal contracting, tendering and advertising process to see whether the voluntary and

[Mr. Blunkett]

private sectors would like to propose other sites. From all those sites, we will initially select four for consultation. My noble Friend Lord Rooker contacted the hon. Members in whose constituencies these initial centres are proposed in order to ensure that no secrecy or underhand activity was involved. We will do the same when additional sites have been identified. We will then work through those that are unacceptable because of factors that make it unhealthy or undesirable for the centres to be placed there.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement. I think that I agreed with just about every word in it—an unusual situation for me.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in respect of Islam, it is clear that when parents are arranging a marriage for their children, the main prerequisite is compatibility? Will not that compatibility be much more easily achieved if parents arrange marriages within the UK community of Muslims who are originally from the Asian subcontinent, rather than by going to the subcontinent to bring back young husbands and wives? That would help with many of the aims that he is trying to achieve in his White Paper, as many of them are better achieved from within the Asian community. It would certainly help the many young women who, I am afraid, visit my office in need of help because of the breakdown of traditional arranged marriages that have gone very wrong.

Mr. Blunkett: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her sensitivity and forthrightness in representing her constituents and in raising the issue of equality. I want to make it clear that we are not seeking to impose anything on the communities with regard to these issues. We are simply raising an issue that many people in communities in which arranged marriages are part of the culture wish to have addressed, and wish to have articulated in this, their and our Parliament.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): The Home Secretary will be aware that, between 1997 and 2001, in the light of two critical reports by successive chief inspectors of prisons, his Department was urged to close Campsfield House. Every year, however, the Department said no, and that Campsfield House was fit for the 20th and 21st centuries. Today, the Home Secretary has suddenly decided that it is not fit for the 21st century, which is welcome. Does he not think it unfit because it is too small to accommodate the large numbers of people he wishes to detain, including those who are not due for removal and, for the first time, families, who—according to the White Paper—are now liable for detention, even when they are not due for removal? Is it not time for a radical review of the Government's detention regime, to stop people who have been persecuted, and who are later granted asylum, being detained for months in unsuitable detention centres?

Mr. Blunkett: First, I am setting up accommodation centres. Only when someone has failed to establish their right to remain through the appeals process am I using secure removal centres. Secondly, I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman was so churlish. If I was closing Campsfield House only because it was not big enough, I would have waited to close it—and to announce the closure—until the accommodation and removal numbers were up to an acceptable level. I have not done that, because I believe—and the hon. Gentleman appears to agree—that Campsfield is unsuitable. I would have welcomed a little more warmth from him.

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): As a site in my constituency is being considered for an accommodation centre, I have tried to reassure local residents that they will be consulted fully about the proposals, should South Killingholme be selected. Will my right hon. Friend reassure those residents that they will be involved in the consultation process? Will he similarly reassure the three parish councils and the unitary authority affected?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. It is important that people understand what is on offer, so that they do not badly misunderstand what is to take place. It is also important, when establishing such centres, that people genuinely feel that they have a contribution to make, not least because the centres will provide substantial opportunities for jobs for local people.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We now come to the business statement and I must advise Back Benchers once again that one question to the Leader of the House is sufficient.

Business of the House

1.22 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The business for next week will be as follows:

Monday 11 February—Remaining stages of the Land Registration Bill *[Lords]*.

Tuesday 12 February—Remaining stages of the Employment Bill.

Wednesday 13 February—Debate on the appointment of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards.

Remaining stages of the British Overseas Territories Bill *[Lords]*.

Thursday 14 February—Debate on defence policy on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Friday 15 February—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week following the constituency week will be:

Monday 25 February—Progress on remaining stages of the Proceeds of Crime Bill.

Tuesday 26 February—Conclusion of remaining stages of the Proceeds of Crime Bill.

Wednesday 27 February—Opposition Day [11th Allotted Day]. There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

Thursday 28 February—Debate on Welsh Affairs on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Friday 1 March—Debate on the achievements of the national lottery on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall before Easter will be:

Thursday 28 February—Debate on the report from the International Development Committee on the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and the surrounding region.

Thursday 7 March—Debate on increasing access to heritage attractions.

Thursday 14 March—Debate on Government policy on health and safety at work.

Thursday 21 March—Debate on the report from the Public Administration Committee on ministerial accountability and parliamentary questions.

The House will be aware that London Underground will make an announcement this afternoon on the value-for-money review of the public-private partnership plans for the tube. I am pleased to inform the House that, with the permission of Mr. Speaker, the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions will make a statement at the close of Third Reading of the Tax Credits Bill at 7 pm today.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I thank the Leader of the House for his statement. You have told the House more than once recently, Mr. Speaker, that you deprecate Ministers' habit of making announcements outside the House before making them here, especially, if I may say so, on something as important as a White Paper. However, this morning's edition of *The Sun* includes the headline:

> "Sun Exclusive. Immigrants Must Pass English Test. Lessons in how to be British."

Indeed, the Home Secretary seemed to take pride in the fact that he appeared on Radio 4 this morning, telling us most of the contents of his White Paper. When will Ministers end their persistent practice of appearing on the media to make announcements before coming to the House to do so?

In connection with what the Leader of the House has just told us about the odd device of a statement at 7 o'clock this evening on the important matter of the London tube, word has reached me, though I can scarce believe it is true, that there will be a press briefing this afternoon, probably arranged by Jo Moore on behalf of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

I hope that the Leader of the House will assure us that there will be no such press briefing this afternoon on a matter that will be announced to the House by the Secretary of State this evening. If, for any reason, the Leader of the House cannot give us that assurance, I hope that he will be able to make his peace with you, Mr. Speaker. It appears that Ministers are persistently flouting what you have made absolutely clear—statements must be made here before they are made anywhere else.

I draw the Leader of the House's attention to early-day motion 821, on the conduct of the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw).

[That this House is concerned by the exchange between the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside and the Foreign Secretary (5th February, Official Report, columns 745-6) about Gibraltar, in which the Foreign Secretary told his honourable Friend that she had asked him a "disobliging question" and that "she should not judge the Government by her own standards"; believes that Back Bench honourable Members have the right to ask searching questions of Ministers without being subjected to insult or innuendo; and calls upon the Foreign Secretary to clarify his remarks forthwith or to withdraw them.]

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that on 5 February, just a couple of days ago, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) asked the Foreign Secretary to

> "tell us what unpleasant circumstances and trick question he is preparing for the referendum?"

The Foreign Secretary, a very senior member of the Government, replied:

> "My hon. Friend asks me a disobliging question. She should not judge the Government by her own standards."—[*Official Report*, 5 February 2002; Vol. 379, c. 745-46.]

What protection do you believe you can give Labour Back Benchers against their Secretaries of State? It seems that relations in the Labour party have reached such a state that the Opposition must table early-day motions to try to protect Labour Members from Ministers. I hope that the Leader of the House will give us some idea of when he will give hon. Members his assurances on what he proposes to do to protect his own colleagues.

You know, Mr. Speaker, that the House has been joining in this week's celebrations of Her Majesty's jubilee. ~~She~~ is a septuagenarian who has been in office for 50 years, but the House may not know that, next

[Mr. Eric Forth]

Monday, we will have our own septuagenarian, who will have been in office for 30 years. I refer, of course, to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner).

I hope that the Leader of the House will approach the appropriate authorities, perhaps through you, Mr. Speaker, to see whether we can arrange a street party for the hon. Gentleman to celebrate the fact that he has shown sufficient flexibility not to retire at 65. I hope that the House will join me in wishing him a happy joint jubilee with Her Majesty.

Mr. Cook: I am very happy to join the right hon. Gentleman in congratulating my hon. Friend. I am available to attend any street party that he thinks may be appropriate. Whether my hon. Friend will invite Her Majesty, I will leave to him—I am not entirely sure that she will be on the guest list.

The statement about English being required for British citizenship was made last October, not in *The Sun* this morning. I listened with care to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on the "Today" programme and again this afternoon. There is a breadth of policy statements in the White Paper that was totally untouched in the "Today" interview.

The shadow Home Secretary said at the Dispatch Box that he would only gently rebuke my right hon. Friend for appearing on the "Today" programme.

Mr. Forth: That is not what I said.

Mr. Cook: I fully understand that there is a gulf between the right hon. Gentleman and the shadow Home Secretary both in personality and in policy, but it may just be that the latter was only gentle in his criticism because he, too, appeared on the "Today" programme this morning, rather bizarrely responding to a statement that he had not even heard.

On what the right hon. Gentleman said about the device of having a statement at 7 o'clock, I should have thought that the House would welcome the opportunity to hear a statement from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what is not his announcement but an announcement by London Underground. I would deprecate it if we were to break into a very important debate on the Tax Credits Bill, to which many amendments have been tabled, including by Opposition Members. As Leader of the House, I wanted to protect the time for scrutiny of that Bill. We have arranged for a full statement. The right hon. Gentleman keeps complaining that we do not sit long enough. He has today the opportunity to sit for an extra hour and hear that statement. I hope that he will be here for it.

On the early-day motion, I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) is grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his protection, but I know her well enough to know that she can stand up for herself. This Chamber is a place for robust exchanges—we are all grown-ups—and, if I may say so, the right hon. Gentleman has in his time been every bit as robust as my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Some hon. Members who came into the Chamber after the statement had started are seeking to catch my eye. They will not be called. In order to be called, hon. Members must come into the Chamber in time for the statement.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is my right hon. Friend aware that I am able to be here, almost on the verge of my 70th birthday, because of the dedication of the nurses and doctors in the hospital who gave me a second mortgage on life a few years ago? While I am here, let me also ask him about those other 70-year-old miners and widows in the mining communities. Can we have a statement to ensure that they, too, can celebrate the years ahead of them with their proper miners' compensation? Will he hurry and speed that along and call on Industry Ministers to deal with the matter? Then, most people in Bolsover will not be too happy about me, but will be happy about the Labour Government having paid out that £5 billion in miners' compensation.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): He is a national treasure.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman will have noticed that we have an opportunity to debate the national heritage in March, and he will no doubt wish to celebrate my hon. Friend's contribution to it.

I repeat my congratulations to my hon. Friend. It is entirely characteristic of him that he should share his own celebrations with the staff of the NHS. In his three decades in the House, he has been a redoubtable champion of an NHS that is free at the point of use and provided on the basis of need, not ability to pay. I hope that we will share many more decades together, defending that important principle.

I will certainly draw my hon. Friend's remarks about miners to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and suggest that, in the spirit of celebration of his contribution, she should give a speedy response.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I associate myself with the good wishes expressed to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). Many of us would agree with him that the current fad for denigrating NHS staff does no credit to politics, from whatever source it comes.

Several issues are raised by the statement on the public-private partnership for the tube. The excuse given by the Leader of the House for having it at 7 o'clock—when of course it will be more difficult for hon. Members and the media to take the issue seriously—is that the only opportunity for ministerial statements is at 12.30. Well, we are already at 1.30, and the likelihood is that this session will continue for some time longer, so it would be perfectly possible to have a statement at 2, if not 2.15 or 2.30.

Given that the Prime Minister effectively made a statement on this subject to the BBC yesterday by saying that the plan was ready to go, and that the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions also made a statement yesterday, can the Leader of the House tell us: when is a statement not a statement? If people are prepared to make statements to the media, why are they not prepared to make statements to the House? Will we have a firm assurance from the Secretary of State this evening that the plan has been approved by the Health and Safety Executive? If it has not, why is a statement being made at all? Surely safety questions must be paramount.

On another subject, it is reported today that there is a six-week wait for the single vaccine for measles, mumps and rubella. Can the Leader of the House give us an assurance that this is not an attempt to ration the single vaccines—and an absolute assurance that parents will be encouraged to have their children vaccinated on the basis of the credibility of the joint MMR vaccine, not by any restriction on the single vaccines? Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that since the Phillips report on BSE there has been a real credibility gap concerning the advice available to the Government on matters of scientific and medical importance?

Mr. Cook: I have not offered any excuse to the House for not breaking into the debate on the Tax Credits Bill; that is a real reason. The hon. Gentleman and I have repeatedly pressed the importance of ensuring that the House has adequate opportunity for scrutiny—

Mr. Forth: Oh!

Mr. Cook: It is true: a number of amendments have been tabled to the Bill that will be before the House this afternoon, and there are several different groups to discuss. I am keen to ensure that we have adequate time to consider them. As for the idea that a statement should be made now, I remind the hon. Gentleman that the statement will be about the announcement by London Underground—an announcement that has not yet been made. With the best will in the world, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State cannot make a statement on an announcement that has yet to be made.

As for the vaccines, I say firmly to the hon. Gentleman—I hope that he will accept this—that our case for the MMR vaccine as the best way to protect both public health and the individual rests on the credibility of that vaccine. May I "gently"—as the shadow Home Secretary said—remind him that the assurances have come not only from Ministers and the Government machine; just about every independent scientist and medical body that has considered the question has echoed our faith in that credibility. I hope that we can now reach a responsible phase in which people recognise that the best way of protecting public health and the safety of individual children is to encourage people to use the MMR vaccine, which will ensure that we protect the individual and the population at large.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), because I too want to raise the question of MMR with my right hon. Friend. I am sure that he has seen early-day motion 815, which was tabled by the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley).

[That this house notes with concern the recent outbreaks of measles in London and the north east; further notes the often devastating consequences of measles, mumps and rubella for young children and their parents; condemns the irresponsible conduct of some sections of the press and media which have undermined public confidence in mmr either by sensationalising the doubts about its safety of a small minority of doctors or by cynically manufacturing a political controversy without regard for the consequences for public health; and urges parents to consider the almost unanimous medical advice from this country and the 90 others where mmr is routinely in use that the risk associated with the triple vaccination is vastly outweighed by the danger to their children and those of others of not having it.]

My right hon. Friend will also have heard the Prime Minister's statement yesterday, which mirrors his own. May we have a debate in Government time on the subject, so that we can hold the Opposition to account for their irresponsibility and scaremongering, particularly the Conservative spokesman on health, who is himself a doctor? We could also point out to the Opposition how disastrous it will be if parents stop their children having that excellent, and proven, vaccination.

Mr. Cook: I fully echo what my hon. Friend says; she speaks from a lifetime's work in the NHS. It is very important for the nation as a whole that we encourage the maximum number of families to ensure that their children are vaccinated. I fear that we may be witnessing the first hint of the problem that will arise if the uptake declines, and I deeply regret the fact that the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), who speaks for the Conservative party on health and is himself medically qualified, has chosen to put politics before science in this matter.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): May we have an early debate on the new White Paper on immigration? We have a crisis in Kent, with the largest concentration of vulnerable unaccompanied minors seeking asylum. That problem is compounded by the fact that the Government's monstrous standard spending assessment system values a child in London at three times the rate of a child in Kent. The combination of local deprivation and large numbers of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum—together with the many children in care who are sent to us by London authorities—is creating a crisis that is getting progressively worse.

Mr. Cook: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says about the House exploring the matter further, and we will have many opportunities to do so when we discuss the Bill that will follow in the White Paper's wake. I am sure that he and many other hon. Members will wish to make their constituency points then.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. We have not set a good standard for brevity so far. I am not going to run this statement for an excessive time, so I ask that questions be as brief as possible.

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to my early-day motion 812?

[That this House notes that there have been numerous and highly credible allegations made of large commission payments made to individuals in Saudi Arabia as part of the Al-Yamamah arms sales to that country; is concerned that the 1992 National Audit Office report into the Al-Yamamah arms sales has been kept secret; further notes that other allegations have been made that Osama bin Laden and the Al-Qaeda network have received substantial funds from individuals in Saudi Arabia;

[Harry Cohen]

desires reassurances that the commission payments have not ended up in the hands of international terrorists; calls for publication of the 1992 National Audit Office Report; and believes that transparency in arrangements for arms sales creates a safer and more stable world.]

I suggest to my right hon. Friend that next Thursday's defence debate will provide the Government with a good opportunity to arrange publication of the National Audit Office report on the Al-Yamamah contracts, which has been kept secret since 1992. The report almost certainly refers to the payment of kickbacks and commissions as part of that arms deal, some of which may have been used to fund Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. Does my right hon. Friend accept that there is a powerful case for publication of that report?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend makes some rather large claims for a report that neither he nor I have seen. I am in no way able to authenticate what might be in it, but I suggest that we do not speculate too widely. As he says, the report has not been published since it was drawn up in 1992, so there is a long tradition of its not being published that he must displace. However, I am sure that he will take part in the debate and he can press his case then.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): I follow the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) by suggesting strongly to the Leader of the House that the Secretary of State for Health should make a statement on the current vaccination problems, which clearly constitute a crisis. That would allow many of us to express our belief that the national health service should offer parents an informed choice.

Mr. Cook: My right hon. Friend's policy is well known, has been stated often in the House and was restated by the Prime Minister only this week. It is that the Government stand firmly behind the MMR as the best way to provide protection for children and protection of the public health. Given that we are providing the MMR vaccine as a matter of policy, and that we believe it to be the best vaccine for the nation and the public, it would be very strange not to continue to say that that is the vaccine on which we should rely.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is a way to involve in discussions in the House the four elected Sinn Fein Members? A debate on paramilitary intimidation will take place in Westminster Hall on 14 February, which will include discussion of the forced exiling of many people from Northern Ireland by paramilitary groups. Although the Sinn Fein Members can attend and listen to that debate, they cannot participate, but they could book a Committee Room in which discussion could continue afterwards. That would enable some of us to ask those Members when they will call the dogs off and allow those placed in exile to return.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend has a long record of being robust with Sinn Fein and on the record of the IRA in Northern Ireland, and I congratulate him on the vigour with which he has pursued such matters. One reason why we decided to accept the four elected representatives of Sinn Fein on to the precincts was so that they could engage in dialogue, and my hon. Friend points out a useful way in which they could do so, if they so wish.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Is the Leader of the House aware of reports suggesting that payments of up to £150,000 a piece are being urged for Scottish Labour Members of Parliament whose seats might disappear through Boundary Commission adjustments? Does he think it right that Members who lose their seats in that way should be paid up to three times as much as those who lose their seats through retirement or the hazards of the electoral process? If so, why should such payments be made only to Labour Members in Scotland, and not to Members of Parliament throughout the United Kingdom?

Mr. Cook: I have never heard of such figures—

Mr. Forth: Answer.

Mr. Cook: I shall indeed do so. In the case of my local patch, the Boundary Commission has shown great wisdom, judgment and sense, and I welcome the result. However, in view of the figures that the hon. Gentleman quotes, I may rethink whether I wish to contest my seat.

David Hamilton (Midlothian): Can my right hon. Friend inform me of the truth of some of the reports in the news today about the last deep mine in Scotland, the Longannet complex, which is under threat? Will he ask the Minister for Industry and Energy to make a statement to the House?

Mr. Cook: I had not heard that report before I came to the Chamber. If it is true, I fully understand the enormous concern that it will cause to the many people who work in that pit and to the community surrounding one of the last remaining deep mines in operation. I shall certainly ensure that we convey my hon. Friend's question to my colleague and that an answer is forthcoming today.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): May we have an urgent debate on the future of the BBC, in particular on its political coverage? Is the Leader of the House aware that many people in the House and, indeed, in the BBC are concerned that political coverage will now be sidelined from mainstream radio and television channels? Does he agree that the licence payer deserves to see the way in which the democratic process works? That will not happen if coverage of this place is consigned to minority digital channels.

Mr. Cook: I fully endorse the principle behind the hon. Gentleman's question and the House will be aware that I have repeatedly expressed my concern about the decline in the coverage of Parliament in the written and the broadcast media. He touches on an unusual point of consensus between the Labour and Conservative parties, in that our joint chairs have both written to the BBC chair to point out that the BBC has a public service obligation. It receives funding for that obligation and I hope that it will bear in mind that that obligation requires the BBC to ensure that it adequately and properly covers Parliament.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): My right hon. Friend mentioned the importance of adequate scrutiny of legislation. Does he think that any lessons can be learned for the future programming of Bills from the lack of scrutiny given to many amendments to the Education Bill? Will he consider allocating an adequate, but not excessive, amount of time for the consideration of every subject area to which substantive amendments have been tabled?

Mr. Cook: Of course we want to ensure that there is adequate time for parliamentary scrutiny of legislation. For that reason, several times during the proceedings of the Education Bill in Standing Committee we approached the Opposition to offer additional sittings. Indeed, we tabled an additional meeting on 22 January, which turned out not to be necessary as there were no amendments to be debated at that sitting. As for Report, the original programme resolution provided for one day, but we provided for two. When there was difficulty on the first day, we provided an additional two hours on the second day. At every stage, we have responded to requests for additional time. I regret the fact that some of the important provisions in the Bill were not adequately debated, but that was entirely because the Opposition chose to conduct themselves in a way that did not make it possible.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): May I bring to the attention of the Leader of the House early-day motion 767 on the Omagh victims' legal action group?

[That this House remembers with deep sadness the Omagh bombing of 15th August 1998 in which 31 people—including seven children and two unborn babies—were murdered by the Real IRA; commends the courage of the families of the victims of this bombing in launching an unprecedented civil legal case against five named individuals, suspected of planting the bomb, and the Real IRA; congratulates the families on their persistence in attempting to seek justice; and urges the public to show their support for the families' legal action in whatever way they can.]

Almost 100 hon. Members have signed up to support that motion and to urge the public to support the families' legal action. I appeal to the right hon. Gentleman to raise at Cabinet level the justice of the Government providing matching funding to support the money raised privately for that legal action against those perceived to have been responsible for the murder of 29 people in Omagh three years ago. That would be a small sum compared to the £100 million perceived to have been spent on the Bloody Sunday inquiry into the loss of 14 lives 30 years ago.

Mr. Cook: I understand the gravity of the issue and the extent to which it troubles the hon. Gentleman's constituents and many others throughout Northern Ireland. I will certainly reflect on his request. I assure him that the proper place to deal with the pursuit of justice and legal action is through the prosecution service, which is adequately resourced to meet anything that may be available to the defence.

Geraldine Smith (Morecambe and Lunesdale): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Post Office is still publicly owned? In view of the irresponsible attitude of the regulator, which is jeopardising the universal service obligation, will he ask the Minister with responsibility for the Post Office to make a full statement to the House?

Mr. Cook: I have drawn to the attention of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry the many remarks that were made about that matter following the business statement last Thursday. I stress that Postcomm's first statutory obligation is to maintain the Post Office's universal service obligation. We would require any proposal that the regulator persisted with to be consistent with that obligation.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): As far as I understand the right hon. Gentleman's response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions is unable to make a statement to the House at the normal time because London Underground will not have reached its decision by then. However, it will have done so at 3.30—that is why the Secretary of State is holding a press conference with two other Ministers. In the interests of brevity, may I suggest a compromise? If the Secretary of State came here to make a statement, the press could appear in the Press Gallery and listen. I think that this is the single most important piece of public finance anywhere in the world, so it is very frustrating for London Members to wait a further four hours before having an opportunity to ask the Secretary of State a number of pertinent questions. If he fears that we will run out of questions, there is no possibility of that.

Mr. Cook: I invite the hon. Gentleman to look at the Order Paper. He will see that a large number of amendments have been tabled to the Tax Credits Bill, all bar one of which are in the name of Opposition Members. Those Members want those amendments to be debated. I have therefore ensured that the Secretary of State will make a full statement to the House and will not interfere with the debate on the amendments. My hon. Friend the Paymaster General is on the Front Bench, ready to take part in that debate. I hope that we will be able to start it soon.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Since it was my right hon. Friend, to his credit, who persuaded Madeleine Albright to allow a trial in a third country, he knows a great deal about Lockerbie. Can we have a statement next week about where the responsibilities of the House of Commons end and those of the Scottish Parliament begin? In particular, is it not high time that we had a statement on Strathclyde police's extraordinary actions, which have gone unchallenged, in providing a witness in a forthcoming murder trial, namely Tony Gauci, with salmon fishing on the River Spey? That aspect of the proceedings is not sub judice. Should there not be an explanation?

Mr. Cook: I am always nervous when my hon. Friend gives me credit, but in response to his last point may I say gently to him that that matter is sub judice because it touches directly on an appeal proceeding that is currently under way. It would be wholly inappropriate and improper of me to comment on it. In any case I am not in a position to enlighten him on that specific point.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): Given that yesterday and the day before we were allowed a total of six minutes to debate clauses relating to Wales in the Education Bill, and that more clauses related to Wales than to England, will the Leader of the House tell us whether he would

[Hywel Williams]

allow the Welsh Grand Committee to examine such measures on Second Reading, as the Scottish Grand Committee did?

Mr. Cook: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says but I remind him of the point that I have just made. We doubled the amount of time that was available for the Report stage and having found that there was a difficulty on the first day, we extended consideration on the second day. The House itself has some responsibility in this matter. If there is adequate time available for examination and scrutiny of a Bill, we must ensure that we reasonably pace it so that all clauses are debated and people such as the hon. Gentleman can make their voices heard.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): On Tuesday the Department of Trade and Industry published its clean coal technology review. Today the Select Committee on Trade and Industry has published its report on security of energy supply, and we are all waiting eagerly for the Government's performance and innovation unit energy review. Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that he will arrange for a full day's debate on those matters? The issue is the total energy supply, perhaps for the next three decades. I would like a debate so that our views can be heard, as well those of the policy wonks that put these reports together.

Mr. Cook: I am not sure that I recognise the description of my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy as a policy wonk. I suspect that he would also take issue with it but we all look forward with interest to the forthcoming PIU energy review. I am sure that the House will wish to ensure that it is fully explored. I have a difficult task which becomes more difficult every Thursday with the number of additional claims—

Mr. Forth: Good.

Mr. Cook: The right hon. Gentleman does not help me, but nor is it his job to help me in this. Every Thursday there is an increase in the list of subjects for which we would wish to have a day's debate. I cannot satisfy everybody, but I am very conscious of my hon. Friend's claim.

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): When the Leader of the House contemplates his political future can I appraise him of the full offer that is being made to Labour Members? He was slow to back the Conservative proposals for PFI, so may I seek his assurance that he will firmly reject Scottish Labour's PPP—peerages on offer, pensions on offer and pay-offs on offer? Is it not the case that every Member of Parliament here today either voted for the Scotland Act 1998 and accepted that there would be fewer Members here thereafter, or has arrived since?

Mr. Cook: Of course I voted for the Scotland Act and of course I fully recognised what we were voting for, namely a reduction in the representation of Scotland at Westminster. We have carried through that commitment and we intend to honour it. I say to the hon. Gentleman, who is the sole Conservative Member from Scotland, that I am delighted that we are able to maintain that token relic from Scotland, just in case we in Scotland forget the nature of the Tory party.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the handling of the dispute with the Public and Commercial Services Union over the introduction of Jobcentre Plus and unscreened areas in offices? It would appear that this has ground to a halt with letters, particularly a very unhelpful letter from Leigh Lewis, being fired at the union, demanding that it replies. Letters are going backwards and forwards like bullets when we should, as a Government who believe in negotiating with trade unions, be negotiating a settlement and not getting into this stalemate. Surely we should debate the matter in the House to help the Secretary of State who appears to be supporting this gunfire diplomacy rather than negotiation.

Mr. Cook: I understand the strength of feeling on this and my hon. Friend no doubt speaks from having consulted in his local area. We have now had 60 hours of negotiation with the unions on this particular question. My hon. Friend should also reflect that only one in four of the membership of the union voted for strike action. I strongly support the principle of having unscreened offices for the public. I am pleased to report that in offices where unscreened facilities have been provided there has been a reduction, not an increase, in the abuse or intimidation of staff. Of course we look forward to ways in which we can increase the safety of those working in unscreened offices, but in the 21st century that is the type of service that the public are entitled to expect.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): The Leader of the House will be aware of the belief of many Members of all parties represented in the House that the finding of negligence made against the two pilots of the Chinook aircraft which crashed on the Mull of Kintyre is unjustified and should not stand. He will also be aware of the publication this week of the House of Lords Select Committee report under the chairmanship of Lord Jauncey, who legitimately has the reputation of being one of Scotland's most eminent judges and of robust intellectual rigour. It is clear from the publication of the report that the Committee charged with the responsibility of examining these matters concluded that the original verdict was unjustified. An error of judgment having occurred and an injustice having arisen as a result, when may we have a debate to discuss these matters in the House?

Mr. Cook: I am aware of the report produced by the House of Lords Select Committee. The right hon. and learned Gentleman will be the first to agree that these are complex matters touching on difficult questions of interpretation and issues. The Minister of State for Defence has received the report and given an undertaking that he will study and respond to it. Over the years respective Governments have said that before revisiting the conclusion they would want new evidence. At present it is not clear that the House of Lords Select Committee has come up with new evidence.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): Could my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on car manufacturing? Later this month the last car will roll off the assembly line at Ford, Dagenham and for the first time in decades no cars will be made there. Many of the thousands of people who work there, 600 of whom are my constituents, feel that that is a bitter and deep betrayal, particularly after all Ford's past promises of a golden future.

Mr. Cook: I understand the enormous significance of the ending of car production as regards both employment and the culture and history of my hon. Friend's region, although I understand that Dagenham will continue to be a centre of excellence for diesel engine production. I shall take note of what my hon. Friend says about a debate. I am conscious of the fact that there have been several requests for debates on the manufacturing industry.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): Why did not the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions ask London Underground to delay its announcement until 7 o'clock so that it would coincide with his statement to the House?

Why does the Leader of the House describe the week after next as a constituency week, when it has previously been described as a half-term?

Mr. Cook: I described it is a constituency week because that is where many of my colleagues intend to spend the week.

On the question of London Underground, I have many responsibilities for which I am happy to answer to the House, but the timetabling of board meetings of London Underground goes beyond my writ.

Points of Order

2 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If the Leader of the House were to ask you for the opportunity, would you allow him to correct an impression that he gave—I am sure, inadvertently—a short time ago? I thought that he suggested that the Opposition were responsible for delaying business yesterday, yet during about six hours of debate, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills alone spoke for 43 minutes and the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) spoke for 35 minutes. Government Members spoke for a total of three and a half hours, while Opposition Members spoke for only two and a half hours. I say that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I do not want either the House or you to be under any misapprehension—nor would I want anyone to accuse the Leader of the House of giving the wrong impression: during yesterday's business, in which, regrettably, we made so little progress on the Education Bill, Government speakers took up much more time in total than Opposition speakers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I think that it suffices that that point is on the record. I had the pleasure of listening to most of those speeches, so I am well aware of the balance.

Clive Efford (Eltham): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It should be pointed out that the majority of Labour Members who spoke from the Back Benches in support of the new clauses could hardly be described as Government members.

Hon. Members: Oh!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I think that it would be safer for the Chair to let that rest.

Orders of the Day

Tax Credits Bill

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

New Clause 1

RECIPIENTS OF CHILDREN'S TAX CREDIT PRIOR TO APRIL 2003

'Persons in receipt of children's tax credit immediately prior to April 2003 shall continue to receive tax credit of the same amount after that date in any case where their award of child tax credit under this Act would be of a lesser amount, for as long as they are responsible for one or more children or qualifying young persons.'.—*[Mr. Webb.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

2.2 pm

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to consider the following: New clause 4—*Effect of working tax credit on housing or council tax benefits*—

'No award of working tax credit under this Act shall be taken into account in the determination of any housing or council tax benefit to which a person may be entitled under any other enactment.'.

New clause 7—*Access to social fund*—

'Before the coming into effect of this Act, the Secretary of State shall lay before Parliament regulations providing for the conditions and qualifications for access to the social fund of persons ceasing to qualify for income support or income based job seekers allowance upon the coming into effect of this Act.'.

New Clause 8—*Access to passported benefits*—

'Before the coming into effect of this Act, the Secretary of State shall lay before Parliament regulations providing for the conditions and qualifications for access to passported benefits provided by the Secretary of State, devolved administrations and local authorities which prior to the coming into effect of this Act had been afforded by qualifying for working families tax credit, income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance.'.

Amendment No. 1, in clause 1, page 1, line 12 at end insert—

'(subject to the exception provided in section (*Recipients of children's tax credit prior to April 2003*))'.

Amendment No. 5, in clause 60, page 32, line 25, at end insert—

'(except for regulations made under section (*Access to social fund*) or section (*Access to passported benefits*).'.

Mr. Webb: It is my pleasure to speak to new clause 1. We also support new clause 4. I shall not comment on new clauses 7 and 8—they will be discussed by the Conservative Members who tabled them—other than to note that they raise important issues and we are sympathetic to their intention. We look forward to hearing more about them in due course.

During our deliberations in the Standing Committee, a certain amount of ping-pong took place between the two sides. We wanted to give the Paymaster General the opportunity to set out her thinking on the rates and structure of the tax credits, but she declined to do so. Lest the hon. Lady be under any misapprehension, new clause 1 is different altogether. It does not relate to new claimants of the tax credit who start to become entitled—for example, due to the birth of a child—after April 2003; it relates to the rules that will govern the existing recipients of that tax credit.

The new clause would mean that people receiving tax credits before April 2003 were not cash losers due to the transition. They would be able to continue with the same cash receipt of tax credit for as long as they still had a dependent child, or a qualifying young person.

Obviously, the Chancellor will have to make decisions about the rates and thresholds of the tax credit in his Budget statement. We are not trying to pre-empt that. The acceptance of the new clause would not prejudge any of those decisions. It is really a statement of the principle that people who currently receive the tax credit should not be cash losers—whatever the Chancellor's decision as to the rates and thresholds.

I shall give the House an example, as otherwise we might assume that—in a rare lapse—the Liberal Democrats were defending the rich while the Conservatives were talking about the social fund. The families that I am talking about are not necessarily filthy rich.

I take the example, which I believe to be a good one, of a couple, both of whom work full-time—one on the typical salary for a nurse, one on the typical salary for a teacher. At present they receive the full child tax credit of £520. It seems almost inconceivable that, assessed on their joint income, they would receive anything other than zero. If a family of that sort received child tax credit, so would Back-Bench Members of Parliament. If, having decided to introduce a taper that withdraws child tax credit from higher earners, we include Back-Bench Members of Parliament among those who receive it, there is not much point in having a taper. Therefore, without going into details on the exact rates and thresholds that the Chancellor will choose, there is bound to be a doubt in the minds of families such as the nurse married to the teacher that they may be about to lose some, or all, of the £520 a year that they currently receive. 6

More than one or two families are in that position. If the thresholds remain the same, 900,000 families could lose all of their tax credit, and another 500,000 could lose some of it. The purpose of the new clause is to tell them, "You may be reassured. Although you might not get an increase, we offer you our assurance as a House today that, whatever rates and thresholds the Chancellor introduces, you will not be cash losers."

One might ask, why should not those families be cash losers? If a new system is introduced that is less generous to people in those circumstances, why should they not lose? We must remember that the children's tax credit was the successor to the married couples tax allowance, so we had a year when that allowance was abolished and nothing took its place, and we shall have had at least two years of the children's tax credit, now payable at £520 a year. It is reasonable to suppose that families have got used to budgeting on the basis of that income, and £520 is quite a serious sum of money. All that we are asking the House to agree is that such families may continue to receive that amount at that cash level. It would not be inflation-proofed, but they would be protected from a windfall loss of up to £520.

Unless the Chancellor wants to create 1.4 million losers, he will have to spend some money on that issue anyway—perhaps by raising the threshold or changing the taper. We are not prejudging that decision, but we are proposing a relatively cheap solution, as is our wont, because the only group that we are protecting consists of existing recipients, who gradually fade out of the system. An existing recipient with a 16-year-old child and nothing else gets the money for one year, and that is it.

If we were arguing that the Government should be raising the threshold so that new recipients in the same circumstances received the full tax credit, that increased cost would roll on indefinitely in the system. Our proposal is a transitional measure, not one for new claimants, because arguably a new family—the nurse married to the teacher who then has the first baby—has never budgeted on the basis of that sum of money and has never got used to having it, so that family's not having it through a new system is defensible. However, taking the money away from people who have got used to having it is far less defensible. Ours is a very modest proposal, to protect existing recipients and to make a statement of principle that there should be no cash losers, without prejudice to any decision that the Chancellor might take about raising thresholds.

I shall briefly address new clause 4. Here there are interesting parallels between the Tax Credits Bill and the State Pension Credit Bill. In the case of the latter Bill, which is passing through another place, the Government have decided that any gains that are given to people through the credit should not be taken from them by means of tapers on housing benefit and council tax benefit, but the Government have not offered us those assurances in the case of tax credits—quite the contrary.

There is some suggestion that a person who gets tax credits through the Tax Credits Bill will then potentially have some or most of them taken away as a result of the tapers on housing benefit and council tax benefit. Several London Members, who served on the Committee with us, expressed concern that because, in view of high rents, people can be on housing benefit while having relatively high incomes, those people could lose 65p—perhaps 85p—in the pound of the money that the Government want to give them.

If the purpose of the Bill is to reward work, to encourage people to work and to teach that work pays, it is dishonest to give them money through the pay packet so that they get a high take-home pay figure and then allow the local authority to come along and take 85 per cent. of it from them. That seems counter-productive in terms of the Government's objectives. We therefore consider that new clause 4 is helpful to the Government—just as we have been in tabling many of our amendments—by enabling those whom they intend to benefit from the tax credits to keep the money, instead of having to give it to someone else.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): Does the hon. Gentleman realise that the point that he is discussing merely replicates the very worst aspects of the previous system and that that is a disincentive to returning to work, not only in London but in constituencies such as mine where many people claim the working families tax credit, are paid low wages and are in part-time or short-time work?

Mr. Webb: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. Although high rents and council taxes in London are important, the issue is more about the interaction between high housing costs, high local taxes and low wages. Where all those factors combine, the problem will be particularly acute.

The principle of what we want to achieve under new clause 4 is relatively straightforward. We are sure that the Government want to encourage people to take the low-paid jobs that are available, but if the money that the Government give them is taken away from them partly or wholly because of another benefit system, that goes against what the Government want to achieve. We seek to protect existing claimants and to help the Government achieve their goals of encouraging low-paid work, and we believe that new clauses 1 and 4 would help to achieve those objectives.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): This group of new clauses and amendments essentially covers territory that there was insufficient time to cover in Committee. Yet again, that is evidence of the unsatisfactory nature of Bill programming.

Amendment No. 1, tabled by the Liberal Democrats, raises an important point of principle and, as has been stated, it grandfathers claimants' benefits under the existing children's tax credit. It was the consistent policy of Conservative Governments in changing social welfare, in essence, to grandfather existing claimants and to ensure that people were not disadvantaged by legislative changes. Therefore, amendment No. 1 is, in part, a probing amendment—it is important for the House to know what the Government intend to do. As the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) said, the intention is not to discover what the rates will be across the board, but to address a point of principle, so I look forward to hearing what the Paymaster General has to say.

New clauses 7 and 8, with amendment No. 5, broadly address overlapping territory. Under new clause 4, the Liberal Democrats would apply a disregard principle, designed to address problems that arise in areas where housing is expensive, such as London. Under new clauses 7 and 8, we raise a much wider issue. The Bill does not explicitly state how passporting to the social fund and the various other crucial benefits—housing benefits, school meal benefits and council tax benefits—will be dealt with as a result of ending income support and income-based jobseeker's allowance, which provided crucial passports to qualify for those benefits.

The Bill therefore leaves major uncertainties about the arrangements for people who are presently passported by the existing qualifications under the working families tax credit, disabled person's tax credit, income support and jobseeker's allowance. The Bill will float some families off income support and income-based jobseeker's allowance, and they will lose access to the social fund unless specific provisions are made.

We want the Government to set out what their proposals are, as they should have done in the first place in the Bill. Perhaps those proposals will be satisfactory, but, unless that issue is properly addressed, the House

[Mr. Howard Flight]

should divide on the new clause because the most needy in society will face a major flaw if the issue is not addressed.

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): Notwithstanding the fact that the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) has already declared that he intends to vote for the new clause before he has even heard what I have to say—I shall endeavour to be my normal persuasive self—several important issues are raised in this group of new clauses and amendments, and I should like briefly to deal with each principle. The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) has moved a new clause that deals with one set of changes, but the hon. Gentlemen have spoken about something unconnected to the new clauses and amendments that they have tabled. That causes some difficulty, but let me give an explanation.

This group of new clauses and amendments deals with the relationship between the new tax credits and the existing forms of support. They cover three main issues—the children's tax credit, the interaction with housing and council tax benefits, and the passporting issue. I want to deal with each issue in turn because they are very important, as the hon. Gentlemen have said.

2.15 pm

In speaking to new clause 1 and amendment No. 1, the hon. Member for Northavon returns to a point that we considered in Committee, even though he tries to explain that he is not doing so. I disappointed him in Committee, and I am afraid I shall do so again now. In dealing with what he claimed was a principle, he suggested some solutions. He said that the Chancellor could let thresholds remain the same, or he could change the threshold to address the point that the hon. Gentleman was making. As I have repeatedly said, the rates and tapers will be announced in the Budget by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

New clause 1 refers to the children's tax credit and to people who are currently entitled to it. Under that new clause, the hon. Gentleman continues to try to extract a commitment from the Government about how a particular group of people may be affected. He then tries to extrapolate from that the type of decisions that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will want to announce in his Budget statement.

The children's tax credit was one of a series of measures that we introduced in the previous Parliament to improve support for families with children. The measures that we introduced in our first term in office were constrained, as was the working families tax credit, by the system that then existed. The children's tax credit works in the framework imposed by independent taxation. It is therefore based on individual claimants and their individual incomes. That territory is fairly well understood in the House. The children's tax credit had to work in that way because of the income tax system.

One of the consequences of that has been that couples with the same aggregate income may receive different amounts of the children's tax credit, depending on how the income is distributed between them. Hon. Members and organisations have lobbied us extensively to tell us that that simply was not fair and that we needed to address it. That issue has been addressed in the child tax credit, and the hon. Gentleman would like me to tell him exactly how the rates and tapers will affect people as they transfer, but I am not about to do so. I have not seen any serious suggestion that the Government are at fault in trying to resolve that difficulty.

The formal announcements on the rates and tapers and on when the new tax credits will be introduced will be made in the Budget statement. I confirm yet again that that will happen in the Chancellor's Budget statement on 17 April and that we are planning a start in April 2003.

When setting the rates and thresholds, due consideration will be given to the relevant factors. My right hon. Friend will take those into account. As I said to the hon. Gentleman, the outline is in the Bill, but asking for specific undertakings on different sections of the population that will receive the tax credits is another attempt to debate rates and tapers. I know that he is keen to have that debate; so am I, and I look forward to engaging in it when the Chancellor makes his announcement. I hope that the hon. Gentleman's cold is not so bad that it restricts him from participating then.

Mr. Webb: New clause 1 is devised to allow us to request an assurance that there will be no cash losers among existing recipients. The Chancellor can set any rates or thresholds that he likes for people who come into the system or who continue in it, but do the Government believe that, no matter what those are, the principle of no cash losers is at stake? It seems that the Minister wants to keep cash losses on the table.

Dawn Primarolo: I am not going to help the hon. Gentleman to make his points about whether there are losers in the transition to the new tax credits, which he made in the press. As I said to him and to other Committee members and Members of the House, it is clear that the Chancellor will take all considerations into his calculations. Thresholds and tapers, which will influence all those who transfer into the new tax credits, will be announced in the Budget statement. The hon. Gentleman is trying to crack open that debate now so that he can continue to advance the arguments that he made in the press. I understand why he wants to do that as an Opposition Member. However, he will understand, because I have said this to him so often, that the Chancellor will make the announcement in the Budget statement.

Mr. Flight: Is the Paymaster General aware of the principle of Newton's law, named after Tony Newton? It clearly established that there should be no cash losers when welfare benefits change. For the record, the Minister is saying that this Government do not follow that principle.

Dawn Primarolo: That is not the Newton's law that immediately came to my mind. If you will excuse the pun, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is a fruitless debate. All hon. Members know that rates and tapers are the subject of the Budget announcement by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. The Bill and our debates on it have been widely welcomed by everyone who is concerned about simplicity and transparency and about ensuring that families on the lowest incomes get the most support from our policies to tackle child poverty.

New clause 4 deals with the interaction of the working tax credit with housing benefit and council tax benefit. It would prevent the working tax credit from being taken into account in assessing entitlement to either of those benefits and would mean that people in work had a higher entitlement to benefits. I am not sure that that would produce the bed of roses that the hon. Member for Northavon might suppose.

Of primary importance to any family or individual is the overall package of support that they receive if they are in low-income work. A family with children could receive a combination of child benefit, child tax credit, working tax credit and housing and council tax benefits on top of their earnings. The Government are committed to ensuring that the overall package provides sufficient incentives for families to move into work and, once they are working, to increase their earnings.

The hon. Gentleman is well versed in the interactions of tapers and their effects on incentives to move into work. A key factor is the effect of the interaction of the various elements of the package on overall withdrawal rates. I know that the hon. Gentleman and many of my hon. Friends are concerned about the impact of that on rental costs in some parts of the country. It might help if I outline the effect of the new clause on the current system because it does not deliver what the hon. Gentleman wants.

If the working families tax credit were not taken into account in housing benefit and council tax benefit, the combined withdrawal rates of the two credits would increase significantly, producing a total withdrawal rate of around 125 per cent., so people would be worse off for working harder. The underlying principles, if not the precise numbers, are the same for the working tax credit as they are for the working families tax credit and the disabled person's tax credit.

The Government are committed to improving work incentives. I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern about areas with high rents. We have discussed that in the context of housing benefit, and the Department for Work and Pensions is considering the problem. Far from improving things, new clause 4 would cut across the work that we are doing to ensure that people are better off in work. In addition, its effects would not be well targeted, so not only would it result in a withdrawal rate of 125 per cent. but the targeting would cause problems. Housing benefit and council tax benefit are withdrawn as incomes increase, ensuring that those on the lowest incomes get the most support. Apart from a small disregard, net earnings are taken fully into account in housing and council tax benefits. It would not make any sense to treat the working tax credit, which is designed to boost net earnings, more favourably than earnings themselves.

New clause 4 would not work. Indeed, it would make things worse. The debate allows the hon. Gentleman to highlight the interaction between high-rent areas and housing benefit payments. None the less, the new clause would destroy all the work incentives and the possibilities offered by the working tax credit. That might be his intention; I know that he is not a fan of the working tax credit. However, the new clause does not impress its virtues on the Government.

I am trying to explain the Government's intentions and how we view the interaction between benefits and the new tax credit. The interaction is especially important when we consider the passporting of benefits, which is dealt with in new clauses 7 and 8.

2.30 pm

New clauses 7 and 8 set out to probe the Government's intentions regarding entitlement to what are commonly known as the passported benefits—benefits provided by other Government Departments, for example, free school meals provided by the Department for Education and Skills, and free prescriptions and dental treatment provided by Department of Health. Those benefits, and many more besides, use entitlement to certain key social security benefits and tax credits as a peg in decisions on who should get access to them, as a way to reduce the administration and difficulties involved in making sure that benefits get through.

Passported benefits remain the responsibility of the administering Departments, not of the Treasury; it is for those Departments to set the rules for entitlement and decide what level of income brings a family into entitlement. For those reasons, it is inappropriate to legislate for other Government Departments in the Bill, even though the Bill gives powers to provide information to the other Departments to undertake passporting.

The key issues in passporting are, as the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs mentioned, those who are floated off income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance when the child elements of those benefits are removed, and what we do to ensure that people who had passported benefits continue to receive them in the new tax credits. The latest estimates suggest that about 70,000 families, out of a total 1.3 million currently receiving income support or jobseeker's allowance, will no longer receive the benefits as a result of the changes. Naturally, we are anxious to ensure that their entitlements are protected.

The Department for Work and Pensions will make proposals on how those families will be treated in due course, once the rates, tapers and income rules have been determined. Families that are floated off will be contacted well in advance by that Department and offered an interview; they will be provided with all the details and with help to secure their position.

In previous discussions, hon. Members have asked about entitlement to free school meals and free milk for the young children—the so-called welfare foods scheme—of those floated off income support and income-based jobseeker's allowance. They are two specific issues on which I can offer more detail on the Government's thinking.

On 24 January, my hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards made it clear to the Committee considering the Education Bill that the Government intend to put in place measures to guarantee that those who are floated off income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance because of the introduction of the new tax credits will not lose their access to free school meals—they will be protected. Today, I can confirm that similar arrangements will be put in place to maintain that group's entitlements to the welfare foods category of benefits.

I am trying to reassure the House that those who are currently passported to certain benefits will continue to be passported on the same basis as now. It is necessary that

[Dawn Primarolo]

the Government Departments involved develop new regulations using the new tax credits to ensure that there is no loss. I am confident that that will be achieved.

I hope that in the light of my explanation of how the amendments are technically flawed and would make matters worse, and my reassurances about passported benefits, together with the fact that I am not persuaded to make today an announcement on rates and tapers that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is due to make in his Budget statement, the amendments and new clauses will be withdrawn. If they are pressed to a vote, regrettably I shall have to recommend to my right hon. and hon. Friends that they oppose them in the Lobby.

Mr. Flight *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot speak again. Only the mover of the lead new clause can do so.

Mr. Webb: I am grateful to the Paymaster General for putting on the record some of the issues that we had no time to discuss in Committee, especially those relating to passporting. The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) can decide for himself whether or not he is satisfied with the hon. Lady's response.

Taking our new clauses in reverse order, I accept the Paymaster General's explanation of new clause 4's effect on the marginal tax rate. I would go so far as to say that I made a mistake—that is not the effect intended. However, she did not satisfy us on the principle. Her colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions were prepared to say in respect of pension credit that they will put up housing benefit thresholds to ensure that the benefit of the credit gets through. That credit is not due to start until October 2003. That Department is prepared to assure people that it will adjust rates and thresholds to ensure that they will get the benefit 18 months or so down the line, but the Paymaster General is not prepared to assure them that what they are given with one hand through the working tax credit will not be taken away with the other through housing benefit even 12 months down the line.

Whatever the merits of the new clause, the Paymaster General might have offered us some reassurance. The issue of high housing costs can only be addressed with reference to the effects on the housing benefit system, because the only way to identify those who have the combination of low income and high housing costs is through housing benefit. The hon. Lady said that the new clause would not deal with the problem, but did not say what would. I think that she recognises there is a problem, but she gave no sense that the Government intend to deal with it, nor any indication of how they might do so. We are disappointed by the Government's response to new clause 4, which, although it would not achieve what we intended, at least raises the issue.

It is interesting to compare the Paymaster General's response on passported benefits to her response on continued entitlement to the children's tax credit. On passported benefits, she gave an assurance that there would be no losers—people getting free school meals now will get them in future—but there was no such assurance on the children's tax credit: that will be dealt with in the Budget. What is the difference of principle between the two? *[Interruption.]* None—it is decent of the hon. Lady to say that. After all, I have admitted that I was wrong.

People are getting credits now and they want an assurance that they will continue to do so in future. We are delighted by the assurance that free school meals will be carried over; why can we not have a similar assurance on the children's tax credit? As the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs said, when structural changes are made there tends to be a principle whereby attempts are made to avoid cash losers. People then work their way through the system and inflation does its bit, but people are protected when changes are made.

Whatever rates and thresholds the Chancellor chooses—we are not trying to pre-empt his decision—we seek an assurance today that those who currently receive money will be protected and that there is a principle of no cash losers at work. However, the Paymaster General has reserved the option, in effect saying that she wants to leave for the Chancellor in the Budget the discretion not merely to set the rates and thresholds that he wants to set, but to take some or all of the £520 a year that those hard-working families are getting.

My hon. Friends and I are concerned that the Chancellor wants to reserve that option. We therefore want to test the opinion of the House.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 165, Noes 245.

Division No. 163] **[2.38 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul

Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Heath and
Richard Younger-Ross.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Alexander, Douglas
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burgon, Colin
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hurst, Alan
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil

Shaw, Jonathan
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
White, Brian
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Angela Smith.

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 2

MEANS OF PAYMENT OF TAX CREDITS TO RECIPIENTS

'(1) Subject to subsection (2), a person to whom an award of tax credit has been made shall be entitled to receive it by means of a book of serial orders at a post office.

(2) Regulations may provide that the entitlement in subsection (1) shall end when arrangements are in place for any recipient who so wishes to receive payment into a basic account accessible at a Post Office in which case that entitlement shall be replaced by an entitlement to payment into such an account.

(3) This section applies to payments—

(a) of child tax credit and any payments of working tax credit being made directly by the Board under section 23, and

(b) of working tax credit being paid by employers by virtue of section 24.'—*[Mr. Heath.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 15, in page 16, line 20, at beginning insert—

'Subject to section (*Means of payment of tax credits to recipients*)'.

No. 13, in page 16, line 30, at end insert—

'subject to employers consulting with their employees as to whether they would prefer working tax credit payments to be made by the Board directly.'.

No. 16, in page 16, line 30, at end insert—

'(1A) Regulations under this section shall not apply to an employer with fewer than 15 employees'.

No. 14, in page 17, line 42, at end insert—

'(8) The Board will refund to employers their costs incurred in making payments of working tax credit to employees.

(9) No employer with 20 or fewer employees will be bound by the regulations set out in this section.'.

Mr. Heath: Amendments Nos. 15 and 16 were tabled by the Liberal Democrats. Should my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Richard Younger-Ross) catch your eye later in the debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he will speak to amendment No. 16. Amendment No. 15 is simply a paving amendment for new clause 2.

The new clause deals with the payment of tax credits through the sub-post office system. It is a great delight to engage the attention of yet another Department on the matter of sub-post offices, as we are already talking simultaneously to two Departments. Nothing would please me more than if the new clause were to be unnecessary when events reach their conclusion next year.

We greatly welcomed the performance and innovation unit report and its comments on the universal banking service. We hope that it will be put in place satisfactorily, but we do not share the Government's confidence that that will necessarily be the case. In that view, we have allies, not least the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters, which has serious concerns about the readiness of the Government systems to implement what the NFSP sees as an important part of the strategy for the future survival and development of the sub-post office system. As we know—I will not go into a long history of sub-post offices, as that would be unnecessary to the prosecution of the argument for the new clause—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That would not only be unnecessary, but it might take us outside the scope of the discussion that we should be having.

Mr. Heath: Absolutely right, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I obviously phrased my comment badly. I meant to say that to widen the scope to include the history of sub-post offices would be inappropriate to the debate. However, to deal specifically with the payment systems within sub-post offices, which is the substance of the new clause, is necessary.

As we know, three forms of bank account are to be offered by sub-post offices. I need to deal with only two: the basic bank account, which will provide basic banking services through the clearing banks but situated in the sub-post offices, and the Post Office card account. That baseline provision is the most critical element. It is designed for those who have not had or do not want a bank account, but still need to receive their benefits through the sub-post office system, and for whom we would suggest that the tax credit is also a relevant factor.

The Government were tardy in getting arrangements under way for that basic payment system. There seems to have been almost no progress under the aegis of the Department of Trade and Industry. Perhaps for that reason some rattling of the cages was necessary in autumn last year, when the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions was appointed as a sort of universal bank tsar. We know that, last October, the contracts had not been placed with the companies that were to put in the infrastructure.

In a letter to Mr. Colin Baker, the general secretary of the NFSP, on 19 October, the director of postal services—network and markets—in the DTI commented:

"There is a lot to do to put in place these sophisticated, if commonplace, banking arrangements".

That is a masterpiece of understatement. The IT project in question is massive, if not revolutionary. It involves a great deal of development work, provision of infrastructure and training. None of those were in place in October. The contracts were not let until November, when a decision was taken to split the contracts between the basic bank account, which was to be provided by LINK Interchange Network Ltd., and the Post Office bank account, to be provided by EDS/Citibank.

Since then, I have had a number of meetings with representatives of those companies and with representatives of IT companies on a wider front. The one word that keeps coming back to me about the project is "challenging". We can assume that that means well nigh impossible to deliver on the date on which Ministers still assure us it will happen. One of the leading IT manufacturers told me that the industry norm for such a project would be to have it developed and operational at least 12 months before it was to go live. That time would be needed to identify difficulties, to train the personnel who were to install the system and use it and to ensure that it was working to everyone's satisfaction.

Twelve months before the new payment system is to go live is the beginning of April this year, yet we know that the contracts have only just been let and that progress on development is limited. We are at a loss to know how personnel are to be trained, as the Government tell us nothing about that. We are at a loss to know what the migration policy is—what its objectives are, let alone how it is to be implemented. Again, the Government will not tell us. They will not tell us anything at all about the project. They merely repeat that it will be all right on the night and that the system will be ready in April.

Nothing would delight me more than if that were the case, but if not, there is an argument that for other benefits, there is a period of migration which allows for flexibility, but the child tax credit is not a mobile target. It is to come into effect in April 2003, so there is a fixed deadline for that element of tax credit. There are serious fears that the system will not be ready. The new clause would provide a plan B for the Government. They may well need such a plan to allow people to receive their payments through the Post Office on the specified date if they do not have a bank account.

3 pm

What is the argument against such an alternative? The only argument against the ability to make such arrangements if the Post Office card account is not ready is that the Government want to move people towards basic bank accounts instead of towards the Post Office card account. That is what the clearing banks think. They feel that they have been sold a pup and coerced into providing the services, while the Government do not intend the card account to be ready on the day. If it is not ready, people will be pushed into basic bank accounts, irrespective of their wishes. The post offices share that suspicion and see such a move as very retrograde, as people who have bank accounts may well opt for the bank rather than the Post Office. All the benefits that would accrue to the Post Office system would then be nugatory. Clearly, the Government have an argument in terms of reducing costs, but not in terms of providing the choice that they have always maintained to be the basis of their proposals. That is why the new clause would provide an appropriate safety belt for the Government and for the system.

The new clause has another separate purpose. Subsection (3) would extend the payment system for working tax credit into the same payment framework as the other payments. That is another very important aspect of the new clause. I understand that the Government's argument against the proposal is that they want to preserve the linkage of working tax credit with work, but they take the deeply patronising view that recipients can make the connection only if two lines to that effect are written on their pay cheque, rather than on their bank statement. That view is wrong.

The arguments for providing the option proposed in the new clause—it is not a compulsory course of action—are threefold. First, it would reduce costs for employers. That is a valuable objective and I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge will amplify that point in terms of small employers if he can catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Secondly, it would extend control to the recipient, which is right in itself. Thirdly, it would help to safeguard our post office network—something that hon. Members in all parts of the House would see as a key objective.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): Surely the proposal would achieve a significant reduction in an employer's costs only if all the employees in a company opted to take their payment through their payment book at the Post Office. If one employee did not take the option—the hon. Gentleman said that it is an option and is not compulsory—the employer would still have to set up the system, fill in the forms and cross a certain cost threshold. A significant saving will be secured only if all the employees of a firm opt to go to the Post Office. How will he make that happen?

Mr. Heath: I gently suggest to the hon. Gentleman that he is perhaps talking about big business and has never had experience of a small business with a small number of employees. It is perfectly possible that all the employees in such a business might opt for the proposal, not least because there might be only one employee who is receiving the relevant payment.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the point of the proposal is to give people a choice? It is important that people should have such an option.

Mr. Heath: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Typically, the Government want to extend not choice, but compulsion, because there is only one way of delivering the objectives that they have in mind. We reject that position and I think that he probably rejects it as well.

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): The hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) mentioned set-up costs. The other costs that are borne by employers—the £90 million a year that the package will cost—are related to individual transactions. Although the set-up costs will be lost if all employees opt out, costs will still be reduced even if some of them remain in the system and are paid as before through their payroll, because there is a transaction cost as well as a set-up cost.

Mr. Heath: The hon. Gentleman is, of course, absolutely and transparently correct. The matter involves not all employees, but those who are receiving working tax credit. Often, only relatively small numbers of

[Mr. Heath]

employees would be involved, so it is not unrealistic to assume that the new clause would have tangible benefits for employers.

I know that other hon. Members wish to speak to the new clause, so I shall conclude my remarks. I repeat that this is a win-win situation for the Government. No additional cost would accrue to them and the new clause would provide real benefits for individuals. It would safeguard our post offices at a time when many people are yet to be convinced that the Government's proposals, however creditable, will be in place when they are needed to safeguard the system. I commend it to the House.

Mr. Flight: The first part of the new clause deals with an issue that was extensively discussed in Committee. I put it to the House that there is not only a likelihood but an extremely strong probability that the arrangements that the Government envisage for delivering the new tax credits in April 2003, essentially through the universal bank, will not be in place. When the subject was discussed in Committee, after we had asked a number of questions, the Paymaster General effectively said that the Government accepted that that could happen and that standby arrangements were in place to deliver payment—it certainly included the child tax credit—by coupons or order books at post offices. I looked through the Bill, but could not find where it provides for such arrangements, so in principle, the new clause seems to be necessary to ensure that they are covered.

Rather than commenting on the proposed arrangements for the option on payment of working tax credit, however, I should like to focus on amendment No. 13. The Government are well aware that the Opposition believe in principle that the arguments stack up in favour of paying working tax credit not through employers but directly to recipients. One of the main arguments that they have put forward for paying it through employers is that of stigma. Amendment No. 13 is designed to test that argument. Rather like the second part of the new clause, it seeks to offer an appropriate option on a collective basis. Therefore, it requires a consultation process between employers and employees to take place before the obligation for employers to pay the credit through the pay packet takes effect. Implicit in the proposal is the idea that, if a majority of employees prefer to be paid directly by the board, that is the arrangement into which the company would enter.

We are extremely surprised that the Government have paid no heed to the arguments against paying working tax credit directly to beneficiaries. The evidence—in so far as it exists—is indeed that more stigma is attached to payment through the pay packet, as people's personal backgrounds will implicitly be known by their employers and often, as a result, by their work colleagues. The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux has made the point that, notwithstanding the provisions of the Bill, employers in smaller businesses could be discouraged from employing people if that entailed the hassle of administering working tax credit. There is strong evidence that the stigma element would be greater as a result of payment through the pay packet than as a result of direct payment.

David Cairns: This is one of the issues that I hope to raise later. The hon. Gentleman has twice referred to extensive evidence that greater stigma attaches to payment through the pay packet than to payment through the order book. Other than the anecdotal evidence that he has given, can he outline exactly what that extensive evidence is?

Mr. Flight: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the studies, which I have already mentioned, undertaken by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux and by the Institute for Fiscal Studies.

Have the Government taken into consideration the fact that people in marriages and partnerships frequently hold joint bank accounts, and that those accounts might sometimes come under pressure from the more powerful character in the partnership? Going back to the child tax credit, one of the results of paying everything automatically through a bank account, as the Government wish to do, is that that might undermine their correct intention that the money should go to the carer.

The Government suggested, somewhat unenthusiastically, in Committee that if the recipients of child tax credit really wanted to go on receiving their payment through vouchers that were cashable at post offices, they would be able to do so. It is still not clear whether that is a realistic option. If there is a genuine intent that child tax credit should go to the carer, I suggest that that is more likely to be achieved by permitting those at the poorer end of society, in particular, to receive it through vouchers, rather than by forcing them down the bank payment route.

I return to the question whether working tax credit should be paid directly, which we believe remains the better option, or by employers. The Government have refused to accept that the result of what they are seeking to achieve will be to produce a social wage. People will take home a certain amount of money, but they will not understand the details in terms of whether they have paid tax, or of how much of the new negative tax rate income they have got back. They will simply have a sum of money. In many cases, their take-home pay will bear no relation to the economic market value of the job that they are doing.

We remain concerned that that will act as a disincentive to people to up-skill themselves and to improve the amount that they earn, and as an overall disincentive to productivity improvements in the economy. I urge the Government to be a little suspicious of the CBI's support for payment via the payroll. It is clear that that is attractive, and I recollect the Paymaster General making certain references to that effect. There are attractions to employers in having pay subsidies, because they reduce the pressure to pay a proper rate for the job and exert downward pressures on rates of pay. If the Government ignore that important aspect of the question, they do so at their peril and in the face of what is already happening.

3.15 pm

Amendment No. 14 is a probing amendment, and we discussed some of the issues involved in Committee. The proposal is a response to the issues raised by the Government's better regulation task force and by the Carter report. The burdens of administration transferred on to businesses by the Government have fallen particularly on small companies with fewer than four employees. That represents something like £25 million out of their total costs. Worse than that, of that £25 million, small companies spend some £15 million not on payments but merely on keeping on top of the regulations and the requirement to know what they are supposed to be doing.

We have argued consistently that it is undesirable for small businesses to be burdened with such administrative costs and focuses, when their main task is simply to keep their business alive. The Liberal Democrat amendment has proposed a slightly smaller minimum floor at which businesses would be exempt than the one that we have proposed, but it deals with the same issue of principle. Will the Government consider the points made by Lord Haskins and his taskforce in relation to small businesses?

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): Prior to entering this place, I ran a small business that would have come within the scope of the Liberal Democrat amendment and our own, in terms of the number of employees. My concern is that whatever level is set, when a company gets near to that level it will provide a big disincentive to taking on any more employees. I am sure that that point will be addressed by the Minister later. What thoughts does my hon. Friend have on the matter?

Mr. Flight: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. I was about to come to the other part of our amendment, which proposes that the Government should consider measures for the Board of the Inland Revenue to refund to companies the cost of administering working tax credit, if they remain charged with that burden. Again, this is a probing amendment, and we have touched on this subject before.

After consulting widely with businesses, it is clear that they understood that the relevant territory covered by the Carter review and the comments of the Chancellor of the Exchequer were not just concerned with technical arrangements for payroll—which, I grant, is most of Carter's territory, as the Paymaster General has pointed out. Businesses also understood that the Chancellor had indicated in the pre-Budget report that the Government would consider some refunding of costs for administration carried out on behalf of the Government in relation to working tax credit. That is particularly relevant to small businesses, if they are not to be exempt.

The total administrative costs for businesses is now of the order of £250 million a year, which covers tax credits, student loan repayments and the administration of stakeholder pensions. The Government will be turning a blind eye if they do not appreciate that business perceives them to have recognised those costs and to be thinking of doing something about them. In Committee, it was clear that the Government were not interested in so doing, and that they felt that businesses should be very pleased with the working tax credit because it would subsidise employment for them. However, I wish to give the Paymaster General a further opportunity to consider the matter, because that is certainly what business expects.

The amendments grouped with new clause 2 interact and relate to each other, but there are separate issues to consider. First, will the Government even be able to deliver the child tax credit, given the running-down of post offices, the likely failure of the universal bank and the lack of provision in the Bill for an alternative? Secondly, will they reconsider giving employees at least the option to receive working tax credit payments directly, whether on a corporate basis or as specified in new clause 2(2), when they express a wish to do so? Thirdly, it is necessary to tease out of the Government yet again whether they are willing to compensate business for the costs of administering their programmes.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): I support the new clause and the amendments grouped with it and want particularly to discuss further the effects on employers. As the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) said, the Liberal Democrat and Conservative amendments differ only in detail rather than principle. The principles are one and the same.

I have looked up some figures on small businesses. Although I do not have a figure for the number of businesses that employ 15 or 20 people, 83 per cent. of companies employ 10 people or fewer. It might be argued that if 83 per cent. of businesses were exempted from the proposal it would have a dramatic effect, but it would not, because only about 20 per cent. of employees would be affected. Therefore, it is possible, and with minimal effect, to encourage enterprise and remove a burden from a very large number of businesses.

Let us consider the overall cost of the burden on small businesses, which is constantly growing and never seems to diminish. The British Chambers of Commerce has compiled figures from the regulatory impact assessment prepared by the Government. The total updated cost, until May 2002, now runs to £15.6 billion. The working tax credit will cost some £262 million and the student repayment loan—another burden on small businesses—£255 million. Businesses, especially small businesses, are bearing heavy burdens that have an effect on the ability to grow and progress.

Without wanting to put words in its mouth, I am sure that the British Chambers of Commerce would support the Conservative amendment as much as ours. I have a note from it:

> "The British Chambers of Commerce very much welcomes this amendment. In the week it published its own Regulatory Reform Action Plan. It shows Government how to seriously go about cutting the burdens on business. Government will no doubt spout out figures about only 1 in 8 businesses being affected by tax credits, but that 1 in 8 equates to 175,000 small businesses."

That is a heavy burden.

Let us consider what other employer organisations say about tax credits. The CBI has spoken in favour and its parliamentary brief says:

> "The CBI supported the introduction of the tax credits system . . . as a valuable way of incentivising work."

However, it warns:

> "The CBI believes that, if there is no possibility of administering the tax credits system within the Inland Revenue, employers should be compensated for the administrative costs associated with running the scheme."

That proposal is included in one of the amendments. Other amendments might also reduce the burden and cost by exempting a large number of businesses from having to administer the scheme.

The Bath report considered tax credits and concluded that

> "the pattern of compliance costs discriminates against small employers in that the bottom thirty per cent of employers bear seventy five per cent of the compliance costs."

[Richard Younger-Ross]

That cannot be right. New Labour wants "New Britain" to have an enterprise culture and, if we are to have an enterprise culture, encouraging small businesses to thrive is vital.

Some 90 per cent. of Government revenue is collected by businesses. Employers are responsible for statutory sick pay and maternity pay administration. Family-friendly schemes introduced in the past two years such as the Employment Relations Act 1999, the working time directive, the Data Protection Act 1998 and the national minimum wage, which I support in principle, are all burdens on businesses, and on small businesses in particular.

Mr. Webb: Lest my hon. Friend be misunderstood or misquoted, I presume that he is drawing a distinction between measures such as the minimum wage, which we supported and which are beneficial, and tax credits, which can be delivered other than through the pay packet. Whereas the minimum wage can be delivered only in that way, tax credits need not be a burden on business.

Richard Younger-Ross: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing that distinction. I am not saying that we do not support some of those measures, the burden of which must be borne by business, but we must consider the overall burden; if it is not necessary for business to bear a particular burden, it should not have to do so. Small businesses can therefore be exempted and encouraged. We must look at the total picture and not consider such matters in isolation.

America has, in principle, exempted businesses by using the standard of turnover of less than $500,000. Alternatively, companies that employ fewer than 15 people or fewer than 20 people are exempt from certain legislation. That proves that such measures can be achieved in an enterprise culture.

In France, small businesses hold a nominal percentage of the tax collected to help them with the tax collection burden. The cost of tax and national insurance collection for large UK companies with more than 5,000 employees is about £5 per employee. The cost for companies employing between 1,000 and 5,000 people is about £30 per employee. For companies with between 500 and 999 employees, the cost is about £29 per employee. However, the cost for very small companies with between one and four employees is an astronomical £288 per employee.

I know that the Government are minded to help small businesses and are aware of the burdens of regulation. The Prime Minister commented on the working time directive in November 1999:

> "I can see myself how some of the regulation is over the top. The problem is being recognised but more needs to be done."

If the burden has been recognised and more needs to be done, we have an opportunity to relieve the burden through the Bill.

The Minister responsible for small businesses was quoted in *The Sunday Times* on 30 January 2000:

> "It is about balancing the right of individual employees to fair treatment against demands on the employer. Once you get to 20 people it is very different from running a tiny company."

That is one reason why the figure I quoted is slightly lower—the differences are in that band.

Devon has many small businesses—about 37,000. More than three quarters of employers throughout Devon have fewer than 10 employees. I want those businesses to thrive, prosper and grow, but they will not do so if we increase the burden on very small businesses. Instead of being able to climb the mountain of success, they will come across a rock face that they find hard to scale. Progressing from being self-employed to employing others should be made as easy possible, so I ask the Government to consider their response to the amendments carefully.

3.30 pm

Mr. Hoban: I welcome the grouping of the new clause and the amendments, because together they point up one of the issues at the heart of the Bill: the obligation on businesses to pay working tax credit, leading to a high burden on employers. Employers have to bear the cost of administration of working tax credit only because they are required to pay that credit to their employees.

Let me remind the House of the burdens that the Government have placed on businesses. The cost of the Bill, as set out in the regulatory impact assessment, is about £90 million. I welcome the reduction compared with the previous regime, but it is still a significant cost on business. Employers face a problem. In a survey conducted by the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants in July 2001, 97 per cent. of respondents felt that the burden of payroll compliance had increased since April 1997, and 78 per cent. referred specifically to the administration costs of the working families tax credit.

The real cost falls on smaller businesses. The average payroll cost per head for a business with between one and five employees is £288. That is a terrific cost when compared with the cost for businesses employing more than 5,000 employees, which averages at about £5 a head.

I am especially interested in amendment No. 16, which has the deficiencies that my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) highlighted earlier. By setting a limit of 15 employees, it would create an artificial barrier to taking on additional employees. That stands in contrast to amendment No. 14, under which the Board of Inland Revenue would refund employers' costs but which has an opt-out provision for companies with fewer than 20 employees, whose tax credits would be paid directly by the Inland Revenue.

It is a shame that amendment No. 14 is needed at all, because I would much rather the Government did not impose this burden on businesses, but by requiring the Inland Revenue to reimburse the costs it would demonstrate to the Government once and for all the true cost of compliance. Far too often, the Government impose burdens on business without understanding the true cost. Estimates are published in regulatory impact assessments that are riddled with caveats and assumptions. The amendment would lift part of the £90 million burden from business, and the other part of the burden would disappear for businesses with fewer than 20 employees.

My hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) referred to the consultations between employers and employees concerning whether benefits should be paid directly to employees by the Inland Revenue, rather than by the employers. Some people have a problem with tax credits being paid through payroll services, because they want to separate clearly their personal lives and domestic finances from their lives at work. They do not want their employers to know about changes in personal circumstances, such as divorce or—a term that was used in Committee—partnering up, which affect the payment of tax credits. I suspect that many employees, following consultations with employers, will opt for direct payment. Many will prefer that, and it will remove some of the perceived stigma attaching to the credits.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) referred to post offices. Too often in debates on post offices, people refer solely to the rural post office network and the sub-post offices there. Those of us who represent urban areas also have a network of sub-post offices that we wish to sustain. That is an important factor to be borne in mind. The option to enable payment through post offices, either through the order book system, which will act as a failsafe in case the universal bank does not come into effect—as seems increasingly likely—or through such a bank account, will generate the traffic that sub-post offices in urban and rural areas need to sustain their business.

Quite often, the shops are not just a post office counter but provide a wide range of services and are a valuable local amenity. Any measure that will improve the traffic flowing through the sub-post offices is valuable.

Mr. Heath: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for drawing the important distinction between urban and rural post offices and explaining the fact that this applies to both. I was at pains to mention the sub-post office network rather than just rural post offices, because the impact of the loss of benefit traffic is often greater on the urban sub-post offices, which rely on it more heavily.

Mr. Hoban: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. Often, urban sub-post offices rely on the trade from benefit, as it were, to keep them afloat. They also often exist in some of the most deprived areas of our constituencies, where people are least likely to be able to travel from their homes to a main post office in the town centre. In our consideration of the hon. Gentleman's proposals, the importance of sub-post offices to elderly people and young mothers should not be underestimated.

The new clause and the amendments are designed to preserve some of the social fabric of our rural and urban communities and would help to reduce the costs imposed on businesses. We should not be too churlish about the actions that the Government have taken to reduce those costs through their reform of the tax credits system—in Committee, the Paymaster General referred to some of the representations that she had received from business organisations welcoming the changes—but I hope that the House will take advantage of the opportunity that we now have to reduce those burdens once and for all by enabling employers with fewer than 20 employees to have the tax credits paid directly to those employees, and by ensuring that other businesses have their costs reimbursed by those who impose them—in this case, Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Swire: I am particularly interested in this group of amendments, tabled by ourselves and the Liberal Democrats, because I represent a constituency that, like that of the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Richard Younger-Ross), has a lot of small businesses. My local businesses employ an average of between three and five people. We are a diverse community, largely rural but with some urban areas—and, if I may do so without straying too far from the new clause, Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to talk about post offices and how they fit into that pattern.

Having sat through the Standing Committee stage—that was a steep learning curve for me—I believe that when the Government introduce new legislation they have an opportunity that they do not always get: the opportunity to get things right. Our amendments will steer them in that direction.

In Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) spoke lucidly about post offices and the role that the universal bank will play. It is true—although I must not go over old ground—that many of the neediest people, to whom the Bill will be of most benefit, do not have bank accounts. As my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) said, those people—such as the elderly and single mothers—would usually find it easier to go to their local post office, whether they live in a rural or an urban area.

New clause 2 says that anyone who so wishes should be able to

"receive payment into a basic account accessible at a Post Office".

That raises the question of what an accessible post office is, and what is accessible once people get there. One of the problems in rural areas is the number of post offices that are closing. There is some evidence that the rate at which—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. I must bring the hon. Gentleman to order. We are talking about tax credits, not the future of the post office network.

Mr. Swire: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was trying not to stray too far from the new clause, but obviously I failed.

When we think about how we want people to receive their benefits, we must recognise the role of post offices. At this stage I shall make only a few comments about the burden on business, because we shall be debating that subject all afternoon. We have heard comments from the CBI, the Institute of Directors and others, but we should also listen to the Federation of Small Businesses and the British Chambers of Commerce.

As I have said, most of my local businesses in East Devon employ very few people. Small businesses represent the engine room of the economy, and any Government who want that engine room to grow should aspire to enable those companies to employ more people. Yet the Bill as it stands acts as a disincentive to employing 15 or 20 people. What on earth is the incentive to expand a business if that merely invites extra costs and red tape?

I fully agree with the comments that have been made about stigma; indeed, the stigma may apply more in small businesses, where people are more likely to know each other socially than people in larger businesses. The fact that people's pay packets may not be a true reflection of the job that they do could cause dissent, and will be bad for morale.

[Mr. Swire]

I urge the Government to take on board what the Opposition are saying, and especially to recognise that post offices will have a problem, particularly between now and when the universal bank is set up. Our suggestions would give the Government a real opportunity to do what they claim they wish to do, and help those hard-pressed sub-post offices. They have the opportunity at least to nod towards the concerns expressed by the various bodies that represent small businesses, such as the British Chambers of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses, which are worried about ever-increasing regulation and red tape, and the interference in the lives of people employed by small businesses. I hope that the Government will take our amendments in good part, and respond to them later.

3.45 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): I think that all those who served on the Standing Committee would admit that it was good natured throughout its proceedings. Whatever differences there might have been between the two sides of the Committee on some issues, there was a common desire to improve the lot of the poorer people who will benefit from this Bill. That spirit characterised our debates.

The Committee was intimidating, too, because it included not only the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, who is a distinguished lawyer, but the Paymaster General, who is one of the most talented Ministers in Her Majesty's Government, a professor of social policy representing the Liberal Democrats, and one of the most distinguished understanders of the City of London, my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight). Those of us with no such qualifications—apart from a dim memory of an economics degree—felt inhibited from speaking.

On the issues relating to new clause 2 and the amendments that have been grouped with it, however, passions began to be aroused. Uniquely, we got the hon. Member for West Renfrewshire (Jim Sheridan) to intervene on that subject; it was his only contribution. The hon. Gentleman made the traditional old Labour case. I shall not quote his contribution in full, but he said:

> "I thank the hon. Gentleman"—

I think that that was my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban)—

> "for this nostalgic trip back to the dark days of his Government, whereby any legislation enhancing the life of people"—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman's remarks will now be germane to the amendments that we are discussing.

Mr. Luff: They will be strictly germane, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am sorry for my rather lengthy introduction—that was always a fault with my university essays, and I was regularly marked down for it. *[Interruption.]* I did not hear what the Paymaster General said then, but I hope that *Hansard* has recorded it, because it is always worth listening to what she has to say.

The hon. Member for West Renfrewshire continued by saying that in times like the dark days of the Conservative Government:

> "any legislation enhancing the life of people in the lower quartile of our society suddenly becomes a burden on businesses . . . It is ridiculous in this day and age to say that about legislation that allows workers to work for less than 48 hours a week or sets a minimum wage, which takes people off benefits so that they do not need tax credits. It is nostalgic rubbish."

I understand the sentiments that the hon. Gentleman was expressing, but if he were here I would invite him to reflect on exactly what our amendments would do. In Committee I talked about the road to hell being paved with good intentions—and to use another cliché, this is the straw that breaks the camel's back. We all share a desire to enhance the lives of our poorer constituents, but we must look at the consequences of the mechanisms that we choose.

If we put unacceptable burdens on the businesses that support those people, we risk destroying the mechanism that creates the jobs, which lies at the heart of any Government's ability—and the private sector's ability—to remove them from poverty. That is the crucial point.

Ultimately, this is not a matter of great principle, but a matter of balance. We all accept that from time to time Governments must intervene in the affairs of the private sector to enhance some greater social good. As I made clear in Committee, that is a principle to which Conservative Governments have adhered down the centuries. The question is: when has that process gone too far? At what stage do we start putting that process at risk? Our amendments present the Government with a real case to be answered. They should say to themselves, "This may be the moment when the process has begun to go too far."

I have already said that I have a high regard for the Paymaster General—but she was a bit naughty when she quoted so selectively from the words of the brief that the CBI sent to members of the Standing Committee. She described the CBI's position as follows: She said that the CBI brief stated:

> "The CBI supported the introduction of the tax credit system, including paying via the pay packet, as a valuable way of incentivising work. In that context, it also supports the extension of the principle of tax credits to employees without children."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 22 January 2002; c. 143, 153.]

All well and good. That is indeed what the CBI said in its briefing note, but sadly for the Paymaster General, who quoted only the first two sentences, that same paragraph continues:

> "Nevertheless, employers are concerned at the rising burden of payroll administration and their growing role as paymasters of the benefit system. When the government originally suggested payment via the pay packet it indicated that the system should be paid via tax codes, but this now appears impractical. The CBI believes that, if there is no possibility of administering the tax credits system within the Inland Revenue, employers should be compensated for the administrative costs associated with running the scheme."

That is the full and complete CBI position, according to a paragraph from the briefing entitled "CBI position." With respect to the Paymaster General, that is what our new clauses seek to deliver: the CBI's position as fully expressed, and not as selectively quoted.

I shall not trouble the House by quoting the briefing at length, because to do so would be tedious, but I shall read out its final paragraph, which is just one sentence long:

> "Over the longer term, the CBI remains convinced that a technical solution is required which will allow payment via the pay packet to be administered by the Inland Revenue and bypass need for employer intervention completely."

The CBI is advocating an interim solution, and the Paymaster General must address this issue when she winds up this debate rather more convincingly than she did in Committee.

Historically, the CBI has not been particularly good at speaking up for the interests of smaller businesses, but I am glad that, under Digby Jones, it at last seems to be doing so. That is the spirit and rationale that underlies the CBI's position. I am pleased to say that, typically, local chambers of commerce are rather better at standing up for smaller businesses, which would be affected by the amendments and new clauses tabled by the Liberal Democrats and by my hon. Friends.

The Herefordshire and Worcestershire chamber of commerce pointed out to me that a huge proportion of businesses in Worcestershire are smaller businesses. It said that 84 per cent. of businesses in Worcestershire employ 10 people or fewer, and that payroll costs create a real problem for such businesses. I shall read a paragraph from a letter from the chamber of commerce that I quoted in Standing Committee, because it is of huge importance and the whole House has a right to hear it:

> "Each of the tax credit or collection items adds an amount of administration and therefore cost to the job of operating the payroll. It must be remembered that the person doing the payroll is often the owner manager, their expertise is probably in the field in which they started the business and they will have varying degrees of expertise. People running small businesses already need to be multi skilled and able to turn their hands to many tasks, however there is a danger in increasing the non-core workload, that is not income generating, too much."

Mr. Swire: Following on from what my hon. Friend has just said, does he agree with the similar comments of Donald Martin, the UK policy chairman of the Federation of Small Businesses? Mr. Martin said:

> "Businesses should not be treated as a social welfare arm of government. It is an invasion of employee privacy and a major distraction from the business of wealth creating activity."

Mr. Luff: My hon. Friend makes a very powerful point, but sadly, the scope of the new clauses and amendments under consideration does not allow us to debate—as I would like to do—invasion of privacy. We are focusing on the cost, and new clause 2, which I shall come to in a moment, focuses on the method of payment. I strongly agree with my hon. Friend, however, and those are issues that have to be taken seriously.

I urge the Paymaster General to recognise in her response that I am not trying to belittle the Government's attempts to reduce poverty. We all want to reduce poverty, but we must consider how to strike a balance and what mechanisms to use. It is probably asking too much for the Government to consider these new clauses and amendments sympathetically, but they should consider something similar in another place, or undertake to find another mechanism to reduce cost at a later stage, so that the CBI's long-term hope can come to fruition.

A year or so ago, something happened in my constituency. The complaints that we have always heard from the small business sector acquired a new urgency and fervour. There was a change of spirit—I do not know what caused it—and the sense that the burden had become too great was suddenly made very vocal.

In Standing Committee, the Paymaster General helpfully said that, in her view, the overall effect of the Bill might be to reduce the burdens on business. However, her confidence is not necessarily shared by the business sector itself, and experience certainly proves that that sector is right to be sceptical and cynical. It would help if she could explain why she is confident that, even at the margin, the proposals, without emendation, might reduce the burdens on business. That would be an encouraging message, if she can deliver on it.

I realise that new clause 2 represents an example of the law of unintended consequences. It deals with the payment mechanism and is primarily inspired, I expect, by a desire to help the claimant by offering choice. As the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), who spoke so effectively at the beginning of this debate, made clear, the Government appear to be hostile to offering choice in almost anything. However, offering the option of the payment mechanism seems a prudent and sensible step, and I endorse all that the hon. Gentleman said about choice.

As I said, new clause 2 also illustrates the law of unintended consequences, because it would affect the post office network at the margin. You have rightly said, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we should not debate that issue and I shall not do so, but in answering the debate it is important for the Government to bear that helpful benefit in mind. The post office network is in crisis. Thousands of post offices are closing and anything that we can do to increase footfall in sub-post offices would be helpful. Although new clause 2 may be inspired by the desire to help the claimant, it would have a very useful side-effect that hon. Members must concentrate on and bear in mind when they vote. I hope that we will have the chance to vote on new clause 2, because I certainly wish to support it in the Lobby.

New clause 2 also goes a long way towards addressing the issue of stigma, which has been thrown around, and to which my hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire) referred in his intervention. In 1998, Martin Taylor, author of the Government-commissioned report on work incentives, told the former Social Security Select Committee that there was no empirical evidence to suggest that the working families tax credit would have an effect on stigma. He said:

> "As far as stigma goes, the hard and fast evidence in all these non-financial and psychological matters is difficult to come by."

The Government would be ill-advised to hang too much of their case on that point.

The Government should also remember that a formidable alliance shares the view that we are right to be sceptical of the stigma claim. The National Council for One Parent Families, the CBI and the Institute for Fiscal Studies have all warned that the stigma attached to means-tested benefits could actually be increased by paying the credit through the payroll. In its document entitled "Credit Where it's Due", the Institute for Fiscal Studies says:

> "There is no evidence, though, that payment in this way improves work incentives or reduces stigma: the WFTC evaluation programme has not yet produced estimates of WFTC take-up or the impact on employment."

[Mr. Luff]

It also suggests that

> "for some, payment through the wage packet has been perhaps more stigmatising and certainly more hassle than direct payment."

I know that the words of the Institute for Fiscal Studies are always taken very seriously in the House.

In his opening speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs referred to the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux. In February, it published a report affirming that claimants should be given a free choice between direct payment and payment through their employer. The Paymaster General should also be concerned by NACAB reports of staff being dismissed as a result of their employers being forced to administer their claim for tax credits. I do not condone that behaviour. It is often the case that when we consider legislation we have to consider the world as it is and not as we would like it to be. Behaviour of that kind by employers is wrong and against the spirit of legislation, let alone their broader social responsibilities, but it is the inevitable consequence of a system like this one. The NACAB report states:

> "For many people, getting paid tax credit by their employer is simply not worth the trouble it can cause. Some employers consider the administrative burden too great for them to manage. In a small number of cases people have been sacked just for claiming tax credits. Other staff have pressure put on them to reduce their hours so they don't qualify, or are threatened with the sack."

New clause 2 and its grouped amendments deal with two separate issues, both of great importance. The next group of amendments concerns the other important issue of fraud, and the House will wish to explore that at some length.

The Minister must ask herself in all conscience whether she has got the balance of burdens on business and the social obligations of businesses in the wider community right. The amendments, which would relieve employers of some costs and exempt some employers from the provisions altogether, are the right measures because they will enhance employment and wealth throughout society. That is an issue with which she must always wrestle.

The hon. Lady must be careful about relying on some of her well-rehearsed arguments on stigma and so forth. She should also consider the wider benefits of new clause 2—not only the benefits of choice that have been mentioned, but the wider social benefits of protecting the network of post offices. The new clause and the amendments have a huge amount to recommend them to the Government. I urge her to consider them sympathetically. If she has to reject them now, please will she reconsider them in another place?

4 pm

Dawn Primarolo: This has been an interesting debate, although much of the ground was covered in Committee, and it has centred on two issues. First, the new clause and the amendments would impose restrictions on the Inland Revenue board's powers to make payments both direct to the claimant and through the employer—the new clause and the amendments cover a number of issues to which I will return. Secondly, the amendments try to deal with the burdens on the employer.

I share the enthusiasm of the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Richard Younger-Ross) for seeing small businesses thrive and grow. I remind him, however, that the working tax credit makes it possible for employers to draw on a wider pool of labour, as it enables more people to make the move into work and stay there. Employers also derive benefits from having employees in low-income households supported while they make that transition into work.

I also agree with the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. I will demonstrate that the amendments and new clauses tabled by the official Opposition today would restrict the choice of and increase the burdens on employers, which is the exact opposite of what they claimed they were trying to do.

New clause 2 and amendment No. 15 attempt to impose an obligation on the Board of the Inland Revenue to make all direct payments of the new tax credits by order book through the post office. The amendment would restrict the manner in which payments could be made to that set out in the new clause. The new clause goes on to allow the board to make payments by automated credit transfer, but only through a "basic account", accessible at the post office and then only if the claimant has chosen that payment method.

Let us be clear that the new clause would in effect offer the claimant no choice. Claimants would not have the choice of the payment going into their bank account, if they already had one. I am talking not about what the proposer of the amendment thinks he has done, but what he has done. The board cannot make emergency payments—

Mr. Heath *rose—*

Dawn Primarolo: The debate started at 2.50 pm and has been long. Many issues have been covered. I will be more than happy to give way to the hon. Gentleman when I have made some progress.

The new clause would allow the board to make payments by automated credit transfer, but only through the basic account accessible at the post office and then only if the claimant had chosen that method of payment.

There was much discussion of the Post Office. Here, we are concerned only with the payment made. I remind hon. Members that the powers in the Bill are permissive powers for the Inland Revenue to determine how claimants will be paid and what choices they will have. I will be happy to deal with that subject after I have given way to the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), but first I must inform the hon. Member for Teignbridge that the classic problem for some Liberal Democrat Members seems to be accepting a principle, but not accepting the consequences of implementing it. I also remind him that the Liberal Democrats opposed the working families tax credit. While we are more than happy that they now think that the child tax credit is the way forward, they need to be careful as they venture into that territory.

Mr. Heath: I do not understand the basis for the start of the Paymaster General's speech on this subject. She is claiming that the new clause and amendments would leave out the parts of the Bill that deal with alternative methods of payment, which they clearly would not. Furthermore, she interprets the word "entitlement" to mean a requirement on the Board of the Inland Revenue.

I know of no construction that enables the word "entitlement" to be termed an instruction to the board, allowing no other means of payment. Perhaps the hon. Lady will elucidate.

Dawn Primarolo: Indeed I will. The Bill gives authority to the board of the Inland Revenue to administer the new tax credits under its care and management functions. If the hon. Gentleman had been able to attend the Standing Committee—he was not a member—he would have heard some discussion of how those obligations interact with the Bill.

With the exception of transfer into bank accounts, there is no statement in the Bill to list the precise ways in which the credit can be paid. As I said in Committee, the preferred option would be a direct transfer to a bank account—both individual's bank accounts and through the universal bank at the post office. I said that we needed to ensure that that payment was made. I understand why the hon. Gentleman is frustrated, but as he well knows, when one drafts an amendment one needs to know what is already in the Bill and where it cross-references.

There is a second issue. The new clause would impose an obligation on employers to use the same payment methods as the board. I am sure that those who drafted it did not intend it to do that either. I understand the concern that the new clause is intended to deal with. Hon. Members are trying to ensure that claimants can collect their money from the post office, as they do now, and that they are not forced to use bank accounts if no suitable accounts are available. I explained in Committee that the amendments tabled there would not have delivered that end. I am now explaining that these amendments will not do so either.

Hon. Members talked a lot about burdens on the employer. The new clause would impose an obligation on employers to make all working tax credit payments payable by them by order book or through suitable post office accounts. The working tax credit is paid by the employer. The payment goes from the board to the employer and then from the employer to the employee. The new clause would have that effect despite the fact that the employer would normally pay the employee's wages either in cash or into a bank account and that is what the employee expects. I find it hard to believe that the intention was to impose such a restriction, although the hon. Gentleman has confirmed that that is the case. I can assure him that the new clause would have such an effect.

The main thrust of the new clause is to enable claimants to continue to receive payments by order book. That would limit the choice of payment methods already available to and used by benefits and tax credit claimants alike.

My key objection to the new clause is that it would prevent claimants from receiving their payments by any method other than order book or through an account at the post office, even if they chose another payment method. It must be remembered that tax credits are paid to a broad range of families, many of whom already have bank accounts, are accustomed to using them and would expect to be able to continue to do so. Many other families will want to receive payments in that way. The new clause would prevent them from doing so.

I made it clear in Committee that a move away from familiar payment methods must be accompanied by suitable alternative methods of payment for the most vulnerable members of society. As I said, the regulations to determine payment methods will deal with exactly that point. I was asked by the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) whether the Prime Minister's commitment that people would still be able to collect cash from a post office via the universal bank would be an option. I confirmed that it would. Not only is the new clause unnecessary because the assurances have been given but should it be carried it would narrow choice and increase the burdens on employers, which hon. Members say they wish to reduce.

Mr. Swire: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dawn Primarolo: I am happy to give way to the hon. Gentleman but hon. Members have already said that they want to discuss at length other new clauses. I will give way but out of respect to the House I need to try to put on the record the answers to the questions that so many hon. Members have asked.

Mr. Swire: It is true that many of the recipients of credits and benefits already have a bank account, but according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies extending the principle of tax credits to couples and individuals without children will bring an extra 250,000 single mothers and 170,000 working couples into the regulations. The IFS believes that in total almost 6 million households will receive some form of support. The number of people entitled to the benefits will rise by a large amount. Does the hon. Lady not concede that many of those people will not have, and will never have had, a bank account?

Dawn Primarolo: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman was listening. I said that we needed to provide choice and to ensure that other payment methods were available for those who had no access to bank accounts. Indeed when we discussed fraud in Committee, every Committee member accepted that the best way to minimise fraud and to ensure that the money went to the family or individual who was entitled to it was to have a secure payment method. We need to balance a secure payment method with ensuring access. That is what the regulations will provide for.

As part of that—I said it in Committee—we are working closely with the Post Office and the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that a suitable alternative will be available. The powers in the regulations are permissive ones designed to deliver that. The Bill provides the power to make the regulations on the manner of direct payment—that is all.

If new clause 2 were part of the Bill, it would restrict entitlement. The new clause and amendment No. 15 would reduce freedom of choice at the same time as putting more burdens on businesses by requiring them to have two methods of payment: they will have to issue an order book, or pay into the post office account. That is clearly daft. I hope that the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome will agree to withdraw the new clause as it is fatally flawed.

4.15 pm

Amendment No. 13 attempts to impose a duty on employers to consult with employees to see whether they would prefer to receive their working tax credit directly from the board rather than through the payroll. It is supported by hon. Members who just a few minutes ago were complaining about burdens. Now they are saying that employers must consult their employees.

What is interesting about the amendment is that it does not say what employers would have to do once they had consulted. Presumably, they would have to start printing order books, if it is linked to new clause 2.

Amendments Nos. 14 and 16 are another attempt to raise the issue of burdens on employers, which we discussed at length in Committee and during debates on the Bill that preceded the Tax Credits Bill. Amendment No. 14 has the dual purpose of requiring the board to reimburse employers for the costs they incur in paying working tax credit to employees, and of exempting employers with 20 or fewer employees from paying the tax credit, whereas amendment No. 16 aims to exempt employers with fewer than 15 employees.

As I pointed out in Committee, the Government are not attracted to that idea at all. The tax system does not provide for a direct subsidy or compensation to employers to fulfil their obligations in relation to tax. However, as I said at length in Committee—I will spare the House the long list—in a number of areas the Government have introduced reforms to reduce burdens, to simplify the operation of PAYE and to assist small businesses in particular. All that has been accepted and welcomed but ironically the amendments put more burdens on employers.

Let us consider the proposal to reimburse employers. What do we reimburse them for? An employer may have 20 employees with only one receiving a tax credit. How do we calculate exactly how much compensation should be paid? What information would we have to ask the employer to give us, so that we could calculate the compensation?

One amendment seeks to exempt employers with 20 or fewer employees and another those with 15 or fewer employees. I think that about 85 per cent. of employers are in businesses with 15 or fewer employees and 95 per cent. are in businesses with 20 or fewer employees. What would happen if a business had 16 employees and the exemption was for businesses with 15? Would it be asked to fill in loads of forms and send in loads of returns? Would it be sent loads more forms back? That would increase the burdens on that business. It has been demonstrated that paying the working tax credit through the wage packet will be simple. It supports the transition into work and assists employees and employers.

The hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire said that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. The Opposition may have been full of good intentions but their amendments are a disaster. They are a disaster for claimants because they would restrict their choice and remove our ability to respond in an emergency by, for example, paying a claimant by giro. They would be an utter disaster for employers, who would have to consult, decide what to do, print order books, make arrangements with the Post Office in case that is where the claimant wanted the money to go, and let us know whether they had 14, 15, 16, 20 or 21 employees, depending on which bit of the system they came under.

These are totally disruptive amendments, and I am happy to send a much longer explanation to the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome of why his good intentions do not work. I urge my hon. Friends to oppose the new clause and amendments because they are simply daft.

Mr. Heath: Until latterly, we had rather a good debate. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Any debate which has the spokesman for the Conservative Opposition standing at the Dispatch Box and supporting collectivism and workplace ballots and expressing suspicion of the CBI shows that we live in a topsy-turvy world.

I am grateful to all those who expressed opinions in the debate, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Richard Younger-Ross) who did a good job describing the difficulties that small businesses will experience. The hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) talked about the law of unintended consequences and my new clause assisting post offices, but that was certainly not an unintended consequence. It was absolutely the intention of my new clause not only to extend choice but to protect the sub-post office system.

What are we to make of the Minister's response? She said as her parting shot that she would write to me at length and I look forward to the letter with great expectations. Other than that, her argument seems to be a simple assertion: she does not like our amendments, so they are daft. She says that with all the authority of the Treasury Bench, and we know how desperately clever the Treasury is at producing briefings on these amendments. She says ex cathedra that because she does not like the new clause, she does not believe it to be sensible or that it will work.

The Minister adduces an argument that the new clause would restrict payments only to those that could be made through a sub-post office and that it would restrict choice. I have looked again at the Bill. I see no change to clause 23 other than the paving amendment which we propose to allow for new clause 2. I see no change to clause 24 which provides the powers that she says are now curtailed. The new clause provides only an entitlement to receive the cash over the counter in a post office. That seems a perfectly sensible and proper proposal.

The Minister asserts, secondly, that the universal bank will be in operation in April 2003. I desperately hope she is right, but I am sick and tired of hearing Ministers assert with no evidence that the development of the universal bank is anything like at the stage it should be if it is go live in April 2003. If it is not, the mechanisms in the Bill will be inadequate and the Minister has no plan B. That may be of no great concern to the Government or the Inland Revenue, but it is of enormous concern to people who need that facility through their post office and to those who are trying to make their businesses in those post offices work, but who will not have the income they desperately need to maintain the network.

For those reasons I reject the Government's simple assertions and seek the advice of the House on the merits of new clause 2.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 170, Noes 252.

Division No. 164] **[4.23 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
John Thurso and
Richard Younger-Ross.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burgon, Colin
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles
(Norwich S)
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay

Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hurst, Alan
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie
(Welwyn Hatfield)
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Shipley, Ms Debra
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Anne McGuire and
Mr. Ian Pearson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I understand that at 3.30 pm today a press release was issued, announcing that the Government were to proceed with the public-private partnership for the London underground. Is that not a contempt of the House, given that the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions is due to make a statement at 7 o'clock this evening?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I remind the hon. Gentleman that what he says is correct: Mr. Speaker has agreed to a statement by the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions at 7 pm this evening.

New Clause 6

AGGRAVATED TAX CREDIT FRAUD

'(1) A person is guilty of aggravated tax credit fraud if he is knowingly concerned in any fraudulent activity undertaken with a view to obtaining payments of a tax credit by him or any other person and—

(a) tax credits have been fraudulently obtained by himself or another in excess of the prescribed sum; or

(b) he has been convicted of an offence under the provisions of this Act or a benefit offence as defined by section 7 of the Social Security Fraud Act 2001 within the preceding five years.

(2) A person who commits an offence under subsection (1) is liable—

(a) on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months, or a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum, or both, or

(b) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding fourteen years, or a fine, or both.

(3) Regulations may make provision as to the prescribed sum in subsection (1).'.—*[Mr. Clappison.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government amendment No. 23.

Amendment No. 3, in clause 33, page 21, line 40, at end insert—

'(3) The Secretary of State shall within one year of this section coming into effect and every year thereafter lay a report before Parliament on—

(a) the extent of fraud in claims for tax credits, and

(b) the measures he has taken to deal with fraudulent claims for tax credits, including measures to facilitate the early detection and prevention of such fraud.'.

Amendment (a) thereto, in line 3, after "credits", insert—

', including the estimated extent of fraud as a proportion of all error in such claims,'.

Mr. Clappison: I shall briefly consider Government amendment No. 23 first, as it deals with a subject that is slightly different from the provisions on non-compliance. We welcome the amendment and we are grateful to the Paymaster General for writing to us about it. The change in the wording of clause 31 will be advantageous and fairer to employers, especially small employers. I ask the indulgence of the Financial Secretary to the Treasury and the House in permitting us modestly to claim some small credit for bringing that about by raising the issue in previous debates.

In Committee, we drew attention to what would have been a significant tightening-up of the provisions, which would have been a considerable imposition on employers. Following that scrutiny, it emerged that the situation that would have prevailed had the Bill been passed unamended would have been even worse than we originally thought. That point was disclosed in a letter from the Financial Secretary.

When we originally raised the issue, we were worried that the clause would extend liability for innocent errors made by employers—acts and omissions on their part—that were neither fraudulent nor negligent but that would have resulted in the imposition of penalties on employers. In the letter, it is revealed that it would have been even worse than that, because the liability would have gone further.

The Financial Secretary wrote that the clause

> "would allow a penalty to be imposed on an employer even if the incorrect payment of tax credit was attributable to an innocent error on the part of the employer or for some other reason outside the employer's control."

That means, quite simply, that an employer could have faced a significant penalty—a particularly significant penalty for a small employer—for something that had nothing to do with him and that was the result of someone else's actions. That would have been a serious state of affairs. Government amendment No. 23 puts it right, and we welcome it.

However, we add this sentiment, which is apt in the circumstances. It is a pity that we could not have extended to the rest of the Bill the detailed scrutiny that we were giving to the parts that were considered in Committee, to discover what other pitfalls there may have been. The Government amendment has emerged as a result of that scrutiny. We can only express the hope that there are no more pitfalls awaiting small employers or anyone else.

I now come to the meat of this group of amendments and the new clause: fraud. We believe that fraud within the tax credit system is a serious issue, and that the starting point for that issue is a proper assessment of the extent of fraud in the existing tax credit system. Quite simply, we need to know how much fraud there is within tax credits.

We have been asking that question for some time and, sadly, we are no closer to receiving a straightforward answer from the Government today than we were when we began asking the question. We would like to know, for example, whether the Government themselves know how much fraud there is. If they do, will they tell the House?

I asked the Paymaster General that question in March 2001, during a debate on the uprating of tax credits. She kindly agreed to write to me and she was as good as her word. She wrote in April 2001 and told me:

> "The Inland Revenue are carrying out a benchmarking exercise to establish the level of fraud in tax credit claims. This began in September 2000 and will run for twelve months. The results will be used to ensure tax credits compliance work is carried out in the most effective way."

Taking the Paymaster General at her word, on 15 October I tabled a parliamentary question, to ask what assessment Ministers had made of the extent of fraud. I received a reply in a written answer on 18 December. You might think, Madam Deputy Speaker, that from 15 October to 18 December was a rather long time to wait for a written answer, but I was treated better than the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), because the answer that I eventually received was grouped with a question that he had originally asked back on 28 June, on much the same subject. Anyway, this is what I and the right hon. Gentleman were told on 18 December:

> "The Inland Revenue is currently undertaking an exercise to benchmark the level of fraud within the working families tax credit. The full results of this will be known early next year."—[*Official Report*, 19 December 2001; Vol. 377, c. 323-24W.]

Well, here we are, early next year as it was then, and in Committee we had the opportunity to ask—at an appropriate time, it would seem—about fraud. We asked the same question, but without any greater success in getting an answer. We have been mulling over what the Paymaster General said in Committee:

> "On the benchmarking report, I told the hon. Member for Hertsmere that the Inland Revenue are considering the details and a report will come to me. It is already using that information to inform people about the new provisions. I cannot give him a guarantee that I will be able to publish that information because it deals with specifics of possible frauds that it would be unwise to put in the public domain. However, I will consider how to ensure that he is properly informed so that he can discharge his parliamentary duties."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 24 January 2002; c. 239.]

Since then I have asked a further parliamentary question. I know that the Government like to control everything these days, but I would like to be the judge of how I discharge my parliamentary duties and I am afraid that the answer I have received from the Government does not enable me or anyone else to discharge their parliamentary duties. I was told:

> "The Inland Revenue are currently analysing the data from their compliance benchmarking exercise. We shall be considering the results, and questions of publication, within the next few months."—[*Official Report*, 5 February 2002; Vol. 379, c. 851W.]

I have been asking the same question for roughly a year. I have been taken through to the time when the Inland Revenue exercise concluded, at the end of September. We were no wiser at the end of that. We were no wiser as a result of asking the parliamentary question in December 2001. We were no wiser after the Committee, and we are no wiser after this most recent written answer. I do look to the Financial Secretary for an answer today.

Given the speed with which the Government are changing the tax credits system and the way in which new tax credits are constantly emerging, I am very worried that this tax credit will be abolished before we have the chance to know how much fraud there was in it. We shall move on to the next tax credit and we shall be told about that, that the Government are conducting a benchmarking exercise and it is too early to say what its results are. We need to know today from the Financial Secretary.

4.45 pm

Mr. Hoban: My hon. Friend has set out a sorry tale of delays and prevarication by the Government. Might he perhaps be tempted to explain to us why he thinks that the Government may have prevaricated in providing that information to the House to enable hon. Members to make a judgment as to the extent of fraud in that system?

Mr. Clappison: A variety of explanations were put forward in Committee, but my hon. Friend assumes in his question that the Government themselves know, so it would be good to have a straightforward answer from the Financial Secretary whether he knows the outcome of the benchmarking exercise carried out by the Inland Revenue. Does he know how much fraud there is in the working families tax credit?

If the Financial Secretary does know, would he tell us whether he will kindly put that figure in the public domain? I am not asking him to clarify what was said in Committee by the Paymaster General. To summarise, she said that the Government were afraid of encouraging people to commit fraud by giving away too many details. Well, we are not asking how to commit fraud. We are not asking for details like that. We are simply asking how much fraud there is. If it is the Minister's argument that it would be dangerous to say how much fraud there is, that in itself would be a very strong temptation to people to commit fraud if they heard something like that coming from the Government. It is hardly a ringing endorsement of the invulnerability of tax credits to fraud.

The same argument has not applied to fraud in the benefits system. At the most recent Work and Pensions questions we were told by the Secretary of State himself, I believe, how important it was to know how much fraud there was in the benefits system. The same considerations apply to the Tax Credits Bill, so today we are looking to the Financial Secretary to give us some straightforward answers to straightforward questions.

Knowing how much fraud takes place is very important, but that is only a starting point; it is also important to find out what is being done about it. That brings me to amendment No. 3, in which we propose that we have a report every year on the extent of tax credit fraud, so that we know what is happening. We would have a starting point—we would know how much fraud there was to begin with. We would know what measures were being taken to deal with it and, as a result of that report, we would know each year what progress was being made in dealing with fraud.

The Government said in the 1998 Green Paper on fraud that that scenario would be desirable. They said it is important to have better information about the extent of fraud and then to discover what is being done about it. In Committee, the Paymaster General told us that early detection is important to stop abuses that may arise in the system. We agree with her, so that would be specifically required under amendment No. 3, which, we hope, will find favour with the Financial Secretary for that reason.

We believe that much more can be done. In Committee, we explained how we would like tax credit fraud to be tackled. We would like better co-ordination between Departments and between local and central Government, greater co-operation between the public and the private sectors and as much involvement from the public as possible in providing information. We welcome the fact that there has been a significant public response to the benefit fraud hotline.

I was told in a parliamentary answer last week that the public had communicated to the Inland Revenue, through the benefit fraud hotline, 16,676 allegations of improper applications for the working families tax credit and disabled person's tax credit. We welcome that public-spirited co-operation from people who share our concern that fraud should be dealt with effectively. I do not know how the public would respond to what the Government have done in relation to that public willingness and spirit of co-operation.

Mr. Swire: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Clappison: I shall give way, but my hon. Friend may want to ponder on the statistics showing what the Government have done. We have heard what the public have done—they have made more than 16,000 allegations. However, I was told, by way of a written parliamentary answer, that there were 530 recoveries—presumably, recoveries of incorrect payments—18 penalties, which are financial penalties, and 2 prosecutions, even though 16,676 allegations were made to the hotline.

Mr. Swire: In developing that theme, I wonder whether part of the problem is that those who run the fraud hotline do not feel that they are given enough support. I suggest that because I have a letter from my constituent, Julie Embling of the Acorn kindergarten in Exmouth, Devon—I wrote to the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, the hon. Member for Bury, South (Mr. Lewis), in November asking for a reply, but I have yet to receive one—who maintains that, in running her small private school, she is owed about £2,000 a year by people claiming the working families tax credit who do not pay it on to her. She spoke to someone at the fraud hotline about her recurring problems and was told that child minders, nurseries and pre-schools are suffering financially from that nationwide problem. Those at the hotline suggested that she write to me as her Member of Parliament to try to persuade the Government to change the laws on the working families tax credit.

Mr. Clappison: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. I am sure that his constituent will be as interested as we are in the consequences of these proposals. She will also have in mind the recent experience of fraud involving individual learning accounts. Innocent providers lost out under that system, as did the people who were innocently trying to obtain education and training, because of the disruption caused when it was suddenly discovered that large-scale fraud was taking place and the Government had to bring the system to an ignominious halt. We are trying to prevent something similar happening again by having a thorough and proper debate on fraud.

We are not impressed by the number of prosecutions for working families tax credit fraud. We do not suggest that that is the only way to tackle fraud, but we would like people who knowingly commit fraud, especially those who commit the most determined fraud—I shall deal with that in speaking to new clause 6—to be prosecuted for a serious criminal offence. We suspect that many people who could be prosecuted are not being prosecuted.

Altogether, in the two years that the working families tax credit has operated, there have been only 28 prosecutions. There has been a recent spurt in the number of prosecutions—it may be entirely coincidental that questions have been asked about that—but the figure is still low in relation to the size of the system, the number of people claiming and the amount of fraud in other parts of the benefits system. I emphasise that we, like members of the public, are interested in prosecuting people who commit serious fraud and in dealing with them severely.

New clause 6 is designed to create an offence of aggravated tax credit fraud for those who repeatedly commit fraud or obtain large sums. Those determined fraudsters need to be dealt with more seriously. We need to decide how best to protect the interests of taxpayers and the majority of tax credit claimants who are honest and who also believe that the fraud is unacceptable. They want us to get to the people who commit serious frauds to obtain a large amount of money or who defraud the state again and again.

Treating such offences more seriously would be in line with what the Government are trying to do in other parts of the benefits system. The Social Security Fraud Act 2001 tackles fraud in other benefits. It received Opposition support and removes benefits from people who are repeatedly convicted of offences. There is a widespread desire to ensure that those who commit the most serious frauds are dealt with more strictly.

We have asked many questions about fraud and want straightforward answers. It is time that the Government came clean. They should tell us what the level of fraud is and set out more clearly what they intend to do about it. We will continue to press for answers.

Mr. Webb: I congratulate the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on his assiduous studying of the Bill in Committee which led to the correction set out in Government amendment No. 23. I wholeheartedly associate myself with his comment that large chunks of it were not scrutinised because of the tight timetable. It would be regrettable if other aspects of the Bill were not picked up on. I hope that the Government take a lesson from that the next time they programme our discussions. They should realise that it is in their interests to have proper scrutiny. Indeed, we would all benefit in such circumstances.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): The hon. Gentleman says that that would be in the Government's interests, but would it not be in the taxpayers' interests?

Mr. Webb: This is a win-win situation. It is in all our interests that there is proper scrutiny. However, the Government's reputation for producing good legislation is damaged if Bills are not properly scrutinised and have to be corrected later on. So I welcome Government amendment No. 23 and the process by which it came about.

I also welcome the suggestion in amendment No. 3 and amendment (a) that there should be annual reports on the extent of fraud, what is being done about it and how it contributes to the total error in claims. My slight hesitation is that a detailed exposition of what is being done to tackle fraud might show our hand too much, but the request for information on the scale of fraud and the overall progress in tackling it would be welcome.

I will be interested to hear the Financial Secretary's response to new clause 6. We all agree that fraud is a bad thing and that repeated or large-scale fraud is even worse. There is only one question, therefore: what is the appropriate penalty? When my colleagues and I ask whether a proposed penalty, of whatever magnitude, is not serious enough or too serious, it is sometimes suggested that we either approve of the crime or are not tough enough. We want such crime punished properly, but does new clause 6 set out the right punishment? The hon. Member for Hertsmere did not try to justify the specific tariff or degree of severity that it sets out, which is why I have an open mind about whether to support it.

5 pm

My instinct is to be slightly nervous of the severity of the proposal. I do not understand the legal system enough to understand the precise implications of new clause 6(2)(b) and its reference to conviction on indictment. However,

> "imprisonment for a term not exceeding fourteen years"

strikes me as an extraordinarily long period.

We have a scale of relative importance of different offences. To draw an analogy with recent news items, it was suggested that those who take mobile phones off people in the street should face four years, or something like that, in the slammer; at that point, someone came on the radio and said, "But something much more serious was done to me, and the person who did it only got 18 months." No one disagrees that the act is wrong; the question is where it fits into the scale of seriousness of offences and penalties.

Mr. Clappison: I am listening with great interest to the important points that the hon. Gentleman is making. The purpose of setting a maximum sentence is to cater for the worst type of offences. The new clause is in effect saying that offences with such aggravating features are the more serious type of offences.

It might interest the hon. Gentleman to know the current state of affairs regarding those who have already been prosecuted for working families tax credit fraud—an offence that currently attracts possible imprisonment. Only seven people have been sent to prison for such offences, and a written answer that I received suggests that some of those people may also have been involved in offences of another type.

Mr. Webb: I am grateful for that intervention, and I understand that we see only the maximum in the new clause. However, I cannot help reflecting on a dreadful constituency case in which a teenager was murdered and the murderer was given 12 years. I find it hard to understand the relative figures when it is suggested that a fraudster—even a serious tax credit fraudster—should be given 14 years. That is not to say that the offences are not serious, or that the sentences are not serious enough. I just wonder about their relative position in the scale of penalties for offences.

I look forward to hearing the Minister's comments. We all agree that tax credit fraud should be cracked down on, but, in passing, I observe that the proposals about not putting the money through the pay packet would have worked well in the context of the current group of amendments. The ability to pass money through the books of a firm is an open invitation to fraud if the firm wants to collude with its employees. Direct payments to the individual are far less prone to organised fraud of that sort.

I welcome the fact that the Conservative amendments turn the focus to fraud. Regular reports to Parliament would be welcome, but I have some reservations about the extent of the penalties proposed in new clause 6.

Mr. David Ruffley (Bury St. Edmunds): I support new clause 6. It is necessary because the regime to be introduced by the Bill will make fraud easier than it is under the system to be replaced.

In 1999, the Select Committee on Social Security said that there were

> "serious concerns . . . about the increased potential for fraud in Working Families Tax Credit as compared to Family Credit."

That Committee suggested, and I agree, that a straightforward benefits system was less susceptible to fraud than a tax credit system. I venture to suggest that one of the reasons why the questions asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) about the level of fraud under working families tax credit have not been answered is that those answers would reveal a higher incidence of fraud under the tax credit system than under the family credit system that it replaced.

Why should that be embarrassing to the Government? The answer is not far to seek: the working families tax credit system and the tax credit system to follow from the Bill was an idea of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Her Majesty's Treasury. The system is manifestly not only more complicated, but more susceptible to fraud.

The questions that I have posed about increased susceptibility to fraud have been borne out by international experience across the Atlantic. The Canadian working income supplement, a tax credit system not unlike the one that the Bill seeks to introduce, has been a disaster. It has resulted in increased fraud and has led the Canadian authorities to the inescapable conclusion that they should scrap it and return to a benefit-based system. Equally, in the United States, the Internal Revenue Service is beside itself at the amount of fraud perpetrated under the earned income tax credit system, which is the key model for the Treasury's working tax credit and, before that, the working families tax credit. The figures speak for themselves. In early 1997, the taxpayers of America lost more than $4.4 billion as a result of fraud in the earned income tax credit system, mainly because of poor certification—in fact, it is virtually non-existent—of hours worked in employment. *The Economist* observed:

> "There is no longer a consensus that the earned income tax credit is a sensible addition to America's anti-poverty programmes."

New clause 6 has a clear intention; it will introduce serious penalties for aggravated fraud. The system that the Bill will introduce provides more scope for the fraudster, chiefly because of the annual basis of assessment, which contrasts with the much shorter periods required for income support and the six-month assessment period for working families tax credit. If a claim is made before the beginning of a tax year for the following tax year, the claimant may have to calculate in his annual assessment what he thinks his income will be for the next 12 months. If there is a change in his circumstances, that will not be assessed automatically before the 12-month period is up.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies said that that is self-evidently loopy, as there is no comparable system in any other benefit regime; it does not think that such a period of assessment has previously been introduced without serious reassessment of the claimant's benefit within 12 months. From the Bill, it is clear that the Government seek to get round that by arguing that if there is a change in someone's circumstances, their case could be reopened. If someone gets a lot more money during the year, there will be a reassessment of the amount of benefit that they receive. However, within certain thresholds, the Government will choose to ignore any change in circumstances. We are told that there will be a threshold above which certain amounts of increased income will be ignored by the authorities, thus leading demonstrably to overpayment. That is what the disregard in the threshold means; someone will get more benefit under the new system than they otherwise would.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies thinks that that is a bit peculiar, but it becomes even more peculiar when we realise that we have not been told what the threshold is. Extraordinarily, all that we are told is that thresholds will be set by regulation; we do not know how much increased income will be disregarded or, in other words, constitute a benefit overpayment. In those circumstances, there is considerable potential for fraud. It may be argued that there will be powers to seek repayment of overpaid benefit at the end of the tax year, but that overpayment has to be detected. I know that my hon. Friends did sturdy work in Committee, questioning the ability of the authorities to get repayments made when overpayments have occurred in year.

At the beginning of a tax year, when information is given to the Inland Revenue about future income for the next 12 months, there is an in-built incentive to underestimate the amount forecast by the taxpayer. An answer to that conundrum has not been forthcoming from the Government and still causes great concern to the Institute for Fiscal Studies.

What about the ability of the Inland Revenue—not the Department for Work and Pensions any more—to police the new regime that the Bill seeks to introduce? I reiterate the powerful points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere, because I fear that Ministers on the Treasury Bench may try to wriggle out of the question. In the letter that the Paymaster General placed in the Library, she stated:

> "The Inland Revenue are carrying out a benchmarking exercise to establish the level of fraud in tax credit claims. This began in September 2000 and will run for 12 months. The results will be used to ensure tax credits compliance work is carried out in the most effective way."

What is the number of cases that have given rise to criminal proceedings as a result of that study?

That is a perfectly simple question. I hope that we will get an answer. During the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere, the Parliamentary Private Secretary scuttled no less than twice to the Box to get bits of paper. Much agitation was evident. I sincerely hope that the Financial Secretary has done his homework and that he will provide an answer to a question that was raised in Standing Committee—an answer that has been asked for twice, including my questioning now, in the Chamber today. It should not be terribly difficult, and it should be something that we have a right to know.

The Financial Secretary may smirk away. Someone once said of his general performance:

> "We have seen the future; and it smirks",

which, I think, is a variation on a quote from the Webbs. The right hon. Gentleman should not smirk. He may congratulate me on what he considers to be an amusing joke. I find it not so much amusing as worrying that he can laugh about a taxpayer issue. The right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) said that it is the taxpayer who is losing out as a result of fraud, and I suggest to the Financial Secretary that the taxpayer deserves some answers today.

The Government have the technology to calculate the number of cases that have been caught and the number of criminal proceedings that have been brought. We know that the Government can have access to that information because in her letter on 11 April 2001, which is deposited in the House of Commons Library, the Paymaster General tells us that between April 2000 and February 2001 approximately 29,000 working families tax credit and disabled person's tax credit investigations were completed, and about 300 penalties were imposed. If she can find the information for that period, why on earth can she not find it for the 12-month period about which she promised to tell us? Those facts need to be put on the record by Ministers today.

I try not to think too ill of my fellow man, in the inclusive Conservative party that my right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo) has done so much to influence over the past few weeks. I do not want to resort to cheap rhetoric about benefit frauds, cheats and scroungers. We are seeking as a party to condemn a little less and understand a little more. So I want to be very gentle in making my point: I think that it is highly unlikely that the number of serious fraud cases that relate to working families tax credit and in which penalties are justified amounts to only 300 in one year. That is the number given in the Paymaster General's figures, but it seems remarkably low, so I repeat that we need the figures that she undertook to give to us.

In conclusion, I should like to make a more general point about fraud, not least in relation to that which is endemic as a result of having a tax credit system, as opposed to a straightforward benefit system and family credit. Apart from housing benefit, the two most vulnerable benefits in terms of fraud are jobseeker's allowance and income support, which are both folded into the working tax credit and child tax credit that are at the core of the Bill. On 20 December 1999, Lord Rooker, the then Minister of State, Department of Social Security, told the House something very interesting. He said:

> "Previous estimates have shown that £2 billion a year has definitely been lost through fraud. A further £3 billion may have been lost in cases where fraud is strongly suspected".

On top of that lot, he referred to

> "a further £2 billion where there is some suspicion of fraud."—[*Official Report*, 20 December 1999; Vol. 341, c. 323W.]

Those figures have been estimated to be somewhat on the low side, not least by my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) when he was Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. That estimable Committee suggested that, in total, social security fraud cost the average family about £500 a year. That is the scale and magnitude of the problem with which the Government have to grapple. Of course, the predecessor Administration also had to grapple with it. However, this Bill seems to encourage a lax culture in terms of application for the two credits. There is the disregard of increases in income, about which the authorities are saying "Don't worry about that, we'll overpay you." A new regime is being introduced in which the arrangements are more complicated and it will be more difficult for people to get the right answers. It will, therefore, give fraudsters more scope to try things on and claim that they were confused—a point that has been rather sagely made by the Institute for Fiscal Studies. For those reasons, as well as that which has already been mentioned—the secrecy with which Ministers are treating the information about the level of fraud in working families tax credit and tax credits in general—I urge the House to support the new clause and the associated amendments tabled by my hon. Friends.

Mr. Frank Field: I rise to speak to the amendments in the group to which I have appended my name. I do so for one very simple reason: when the Opposition were in government, they were, at least in my view, open to the charge of being soft on fraud and soft on the causes of fraud. I hope that those on the Front Bench will accept the amendments, as I would not want us to go into an election with that charge not only being pinned to us, but being widely believed by the electorate.

I want to support my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary and again emphasise to the House the difficulties that he has in trying to ensure that the civil service machine is as effective as we want it to be in countering fraud. It is not part of my normal behaviour to attack civil servants either generally or individually, but I can say that the main culprits are not in the Box tonight and that I am thinking about the generalities and not about individuals.

Two examples might suggest that the machinery supporting the Government is not as anxious to counter fraud, or to take notice of the will of the House, as it should be. I have already cited the first example. I had responsibility for fraud for about 13 weeks, and decided that we should undertake an inquiry into the patterns of fraud in family credit. That information would be made known to the Treasury so that when it came to plan the working families tax credit, it could at least design out of the new benefit the easy means to fraud that were present in the family credit system. As is known, a successor Minister has told the House that the papers carrying my decision have gone missing. That hardly suggests that there is mega-support in some Departments for countering fraud.

The second example has also been cited. Attempts to get information about the extent of fraud through a parliamentary question tabled in my name took six months to elicit a reply. Again, that hardly suggests a group of people actively engaged in trying to protect taxpayers' money. I emphasise that point because we are not talking about our money. We are talking about a large number of people, many of whom earn low wages, who pay their taxes because they believe that they should. We have an equal duty to ensure that the money raised from those people, whether rich or poor, is spent in the way in which the House requires.

If we are casual with that responsibility, in the long run there will be even less support in the House for welfare measures than there is at the moment. So, if we cannot do this for the proper reason, we should do it for another reason—namely, because those of us who are interested in ensuring that those at the bottom of the pile get a slightly better deal than they would if there were no Government intervention want those programmes to be protected.

Mr. Clappison: Just before the right hon. Gentleman moves on from that point, it is worth bearing in mind the answer that he received to his parliamentary question. It stated that

"it is not possible to answer specific questions about the proportion of the Inland Revenue's compliance costs that relate to Tax Credits."—[*Official Report*, 19 December 2001; Vol. 377, c. 324W.]

It took the machinery that he has described six months to tell him that it did not know the answer.

Mr. Field: I hate to say this, but the Treasury looks good in this regard compared with the Department for Work and Pensions. I recently received a reply to a letter that I had sent to that Department nine months earlier. It had a "roller-towel" answer similar to the one to which the hon. Gentleman has just referred. All this suggests that, despite the Government's wish to counter fraud, that wish is not being backed up with resolute action by all civil servants. For the reasons that I have briefly outlined, therefore, I hope that when my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury comes to reply, he will not surprise the House or taxpayers, and that he will express the Government's intention to adopt the amendments.

Mr. Mark Field *rose—*

Mr. Frank Field: I give way to my namesake.

Mr. Mark Field: I thank the right hon. Gentleman—perhaps I should call him my right hon. kinsman. He has made a thoughtful contribution detailing some of the intrinsic problems that the Department faced when he was a Minister. Does he not feel, however, that an openness to fraud will inevitably be endemic in the system of tax credits? That system has been born out of a desire to push the burden of costs on to business, rather than keeping it with the Government.

Mr. Frank Field: I believe that there would still be fraud if we were operating the tax credit system in the Garden of Eden, given how easy it is to commit fraud. Hence the amendments, which are trying to send a police force into the Garden of Eden to do a bit of handiwork on the taxpayer's behalf. That is yet another reason to accept them.

I shall end on the note on which I began. In the run-up to the 1997 election, the party to which I belong was able to seize the initiative in countering fraud. Taxpayers thought that the Conservative party had totally failed to live up to its responsibilities to protect taxpayers' money. My worry is that if we are not seen to act ever diligently in protecting taxpayer's money, the charge made against the last Conservative Government—that they were soft on fraud and soft on the causes of fraud—will be made against us.

I hope that the Financial Secretary will deliver a robust response. Despite his difficulties in bringing some civil servants to heel in implementing the wishes of the House, I hope that we take an important step forward in protecting taxpayer's money and in tilting the balance towards decent citizens and against those citizens who rip us off.

Mr. Flight: The Government's approach contains a genuine flaw. They have understandably chosen a system that prioritises giving people credits as they need them. That system is extremely complex. Indeed, the Financial Secretary said in Committee that it would be like a television set—people would not understand how it worked, but they would turn the knob on and off. We should consider those two points together.

The word "fraud" may be wrong, but human nature is human nature, and, inevitably, those who qualify for tax credits will develop and understand ways in which to play the system. People will work out what cannot be checked effectively or will not be checked at all. Currently, there is a marked lack of discipline in the system, and I can understand why the Government are not keen on the kind of disciplinary measures that might tighten it up. For instance, all claimants might be required to produce a detailed annual return for the Revenue, answering all the key questions about their circumstances. That would circumvent the easy argument, "I didn't really know that I had to give that bit of information, and I didn't understand." The reply to that is, "How could you? It is a very complex matter."

Alternatively, the Revenue might have to check working hours with employers. That would not solve the problem in relation to the self-employed, but, again, checking with employers, whatever formula the Government apply in relation to average working hours, would be an enormous task and yet another burden on employers. The nature of the arrangement will encourage laxity, wheezes and playing the system—not major fraud, but a culture of fraud. We have seen such things in other areas of national life. When the Government are using the taxes and money of those who are not well-off and of others, they cannot afford to have their cake and eat it. If they are to introduce a negative income tax credits system, they must also apply the disciplines that go with it.

As other hon. Members have argued, two outcomes resulted from a similar system in the United States, on which much of the Government's approach is modelled. First, costs spiralled from, I think, $1.6 billion to more than $18 billion in a decade. Secondly, some 25 per cent. of the claims turned out to be invalid. As the Bill stands, we shall go down that road. Are the Government prepared to introduce the disciplines needed to prevent the same thing from happening here?

Mr. Hoban: I do not wish to add a great deal more, but I want to put on record part of the debate in Committee on the message that the Government are sending out on working families tax credit fraud. I also want to explain the importance of the new clause and the amendments grouped with it, which were tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison).

In a parliamentary answer covering the period from October 1999 to September 2001, it was identified that there were 52,000 investigations into working families tax credit claims, of which 8,800 resulted in recovery of an overpayment. There were 478 penalties for over-claiming, but only 22 prosecutions, of which 13 were successful. My concern is that, with so few prosecutions following so many recoveries and penalties, the message to the perpetrators was that, to echo the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), the Government were soft on fraud and soft on the causes of fraud. That can only encourage fraudsters to commit further fraud, which is why I support the new offence of aggravated tax relief fraud. It is important to demonstrate that there is a stiff sanction.

5.30 pm

It is also important, as in amendment No. 3 and amendment (a), to stress that the Government should be held to account by Parliament for the extent of fraud in the system and made to say, without giving the game away to the fraudsters, what measures they are taking to ensure that fraud is reduced. We must send out a clear message to the fraudsters, and I am afraid that the Government's track record, with so few prosecutions following so many false claims, sends out quite the wrong message.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): This worthwhile and thoughtful debate has demonstrated the seriousness with which the whole House takes the issue of fraud. I assure the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) that the Government are determined to tackle it wherever and in whatever aspect of the tax and/or benefit system it appears.

I entirely reject the accusation—it was not only implicit but explicit in some contributions today—that we are not committed to tackling non-compliance in the tax credit system: we are, and I would argue that the measures in the Bill demonstrate that. The notion that the people who are responsible for administering the tax and tax credits system would glean from what some hon. Members have said today is that the House questions their seriousness of intent, which would be disappointing for a body of men and women engaged in a difficult and problematic field of enforcement.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) clearly appreciates the balance that must be struck, whereby we need to be committed not only to deterring, detecting and reversing non-compliance but to encouraging people to take up what is rightfully theirs.

My right hon. Friend has championed that cause for many years, which distinguishes his criticisms and concerns from those of the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley), who, in an interesting reference to the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo), demonstrated that the distance between Kensington and Chelsea and Bury St. Edmunds is more than geographical.

Mr. Ruffley: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Boateng: No, I have not finished.

The attempts by the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea and his hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) to change the face of the Conservative party are likely to take a long time. I heard the points that the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds made, and I will deal with them later.

Mr. Ruffley: On a point of information, I must tell the Minister that my reference to my right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo) was supportive; I agree with his injunction that our party should be more inclusive. The Minister entirely misunderstood the point I was trying to make.

Mr. Boateng: If what the hon. Gentleman said earlier was supposed to be supportive, I hope that I never have to rely on his support.

A delicate balance has to be struck. If the hon. Gentleman is being supportive, I hope that he will have the grace to recognise that we need to get the balance right. There is a balance between helping the compliant majority to claim and to understand both what they are entitled to and their obligations under the system—because with rights come responsibilities—and having effective remedies against those who try to abuse the system.

There undoubtedly are people who abuse the system—we all come across them from time to time in our constituency surgeries. My right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead and I share a common approach to theology, and we both accept that man is fallen—so, as he suggested, we will not have the opportunity to observe what would happen if the measure were enforced in the Garden of Eden. We operate in an entirely different place, and our laws must reflect the nature of that place.

Mr. Frank Field: Given the nature of the Bill, how it operates, and who is responsible for membership, will not the overwhelming majority of the fallen creatures be employers?

Mr. Boateng: I am not sure that I accept that. There are a lot of fallen folk about, and I do not think that they are to be found in any one place or category. Even among ourselves I fear that there are some—on both sides of the House. We have to live with that fact, but our laws also have to reflect not only the reality of human nature but our need to get the balance right.

We had the opportunity to examine this issue at length in Committee, and I am rather surprised by some of the suggestions that have been made about the Bill. For example, I should have thought that the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) would welcome the fact that we recognise the merits of his amendment and the points that he made so ably in Committee. However, he seemed a little churlish—

Mr. Flight: Surely not.

Mr. Boateng: I fear so, although it was uncharacteristic. It was churlish of the hon. Gentleman to chide us for tabling our amendment. We recognised the force of his case, and I find it rather surprising that he suggests that simply because we tabled our own amendment, there may be other hidden horrors lurking in the Bill, as yet unrecognised because there has not been enough time for consideration. I would say that we gave the Bill very thorough consideration in Committee, just as we have done tonight.

Be that as it may, I would argue that aspects of the new tax credits make the system intrinsically more secure. The measure of income used is the income for a tax year, which is defined much more closely in line with tax, reducing the capacity for understating income and making it easier to cross-check income figures with tax and national insurance records. As right hon. and hon. Members know, understatement of income is a common feature of the system at the moment. It will be much harder to get away with that once the Bill completes its passage through this House and the other place.

I assure all who have contributed to the debate that our intention is that the administration of the system and the ethos that we create will develop a culture not only of

[Mr. Boateng]

maximum take-up of the system and the credit—the importance of that was put forcefully in Committee by the Liberal Democrats and my hon. Friends—but, importantly, of compliance and of intolerance of abuse. There must be a determined effort to bring to book those responsible for abuse. The regulations, and the guidance given to those seeking the credit and to those administering it, will buttress that culture.

Secondly, concern has been expressed about the child care tax credit. The ability of the new tax credits to respond to changes as they happen will mean that support for child care costs through the child care element of the working tax credit will be matched much more closely to the actual costs incurred. At the moment, support for child care depends on the situation when the claim is made; once awarded, child care tax credit stays in place for the full six months, but we are awarding that structural point. Entitlement to the child care element will stop if the use of qualifying child care stops. Of course, the corollary is that parents who are already claiming working tax credit, and who become eligible for help with child care costs, will be able to apply for it at that point.

The important point, which addresses directly the comments of the hon. Member for East Devon (Mr. Swire), is that we intend that there should be a system of rigorous spot-checks. Officials will visit nurseries to ensure compliance, so the system will not be lax or in any way tolerant of abuse. There will be checks, and we will try to improve links between the different Inland Revenue systems, which will make it harder for claimants to hide sources of income and to receive tax credits to which they are not entitled.

To combat fraud, up-front checks will be made, and the automated systems and data sources available to the Inland Revenue will be used to support systematic risk-screening techniques. My right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead made a very fair point—we have not always done as well as we should.

I regret any failures to answer letters and queries promptly. Right hon. and hon. Members may not like the responses that they receive, but as Members of Parliament they are entitled to speedy responses and every effort is being made to improve performance in that area.

5.45 pm

Those checks will enable those cases that carry the greatest risk to be identified before payments are made. The Inland Revenue will then be able to carry out further checks and ask for additional information or supporting evidence from the claimant before deciding whether to put an award into payment.

The Revenue will carry out up-front checks on all claims. The initial automated risk assessment will identify claims that present a high risk of non-compliance or fraud and need immediate investigation. Those will be directed for consideration to staff in one of the Revenue's research, intelligence and analysis teams. The risk weightings used in the up-front screening process will be capable of being varied, either centrally or locally, in response to different factors such as changing perceptions of risk. I think that my right hon. Friend will accept that that is a very different attitude and approach from the one that has sometimes existed elsewhere. The research, intelligence and analysis teams will also have access to third-party information and data from other sources, such as the self-assessment system, to assist them in identifying cases.

During the year, the Revenue will carry out compliance work on cases where it suspects that an award is incorrect. Clause 16 enables the Revenue to require information and evidence to help it decide whether there are grounds for amending or revoking an award, allowing it to take effective action during the year to prevent tax credits being paid incorrectly.

Clause 18 allows the board to conduct inquiries into awards after the end of the year, enabling it to implement an end-of-year compliance regime—investigating awards, ensuring that they were correct and either amending or revoking them if they were not. The clause gives the Revenue the power to require information and evidence from any person to whom an award has been made, provided an inquiry has been opened. The Revenue may also obtain information from third parties.

In response to the hon. Member for Hertsmere, I should point out that there were more than 16,000 allegations to the hotline, but, as he will know, there were more than 50,000 investigations into working families tax credit applications. Up to November 2001, there were 50,382 investigations into WFTC applications and 1,668 into disabled person's tax credit applications. I suggest that that is not indicative of any slackness. The hon. Gentleman will want to know that we will be guided and informed by the outcome of the study to which he referred as we implement this tax credit system, and I can assure him that we will be.

On the most serious cases of suspected tax credit fraud, the provisions giving the Revenue powers to investigate fraud cases effectively are in clause 34. Clause 33, which amendment No. 3 would amend, creates a new offence of tax credit fraud. Such cases will be those where the actions of claimants are particularly offensive—the use of false documents, repeat offences, collusive employers or organised fraud by criminal gangs. Those cases will be considered for prosecution, but where they do not proceed for one reason or another, they will go back to the compliance teams at local level to be investigated and penalised. There is no question of people just getting away with it. It is not a case of, if they are not prosecuted, there is no follow-up. There will be follow-up. A clear message will be sent that fraud is simply not acceptable. That approach mirrors that for tax fraud, where similar considerations apply in deciding which cases should be subject to prosecution.

We on the Labour Benches cannot accept the notion that people who are being investigated for tax fraud, many of whom will be white collar workers or self-employed, should be treated differently from those who are being investigated for tax credit fraud, that tax credits are outside the overall tax system and that one particular group of people in society should be treated more harshly and more aggressively when it comes to prosecution than another. All people must be treated fairly. All people must understand that they have rights and responsibilities.

New clause 6 seeks to introduce the offence of aggravated fraud where the sum of tax credit at stake is particularly high or where a person has been convicted of social security or tax credit fraud in the recent past, opening the way to a higher maximum sentence on indictment.

Courts already have the power to take previous offences and the size of any fraud into account when setting sentence. We know that it is unusual for any court to pass a sentence for tax or tax credit fraud in excess of seven years, however aggravating the circumstances. Dealing with the mischief is not made more effective simply by ratcheting up the maximum sentence. That is an odd way in which to approach sentencing.

There is, however, the common law offence of cheating the public revenue: that can and will be used in appropriate circumstances. It allows the court to pass whatever period of imprisonment it feels is appropriate—there is no maximum sentence. I hope that, having considered that, hon. Members will not feel the need to proceed down the road that new clause 6 suggests. There are sufficient avenues available, and they will be used where appropriate. New clause 6 simply is not necessary.

Amendment No. 3 takes us into different territory. It seeks to impose a requirement on the Secretary of State for an annual report to Parliament on the extent of tax credit fraud and the counter-measures taken. I am not sure what it would add. The Inland Revenue already produces an annual report every year, which is presented to Parliament by Treasury Ministers. It covers, among other things, the Revenue's work on countering fraud and non-compliance across the range of its responsibilities. Since the Revenue took over responsibility for tax credits, the report has included its work on countering tax credits fraud and non-compliance. We are seeking to take a co-ordinated approach to tackling non-compliance in tax and tax credits.

The Revenue is subject to scrutiny by the National Audit Office and its board appears before the Public Accounts Committee. Treasury Ministers are, and will remain, answerable to Parliament on tax credit matters in the normal way.

I assure right hon. and hon. Members that their points about the importance of a vigorous and determined culture in relation to tax credit fraud will be taken on board. We will seek not only in debates in the House but in any other appropriate way to ensure that the House is kept informed of developments in that area.

I shall say a few words about the benchmarking study that was conducted on WFTC cases, which I know is of concern to right hon. and hon. Members. That work was undertaken as a means of evaluating the effectiveness of Revenue systems and, in particular, to inform the development of the risk assessment process. My hon. Friend the Paymaster General has made it clear that we do not think that it would be helpful to provide details of the factors that the Revenue would consider when deciding whether to take up a case. My hon. Friend has said that she needs time to consider the results of the Revenue's analysis and will consider whether it is appropriate to make any of that information available. She has heard the points that right hon. and hon. Members have made forcefully and effectively, and no doubt in due course will communicate her intentions in that regard.

This has been an important debate. We need to make sure that we send a clear message that fraud is unacceptable, that rights bring with them responsibilities and that we intend to ensure that we create a culture of compliance and determined enforcement of the tax credit system, while never forgetting that the system is designed to ensure that those who need help receive help when they need it. It is designed to ensure that we address the evils of poverty, particularly child poverty, and make work pay. In doing that, we need to be aware of the importance of combating fraud.

I hope that I have demonstrated to the House our seriousness of purpose and intent and that hon. Members will not push the amendments to a vote.

Mr. Clappison: This has been an interesting debate and it has ranged widely into theological questions. I always approach issues of theology and morality with a certain degree of humility and reluctance. I never like to say too much on the subject; I do not want to speculate about who is fallen and who is not fallen. In this context, I am interested only in finding out what the wages of sin are, but the Minister will not tell me. I have asked him over and over again and he simply will not say. We heard more elegant prevarication, if I may put it that way, in his speech.

I should hate to be thought of as churlish in my response to Government amendment No. 23. I hope that I commended the Minister's response in Committee. I also commend his openness in revealing through his correspondence that the situation was even worse than we thought it was, and that the good that we have done through the amendment will be all the greater. Our sadness is that we have helped the Government in this, but we have not been given the chance to help them a little more by looking at nearly half the Bill, which did not receive any scrutiny.

The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) asked, interestingly, what the sentence should be and whether the maximum sentence was too harsh. I recommend that he look at the sentence of seven years' imprisonment, which is set for every fraud in the Bill. We are setting a maximum to deal with the worst cases of fraud—those that involve repeated offences of fraud and frauds of large sums. We would have to be realistic in considering what that large sum would be. It would be the amount that ordinary people thought indicated that somebody was profiting far too much. Some people are profiting far too much. On any view of it, the amount of fraud in the system is not reflected in the number of prosecutions. The Financial Secretary told us of the 50,000 investigations, but he did not go on to tell us that of those only 28 prosecutions were generated. The child care providers investigation did not result in a single prosecution, nor did the investigation of employers. So whatever applies to the rest of us as regards the wages of sin, as far as the Government are concerned employers are saintly and immune from sin, because employers are never involved in fraud. The Government are being complacent and we are disappointed by the Financial Secretary's response.

It being Six o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [10 December].*

The House divided: Ayes 120, Noes 294.

Division No. 165] **[6 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard

Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul

Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cran, James
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne

MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Laurence Robertson
and
Mr. Stephen O'Brien.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Richard
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John

Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brennan, Kevin

Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynem[illegible])*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike

Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Holmes, Paul
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hurst, Alan
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona

McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Jim Fitzpatrick and
Mr. Ian Pearson.

Question accordingly negatived.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *then proceeded to put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Clause 31

FAILURE BY EMPLOYERS TO MAKE CORRECT PAYMENTS

Amendment made: No. 23, in page 21, line 22, after "has" insert—

', by reason of his fraud or neglect,'.—*[Mr. Boateng.]*

Order for Third Reading read.—[Queen's Consent, on behalf of the Crown, signified.]

6.12 pm

Dawn Primarolo: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I am pleased to open this debate on the Bill. I am grateful to hon. Members on both sides of the House for the detailed and constructive debates that have taken place on Second Reading, in Committee and on Report. We have been able to discuss a wide range of matters of concern to hon. Members. My right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary and I have been happy to explain the Bill's provisions, and I believe that they address some of those concerns. I am extremely grateful to hon. Members for their assistance in these proceedings and for the very thoughtful way in which they have approached the Bill, not only in challenging the Government, but in genuinely helping us to consider the issues that it raises. I shall return to a few of those points briefly.

The Bill marks another important step towards achieving the Government's aims of providing employment opportunities for all and tackling poverty. The Bill will introduce two new tax credits—the child tax credit and the working tax credit—which will provide focused and flexible support to families. There will be a single credit to support families with children and a separate credit to provide a top-up for the low paid, providing inclusive support for those facing persistent in-work poverty.

The Bill will provide the framework for the credits, as well as a further streamlining in the way that support for families is administered, through the transfer to the Inland Revenue of responsibility for child benefit under part 2. By establishing a common framework for the credits, the Bill provides an opportunity to create an inclusive system of support in which families comply with a common set of rules regardless of their income or circumstances. The detailed rules for the credits will be brought out in regulations. I was grateful for the opportunity in Committee to provide more detail on those rules. I was also grateful for the challenge set by the Opposition to respond in varied and creative ways to their insistent and creative questions on whether I was able to share details on the rates and tapers, which as the House well knows are the subject of the Budget statement.

Hon. Members expressed a desire for more detail to be included in the Bill. It provides the framework for the credits and the regulations contain the technical detail. That is the right way to introduce the reforms and is the norm for such legislation. It allows us the flexibility to adjust the detailed rules over time as we have more experience of the pattern and changing lifestyles of the families that we want to support.

However, as the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) and other Committee members explained, the powers to make regulations are subject to negative resolution procedure. There is nothing wrong with that approach. Like all Governments, we try to strike a balance between the appropriate use of parliamentary time to construct a framework and the way in which we deal with the mechanical issues, which in this case relate to how the credits work.

I have given the use of regulations careful consideration. Important regulations will need to be made and I accept that it will be helpful to reconsider whether we need to use negative resolutions for every set of regulations. When we introduced the child care tax credit

[Dawn Primarolo]

as part of the working families tax credit, and the disabled person's tax credit, the first statutory instruments to contain the relevant legislation were subject to affirmative resolution procedure. I will consider how we can make some of the regulations subject to the affirmative resolution procedure in the first instance, although they would have to return to the negative procedure. That reflects further the co-operative and suitable way in which the Committee approached its work.

The new tax credits will be awarded for up to a year and are based on an annual income of the claimants for a tax year. They will make the process of claiming easier and will further integrate tax credits with the income tax system. The annual framework will allow the credits to be more flexible during the year. In Committee, we discussed at length how to provide the claimant with the certainty of having a stream of income for the year while ensuring that the system was flexible enough to adjust to changes in income that were dramatic for a family. At the same time, we did not want claimants to think that every penny of change would require a notification to the Inland Revenue. We had a helpful discussion on that in Committee. I hope that the draft regulations, on which we are consulting, will be available to Members of this House. They should also be available to Members of the other place when they consider the Bill and before it returns here.

Hon. Members were concerned about the potential for overpayments to be run up, and about the complexity of the system. The annual nature of the credits will simplify the income assessment process. We will aim to make sure that in any in-year reporting of changes our desire to avoid any overpayment at the end of the year is borne in mind. When hon. Members see the draft regulations, they will realise that progress has been made to deal with those details.

The Bill also provides for the credit to contain several elements so that the level of support is dependent on circumstances. I confirm that the working tax credit will contain elements focused on helping various groups who may face in-work poverty. In particular, elements in respect of disabled workers and severely disabled adults will be included, alongside extra recognition for couples, lone parents and those working full-time hours. The working tax credit will also build on the success of the child care tax credit in the working families tax credit by providing a child care element. The basic existing framework will be retained, but the payment will be made directly to the main carer.

In considering legislation in isolation, we often forget or are not able to bring into our debates the often complex reality of people's lives. Although the nature of legislation such as the Bill is simple, the legislative drafting of simple concepts sometimes demands further explanation. When considering the main principles of the Bill, hon. Members were anxious to ensure that persons or families claiming the credit were given a simple, direct and clear explanation of their entitlement, and that requests for advice or for help in making sure that they receive their full entitlement were responded to.

I am confident that the Bill provides that framework for entitlement and strikes the right balance in respect of the problems to which my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary spoke in the important debate on how to deal with those who commit fraud against the system. The penalties, sanctions and effective deterrents we can use against those who seek to cheat the system enable us to strike the right balance between making sure that people receive their rightful entitlements and preventing those who seek to steal the money to which others are entitled from doing so. None the less, the regime is geared towards ensuring that everyone claims their rights. The Bill strikes the right balance in respect of compliance and the provision of support to genuine claimants.

The Government are resolute in our commitment to tackle child poverty and to ensure that work pays. We have already taken more than 1 million children out of poverty. The new credits build on the successful reforms of the last Parliament: the working families tax credit, the children's tax credit, the disabled person's tax credit, and the unprecedented real-terms increases in child benefit and out-of-work benefits. Those reforms have achieved a lot in a short time, but we now have the opportunity to introduce a modern system of support that can deliver even more.

I agree with the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb): we have the opportunity to change the system radically. That is precisely what the Bill is designed to do. We should not pass up this opportunity to make a huge difference to the lives of the poorest in our society, and to ensure that their children are not scarred by poverty, grow up in poverty, and inherit poverty in their working lives. I commend the Bill to the House.

6.24 pm

Mr. Flight: We have had a constructive debate on Report and in Committee. The only sadness is that we have not discussed or focused on many parts of the Bill. The Government should have delayed introducing it until they had resolved their policy and intentions, and decided how they wanted to implement them. There are no forecasts about costs, no indication of the size and nature of the benefits and no cost analysis. As the Institute for Fiscal Studies said, the consultation process was wholly inadequate. I understand that the original numbers in the consultation document were taken out before publication.

Parliament is being asked for a blank cheque. This is a framework Bill too far, and Opposition Members do not accept that that is a justifiable approach to legislation that is likely to result in £2.8 billion of expenditure of taxpayers' money. The Bill is not in a form for it to be practicable to make a proper assessment of its proposals, either to oppose them in aggregate or support them.

As I pointed out on Second Reading, the Bill's proposals are essentially similar to the negative income tax reforms proposed more than 25 years ago by the Heath Government. As the House will be aware, a Select Committee then reported on tax credits and there was an important minority report by Labour Committee members, some of whom still serve as MPs. The minority Committee was advised by Lord Kaldor and the Child Poverty Action Group, and led the incoming Labour Government in 1974 to decide against implementing tax credits. There were good reasons of principle for that. Those principles remain valid today and are the antithesis of the fine intentions that the Paymaster General has just expressed. The Committee felt that tax credits were insufficiently focused on those most in need, that the majority of the expenditure benefited people not in poverty, that the costs were too great in relation to the benefits paid to those who were in need and that the additional revenue would be better spent on more focused measures to help people in need.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): I am interested to hear the hon. Gentleman repeat the argument that he made on Second Reading. Does he not accept that the world has changed enormously 25 years on? The argument for tax credits is valid today because we can no longer hope just to compensate people for being poor, on low wages or not having access to work. We have to achieve the dynamic effects that come from reconnecting people with the labour market, providing incentives to get back to work and, of course, providing proper child care and support for their children.

Mr. Flight: First, I made those points in Committee, not on Second Reading. Secondly, they are points of principle, not just points of practice. Given the expenditure and the difficulties associated with the Bill's approach to addressing the problems of those most in need, the arrangements are not particularly effective. The hon. Gentleman will note that these criticisms have been made by a number of organisations that focus on poverty. There are many good things in the proposals, to which I referred on Second Reading. However, our objections of principles remain valid and have not been adequately debated—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order.

Mr. Flight: In view of the many issues that have not been addressed, I suggest that the Government agree to give the relevant Select Committee responsibility to scrutinise the substantial volume of regulations that will need to be introduced; otherwise, as the Law Society has warned, many important issues and principles will not be considered properly by Parliament.

I shall focus on difficult issues raised by the Bill, many of which are issues of principle that have not been resolved. There is the simple question of how generous and expensive the child tax credits will be. The lower the level of child tax credit, the less effect there will be on reducing child poverty, but the higher the level, the greater the risk of reducing work incentives, which the tax credits are intended to increase. More generous tax credits will reduce the financial disincentives to marriage or cohabitation for parents who are jobless, but the CTC and WTC proposals will continue some of the financial disincentives of the working families tax credit to marriage and cohabitation for parents. In Committee we touched on this issue, which is acknowledged by the study sponsored by the Rowntree Trust.

Working families tax credit and child tax credit have already brought back elements of joint assessment for both married and cohabiting couples. As a result of the Bill, one partner will be liable to repay the CTC or WTC if it is wrongly paid to the other partner. That could cause a nightmare situation when couples split up. Although working tax credit will increase incentives for people to get a job, it will reduce the incentives as they earn more, and some will lose more than 90 per cent. through tax and the withdrawal of benefits. The problem of squaring incentives to work is by no means fully addressed by the Bill. Under working tax credit, as with working families tax credit, parents remain the only people who are not eligible for child care subsidies.

As I said on Second Reading, I welcome the fact that the savings rules that applied to WFTC will not apply to child tax credit, but I do not recollect the Government ever setting forth the policy on savings for working tax credit.

Both credits are complex and present people in real life with complex decisions about whether to work more hours and whether to live together or apart. There is an issue of principle as to whether Government should use financial incentives to influence people's personal behaviour in those areas.

As in Australia and Canada, payments will be based on annual income figures, but unlike Australia and Canada, in the UK the Inland Revenue will not have the necessary data for many potential claimants unless the Government adopt the suggestion that all claimants should be required to produce annual returns for the Revenue.

Major problems will remain in defining and determining cohabitation. The Revenue said that it would check whether anyone was lodging a tax return from the same address as the claimant, but care will be needed by the Inland Revenue to avoid the risk of making a wrong cohabitation decision, such that under the law a couple is deemed to be cohabiting, because there will be consequent penalties and difficulties in recovering overpayments.

The arrangements depend on a great deal of information being transferred between Government Departments, especially from the Department for Work and Pensions to the Inland Revenue. We have not touched on the question whether this is potentially in breach of the data protection legislation, if not data protection principles.

The Bill fails to ensure that a national system of credits and benefits is maintained, and it risks the possibility of disputes similar to the current threat that the Whitehall moneys financing attendance allowance could be withdrawn in Scotland. The threat exists as a result of Scottish Ministers having chosen to provide free nursing care. It is in the interests of the country that there should be one system in all of Britain to avoid the possibility of conflicts, which the drafting of the Bill has not ruled out.

The Government have not resolved the difficulty of defining minimum hours to be worked to qualify for working tax credit, or how that will be checked, if at all. Will employers be required to provide information either regularly or on a spot-check basis? We have argued very strongly—this is the main point that has been made by the Institute for Fiscal Studies—that there is no work incentive argument for providing tax credits for singles and couples without children and thereby adding about 500,000 claimants a year.

Another issue that has arisen is the fact that the Government continue to propose in the Bill what I can only call Enron-style, off-balance-sheet accounting. Some £4 billion of existing expenditure is automatically being transferred to a tax net-off, and another £2.8 billion will probably be transferred as a result of the Bill. A total of £15 billion of welfare-related expenditure will then be accounted for in terms of netting-off tax receipts, rather than being shown as expenditure. The Office for National Statistics, which adopts the accounting conventions set out in the 1995 European standard of accounting, keeps

[Mr. Flight]

the national accounts on one basis, but there are now difficulties in reconciling the Red Book with national accounts. There is no logic to justify taking the proposed approach other than that of seeking to conceal the extent of such expenditure.

It has emerged from this debate that at the heart of the issue are our concerns about the complexities of the arrangements and our anxiety that the need for claimants to keep detailed records and monitor the number of hours worked, the amount of income earned and child care costs will lead to a much-increased risk of non-compliance. The right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) was more constrained today, but as he has warned previously, the arrangements in the Bill are likely to result in spiralling costs of the sort that were experienced in America as people learned to play the system and to offer excessive bonuses for dishonesty.

Above all—I suggest that hon. Members think about this point—the Bill will ensure that about 40 per cent. of all families will be on means-tested benefits. Some 30 per cent. of those will be of working age; and, on the Government's figures, about 80 per cent. will have children. Other tax credits will go to 56 per cent. of those in retirement. Stepping back, one can see that that means that well over half of the recipients will be paying for their benefits through direct and indirect tax. Is there any logic in a system that includes the costs, difficulties and administrative issues that are involved in taking money from people and then giving it back to them? That cannot be an ideal way of running our affairs. Indeed, the Prime Minister himself has warned of the major problems in having too much means-testing.

There are good objectives in the Bill and several aspects that we support, which I highlighted on Second Reading, but the House has not had the opportunity to consider many serious problems and a lot of the issues that I have sought to raise in this speech. I end where I started: it would surely be much more healthy for the Government who seek to introduce such legislation to bring to the House much more detailed proposals, rather than a framework in respect of which we do not know how many of the problems will be solved, when we do not know how much it will cost or whether 1.3 million people will be worse off as a result of its introduction. That is not the way to legislate, and I do not think that the Paymaster General made any convincing case for addressing this important territory with such a framework Bill, so we will abstain from voting. On the many areas that it does not address, there is scope to deal with hon. Members' queries through parliamentary questions, but it is to be hoped that many of the outstanding issues can be addressed in the other place.

6.39 pm

Jon Cruddas (Dagenham): Two elements dominated Government thinking on the social security/labour market interface in the last Parliament: first, helping families in poverty, especially those with children, by means of the children's tax credit; and secondly, pricing people into work through measures to alter the trade-off between work and non-work, through the working families tax credit.

The Bill proposes two new targeted tax credits: the child tax credit to tackle child poverty and target support for parents, and the working tax credit to tackle in-work poverty and remove barriers to work. These two new initiatives develop the strategy of confronting poverty and restructuring the supply of labour that was started in 1997. The strategy on the labour market has been to alter the derived utility of work for those not in employment. It makes work pay by altering the trade-off between work and non-work by building a minimum floor for wages—through the minimum wage—and by constructing a take-home premium above market wage rates for poorer labour market participants through the working families tax credit.

These measures work alongside the new deal and benefit-policing arrangements in terms of people's availability for work. If we add to that the record rises in child benefit and the 10p starting rate for income tax, the reform package begins to take shape. The Child Poverty Action Group has identified a substantial reduction in poverty—whatever measure we care to use. Separately, Piachet and Sutherland estimate that 1 million children have been lifted out of poverty since 1997.

Any labour market initiative such as the working tax credit should be judged against the nature of the labour market that it seeks to affect. New analysis of the labour force survey data by Professor Peter Nolan, the director of the future of work programme at the London school of economics, is helpful here. Let us consider the three general classifications in the labour force survey: white collar; traditional services; and manual, manufacturing and construction. Between 1992 and 2000, white-collar professionals accounted for 1.5 million of the 2.3 million increase in employment numbers. Yet traditional services—covering clerical and secretarial, personal and protective, sales, postal and cleaning services—together with manual, manufacturing and construction workers still account for nearly two out of three jobs.

Closer analysis suggests that the fastest-growing occupations have been: first, the four long-established services of sales assistants, data-input clerks, storekeepers and receptionists; secondly, state-dominated education and health service workers; and thirdly, the caring occupations such as those of care assistants, welfare and community workers, and nursery nurses. The fastest-growing occupation in the 1990s has been hairdressing. The fastest-growing manual occupation since 1992 was housekeeping, with a rise of 368 per cent. In short, the key areas of growth in the demand for labour through the 1990s have been in traditional, low-paid, unskilled and routine employment. Much of that is carried out by women and much is part-time.

It is precisely because of these developments that the policy proposals before us are so important. The child tax credit will be the first single system of income-related support for families with children, irrespective of whether they are in or out of work. The working tax credit rationalises and extends the current provision of in-work support and, in so doing, increases the utility of work for more people.

The Bill establishes the machinery, prior to the Budget, for an extension of our attack on poverty in terms of the realities of labour market structure. There appears to be a problem, however, in terms of the operation of the working tax credit. This exists in areas with exceptional market conditions and strong disincentives to work. They are areas characterised by relatively high-wage economies, but with significant proportions of deprived families and, often, single parents. There are shortages of child care and early-years provision, together with exceptionally strong disincentives in the housing market in terms of labour market participation.

I am talking about London. Research by the Greater London Authority suggests that London has the lowest take-up rate of the working families tax credit in the UK—in London the rate is one in 10 families compared to one in six nationally, and one in five lone parents compared to one in three nationally. Part of this is accounted for by regional earnings differentials, yet even with a 70 per cent. write-off of child care costs, the higher-cost child care is a disincentive to participation, as are higher housing costs. Research suggests that people paying higher rents lose out. The gain through the tax credit is lost through housing benefit withdrawal.

In short, because of a combination of forces, the labour market participation strategy underscoring the policy is less effective in London, as there are greater financial disincentives to participation. Let us take my constituency as an example. It is one of the capital's more deprived constituencies, with a high number of one-parent families and housing benefit recipients. According to House of Commons statistics supplied to my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck), Dagenham remains 533rd out of 641 constituencies in the ranking relating to the proportion of families receiving the working families tax credit.

That implies serious imbalances between poor families' unemployment entitlement and take-up incentives. The issue should be investigated and there may be a need to introduce regional premiums to the regime to ensure that the policy works with maximum effect, consistently across the country.

Overall, I welcome the Bill, as it is specifically designed to confront the labour market that we have, but I am concerned that we are not yet maximising the strategy's potential in deprived parts of the capital such as my constituency.

6.45 pm

Mr. Webb: It is interesting to follow such a well-informed and thoughtful contribution from the hon. Member for Dagenham (Jon Cruddas). It is a shame, in many ways, that we did not have the benefit of those and other insights from him in Committee. That is perhaps a shortcoming of our proceedings.

On Second Reading, we gave a broad welcome to the Bill's aim to streamline and focus extra resources on families with children. We have not changed our position. As the Minister said, the Committee debates were instructive, and hon. Members from both sides contributed thoughtfully and helpfully. The Committee process highlighted the difficulty of debating such Bills in the absence even of draft regulations. I hope that the import of what the Minister said a few moments ago is that their lordships will have sight of the regulations early in their deliberations. I am reassured by her nodding in response. That will make a big difference.

It is important to put on record one or two reservations that survived the Committee's scrutiny. As the Minister is aware, my principal reservation is about what the working tax credit is supposed to achieve, as distinct from other support for low-income childless people. I tabled two written questions to pick up on the Government's two justifications for the strategy. Both were for answer today and they were submitted in good time, but neither has been answered.

One question relates to the Government's statement that poverty also affects childless people—they cite 1 million childless people in poverty. I simply asked how many of those people would be entitled to the working tax credit. In other words, how many are over 25 and working 30 hours a week? Very few, I suspect, but answer came there none. The argument that we need the working tax credit to relieve poverty is open to question.

I asked about the incentive argument—an unemployment trap exists because a childless person who takes low-paid work does not get much reward. Clearly, there is not much reward for a renter, but there is a much greater incentive for a person whose mortgage is not paid for by work and whose help is not taken away when he gets a job. The anti-poverty and unemployment trap arguments for the strategy are weak and it is regrettable that we did not discuss the meat of that in Committee.

The practicalities for our constituents of claiming these tax credits still worry me considerably. If authorities are to decide whether they will be assessed on this year's income or last year's, that requires an estimate of this year's income. Therefore, if 1 million-plus people must estimate income and if some get that or their hours wrong, there could be serious over-payment problems. Without being patronising, some members of that client group are simply not used to such calculations, so we may be storing up troubles ahead.

The strategy is a difficult mix of the tax and benefits systems. In some cases, the benefit route has been chosen, as in the example of joint assessment, while in others the tax route has been taken. In particular, the appeals process, which we raised briefly, still gives me real cause for concern. I am worried that, instead of appeals going through the effective tax credit appeal procedure, a whole new tax appeal process will be created.

We welcome the additional support for families with children and the attempt at streamlining, so we support the Bill.

6.48 pm

David Cairns: I am pleased to speak in this debate. Unfortunately, I could not take part in the discussions on Second Reading or in Committee. However, I have followed the debate in the *Official Report*, and it has been fascinating, instructive and, of necessity, very technical. It is important to step back from the technicality and consider the broader picture of the range of Government strategies aimed at alleviating poverty and making work pay for those who are in work but, for whatever reason, inadequately remunerated for it.

The Government's commitment to poverty alleviation is strengthened by the Bill, which builds on the success of the working families tax credit, which in turn currently benefits 1.3 million families, including 1,893 families in my constituency. That is a large number in what is, even before the boundary changes, a relatively small constituency. Across Scotland, 119,000 families are benefiting in a very direct way from the measures.

Incidentally, it is a disappointment to me that no member of the Scottish National party, which is alleged to stand for Scotland, has sought to take part in or even

[David Cairns]

be present at most of what is an extremely important debate for Scotland. Now I shall move on, before I am called to order.

We have heard about the minimum wage, the children's tax credit and the increases in child benefit, but no one has mentioned another important element in the strategy—the Jobcentre Plus initiative. I thought that my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Jon Cruddas) might mention it, but perhaps time constraints got in the way. In my district authority alone, £3 million has been spent on modernising jobcentres, giving them excellent computer connections and making them better and friendlier places that can help people to move from welfare into work. The programme has been tremendously important throughout the country.

It was said on Second Reading and in Committee that the fact that we are introducing this measure to build on the working families tax credit is an admission that we got it wrong. That is baffling. The entire history of the welfare state—certainly the modern welfare state—is that measures are introduced and the world moves on, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) so tellingly said, so that we have continually to refine and improve on our systems. I hope that Ministers will not rest on their laurels and that they are already examining what further improvements can be made five or six years down the line. I am sure that they are.

It was said of Beveridge, perhaps wrongly, that he believed that unemployment, or idleness, was the root cause of poverty. Perhaps there was too much emphasis in the past on simply getting people into work and off benefits, with the assumption that they would automatically stop being poor. We know from constituency experience that that is not the case, and we need tailored programmes for people who are in work but remain poor.

I urge Ministers not to retreat one inch from the principle of delivering our programmes through the wage packet and the good offices of the Inland Revenue. We have had a good debate about the comparative stigma attached to the benefit book or the Inland Revenue approach, and I take on board the sincere points that have been made, but people in receipt of the working families tax credit who come to my surgery are very grateful for what they get and they want to explain all their circumstances to ensure that they can claim everything to which they are entitled. Stigma is not quite the issue that Opposition Members would have us believe.

There are undoubted benefits in incentivising work and allowing people to look at their pay slip at the end of the month and say, "I earned that by my own endeavours, by being disciplined and getting out of bed in the morning." That is a positive gain, and I hope that the blandishments to revert to a benefit book approach will be rejected.

We need only consider the difference in take-up between the working families tax credit and the systems that it replaced—family credit and so on—let alone the opportunities for fraud that the benefit book system introduced. If some of the amendments that we discussed earlier had been accepted, employers would have been printing their own order books and distributing them to their employees, and there would have been a great risk of fraud.

We have heard some criticism about a lack of flexibility with regard to changing circumstances; the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) made some good points on that subject. It is true that the situation must be monitored closely, and the system must react quickly to people's changing circumstances—but that applies to the current system, including the benefits system, too.

A classic example, of which all hon. Members will be aware, is the position of school cleaners, who work fewer hours in the summer but get paid the same because their wages are aggregated and averaged over the year. I had a constituency case recently involving a school cleaner whose benefit entitlement was changed over the few months of the summer when she was working fewer hours. I am thankful to say that we got a result fairly quickly, so there is flexibility in the current system. It is not perfect, however; no system would be, and the hon. Gentleman was right to raise those issues. It is a flawed assumption that the current system is flexible enough. It must be improved.

Some hon. Members have talked about stigma, but one positive change that has not been mentioned on Third Reading so far is the fact that the disabled person's tax credit will now be focused on the working tax credit. There will be a focus on the work that disabled people do, by their own endeavour and efforts, and they will get the rewards of being in work. That is a positive step, and has been welcomed by those who represent disabled people. They are not being patronised or getting a handout for being disabled; the focus is on the work that they do, not who they are.

Much has been said about the effects on businesses. My hon. Friend the Paymaster General was too modest, in that she did not explain everything that the Government have done for business. That gives me the opportunity to mention that under the Labour Government we have the lowest inflation in Europe, the lowest interest rates in 30 years, favourable tax regimes for capital investment, the lowest corporation tax in many years for larger businesses—it is down from 33 to 30 per cent.—favourable regimes for research and development, and 1 million more people in work today than when we came to power in 1997. We must balance what some may call the burdens on business with the tremendous benefit to business of having a Labour Government who are friendly to business and understand and reflect its needs.

The Bill will also affect the work of the Inland Revenue, where there is a quiet revolution under way. If hon. Members have not been to their regional office lately to talk to the people who work there, I recommend that they go. North of the border, we were fortunate to be invited by the Minister of State, Scotland Office to meet the Scottish chief executive of the Inland Revenue, and we were told that as a direct result of the Bill, the work of calculating, assessing and collecting taxes will be a minority part of the Inland Revenue's business by 2003. That is a big change from the position a few years ago.

With its work on integrated tax credits, making sure that businesses comply with the minimum wage, administering student loans and so on, the Inland Revenue is undergoing a quiet revolution, and it is to be commended. When I have spoken to the people there I have been tremendously impressed by their vigour and their zeal for that approach to their work. They realise that there is a change in attitude towards them, because they are no longer seen as the bad guys of the piece but as people doing something positive. The Inland Revenue now has a much more business-oriented approach. It is proactive, going out to businesses to explain the integrated tax credits and helping them comply with the new arrangements.

On Second Reading the Paymaster General said:

> "By the mid-1990s, the United Kingdom had the highest rate of relative poverty in the European Union and the highest proportion of children living in workless households."—[*Official Report*, 10 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 598.]

By the middle of this decade we will be able to say that 1 million children have been lifted out of poverty and 1 million more people are in work, and they will be receiving more help through the tax credits. I am extremely proud of that, and I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

London Underground

7 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): With permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the future of London Underground.

Earlier today, the board of London Regional Transport announced that it was "minded to proceed" with the plans for modernisation of the tube. In coming to its conclusion, the board has undertaken a thorough evaluation of the bids to assess whether they are likely to provide value for money. It is confident that they will do so and that the proposed contracts will provide an appropriate basis for the future maintenance and renewal of London Underground's infrastructure.

The board of London Regional Transport will now consult the Mayor of London and Transport for London under the terms of the Greater London Authority Act 1999. The final decision on whether to proceed will be taken in the light of that consultation.

Last autumn, I announced that I intended to take independent advice from Ernst and Young on the evaluation process that London Underground and London Regional Transport had followed, and on the robustness of their conclusions. Ernst and Young began its work in October, and has kept in close contact with London Underground during the evaluation of the final bids.

Ernst and Young reached the following conclusion. Overall, the methodology adopted for assessing the value for money by London Underground has been robust and appropriate, and London Underground's recommendation that the public-private partnership proposals deliver value for money is a subjective one, which is supported by its analysis. Copies of the report were placed in the Vote Office at 2.45 this afternoon, when I answered a written question on this issue.

I have always made it clear that my approach to the modernisation of the underground would be based on three principles. First, there must be no privatisation; secondly, safety must not be compromised; and thirdly, the contracts must offer value for money.

Under these proposals, there will be no privatisation. London Underground will remain in the public sector and will have control of all operations. It will run the trains, work the signals, control the track and operate the stations. So there will be no privatisation, or part-privatisation, of the London underground. The public sector will be in charge of the safe operation of a single unified network. London Underground will set the strategic priorities for investment, and monitor the performance of the private sector contractors that build and maintain the infrastructure.

Where the contracts differ from current arrangements involving the private sector is mainly in their scope and duration, and in the allocation of responsibility for integrating the various packages of work necessary to upgrade the tube and modernise it properly.

These are long-term arrangements that envisage a real partnership between London Underground and the private sector, which will work together to deliver sustained improvements. That partnership should enable substantial efficiencies to be realised and locked into the long-term process of tube modernisation. In particular, it should prevent the problems of the past, when infrastructure

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improvements—notably, of course, relating to the Jubilee line extension—have all too often come in over budget and later than originally planned.

The private sector will be contractually bound to deliver specific improvements. London Underground will be empowered to monitor the contracts closely and enforce them rigorously. If the private sector companies fail to perform, they will be penalised for so doing. If that sanction fails, they could lose their contracts. If the private sector does not do the work properly or puts safety at risk, London Underground will have the power to step in, do the necessary work and bill the private sector accordingly.

Secondly, safety will not be compromised. The Health and Safety Executive is currently considering the changes to London Underground's railway safety case to reflect the bidders' proposals for maintaining and upgrading the network. Only if those are accepted will the modernisation plans be allowed to proceed. If they do proceed, the infrastructure controller, London Underground—in the public sector—will retain clear statutory responsibility for safety across the whole of the network. The private sector infrastructure companies will have a contractual safety case with London Underground. They will have to perform to standards every bit as demanding as those required at present by London Underground's own statutory safety case. It will be for the Health and Safety Executive to accept the safety case. That is not a matter for politicians to decide. In my view, it is far better to leave it to the independent experts.

The third test is value for money. I have always said that the tube modernisation plans should not proceed unless they are likely to provide appropriate value for money. In preparing its final assessment of the proposed tube modernisation contracts, London Underground has conducted a full evaluation of value for money. As the National Audit Office has said, value for money is not a simple pass-fail test. London Underground has carried out a thorough evaluation of bids, incorporating both a financial assessment against a public sector comparator and wider factors that cannot be quantified in purely financial terms.

Essentially, the public sector comparator measures the cost of providing the same modernisation of tube infrastructure under current arrangements. It also takes account of two possible funding scenarios: annual grant and bond finance. Hon. Members will be aware that in December 2000 the National Audit Office reported on the public sector comparator that London Underground proposed to use and made various recommendations. Those have been taken into account in the construction of the comparator used for this final evaluation of the bids.

London Underground's evaluation demonstrates that the tube modernisation contracts are likely to deliver good value for money over their 30-year term. Even when tested on a much more demanding seven-and-a-half year basis, the value for money of the PPP remains favourable. The bids look good not just against a public sector option funded in the conventional way through annual grant, but also one funded by bonds, which was, of course, the Mayor's preferred approach.

On the basis of the advice that we have now received, the Government believe that the tube modernisation proposals represent the best way forward. In headline terms, London Underground will receive investment on an unprecedented scale. Now that the actual bids have been evaluated, I am able to report that we would expect investment of about £16 billion in the next 15 years. That figure includes nearly £8.5 billion to be spent on trains and signalling, nearly £4 billion on track, and more than £3.5 billion on stations. By any standards, it will represent a step change in the amount of money spent on the underground and will begin the process of making it a system fit for the 21st century.

The benefits of proceeding with the tube modernisation contracts are considerable. Over the first 15 years of the contract, London Underground will save £2 billion compared to traditional public funding. On any measure, that represents a significant saving to the public sector. What is more, the contracts will mean faster and more reliable tube journeys than the alternatives. London Underground says that those could be worth as much as a further £2 billion to its passengers.

Such savings can be achieved only through harnessing the private and the public sectors together, which is why this partnership is such an important feature of the Government's reform of the delivery of public services. Over the first 15 years of the contracts, £4 billion of the money going into improvements to the tube will come from private finance. Put simply, if that private finance was not forthcoming, it would need to be found within the public sector or not at all, which would mean less money to spend on other priorities such as health, education and other parts of the transport system.

We believe that there is now a clear choice. On the one hand, we can move ahead with proposals that will see the tube transformed, with real year-on-year improvements beginning immediately the contracts are signed. We think that that is the right way forward, subject, of course, to the outcome of the consultation process and to the board of London Regional Transport taking a final decision to proceed with the contracts.

Alternatively, we could look forward to yet more delay while different plans are prepared and a new procurement exercise is put in place. That would condemn Londoners to several more years of the status quo, with a creaking infrastructure that is unable to deliver the efficient and modern underground system that the travelling public rightly deserve.

Our modernisation plans for the tube will unlock £16 billion of investment over the next 15 years, the equivalent of £5,000 for every household in London. There will be no privatisation. The publicly owned London Underground will remain in control and safety will be paramount, which is why the Health and Safety Executive will have the final say.

These proposals form the basis of creating a tube fit for the 21st century, and I commend them to the House.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): I thank the Secretary of State for his usual courtesy in giving us sight of his statement before he made it. No doubt he expects us to rant and rave over the fact that the statement was made at 7 pm when the entire world knows exactly what he intends to do, but frankly there are more important things to deal with and I intend to move on, save to say that I congratulate the Secretary of State on making history. Usually statements at 7 pm have been on matters of war or catastrophe. This is the first time that a statement has been made at 7 pm on an impending catastrophe.

In particular, I thank the Select Committee for its splendid work, which has made the Secretary of State's statement understandable, and the many Labour Back Benchers who have briefed me over the past few days warning me about the problems that are to come.

The Secretary of State is enthusiastic about these proposals. Sometimes we are told that savings will total £3 billion, sometimes that they will total £4.5 billion. Now we are told that they will total £2 billion.

The Secretary of State says that the proposals represent best value for money, real improvements and a saving for the public. I almost expected him to produce a piece of paper from the Government's favourite accountants saying that this is the best thing for transport policy since the De Lorean motor car.

Does the Secretary of State understand that the proposals rely on a serendipity of circumstances? Everything has to be lined up to the most favourable of the various variable circumstances for the savings to occur. The PPP is more expensive than the Mayor's bonds. Does the Secretary of State accept that to achieve £1 billion of savings, efficiency savings of 35 to 40 per cent over the public service model would be needed? Given that the projects involve not only infrastructure but day-to-day maintenance does he seriously expect the House to believe that 40 per cent. savings can be achieved?

The proposals also rely on the serendipity of nothing going wrong. The liability of risk for certain events and assets has been shifted from the private sector to the public sector. The liability of risk of contractors will be capped. That is why the Secretary of State was most careful to use the expression, "They will be billed accordingly." According to the contracts they will not pay accordingly because their liability will be capped. Does he agree with London's Transport Commissioner that

"the amount of risk that has been transferred"

to the private sector

"is barely perceptible"?

It is little wonder that the Ernst and Young report said that the assessment was "subjective". There has been no independent assessment, as Ernst and Young explains at great length. It said, more or less, "We were asked to do a job and we have done it. We have been asked whether the methodology is okay and we have said that it is. We were asked whether it would work. We have told them that the assessment was subjective." So all that money has been spent and we are exactly where we were to begin with.

Let me briefly read from the Ernst and Young report:

> "The contract structure is unique, inevitably meaning that it has not been proven in a commercial environment . . . If the contract structure, in particular the risk transfer and review mechanisms, does not function effectively, either through poor design or operation, then there is a risk that value for money could be eroded."

It seems appropriate in the period that the Secretary of State has given that we should ask the National Audit Office to be brought in to look at the assessment. This is probably the most major piece of infrastructure change in the world and we desperately need an independent assessment.

I wish to ask the Secretary of State about the connection of Ernst and Young with the various contractors who are bidding. I expect such a company to have some connection with many of the main players, but I am surprised that it has entered into a partnership with W. S. Atkins, one of the principal bidders. Did the Department question the partnership? What assurances did the Secretary of State receive? These are matters of probity. I should be grateful to hear from the Secretary of State why it was felt appropriate for Ernst and Young to go into partnership with W.S. Atkins.

The Secretary of State fails to address capacity. All the decisions are pushed to the second quarter of the 30-year period. There will be no new trains for years. There will be no upgrades for years. Ten years from now passengers will notice little or no difference. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Jubilee line will have no new trains or no newly refurbished trains until 2018? Will he confirm that the Bakerloo line will have none until 2018? Will he confirm that he will be 67 years old before the Bakerloo line sees refurbished trains? I know that the Government are asking us to prepare for retirement, but I do not think that that is entirely what they had in mind.

The PPP will be supported by a combination of fare box and public subsidy. Before the Select Committee the Secretary of State said he felt that the fare box could cover 30 per cent. of the PPP without raising fares above the rate of inflation. Can he now tell us what the level of public subsidy will be over the first seven-and-a-half year period? Given that he has extended the consultation period until 8 March, which coincidentally is the same date as the Health and Safety Executive is due to approve version 3.1 of the safety case, is he confident that by the end of the consultation period we will have the HSE safety case?

This is an off-balance deal. It is so off balance sheet that it would make Enron blush. For five years the Labour Government have neglected the tube. Public investment has been down by 25 per cent. Delays and overcrowding have increased. The measure bears all the hallmarks of the Secretary of State: it is wildly optimistic, it completely disregards dangers and it is made with the certain knowledge that when it is time to give account, others will be carrying the can.

Mr. Byers: The House will be aware that the information was provided by way of a written reply at 2.45 pm when copies of the Ernst and Young report were placed in the Vote Office. We are having the statement now because this was the soonest that I could come to the House to make a statement. Business managers will know that very well.

On the specific points raised by the hon. Gentleman—of which there were many—he said that there would be a long delay before new trains were put on the Jubilee line. That revealed the fact that the hon. Gentleman is not a frequent user of the line. If he would like to go over the road and into Westminster station, he can travel on the Jubilee line. He will see that all the rolling stock is new. It would be rather foolish to try to replace it in five or 10 years' time.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the fact that there would be no extra capacity on the Jubilee line to meet the increased demand. What he has not seen—because he has not yet looked at the papers—is that there will be a

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22 per cent. increase in capacity on the Jubilee line within the first 10 years. The reality is that there will be increases in capacity on lines where there is currently significant overcrowding.

As regards the fare box, I shall make the position clear: the assumptions in the papers show that there is no need for an increase above the rate of inflation.

The HSE has no timetable for its report on whether the safety case has been met. The HSE is independent of Secretaries of State. It will take as long as it needs to decide whether the safety case has been met. There is no deadline. No one has laid down a timetable. The HSE will take its time and will arrive at a conclusion when it is ready to do so.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the role of the National Audit Office. That is an important point. We in the House respect the work undertaken by the NAO. However, the view of the NAO is clear: it did not want to publish a report at this stage of the process as to do so would involve it too closely in the decision-making process. In the view of the NAO, that would make it impossible for it to carry out an independent value-for-money assessment after the decisions had been taken. That was the NAO's position. It would have made my job in reaching a decision an awful lot easier if the NAO had been prepared to make a clear recommendation on value for money, but that was not the case.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the capping of liability and where risk would be transferred. Because we are publishing the Ernst and Young report and because London Transport will publish details in due course, people will be able to see those details. The important point in the contract is that liability for the issues that worry the travelling public will be transferred to the private sector.

I shall give the House three examples. If a train breaks down for 10 minutes during the rush hour at Victoria, the private company will be fined £21,000. If an escalator at Oxford Circus is out of action for a month, the private company will be fined £45,000. If a signal on the Jubilee line is out of action for a day, the private-sector company will be fined £300,000. Those are the penalties that will be imposed if the companies do not perform as they should.

I was disappointed by the hon. Gentleman's response. However, it shows that the Conservatives are thoroughly divided on their approach to the public-private partnership. Steve Norris, the Tory candidate for Mayor of London last year—and probably the Conservative who knows most about transport—said that the public-private partnership was, in reality, the only game in town and that to imply that we can just go back and have another negotiation was naive.

So that is the reality—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members do not like it when I reveal that their candidate for mayor holds a completely different view. We did not hear a word from the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) about the Conservative approach to the underground, but we know what it is, because it is on the record. The Conservatives have said, "We should transfer the underground into the private sector"—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where?"] In "The Common Sense Revolution".

We have ensured that we shall put investment into the London underground. The system has been denied investment for generations. The time has now come. If one talks to people travelling on the underground, they do not want political arguments—they want money to go into the system. This Government will deliver the investment of which the underground has been starved for far too long.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): My right hon. Friend will know that London, as a capital city, is desperately in need of a modern and efficient transport system, and that its underground has been neglected for many years. Could he tell me, in fairly simple terms, why he is persisting with a scheme that is manifestly unworkable, when there is a volume of evidence that says that it is not value for money, that there is no control on the costs after seven and a half years, and that what he is doing is opening up the viper's nest of exactly the contractual problems that destroyed Railtrack? Frankly, it seems to many of us that, although his intentions are excellent, the result of today's decision will be more delay, more confusion and—very sadly for all of us—a system that will be indefensibly incompetent.

Mr. Byers: I read with great interest the report of the Transport Sub-Committee of the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions—which my hon. Friend chaired—that was published on Tuesday. That obviously will have informed our thinking and will inform the thinking during the consultation period that has just begun.

It is worth noting that this is not just the largest public-private partnership that the Government have entered into; it will also be the most open and transparent, because the public will be able to see in detail the basis on which we have arrived at our decision and there will then be a real debate during the consultation period about the merits or otherwise.

On the specifics that my hon. Friend raised, she is right to point out that there are 30-year contracts with a periodic review after seven and a half years. I believe that that strikes the right balance between introducing a degree of flexibility into the contractual arrangements and having some long-term certainty. London Underground and London Transport will have the opportunity, in that periodic review, to address issues such as capacity on individual lines, because that will be a real priority as far as they are concerned.

However, I have to say—this is a crucial issue—that I, of all Ministers, am not going to repeat the mistakes of Railtrack and the railway system. The crucial difference is that London Underground will remain publicly owned and publicly accountable. There will be no shareholders in London Underground. The priority for London Underground will be ticket holders, not shareholders. That means that it must concentrate on ensuring that the private sector delivers as far as the ticket holders are concerned. There will not be a great fragmentation of the system, because there will be a unified structure, and that unified structure will be London Underground. There will be three private contractors working for London Underground, but the unified structure will be provided by London Underground itself.

Therefore I do not believe that this is a repetition of the mistakes that the Conservative party imposed on the railway network. Instead it is a new way of securing private investment while ensuring that London Underground remains in the public sector.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I thank the Secretary of State for giving me an advance copy of the statement, although I doubt that, when I received it, it contained anything that I did not know already, given that he had announced its contents yesterday and earlier today.

The right hon. Gentleman's statement does prompt some questions. First, does he stand by the Deputy Prime Minister's figure of £4.5 billion-worth of savings, and why is he so confident that this represents value for money? He has himself said that the criteria are subjective. Ernst and Young has said that they are subjective. His statement has said that the PPP is likely to represent value for money. Mr. Wilkes, who is a PFI expert, has said that what tends to happen in this sort of deal is that extra costs are loaded on to the public sector model simply to tip the balance in favour of PPP.

What has happened to the reputational externalities that have been referred to in the past? There is only one reference to those in the Ernst and Young report, and that is in the glossary. There is no other reference to them throughout the document. Those were supposed to show that £700 million extra was going to be loaded on to the public sector model. Where have those gone to?

Can the right hon. Gentleman guarantee that the consultation to which he refers will be genuine? Perhaps he will allow Labour Members the opportunity of a free vote to express what they feel about the proposals.

Finally, on the Health and Safety Executive, the right hon. Gentleman says that there is no given date by which the report must be delivered, but will he guarantee that if there is any uncertainty about whether the safety case is valid he will throw out the PPP? There is clearly uncertainty about whether the PPP represents value for money, yet he is proceeding with it. Will he do so if there is any doubt about the safety case? I believe that this PPP represents the Labour party's poll tax on wheels, and that it will haunt them for 30 years.

Mr. Byers: The safety position has been absolutely clear throughout—it will be decided by the Health and Safety Executive; it is not right for politicians to decide whether a safety case has been made. Independent safety experts—the Health and Safety Executive—will decide whether they agree with the safety case. I have said several times before that if they do not agree, we will not proceed with the PPP. I said that months ago; I continue to say it, and I say it again in the House this evening.

The Deputy Prime Minister suggested that there might be indicative savings of about £4.5 billion—I read his precise words today. There are savings of about £4 billion, which is significant. *[Interruption.]* It is £2 billion, and £2 billion indirectly. Hon. Members should read the report that the National Audit Office produced in December 2000. I have looked at it in detail and, as those who follow such things closely will know, the NAO makes it very clear that the benefits of a value-for-money assessment are not just the direct financial benefits but the indirect financial benefits, and people should consider that if they want to look at the issue in the round.

The NAO also said in its December 2000 report that value for money will not be a pass-fail; there will always be a subjective test. That is why I felt it was important that, rather than having a report to me that is not made public, I will publish the report and people can then judge the steps and decisions that I have taken. I am happy to do that; it is part of being accountable. There will be a row and a disagreement, and people will pick up certain aspects of the report, but as Ernst and Young says in its conclusion, on balance—it is a subjective view—it believes that value for money has been achieved.

On the public sector comparator, we have ensured that there is a fair judgment. We have considered more than 200 situations in the public sector comparator. We did not include those that involved, I hope, unique large cost overruns—for example, the Jubilee line's cost overrun was about 67 per cent.—because I believed that they would distort the overall figure. The cost overruns in the 200 situations that we considered came to about 20 per cent. on average, and that figure has been included in the public sector comparator.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. Hon. Members can see how many Members are seeking to catch my eye, so unless questions are brief—by brief, I mean one question—an awful lot of hon. Members will be disappointed.

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the brave face that he has put on the statement, but that does not disguise the fact that this is a pig in a poke. Will he go back to the Chancellor and tell him that there were two cases for the PPP—first, that it was value for money and, secondly, that it transferred risk from the public sector to the private sector? Does he not accept that the Ernst and Young report does not show that the PPP is value for money? It certainly does not transfer risk from the public sector to the private sector. The contract management risk will be horrendous. The risk to the passengers of a declining service with no penalties still exists, and there is the health and safety risk as well. My right hon. Friend says that the Health and Safety Executive is totally independent, but will he confirm that it is his Department's responsibility to make available to the HSE sufficient resources to enforce the highest standards of safety in the contract?

Mr. Byers: I believe that value for money has been achieved in the terms outlined in the Ernst and Young report. I also believe that risk has been transferred, as I outlined to the House in the examples that I just gave.

I ensured that the Health and Safety Executive received a substantial increase not just in its own resources, but in the number of people it can employ specifically to inspect the railway system, which includes the London underground. It has the resources, which is why it can do a comprehensive job in judging whether it is prepared to agree the safety case. The HSE will be given the time to do that. There is no rush; there is no timetable. It will proceed at its own pace and arrive at its own conclusion. In my view, that is exactly how it should be.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Does not the Secretary of State realise that a consultation has

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already taken place on the scheme that he proposes? I refer to the consultation through the ballot box in the Greater London Authority elections. Was not the proposal thrown out overwhelmingly by the electorate of London because they had no confidence in it?

How will the Secretary of State meet the capacity demands? Over the past 11 years, passenger journeys increased by 25 per cent., or 200 million. How will that be met in the next few years by this cockshy scheme in which no one has any faith?

Mr. Byers: I think the hon. Gentleman knows, because he served on the Standing Committee, that the provisions of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 were clear: the terms under which the transfer took place would be determined by the Government. We are determining those, as laid down in statute.

Capacity is a key issue. That is why, under the modernisation proposals, capacity on the Jubilee line will increase by 22 per cent., on the Victoria line by 15 per cent. and on the Metropolitan and Circle lines by 17 per cent within the first 10 years. We are addressing capacity improvements within the first 10 years.

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): I have spelt out in the House my opposition to many worrying aspects of this scheme, not least the fractured management and its consequences. It was interesting that the Secretary of State kept referring to the public sector as London Underground but did not mention the Mayor and Transport for London in that context. I limit myself to one brief question: who is accountable under the system—the Mayor or the Minister?

Mr. Byers: Until the transfer, we remain responsible. The Greater London Authority Act allows us to take these decisions. When the proposals are in place, we will talk to the Mayor and Transport for London about a timetable for transfer. They will then take responsibility. Those are the provisions laid down in the 1999 Act. I know from conversations that I have had with the Mayor that they will be constructive in ensuring a smooth transition and transfer.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Given that the Government have taken more than four years to produce this proposal to put investment into London Underground, is the Secretary of State aware that the amount of investment since 1997 has been considerably less than the comparable period before? When he talks about an investment of £16 billion over the next 15 years, does that take inflation into account, because that will be considerable over that period? If it does, will not the costs of the contracts have to be increased? Taking all things into consideration, the more one looks at the figures, the more one must conclude that the level of investment over the next 15 years will not be more than it was just before 1997.

Mr. Byers: That is simply incorrect. If the hon. Gentleman looks at core investment he will see that the improvements under our proposals are considerably in excess of the core investment proposals that were implemented between 1991 and 1997. The significant blip upwards was due to the cost overruns on the Jubilee line extension. The Conservatives talk about the great investment that took place, but they should look at the figures, as I have done. They show that the blip was a result of a failure to control the costs of the Jubilee line extension. If Members look at core investment, which is what we are dealing with, they will see a huge difference—greater investment each year for the 15 years covered by the proposals that we are putting to the House this evening.

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): The Secretary of State will be aware that the public know that failure to invest for decades is the reason that we are in a mess now. They also know that we need money put in, and we need it fast. To be frank, if anyone messes around with this and delays it, they will not be easily forgiven. Yes, the public want it done safely and efficiently, but they want it done, and they expect the Minister and the Mayor to get on with it, and soon.

Mr. Byers: That is the important message. We have the plans, which are ready to go, and we have the money, which is ready to be invested—some £16 billion over 15 years. The message, not only from my hon. Friend but from London's travelling public, is clear: they have had enough of politicians arguing; now, they want us to get on with the job and invest the money. That is what we want to do. We have a plan, we have the money, and now we want to get on with investment in the underground.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): The Secretary of State will know that Metropolitan line rolling stock is the oldest on the system. Will he confirm that it will still take between 10 and 15 years for that to be replaced? Will it also take 10 or 15 years to modernise the system, and are there any plans to extend the network?

Mr. Byers: Full details will be produced by the contractors tomorrow. Offhand, I am not sure of the specific details regarding Metropolitan line rolling stock, and I apologise for that. The information will be published—

Mr. Pickles: Circle line.

Mr. Byers: No, it is not the Circle line but the Metropolitan line that is being discussed. The information will be available tomorrow. What I do know about the Metropolitan line is that there will be a 17 per cent. increase in capacity on it in the first 10 years.

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): Everyone welcomes the commitment to additional investment in the underground to be delivered through a public-private partnership, but because the Government have chosen a model of public-private partnership in which the public have lost confidence, they will need to win the safety and value-for-money arguments not only today, but every day for the next 30 years. The Ernst and Young report says that value for money is

> "part art, part science and involves a blend of subjective judgements and fact-based analysis"—

in other words, a highly educated guess. The report says that over the seven and a half years, it is

> "less likely to support value for money".

How can a convincing value-for-money case be made when after seven and a half years there is no pricing structure and no contractual guarantee to deliver value for money?

Mr. Byers: The important point is the periodic review. As is only right and proper, London Underground will be in a position to negotiate changes and improvements to meet the needs of the system at that time. That is the important aspect.

Value for money is always a subjective test. I do not regret Ernst and Young's openness in expressing its concerns about the process. I believe that there should be a debate on the issues, and I will not run away from that debate. However, having looked at all the considerations in the round, Ernst and Young reaches the conclusion, based on the figures available to it, that value for money has been achieved.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): In view of the serious doubts expressed on all sides about the likely success of the scheme, what arrangements will the Secretary of State put in place now to ensure that there is no further disruption or deterioration in tube services to the travelling public, such as my constituents in Upminster, who live at the end of the District line, before, if, or when any noticeable improvements are made?

Mr. Byers: The hon. Lady makes an important point about the disruption, cancellations and delays that people experience daily on the underground at present. As soon as one looks for the underlying reason for that, one finds the chronic lack of investment over generations. Now, we need to get the money invested. The money is there and we have a plan that will secure improvements. Now, we just have to get on with the job.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): The Transport Sub-Committee under the distinguished chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) has systematically dissected the proposal technically, but I put to the Secretary of State the democratic argument. Whatever the terms of the Greater London Authority Act, the fact is that Londoners have said again and again, using every means available to them, that they have no confidence in the PPP. Londoners' support for PPP was tested to destruction in the campaign for the London mayoralty, and Labour's candidate was humiliated. Londoners do not want this; London's Mayor does not want it; and London's Transport Commissioner does not want it. Does it not make nonsense of regional devolution and does it not show a breathtaking arrogance to force that misconceived scheme down the throats of Londoners, who have said over and over again that they have no confidence in that way of proceeding?

Mr. Byers: When the Committee reported, it had not seen the details of the contracts. Now that it has the opportunity to do so, no doubt it will consider the position.

On the democratic points, the position is clear in the Greater London Authority Act, for which the House voted and which Opposition Members opposed. It is for the Government to determine the details of modernisation, which is then transferred to the Mayor and Transport for London.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): My constituents are meeting right now in Chesham town hall with officials of London Underground to look at the appalling service on the Metropolitan line. They will not have been heartened, either by the Secretary of State's disgusting answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall), or the right hon. Gentleman's lack of knowledge about one of the worst London underground lines. Can he give my constituents a guarantee that Chesham station and the branch at the end of the Metropolitan line will remain open with a full service? Can he also confirm that it appears that anybody who is 45 or over in my constituency will have ended their working life before there is any real improvement to the Metropolitan line under his plans?

Mr. Byers: They will know that the reason for that is that we had 18 years of a Conservative Government who did not invest in the underground; denied improvements to the hon. Lady's constituents in Chesham; and did nothing about the Metropolitan line or the District line. That is the legacy that we are seeking to deal with. The Opposition have no solutions to the problems; it is we who are prepared to take tough decisions and ensure that investment goes into the underground.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): My constituents in Kingsbury, my right hon. Friend will know, have endured speed restrictions to Wembley Park tube station for far too long. They will be as delighted as I am that one of the first things to be undertaken in the first year of the programme is the renewal of the southbound track, which will ensure that the speed restrictions are lifted. When they get to Wembley Park station they will, unfortunately, come out on a dilapidated, bankrupt station. Is the Secretary of State aware of the letter that I have received from Transport for London, which states that in its programme it has already identified £100 million for the refurbishment of the station? Does he agree that it is vital that money is spent to make sure that the station can safely control the crowds visiting Wembley and the new national stadium?

Mr. Byers: Members will have an opportunity to see the improvements that will be delivered. The speed restrictions to which my hon. Friend refers are an example of the difficulties that will be addressed in a major track renewal programme. I am aware of my hon. Friend's concerns about Wembley Park station, and discussions are taking place at the moment about the issue.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): We wait four years for a PPP to come along, then this shambles arrives late on a Thursday night after newspaper reports have been written, so little confidence does the Secretary of State have in the PPP. Does the right hon. Gentleman not understand that Ernst and Young has refused to put its name to his fantasy figures? Does he not realise that he will go down in history as the man who thought that the third way meant destroying a private sector company, Railtrack, then, to be even-handed, destroying a nationalised company, London Underground?

Mr. Byers: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman did not waste too long coming up with those comments. Of course, he failed to reveal his own views, which we heard

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when he was shadow Secretary of State. He said clearly, as *Hansard* on 15 July 1999 shows, that he would privatise the tube.

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): The Conservatives are all nodding.

Mr. Byers: Yes, Conservative Members all agree. That is where they want to be. Speaking to the Conservative party conference on 23 September 1999, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) said:

> "We will transfer the Underground into a series of privately-run, vertically integrated, publicly limited companies."

He did not mention that in his comments. That is probably understandable. *[Interruption.]* It is always interesting to know the right hon. Gentleman's views, which are usually far more interesting than the views of the hon. Members for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) or for Brentwood and Ongar. *[Interruption.]* I would never get personal with the hon. Gentleman. The right hon. Member for Wokingham reveals what lies at the heart of the modern Conservative party—privatise anything. That is the reality. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (David Maclean) should be mindful of his blood pressure.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order.

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): While bids are being submitted, I could mention that we are still waiting for a down escalator at Greenford station, and we have been waiting since 1943. Most of my constituents and I could live with an integrated system where safety is taken out of the political arena. What we simply cannot live with is more time standing on a platform watching the cancellation board, while people play petty party politics with such a vital issue. Will my right hon. Friend give us some idea of the timetable for implementation? We cannot keep on waiting.

Mr. Byers: That is the important message, which I know the travelling public in London are expressing loudly and clearly. Provided no external factors cause a delay and we can proceed—people are threatening a legal challenge to the process, which clearly will mean a further delay—the intention is that towards the end of May or the beginning of June we will see the investment going in. It can start as soon as the contracts are signed, which we expect will be at the end of May or during June.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Does the Secretary of State accept that his credibility, already broken-backed, has been destroyed tonight? He dismisses the report of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), the Chairman of the Select Committee, which has many experienced members who know a great deal about the subject, and which is highly critical of his proposals. He dismisses all the objections raised by Labour Members, and most damning of all, the words of Ernst and Young in the conclusion of the executive summary:

> "London Underground's recommendation that the PPP proposals deliver value for money is a subjective one which is supported by its analysis."

After what he has done to Railtrack, the right hon. Gentleman has a nerve to come to the House of Commons to try and sell us this pup.

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman will always defend Railtrack. That is a position that he and his party have adopted. We know that £1 billion of compensation to the Railtrack shareholders is the Conservative party position. With regard to London Underground, I repeat that the subjective approach is one that the National Audit Office said will apply to the value-for-money test. That will always be the case, because in making a value-for-money test, one must consider a number of factors—not just the financial ones, but the benefits that will accrue to the travelling public.

Ms Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): Those who are less than enthusiastic about the scheme need only look at the Jubilee line, which my right hon. Friend described at length and which I have to use every day. It would be a great service if it worked and if the signalling worked from time to time. They should also look at the docklands light railway and the service that it provides for my constituents in Lewisham and others. The docklands light railway is a good example to show why the scheme is the one that we want to go forward.

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. We have an example in London of a public-private partnership that is delivering day in, day out—the docklands light railway. When people see that it can be successful, they will recognise that we are taking the right way forward.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): Given the Secretary of State's experience in applying for the administration of Railtrack, what provision has he insisted that the contracts should include for orderly termination if one of the consortiums fails to deliver? Which person or body will be responsible for terminating a contract on behalf of the taxpayer and the London commuter if one of these underground Railtracks fails to deliver?

Mr. Byers: The situation is not at all like that which applies to Railtrack. I shall keep saying it: it is not at all like that. The reality is quite different. There will be a contractual relationship between London Underground and the three private-sector contractors. There are financial provisions underpinning the viability of each. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the companies that are involved, he will see that they can call on huge financial support. London Underground will have the power to terminate if there is a failure to deliver on the contracts and it is only right and proper that it should be able to do that. Most importantly, London Underground, which is publicly owned and accountable, will be the body with that responsibility, and when the transfer has occurred, the commissioner, the Mayor of London and Transport for London will have those powers.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): While Londoners are indeed tired of politicians squabbling about the underground, does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be helpful to allay Londoners' fears that the Mayor and his Transport Commissioner have been deliberately excluded if they could be re-engaged by the Government during the consultation period? The scheme, which is the only way of attracting the relevant amount and gives a clear guarantee of safety, could then be brought into being with rather more support from Londoners than is being expressed by Opposition Members, who would, as we know, simply have sold off the whole underground.

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the position of the Conservative party, which would simply privatise the London underground. It is right to recognise the concerns expressed by people in London and others about our proposals. We must take people through the arguments to show that this is not a privatisation or part privatisation, that safety will not be compromised because the Health and Safety Executive will take the final decision and that it is value for money. It is £16 billion that will deliver real improvements. The Opposition would not match the investment; they would take it away. We are ensuring that we invest in the London underground so that real improvements can be seen not in the distant future, but in the near future.

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): The Secretary of State indicated in his statement that £4 billion of investment over 15 years would come from private finance. He said earlier today that the rest would come from fares or Government grants. The taxpayer and farepayer will not be expecting their money back, but private finance will. How will the £4 billion be repaid—or is this a debt that will be dumped on the people of London?

Mr. Byers: It is certainly not a debt that will be dumped on the people of London. It is a commercial agreement that will secure the level of investment and guarantee the significant improvements in the London underground that we want. In the process, we will get the £4 billion of private finance, and there will be a return, provided that those private companies deliver the very significant improvements set out in their contracts. If they fail to do so, they will not receive the financial return that they would otherwise get. That will be one way in which we can ensure that they deliver on the commitments that they made in the contracts. It will be not a burden on the farepayer, but a balance between the responsibilities of Government through grant and our commitment, which we have made very clearly, which is to say that there is no need for a real-terms increase in the fares being paid by passengers.

Jim Dowd (Lewisham, West): May I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement on the north London underground and reiterate what my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Ms Prentice) said about the DLR, which is not only working efficiently, but was completed on budget and two months early, in contrast with the debacle of the Jubilee line? Will he confirm that he will stick rigidly to the tests of no privatisation, value for money and safety? Once those tests are satisfied, the argument should be about product, not process, and ends, not means. The end should be a better service for the people of London, for which they have waited for far too long.

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend is right. The first key issue is that safety should not be compromised, and it will not be. The Health and Safety Executive—the independent experts—will make the decision on whether the safety case has been met. Secondly, there will be no privatisation or part-privatisation. London Underground will remain in the public sector. Thirdly, in the light of the reports that we have received today, I believe that value for money will be achieved. So we can satisfy all three criteria.

The choice for people now is whether we make progress and get the investment in, as the Government want to do, or whether we find further reasons to argue and delay, and have a political row about the way forward. I happen to believe that if we delay further, we shall be condemned by successive generations of Londoners, so the real message—and the choice for me and the Government—is to get on with the job, put the bickering behind us and invest in the London underground.

Derek Conway (Old Bexley and Sidcup): The Secretary of State's self-confidence is wondrous to behold, and I congratulate him on that, at least. Will he, however, explain to the House the following comment in section 1.4.3 of the executive summary of the Ernst and Young report? It states:

> "The contract structure is unique . . . Whilst the exercise is unprecedented and provides some assurance over the contract, it remains unproven."

Given what Ernst and Young says, and given what the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), the Chairman of the Transport Sub-Committee has said, does the Secretary of State not understand why hon. Members on both sides of the House doubt what he says, just as our constituents will doubt him? My constituents will simply have to avoid the right hon. Gentleman's trains and tubes, but if they drive down the A2, they will see another monument to the Government's proven track record, because they drive into London past the dome.

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman's solution would be to privatise, whether it be the railways and Railtrack or the London underground. It is little wonder that the voters of Shrewsbury showed him where to go. I do not know whether he left by rail or road. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman used to be a resident of Tyneside, so we can have this sort of banter.

Of course this exercise will be unique, because there has never been a public-private partnership on this scale before. It is therefore a truism to say that it is unique. But what it represents is £16 billion of investment in the London underground. Would the hon. Gentleman delay that? Yes, he would. He would not put the investment in; we will.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): May I return to the powers of the Secretary of State and the Mayor? This public-private partnership creates an enormous dependency on a limited number of companies because of the scale of the contracts. If one or more of those companies nears financial collapse in the same way that Railtrack did, will the Secretary of State—or the Mayor—have reserve powers to bring that company into public ownership, or to take direct action in the way that my right hon. Friend did with Railtrack?

Mr. Byers: The situation is quite different, as I tried to explain earlier. This arrangement involves the private sector working for London Underground in a contractual relationship. That is quite different from the situation that

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applied to Railtrack, so the remedies and the powers are not the same. But, under the contractual arrangements, the Mayor and Transport for London will have the power to terminate contracts—these are normal contractual relationships—and to re-let the contracts to someone else in the private sector.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): As is common with many Ministers, the Secretary of State is conveniently misrepresenting the policy of the Conservative party, the views of independent observers and of other people in the House right across the spectrum that we should entrust responsibility to the Mayor and the Transport Commissioner, and not to the Secretary of State. I am particularly distressed by the way in which the Secretary of State has dismissed the Transport Sub-Committee report. We took evidence which showed that the most significant improvements in the scheme would be back-ended to its later years. We also took evidence that passenger growth would rise in line with capacity, which means that overcrowding will not be reduced. Yet we now hear that the Secretary of State is not taking the word of that Select Committee—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman can see that a considerable number of Members still wish to make a contribution. He should get to the point of his question.

Chris Grayling: Will the Secretary of State confirm that he is ignoring the recommendations of the Select Committee and listening to a report that says

"We have not sought to verify . . . the information . . . provided by management"?

Mr. Byers: I said earlier that the Department will make a full response to the Select Committee in due course, but the hon. Gentleman ignores an important point: within the first 10 years, there will be capacity increases of 22 per cent. on the Jubilee line, 15 per cent. on the Victoria line and 17 per cent. on the Metropolitan and Circle lines. Those are real improvements. The important point is that the seven and a half year periodic review will give London Transport and London Underground the opportunity to renegotiate capacity provision. They are able to do that and I understand that it will be a priority for them. The lines with most overcrowding will be dealt with sooner rather than later.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): I welcome the statement as the beginning of the end of the uncertainty, particularly for my hard-pressed constituents who have to use the overcrowded Central line. Does my right hon. Friend agree that a failed legal challenge will lead only to further unnecessary delay? It would be another factor for Londoners to take into account in 2004—part of the cost of Livingstone.

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend is right to say that we must end the uncertainty hanging over the London underground. Today's decision, subject to the consultation, will do precisely that. Of course, it is for Londoners to judge who is delaying the investment and who wants it to be made, such as those of us on the Labour Benches.

David Burnside (South Antrim): The Secretary of State is well aware of the increased industrial action that has affected and inconvenienced the general public in London and the south-east especially. Will he incorporate in these rather loose financial projections the cost between the board, the management and the unions of a no-strike deal to protect commuters in London and Greater London?

Mr. Byers: In the Government's view, those issues are best left to the trade unions and management concerned. We know from history that Government interference in such issues is often not helpful. It is far better to have a properly negotiated agreement between the trade unions and management. That is the view that the Government support. We say to all parties involved that negotiation is often the best way forward.

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on introducing the scheme, which will not only bring substantial private investment to modernising a long-neglected public service, but motivate contractors so that they stay on budget and on time. That was shown in the last Parliament when the Treasury Committee examined the history of private finance initiative projects, which are very similar. Furthermore, the service will stay in public hands, which gives reassurance. However, does he accept that Londoners are tired of checks, reassessments and litigation? Can he assure the House that those will be minimised and that work will begin without too much delay?

Mr. Byers: That is the important message—we want to get on with the job and get the money invested. My hon. Friend is right to point out the good work done by the Treasury Committee on the role of the PFI and public-private partnerships and the benefits that they can bring. I am confident that, when we have the opportunity to make the investment in the London underground, tangible benefits will result.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): We have heard a lot about the potential financial viability of the right hon. Gentleman's programme. I am more concerned with its political viability. Does he genuinely think that he will convince Londoners that it is somehow a good thing?

Mr. Byers: We will convince Londoners by ensuring that there is no privatisation, that the system is safe and that real improvements are being achieved. I believe that the plan we have outlined today will do precisely that.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): Does my right hon. Friend recognise that it would be generous to describe support for the proposals among the people of London as minimal? What will be the political consequences of that?

Mr. Byers: I understand the concerns that have been expressed, but people will see that safety is not compromised, because the Health and Safety Executive will have responsibility for it; that there is no privatisation, because London Underground will remain in the public sector; and that there will be value for money and the investment will go in. The real test will be whether there are real improvements in the London underground, and I believe that there will be.

Joan Ryan (Enfield, North): It may be worth reminding ourselves that the largest poll of Londoners' views was taken in last year's general election, at which Labour once again swept to victory in London with by far the greatest number of seats, and that PPP was a manifesto commitment. It is privatisation that Londoners do not want. My constituents tell me that they want London Underground to stay in public ownership, with safety paramount and no more delays. They want us to get on with the investment and the improvements. The only other issue of concern to them is that the underground remains affordable. Will my right hon. Friend comment on that?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend is right: the issues are safety; ensuring that there is no privatisation; and getting the investment in. I understand the concern about fares, which is why all the work that has been carried out has been based on the assumption that they do not need to be increased above the rate of inflation—so there will be no real-terms increase in fares as a result of our proposals.

Clive Efford (Eltham): In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), my right hon. Friend said that if contracts were terminated, they would revert to London Underground, which would be free to re-let them. In the interests of accountability, so that Londoners can know who will be making the important decisions about the long-term future of the underground, does that mean that London Underground then ceases to pay the infracos that are being engaged under the PPPs, and if not, in what circumstances can those payments be terminated? Will London Underground have the right to step in at any time if the infracos fail to deliver the improvements, and not only if there is a deterioration?

Mr. Byers: The situation will be the one that applies under normal rules of contract. If the private sector contractors fail to deliver their contractual obligations, they will be in either a breach or a fundamental breach of contract, depending on the seriousness, and Transport for London will be able to impose penalties according to the nature of the breach. TFL will have responsibility. If there is a safety issue, it has immediate step-in rights and can remove the contractor and do the work itself, billing the contractor for any work that is necessary. If there is a breach of contract, the remedies, which depend on the seriousness, are there under the normal law of contract.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): I agree with my right hon. Friend when he says that performance is important, but let me remind him of the paragraph in Ernst and Young's report that says:

> "Performance Payments included in the analysis are only expected levels, bidders are not contractually bound to these levels, and therefore performance and subsequent payment levels could vary."

Bearing it in mind that we have seen barrow loads of documents wheeled into London Underground today, and yet we still do not have a contractually binding arrangement, what guarantee can he give that contractors will deliver what they promise and that the penalties will achieve what he says they will?

Mr. Byers: In a lengthy reply that I gave earlier today, I said that one of the conditions that we have attached to our approval is to ensure that there are no material changes in the contracts between the position today and the time of financial closure. That was one of Ernst and Young's recommendations.

Linda Perham (Ilford, North): I agree that after years of neglect and threats of privatisation from the Tories, we need the investment in London Underground, and I welcome the refurbishment of my local station, Hainault, planned for October next year, but does not my right hon. Friend agree that my constituents and other London underground users would much prefer priority to be given to improvements in track and signalling, and more trains? Does he also agree that, as other hon. Members have said, there is, unfortunately, a credibility gap with the PPP, particularly among party members and the trade unions?

Mr. Byers: When my hon. Friend has had the opportunity to examine the plan in detail, she will see that the bulk of the investment—£8.5 billion, I think—is going into track and signals. That will make a significant difference. Moreover, it is false to say that investment in stations will not improve the service. In many parts of the network—including places that most Members will know, such as Victoria, Oxford Circus and King's Cross—stations are closed at certain times of the day because of overcrowding. One of the ways in which we can change that is by changing the design of the stations, so it is wrong to portray work on stations as merely a superficially attractive approach. There are good reasons, in terms of capacity, reliability and performance, why it should be a priority.

Mr. Iain Coleman (Hammersmith and Fulham): It is with considerable sadness that I have to advise my right hon. Friend that in my view, the overwhelming majority of the thousands of my constituents who struggle to work and back every day using the 11 underground stations in my constituency have to use a service that is dirty, chronically unreliable and expensive. It is their view that the worst possible way to try to turn the service round is to hand it over now to the Mayor and the Commissioner for Transport for London, who genuinely believe that the service is massively overcomplex, expensive and intrinsically unsafe. May I urge—indeed, beg—my right hon. Friend, even at this very late stage, to reopen negotiations with Mr. Livingstone and Mr. Kiley, so that there can be an agreed settlement between the parties, which Londoners can support? They will then be able to have the service that they deserve. I have to tell my right hon. Friend that they certainly do not support this—and they do not deserve it, either

Mr. Byers: The Commissioner for Transport was charged by the Prime Minister last year with the responsibility of trying to negotiate a deal with the private contractors, and was unable to do it. That is regrettable, but that was the situation. It is wrong to say that the new system will be unsafe. I know that allegations have been made, but it will be for the Health and Safety Executive

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to determine whether the safety case is made. This is not a repeat of Railtrack on the underground. There will be no shareholders in London Underground; the travelling public will come first. I say to my hon. Friend, with his 11 underground stations and his many constituents who travel on the underground, that I recognise that the present level of service is unacceptable. The choice is: what we are going to do about it? Are we to continue with constant political bickering about a solution, or shall we get on with the job? I think that for the travelling public in London, the issue now is who is going to get on with the job—and the Government intend to do that.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, because although there is a time to debate such issues, there is also a time when it is the job of the Government to decide. I believe that I speak on behalf of the majority of people in my constituency who use the District and the Northern lines when I say that that time has now come. My constituents will judge my right hon. Friend's decision not on the quality of debate tonight but on the results of putting the investment in. They know that we will not get results by privatising the tube, as the Tories want to do, and they are not unrealistic enough to believe that an extra penny on income tax would produce those results, either. As my right hon. Friend will be aware, we have a very viable public-private partnership in the Merton to Croydon Tramlink. Will he continue to put the arguments about why the proposed public-private partnership is in the public interest—but, most important of all, will he please get on with the job?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend speaks for many of the travelling public in London when he stresses the importance of learning from success stories such as the Croydon Tramlink, which is a good example of a public-private partnership. There are other examples in London's transport system, too, and the important message is that our proposals for London Underground will ensure that it remains in the public sector—there will be no privatisation—safety will not be compromised, and we will unlock £16 billion of investment in the London underground. That is the equivalent of £5,000 for every household in London. That is the scale of investment that the Government want to see and those who delay or block it will be condemned by generations of Londoners in the future.

Mr. Pickles: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I seek your guidance on how we may record the fact that of the 21 Labour Members who asked questions on the statement, only five were in favour of the PPP—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order for the Chair.

Housing (Haringey)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dan Norris.]*

8.20 pm

Mr. David Lammy (Tottenham): I am grateful for the opportunity afforded by my first Thursday Adjournment debate in which I shall address the important issue of housing in Tottenham and the London borough of Haringey. This is the second debate on the housing crisis in London this week. I am especially grateful to the Speaker's Office, because I know that Mr. Speaker personally selects the subjects to be raised on the Thursday Adjournment.

Housing impinges on life's many fundamentals, including health, security, education and employment opportunities. Good-quality, permanent housing can generate a sense of community. It is the difference between a building and a home. A real home defines a sense of self, family and personal stability. It allows people a life of dignity and, in a sense, it is that dignity that is at the core of this debate.

No advice surgery I hold passes without a number of Tottenham parents describing the tremendous overcrowding in their two-bedroomed properties, where four or five brothers and sisters are crowded into one bedroom. That leads to poor health and safety standards for the family, little room for children to do their homework and endless sibling conflict. It is no wonder that many of our young people prefer the relative privacy of corners outdoors, on the estate, in the park or at the bottom of the street, where they can hang out with their friends, to falling out with their brothers and sisters in cramped conditions with stressed-out parents.

We know that such overcrowding leads to a breakdown in family relations, missed educational opportunities, exposure to physical and mental health problems and a growth in the drop-out culture, in which young people bypass legal employment and become involved in crime. That was the stark reality of Tottenham in the 1980s: surely in the 21st century it is time for us to move on.

The tremendous volume of temporary accommodation is probably our biggest obstacle to moving on in Tottenham. While it feels intensely like a problem faced only in Tottenham, it is linked to homelessness in London as a whole. In that respect, I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) for securing an Adjournment debate yesterday on the housing crisis in London. In that debate, he stated, rightly, that there are 48,000 homeless households in accommodation in London. Some 10 per cent. of those households are in the borough of Haringey. That is 5,000 households—1,000 more than in any other London authority—which is between 15,000 and 20,000 homeless people.

When I speak of homeless households, I am not referring to the 532 people who literally live and sleep on the streets. That number has fallen by two thirds, thanks to the work co-ordinated by the Government's rough sleepers unit. Rather, I am referring to people, including many families with children, who are without a home and who present themselves either to Haringey social services or to the housing department as having nowhere to live.

At present, London's population growth is not out of control, with an increase of about 2 per cent. per annum. In numbers, that is significant, but it does not reflect the homelessness crisis proportionately as the homeless household rate is more than 10 times greater. In the past two years, the number of homeless households has increased by an alarming 25 per cent. That cannot all be put down to greater numbers of newly arrived asylum seekers.

The trend in the past 10 years has been for the large-scale buying up of properties by landlords and less reputable real estate agents. It is a scandal that those private social landlords—many of them modern-day pariahs—renovate the properties to minimum standards, divide already small houses into much smaller, unappealing flats and then, what is much worse, rent them back to local authority housing departments and the National Asylum Support Service at exorbitant rates.

If I may, I will describe the situation of a professional couple with young children in my constituency. The family bought a long lease in a privately built new block of flats in Tottenham. The flats were sold as an attractive and modern, new development with good transport links to the City and the west end. However, the developer and freeholder were soon in dispute and basic maintenance work was not done. A cycle of deterioration began: common parts were not cleaned, wear and tear stayed worn and torn, the walls became dirty, the carpets stained and ripped. The front door lock and the intercom were smashed and unrepaired. Attempts to get together with other leaseholders in the block to pressure the freeholder failed.

Families started to move out and sublet to others with less stake in the property. Leases became hard to sell without a loss. A landlord in the temporary accommodation business gradually bought up half the flats cheaply from people desperate to get out. Others rented out their flats and are living elsewhere. Soon, that couple were the only original leaseholders still living there. Their neighbours now come and go, sometimes leaving without warning—some are rehoused, some are deported and some are evicted when their rent stops being paid.

Corridors get littered—rubbish, unwanted furniture and items left by previous tenants are thrown in the yard outside, attracting more dumping from the surrounding area. Owing to the smashed front door and the availability of discarded furniture and beds, some rough sleepers have moved into the downstairs cupboard. The common parts are used by local young people to sniff glue, smoke crack cocaine or inject heroin. Burglary is a problem and residents never know who is going to be around the corner.

In all practical respects, the family are living in an unmanaged temporary accommodation block. The landlord who owns half the flats re-lets them to refugees and asylum seekers as bed-and-breakfast annexes and charges the local authority £250 per week. Breakfast appears to be a weekly plastic bag containing milk, a loaf of bread and a box of corn flakes.

If that were the only such example, I would not have asked for an Adjournment debate, but this is not an isolated incident. My constituents will tell you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that there is not a street, a close, an avenue or an estate in my constituency that self-seeking landlords have left untouched. The knock-on effects are huge and equally destructive. The opportunities for families who have grown up and lived in Tottenham for many years and who seek a permanent home there increasingly diminish as we risk the area becoming a colossal modern-day dormitory for people with the most desperate needs.

Presently, planning powers are not sufficient to prevent the particularly insidious development of bed-and-breakfast annexes. Although intended to encourage home owners to buy and live in Tottenham, the recent announcement of relief on stamp duty on the purchase of properties in deprived areas will no doubt lead to the proliferation of those annexes. A knock-on effect of the annexes is the low incentive for tenants to become financially active because they know that they will never be able to afford to pay their housing costs, thus creating a poverty trap for all but the landlords.

Tottenham's proliferation of temporary housing is directly responsible for high population transience, which detracts from our best efforts locally and nationally to regenerate the area and build a safe, sustainable community. There is up to a 20 per cent. turnover rate of people moving in and out of the area, constantly, week on week, month on month, year on year. That level of transience seriously damages any hope of community cohesion. It is exacerbated by boroughs as far afield as Redbridge and Hammersmith and Fulham placing their homeless families in Tottenham without any obligation to let Haringey council know where those families are.

I will be honest: I am extremely worried. I have said before in the House that I grew up in a working-class community in Tottenham in the 1970s and 1980s. It was a community then of primarily white working-class, Caribbean, Irish and Cypriot families. It worries me that the children of the very families who thrived and made a home in that part of London, which has always been a gateway to the rest of London—a tradition of which we are proud—should now come to my surgery and express wrongly placed resentment towards newcomers for the poverty and instability that they purportedly bring.

Long-term residents who are housed by Haringey council find that they are unable to move to larger properties as their families expand, because those in temporary housing are naturally prioritised as permanent dwellings become available, leaving longer-term tenants lower down in the housing list.

We must not remain silent about the real backlash that asylum seekers face because of our failure to deal with London's housing crisis strategically. Families living in temporary households are disadvantaged because of the simple fact that they are seeking temporary accommodation. They face further social exclusion as they try to settle into a new area, get their children into a new school and gain access to public services. For many, English is their second language, and the one thing that they can be certain of is that they will have to move again in due course.

Research commissioned by Haringey council showed that of the children who had the stability gained from remaining in the same school in Tottenham for more than three years, 74 per cent. gained key stage 2, against the national average of 75 per cent. For children who had been in school for less than a year, the figure was 38 per cent. Clearly, their geographical instability was detrimental to their learning opportunities.

Furthermore, general practitioner registration lists show 3,000 rather than the recommended 1,300 patients in many of Tottenham's surgeries. We house the highest

[Mr. David Lammy]

proportion of asylum seekers and refugees in the country, yet every ward in Tottenham is on the index of deprivation. When one throws together the circumstances of long-term and temporary residents living in a concentrated area of high deprivation, battling for access to overstretched public services, it is clear that there is a powder keg waiting to explode.

My hon. Friend the Minister will know that two weeks ago I took a delegation from Haringey council to meet Lord Falconer, the Minister for Housing and Planning. I am pleased that he agreed to work with the council to commission further research to help us to understand the issues.

The solutions need to be addressed in a pan-London framework. Local housing authorities should co-operate rather than compete. In the short term, I would like a quota system for the number of temporary housing placements in each London borough to be developed. In the medium term, we need increased planning powers to control the present mass buy-up of available properties in Tottenham. In the medium to long term, registered social landlords such as housing associations must be encouraged to take the lead in the acquisition and renovation of a large stock of good-quality temporary accommodation in London. That means providing registered social landlords with the financial means and incentives to purchase and renovate properties to a decent standard and protecting them to some extent from the financial risks involved.

Like other world-class cities, London faces the challenge of dealing with housing need. Its economy is growing, so its population will continue to rise, with consequent housing pressure on inner-London areas. Therefore, that issue requires strategic policy development and the implementation of measures that aim to control the problem, rather than allow it to overwhelm us.

Despite all I have said, as someone who has grown up in Tottenham I feel compelled to tell my hon. Friends that there are many success stories to applaud in Tottenham. That is undoubtedly due to the commitment of the Labour Government who have targeted deprived areas, so savagely attacked by the previous Administration. Money is most definitely going into Tottenham, with more than £100 million of investment going into regeneration. Unemployment is down 17 per cent. since 1997, our schools are improving with nine schools out of special measures. Thankfully, we are a long way from the ugly scenes of the 1980s when anger burst onto our streets, because the investments made by the Government have to some extent given my constituents the breathing space to heal those deep wounds.

This Government recognise the moral and economic imperative of creating a nation where all people have access to a top-class education, to decent jobs, to neighbourhoods of which they can be proud and call home. My constituents certainly share that vision. One of the greatest problems holding them back from living that vision is the housing situation that keeps them chained to social exclusion. One can lengthen the chain by improving schools, the health service and crime rates, but I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to help them break free from a housing situation that keeps my constituents shackled.

8.36 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Lammy) on securing this debate on an important issue for Haringey and people across London. He set out clearly and eloquently the size of the task facing the Government in meeting the housing needs of people in London. He is right to say that this is the second Adjournment debate this week on the subject of housing in London, which shows the concern that exists and the need to find a strategic, London-wide solution.

Two issues in particular need to be addressed and both were inherited by the Government from our predecessor. The first concerns the backlog of repairs and the need to bring social housing up to a decent standard after the Tory years of neglect and lack of investment. The second concerns the failure over those years to deal with upgrading some of the recognisable standards of what we would regard as being suitable housing. I shall deal with those matters during my speech. The main ones include the need to revise the overcrowding standards, the need to get a definition of homelessness that resonates with what people would recognise as homelessness, and the need to deal with some of the fitness standards. My hon. Friend set out clearly the consequences of those failures for his constituents.

In looking at the need for a strategic, London-wide solution, my hon. Friend may be aware that tomorrow there will be a conference to launch the consultation process for the 2002 London housing statement. It will set out the key housing policies and priorities for the capital, and describe the contribution that local authorities, registered social landlords and other major stakeholders can make to improve the quality and the quantity of the housing stock. It will form the basis of the Housing Corporation's investment strategy for 2003-04 and give direction to the housing strategies of all the London boroughs. The Minister for Housing and Planning will address the conference and I am sure that all London Members will take a great interest in that debate and will have a lot to say about it.

The Government are very aware of and concerned at the steep increase in the number of homelessness households in London and elsewhere, and in particular about their being placed in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. While we should be concerned about any increase, particularly about families with young children who are forced into bed and breakfast, 10 years ago the crisis in London was very much worse. That is not to say that we are complacent about the present situation; the Government have promptly taken action to address the figures showing an increase over the past couple of years.

We are aware of the phenomenon of landlordism which has afflicted the north of the country as well as London with annexed accommodation. Although in some cases such accommodation may have advantages over traditional bed-and-breakfast accommodation, it causes severe problems—especially when landlords simply go for housing benefit and make no effort to provide the housing management that would be expected of a social landlord.

My hon. Friend highlighted the difficulties in respect of high numbers, costs, turnover and standards. His points are well taken. The bed and breakfast unit has been asked to investigate them and to talk further to Haringey. The unit is working with local authorities and colleagues throughout the Government to find ways of helping authorities to access more temporary accommodation in their own boroughs. They are considering the strategic, pan-London measures that my hon. Friend described.

The scale of homelessness has not been properly recognised in some legislation. As my hon. Friend knows, the Homelessness Bill is completing its passage through Parliament. We shall also introduce a priority needs order. For the first time, those measures will include some groups of homeless people in London who have never had housing rights, especially 16 and 17-year-olds and care leavers. It will be a major challenge to meet their needs.

As part of our commitment to tackling the problems of homelessness, my Department is setting up a new homelessness directorate. It will include the bed and breakfast unit and will work with local authorities, such as Haringey, to reduce homelessness and the number of people in bed and breakfast and temporary accommodation. It will also be responsible for ensuring the effective implementation of the Homelessness Bill.

We are also introducing the "Supporting People" programme. My hon. Friend mentioned that for some people their home is not just the roof over their head. The programme will provide an opportunity for some of the most vulnerable people in our society—especially in London—to have a home with support services. They will be able to live properly. The programme will provide more sustainable communities.

Affordable housing is of prime concern to many people in London. The Government have a range of strategies to ensure that, over time, we improve affordable housing and increase it. As my hon. Friend knows, we have increased investment in housing in London.

My hon. Friend also identified the problem of housing standards. Many people are condemned to live in unfit housing. That is why the Government made a clear commitment to bring all social housing up to a decent standard by 2010 and a third of it up to a decent standard by 2004. Money has been put into achieving that target. It will not be an easy task for Haringey and other London boroughs that have huge repair backlogs. However, with good business planning and careful consideration of all the available investment options, I am confident that those targets can be achieved.

My hon. Friend mentioned overcrowding and the fact that, at many of his advice surgeries, constituents turn up accompanied by one or two children, with whom they are living in a one-bedroom flat. They suffer significant problems of overcrowding, and the children have nowhere to do homework.

The Government are intensely aware of the concern about the current overcrowding standards. The current room and space standards date from the Housing Act 1935 and have not been revised since. The fact that they have passed unchanged from 1935 to 1985 and then on into the 21st century is in itself a reason for taking a close look at them now. We have been taking a keen interest in that issue. I believe that it is time for the standards to be re-examined, although primary legislation would be required to change the overcrowding standards.

We are currently considering the best way to tackle the problem. We need to investigate the issues that surround overcrowding and the effect of a change to the current standards. My hon. Friend set out clearly the urgent need to address that serious problem, which impacts on many families in his constituency and elsewhere throughout London.

Over the next two years we are injecting an extra £300 million above current levels into London's social housing. Even with the massive increase in investment in London's housing since Labour came to power, it is clear that it will not be possible to fill the gap by public subsidy alone.

No one agency and no one measure will solve the problem. Our aim is to think creatively about how to make a difference. Private funds in the form of planning gain are already providing more than 2,000 affordable units in London each year, but we need to ensure that we are obtaining best value for money from public funds and private sector contributions, so we need to make better use of existing housing, whether in the social or the private sector, and we need to provide more sites on which affordable housing can be built.

We can learn greatly from the good practice that is being piloted in some London boroughs and some of the models that they are pioneering of partnership developments involving the public and private sector, to create high-standard affordable homes in which Londoners want to live. That will also provide sustainable communities.

My hon. Friend mentioned the range of disadvantage experienced by people in his constituency. It was in recognition of that type of disadvantage and the urgent need to address it that the Government introduced the national strategy for neighbourhood renewal, and the new deal for the community. My hon. Friend has a new deal project in his constituency.

In conclusion, the Government have inherited some major problems with the housing stock in London and throughout the country. We inherited a backlog in the funding needed just to bring housing up to a reasonable standard, and a need to improve standards in regulation. However, we have taken structural steps to increase the funding to tackle the most pressing problems, specifically of homelessness and of families in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, and have looked to a range of measures to improve people's rights to housing and access to housing.

I am confident that we will provide some of the solutions to the problems that my hon. Friend mentioned. I am sure that the conference tomorrow and the discussions that flow from it will be a major step forward in finding some of the strategic solutions that will apply across London and the measures that will benefit my hon. Friend's constituency. I believe that the debate has highlighted some very important issues and I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for raising them.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eleven minutes to Nine o'clock.

CORRECTION

Official Report, 6 February 2002; In col. 989, leave out "Gareth Thomas *(Clwyd W)*" and insert "Simon Thomas *(Ceredigion)*"

House of Commons

Friday 8 February 2002

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Disadvantaged Areas

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

9.33 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): The Government are determined to overcome the years of neglect that have left too many children growing up in poverty and too many neighbourhoods living without hope and without a future.

The legacy of 18 years of Conservative administration was shocking. Between 1979 and 1994-95, incomes rose by 68 per cent. for the richest 10 per cent. of the population, while the poorest 10 per cent. saw their incomes fall. In 1979, 10 per cent. of children lived in households with below half the average income. By 1994-95, that figure had risen to nearly a third. The legacy was a widening gap between rich and poor people and a widening gap between rich and poor communities.

So often, people in poverty means communities in poverty and neighbourhoods in poverty. For too many people, their personal poverty mirrors the problems of the community around them. Burglary rates are highest in the areas where people earn the least. Waiting lists are longer in places where people are the least healthy. Public transport is worse in places where fewer people can afford a car. Those living in the most deprived areas are more likely to die younger. For example, there is a 10-year difference in male life expectancy between Glasgow city and Chiltern district.

Children living in our most deprived areas suffer poverty three times higher than those of parents throughout the rest of the country. People living in our most deprived areas are far more likely to be members of black and minority ethnic groups. We know that 70 per cent. of people from all ethnic minorities live in the 88 most deprived local authority districts. Taken as a whole, ethnic minority groups are more likely than the rest of the population to live in poor areas, to be unemployed, to have low incomes, to live in poor housing, to have poor health and to be the victims of crime.

Statistics tell their own story: 41 per cent. of African-Caribbean and 84 per cent. of Bangladeshi people have incomes that are less than half the national average compared with 28 per cent. of white people, and 14.7 per cent. of Bangladeshi and 13.8 per cent. of African-Caribbean people have suffered personal thefts or assaults compared with 9.6 per cent. of white people. Residents of deprived communities have put up with poor housing, poor health, poor education, few job opportunities and higher crime rates for far too long. The Government are committed to resolving those problems. They represent considerable challenges that the Government are determined to meet, and are meeting.

The Government are determined that nobody should be disadvantaged by where they live. There is still a long way to go before we achieve that, but we are starting to make a real difference. We are putting our principles into practice and adopting some new approaches, and it is those that I want to set out.

Linda Perham (Ilford, North): Does my hon. Friend accept the real need for investment and regeneration in London, which has many disadvantaged areas? My borough is seen as a leafy outer-London suburb, but five of the eight wards in my constituency are in the top 50 per cent. of the index of deprivation. However, there are pots of money in various sources of funding, for which we are not allowed to apply. Does my hon. Friend agree that Londoners face huge pressures as a result of higher living costs, especially in terms of housing and transport?

Ms Keeble: My hon. Friend is right about the position in London. One of the appalling factors is that the wealthiest communities and the poorest live side by side. Often, little can be done to relieve the poverty of some of those areas. The approach that we are taking, which I shall set out, will deal with my hon. Friend's point about areas of great affluence, or comparative affluence, which mask some areas of acute need. One of the advantages of our approach is that all areas can make an application where they can identify the areas of greatest need, and can seek ways to resolve the problems.

The key to the delivery of our objective of ensuring that everybody should have a decent and sustainable community is our neighbourhood renewal strategy. It can apply to areas of apparent affluence as well as to some of the hardest-hit communities.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): The hon. Lady is right. Will she acknowledge that there will be many areas of deprivation in other places that might be thought of as quite prosperous, such as market towns and boroughs in the countryside? She will know from her own history that Cheltenham has two of the most deprived boroughs in England. Does she agree that Cheltenham deserves as much support as many of the more obvious areas in the north of England?

Ms Keeble: The hon. Gentleman is right about the difficulty of targeting small pockets of disadvantage in otherwise affluent areas. We all know that virtually throughout the length and breadth of the country there are little pockets of disadvantage in areas of comparative affluence.

One of the criticisms that Labour Members always had of the approaches taken by the Conservative Government especially was that they did not target those pockets. A general improvement in the economy did not necessarily stretch to acutely disadvantaged areas. The approach that underpins our national strategy for neighbourhood

[Ms Keeble]

renewal makes it possible even for relatively affluent areas to identify the needs of the most deprived communities, to target them and to meet them.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Clearly, there are areas of considerable disadvantage next to areas that are not exactly well-heeled, but are relatively prosperous. That has consequences for local government finance and standard spending assessments and can lead to the loss of objective 2 status, as has occurred in my constituency, despite the massive rundown of manufacturing in north-east Derbyshire and Chesterfield. It is important to treat the problem where it exists. My hon. Friend mentioned ethnic minorities. North-east Derbyshire has one of the smallest ethnic minority populations in the country and therefore cannot draw from the funds designated for those minorities; nevertheless it is in need of assistance.

Ms Keeble: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that as long as combating disadvantage relies on bolting on new initiatives, we will not achieve the turnaround that we seek in the life chances of people living in the most deprived and disadvantaged communities. That is part of the thinking that underpins the national strategy for neighbourhood renewal. It is designed to address the problems that hon. Members have identified which affect pockets of disadvantage in areas of comparative affluence. That strategy is designed to revitalise our most disadvantaged communities and to ensure that they benefit not just from add-on measures, but from the Government's extra investment in mainstream public services. Our approach involves a radical long-term programme to help poor and excluded people lift themselves into mainstream society.

The national strategy is a series of practical initiatives involving everyone in our poorest neighbourhoods. It harnesses the enormous desire among communities, businesses, local agencies, service providers and residents to make the places where they live and work safer, friendlier and more prosperous. It is a different approach from what has gone before.

Previously, attempts to tackle area deprivation have tended to be prescriptive, top-down and short term. Too much attention was paid to small, fragmented initiatives at the expense of the main Government programmes for schools, hospitals and the police, which have such a massive impact on people's lives.

Previously, Government failed to note the importance of local economies and properly to co-ordinate their efforts. Perhaps most important, communities were never properly engaged as agents for change in themselves. There was too much emphasis on physical regeneration rather than on communities. Regeneration was something that happened to people rather than with them.

In the national strategy for neighbourhood renewal, we have learned from the mistakes of the past. We have found new and innovative ways of working based on three key principles. First, every community has its own set of problems, which no single national initiative on its own can solve. Secondly, local problems often respond best to local solutions, negotiated and implemented by local businesses, service providers and residents; and, thirdly, the best solutions are often owned by the community themselves, with everyone having a stake in the revival of their neighbourhood.

We therefore stress the need for local solutions co-ordinated and delivered by local people with the help and support of a national framework. We emphasise this area-based approach because we can map poverty. The poorest people have become more concentrated in small areas of acute need and, as has been mentioned this morning, many of the most acute differences lie within regions, cities and even boroughs. Our poorest neighbourhoods often exist in the shadow of some of the most prosperous areas. England's poorest ward, Benchill in Manchester, is only a few miles from the famously wealthy Wilmslow.

Local extremes apply to jobs as well. Some of the most deprived neighbourhoods lie only a mile or two from prosperous city centres where employers find it hard to fill vacancies. So we have to get down to the local level really to understand the problems and to deliver the right solutions for the people who live there, and that justifies a neighbourhood-based approach. It is part of the reason why the Government have applied their area-based approach to programmes such as the new deal for communities and the education and health action zones. As my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) said, we have seen the value of making sure that all the mainstream programmes deliver properly for local people in ways that make a real difference. Combating disadvantage is not an add-on; some would say that it is the main purpose of public services, so mainstream services must bend to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged in our society. We have also seen the value of getting local people involved.

Those two concepts—delivering mainstream services better and involving communities—are the purpose behind local strategic partnerships that bring together residents and the public, private and voluntary sectors to identify local problems and deliver local solutions. They should not apply only to the most disadvantaged areas, but operate in areas of need in otherwise affluent areas such as Cheltenham and Redbridge.

Community involvement is crucial, not least because nobody better understands the strengths and weaknesses of an area than the local people. The private sector needs to be engaged because involving local businesses in neighbourhood renewal is key to rebuilding strong, sustainable communities with strong local economies. Improving neighbourhoods leads directly to greater business opportunities, by creating new markets and enabling employers to access better-skilled workers. So we are looking for ways to get local chambers of commerce and local businesses more involved in regeneration. We are also encouraging local communities to participate, although this can be difficult in communities which do not have a sound skills base. We are addressing this through a range of initiatives totalling some £107 million.

The neighbourhood renewal fund, worth £900 million over three years, provides extra resources for 88 of the most deprived local authority districts in England, but that does not mean that those districts should be the only ones looking to identify pockets of disadvantage and finding ways to tackle it.

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): A good example of that is Canary Wharf, which towers above one of the most disadvantaged areas in the country. Will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating the skills match programme, a brokerage agency set up between Canary Wharf and the local council, which has brought 1,500 local people into employment? Does she agree that we need to do more, perhaps through planning gain to ensure that local people benefit more directly from very large regeneration projects?

Ms Keeble: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention and I congratulate the skills match programme. It is extremely important that the business community and local authorities work together, not just to provide opportunities, but to provide a range of opportunities so that people who may be trapped in particular employment sectors have a chance to access the same job choices as the rest of society. My hon. Friend is also right to say that more needs to be done. It is a key part of the Government's strategy to make sure that the good practice in her constituency extends elsewhere.

We know that the neglect of decades cannot be swept away and that there is still much to do. That is why our national strategy has a long-term horizon over the next 10 to 20 years, but we are beginning to see some practical improvements in our poorest neighbourhoods after a very short time.

In our coalfield communities—this will interest my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire—we are on track to deliver the £385 million national coalfields programme, with work under way or completed on almost half the sites. For example, at Sherwood energy village in Nottinghamshire we have reclaimed 37 hectares for industry, housing, education, recreation and leisure development, using renewable energy sources for heat and power; and at Shirebrook in Derbyshire, a burning slag heap is being transformed into a business park thanks to £24 million of investment.

There are also encouraging signs in the vital issue of combating crime. A community-driven package of crime-fighting measures in east Manchester has led to a 25 per cent. drop in crime in the area, including a 34 per cent. drop in burglaries, which amounts to 1,128 fewer crimes—or, to put it another way, at least 1,128 fewer victims.

A 43 per cent. reduction in domestic burglary is attributed to a partnership between wardens in Merthyr Tydfil and Homesafe, a burglary reduction project. Wardens in Sheffield have helped to reduce removal time for abandoned vehicles—a major source of crime—from 30 days to between a week and 10 days.

Those are examples of some of the many ways in which people's quality of life is being transformed. As a resident from east Manchester put it:

> "It has been hell living here in recent years, but all that is changing. I'm really optimistic now."

We are placing our confidence in local people to help themselves. We have underpinned the local strategic partnerships with a national framework for neighbourhood renewal, built on the platform of a stable economy and a remorseless drive against poverty, and against child poverty in particular.

The national strategy for neighbourhood renewal will deliver the lasting change that our disadvantaged communities need, but we still have a huge amount of work to do. However, we can and will overcome the waste of people's talents and the waste of land and resources, which have blighted too many of our communities for far too long.

We want to ensure that in future no one is disadvantaged by where they live and everyone has a chance to make choices in their lives in safe, secure and sustainable communities.

9.52 am

Mr. Paul Daisley (Brent, East): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me to make my initial contribution in this Chamber. I thank the people of Brent, East for returning me to serve as their Member of Parliament. It is a genuine honour.

I have campaigned over many years for regeneration and the role of local government in achieving it. However, I have recently found myself engaged in a different kind of regeneration, courtesy of the national health service, spending seven months in hospital and the rest of last year convalescing. My recovery continues, which explains the length of time before making my maiden speech. That experience has taught me a lot about the unrecognised roles of carers in our society and given me a fresh outlook—values that I hope will never dim during my time in this House.

I would like to thank Mr. Speaker and the House of Commons staff for their understanding and assistance during a difficult time. They could not have been more helpful. I would also like to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg) for making space available in her office. My time in a wheelchair gave me a new insight into and greater admiration of her achievements.

I would like to pay an especial tribute to the dedicated staff of the national health service who helped me during my illness, especially at St. Mary's, Paddington; Charing Cross, Hammersmith; and more recently at Willesden community hospital. I also want to place on record sincere thanks to my wife Lesley and my family and close friends on whom I have leant so heavily for support.

I had also thought about thanking both my physio and the Whips, but I did not think that anybody would believe me. In fact, as my regeneration continues, I am not sure which of the two is likely to cause me the most pain.

I pay tribute to my predecessor, Ken Livingstone, with whom I worked closely, especially during my five years as leader of Brent council. Ken worked hard for the people of Brent, East and was a valuable support in our efforts to stamp out council corruption. I do not want to forget, either, the contribution of Ken's predecessor, the right hon. Reg Freeson. Reg is still respected throughout the constituency, and won admiration among many hon. Friends in the House for his work on housing policy, as a Minister and as a Member for more than 20 years. I know that he has much more to contribute in the years to come.

The constituency of Brent, East is often called diverse and cosmopolitan and has a large ethnic minority population, yet the diversity defies any simple classification in a few sentences. Suffice it to say that 130 first languages are spoken or understood in Brent schools. Areas such as Kilburn, Willesden, Neasden and Cricklewood are testimony to enduring values of tolerance and acceptance across an extraordinary range of cultures. Perhaps our tolerance and appreciation of diversity are some of Brent, East's most valuable qualities.

[Mr. Paul Daisley]

Local religious leaders have none the less expressed concern since 11 September about the rather patchy understanding between different cultures in the area, but our schools are helping to build that understanding, and I am proud that the council has sought to affirm diversity through celebrating festivals such as Eid, Diwali, Chanukah, Christmas and of course St. Patrick's day. Some of these Brent events are among the largest of their kind in Europe.

In fact, in the interests of community cohesion, we have grown quite accustomed to celebrating festivals in Brent, all of which have their own variations of consuming food and drink. My physio is helping me to prepare for the challenges that undoubtedly lie ahead.

I first became actively interested in Brent council in the 1980s. It was then infamous for being unstable, incompetent and inward-looking. It takes only moments to lose a reputation, but years to regain it. As leader of the council from 1996 until last year, I hope that we at least made some progress in that. That achievement is not only part of my personal political history: the role of local government is also critical in delivering effective and sustained regeneration. I would therefore like to take a moment to outline one or two of the council's achievements.

The council has modernised. The chief executive has referred to a "quiet revolution" in the council, with recent years of stability standing in stark contrast to the 10 years that preceded them. My successor as leader, Councillor Ann John, is continuing the transformation.

Achievements have included 11 charter marks; seven beacon schools; shortlisting in three categories for beacon status; 99 per cent. customer satisfaction with the one-stop shops; and numerous quality assurance awards, including ISO 9000 and Investors in People. The Audit Commission awarded the street cleansing and refuse collection service the highest best value rating in England and Wales. A private finance initiative project has dramatically speeded up the improvements in street lighting, reducing the previous estimated wait of 120 years to four years.

Brent's successes have been achieved via effective partnership and encouraging local people to have more of a say in decision making, including initiatives such as the citizen's panel, area forums and our award-winning websites.

Education has gone from strength to strength. School standards are rising. Staying-on rates are high and exclusions have dropped by a third.

Partnership with the police and the community over safety issues has been a council priority. Joint action against gun crime has been effective.

Brent's equalities work is acknowledged as an example of best practice identified in the recent Cantle report on community cohesion.

Brent has delivered services while maintaining the council tax below the London average. That has been achieved through careful financial management, setting tough targets and investing selectively in key services. Brent council tax payers have certainly got value for money.

A comprehensive regeneration strategy is now in place in Brent for tackling poverty and social exclusion.

The council has certainly played a constructive role in seeking to bring the national stadium to Wembley, which is in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) and just outside my constituency, but which will open up opportunities right across north-west London.

I hope that by now I have at least convinced hon. Members that Brent is not quite the shambles that it was a few years ago, even if they are not yet all persuaded that it is the best council in London—which some of us think it is.

I have talked at length about the council's achievements, because an effective council delivering quality services is vital to regeneration. Strong working partnerships are needed between central and local government, residents, business and other stakeholders. That will be central if we are to move beyond a narrow housing-based focus and develop a more integrated regeneration strategy.

That spirit of partnership will be crucial in overcoming the difficulties facing the South Kilburn new deal for communities project in Carlton ward, which is in the top 3 per cent. of most disadvantaged wards in the country. The effective use of NDC funds has enormous potential to succeed in reconnecting this vibrant yet struggling community with the surrounding regions of north London.

The role played by the council will be critical, as will be the need to explore appropriate models of neighbourhood management. Our experience shows that local involvement is a vital component in the partnership needed for success even if it is sometimes difficult to achieve. Involving the community takes time. Training and skills development is very dependent upon effective involvement by a range of agencies.

I am sure that local authorities of all political persuasions will welcome plans in the recent White Paper to lift constraints on borrowing and give greater flexibility. It is providing a valuable and flexible framework for authorities. With another spending review on the horizon, more investment as well as more modernisation of local government will be needed. Improvements in the quality of local government service delivery in areas such as Brent are vital to regeneration. Partnerships with stakeholders, realistic time frames, sustained investment and modernisation are all important.

As the Government continue to focus on those elements, they are making a growing and lasting contribution to regeneration in disadvantaged communities. Through the effective collaboration of national policy, local council leadership, local agencies and community involvement, the quality of life and the life chances of local people can be transformed.

I firmly believe that national Government working together with local government can achieve lasting improvements for our communities.

10.1 am

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I declare an interest as a chartered surveyor, as listed in the Register of Members' interests.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Daisley) on a maiden speech of clarity, vision and bravery. The House will have noted carefully what he said. It was not a partisan speech, and it is good to know that Brent council is not as badly run as it used to be. I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for his time as leader of that council; he will be welcome in this House.

I particularly agree with the hon. Gentleman on two points. First, I agree that to have an effective regeneration scheme, there must be an efficient council, as the local authority plays a major part in such schemes. Secondly, I agree that local people must be engaged with any regeneration scheme. If such a scheme is to work, local people must have ownership of it. The hon. Gentleman made a number of sound points and the House will appreciate the genuine nature of his speech.

We are debating Government measures to regenerate disadvantaged areas. Listening to Labour Members and Ministers, one would think that all the ills of this country started in 1979 and finished in 1997, but the world simply is not like that. Furthermore, the public are rather fed up with that approach. They want constructive policies from the Government and they want the Opposition to hold the Government to account. They want to see what realistic proposals can come out of debates such as this. I hope that, this morning, we will hear some constructive suggestions. Unless we get inner-city regeneration right, our economic growth and quality of life will suffer.

My hon. Friend and neighbour, the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray), made a pertinent point—it is not just inner cities that have disadvantaged areas. I represent the Cotswolds, a relatively prosperous area of the country. However, if one carefully examines all the villages in my area, one finds small pockets of poverty. I have gone out all night with the police in Cheltenham and seen the ward to which my hon. Friend referred. One can see that it is as disadvantaged a ward as any in our major cities. Sometimes we can get a skewed view of the "disadvantaged areas" of this country. Having said that, we must put the debate in context. The scale of the problem of disadvantaged areas in our big cities is much larger and deserves much closer attention.

I was disturbed to see some unfortunate figures showing the rise in crime in some inner-city areas. I hesitate to give these figures because one does not wish to cause alarm and despondency, but the House should be aware of them. For example, in Birmingham, crimes of violence against the person for the year until March 2001 increased by 18.7 per cent. In Nottingham, the figure is 17.9 per cent., and in Tower Hamlets, it is 10.8 per cent. Those are significant increases. Reported robberies increased in Lambeth by 38.4 per cent., in Leeds by 33.8 per cent. and in Sheffield by 46.8 per cent. It is difficult to expect those areas to be regenerated if we do not tackle the increase in crime.

Mr. Gray: In the light of those figures, was my hon. Friend surprised to hear the Minister apparently claim some success for the Government's policies on regenerating inner cities because the crime figures had fallen? If there were to be a direct correlation between the two, presumably—since my hon. Friend has proved that crime has gone up—the Government's policies have not worked at all.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend is right. Nobody likes crime to increase and I do not want to make this a political issue. Crime causes a detriment to the country as a whole—

Phil Hope (Corby): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I will give way in a second. Crime is something that we all deplore and something that we should discuss with our local police forces and local authorities. The Government must pay attention to it and see whether it can be reduced. We note almost every day stories in the *Evening Standard* concerning crime in London, which is getting distinctly worse, particularly gangland crime, vehicle crime and mobile phone theft.

Phil Hope: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I have not forgotten the hon. Gentleman; God forbid. I could never forget him. If I do not give way, he will persist throughout the debate, so it will pay me to give way to him. Suffice it to say, crime is a blight on society.

Phil Hope: The hon. Gentleman quotes selectively from statistics about crime increases in certain urban areas. The fact is that crime in Britain has fallen by 12 per cent. During the Tory years, crime doubled. Before the hon. Gentleman talks about not wanting crime to increase, can he explain why, during his party's time in office, crime significantly increased?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: That is the kind of knockabout politics that I was trying to avoid. Frankly, such comments bring the House and the hon. Gentleman into contempt. Those figures hide a lot of human misery and misfortune for the victims. I hope that the speeches of Labour Members will be constructive. *[Interruption.]* I do not know why the hon. Gentleman is chuntering. If he cannot do better than that, he should keep quiet.

The Prime Minister once pledged:

> "If we win the next election, I want to see us judged by how we treat the weakest as much as the strongest; to see us judged not on how the best advance, but on how far we heal the wounds in our fractured society."

We would all agree with that, along with several other of the Prime Minister's pledges and statements and the high ideals that he set for his Government. The problem is that the delivery is not always quite as he portrays it.

The Government's own figures show that under Labour inequality has risen overall since 1997, and there has been little or no change in the percentage of working age adults below low-income thresholds, which vary according to median income. We all want the disadvantaged and those on low incomes to be helped on to the ladder, so that they can help themselves and play a full part in society.

We need to look at the Government's regeneration policies. During a debate in Westminster Hall the week before last, I pointed out that Labour's policy is fragmented, and I read out a list of schemes and quangos that have been introduced since the Government came to power. I do not want to make a partisan point, but the number of schemes is a major part of the problem. As practice shows, when there is a plethora of schemes and quangos, nobody knows precisely what they are and as a result their budgets are underspent. I read out some of the host of schemes in the earlier debate and I shall do so again because it is worth concentrating on this matter. They include

> "the neighbourhood renewal fund encompassing a national . . . action plan, local strategic partnerships, the new deal for communities, urban regeneration companies, the English cities fund and a host of tax incentives for regeneration."—*[Official Report, Westminster Hall, 29 January 2002; Vol. 379, c. 37WH.]*

[Mr. Clifton-Brown]

The Opposition do not believe that such schemes are the best way forward. For example, at the last election we advocated putting one Minister in charge of regeneration. The problem is that the Department of Trade and Industry has one view, the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has another, the Home Office has a third and the Department for Work and Pensions has a fourth, so we are not getting the joined-up government that we need. I urge the Minister to consider whether matters can be simplified and an explanation given to the stakeholders, so that everybody knows exactly what funds are available and best use can be made of them. For goodness sake, such a scheme should be for the benefit of this country. If it is not being used, let us get rid of it.

Opposition Members want a more effective and cohesive policy on urban regeneration. For example, we are particularly exercised about the new targets for building on green fields. We want to protect our green fields; we do not want the setting of housing and other development targets to result in the building of a huge number of houses and other buildings on our green fields. One of our fears is that the Government's new planning Green Papers will be used to force local authorities to undertake such development. We believe that, as the hon. Member for Brent, East said, local authorities have a democratic mandate to take decisions on schemes that affect their areas. We worry that the Government are increasingly taking democratic accountability away from local authorities and giving it to bodies such as regional development agencies. We do not want a regionalisation of planning policy, but I fear that the Government's planning Green Papers are moving in that direction.

Having said that, as a chartered surveyor I recognise only too well that planning is a major instrument of urban regeneration. We share the Government's aim, as expressed in the Green Papers, that planning needs to be streamlined and speeded up, and to be more responsive to local and business needs. As the Green Papers make clear, although there is often a great battle, 90 per cent. of all applications are eventually accepted. In other words, an extremely cumbersome system deals mainly with just the 10 per cent. of cases that are turned down.

We welcome some of the proposals outlined in the detail of those Green Papers. For example, one thing that slows down many major planning applications is the negotiation of the 106 agreement. I should explain to those who are not familiar with that procedure that under it, the developer provides reimbursement—such as a new roundabout—for damage done to the infrastructure by a large development. In that way, additional schemes can be put in place to boost the infrastructure and enable it to cope with that large development. The problem is that the existing 106 procedure is cumbersome and arbitrary and takes too long to negotiate. I am pleased that reference has been made to the levering-in of private sector funds, which we all want to see. That will help developments, which in turn will help our rural and urban communities.

For far too long, the Government and their supporters have said in debates such as this that regeneration must be undertaken by the monolithic hand of the state. We believe that the private sector has a major role to play in urban regeneration in our inner cities. Innovative schemes—for example, urban development corporations—proved very successful in docklands and in city centres such as Leeds and Glasgow. One reason why is that they brought the private sector into partnership with such companies. Private sector involvement is vital. It is interesting to note that some Labour Members are nodding. I am glad that they accept the need for private sector involvement in urban regeneration, but it is therefore odd that they do not accept its involvement in the running of public services such as the railways and the tube. That seems an odd dichotomy.

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): My hon. Friend mentioned section 106 agreements. Although it is right and proper that companies sometimes contribute to works associated with plans, there is always a suspicion among my constituents that when deals are negotiated between local authorities and companies, money is given for planning permission. Is not there a case for more transparency in such agreements, many of which are negotiated in great secrecy?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend does me a great service by bringing me back to my script. The Green Papers refer to the introduction of a tariff system, and in principle we do not object to that. A system that speeds up negotiation of the 106 agreement and makes it less arbitrary, so that the developer, the local authority and local people know exactly what they are going to get from a particular development, must be a good thing. We need better targeting and definition, and that is the big challenge for the Government. There must be some flexibility in the system, so that it does not become merely a betterment levy tax. We must ensure that it is properly reapplied to the local infrastructure, rather than dissipated into further, more general causes. It is all very well targeting such schemes properly on their introduction. That is what happened with the lottery, but the Chancellor soon cast his eagle eye over the proceeds and used them for causes that are not strictly aligned with the five for which it was originally invented.

In the spirit of this debate, I should explain what the Opposition believe should be done. First, we would stop the fragmentation of our urban regeneration policy. We initiated some successful, cohesive and large-scale projects—for example, city challenge, the single regeneration bid scheme and urban development corporations—that, contrary to what the Minister said, were very successful in the 1980s. Probably the most successful inner-city regeneration took place under those imaginative schemes during the 1980s, so we want the Government to introduce a more streamlined system.

Ms Oona King: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that while there were great strides in regeneration, many communities—such as those in Tower Hamlets, which is next door to Canary Wharf—felt that they did not benefit? That was a sincere feeling that is replicated today. For example, on the Will Crooks estate—the closest to Canary Wharf—only two out of 400 adults have a job. That is what regeneration in this decade has to change.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I entirely agree with the hon. Lady. We have seen this in docklands, and in Leeds, where there has been some very good regeneration of the city centre. However, within a mile of that city centre there is some of the worst deprivation to be found anywhere in the country.

The challenge for the Government, having regenerated one or two beacon areas—including some of the worst areas, such as docklands—is that they now have to move out to the next band and apply some of the lessons learned from the urban development corporations. I agree with the hon. Lady that areas such as hers are among the worst in the country. It is a disgrace, 50 years on from the second world war, that such areas are still so deprived, and we must find schemes that lever in private money and also utilise all the resources of the local area. The voluntary sector, the private sector, the local authorities and business groups must all be levered into partnership to try to regenerate some of these areas.

The most serious question in the debate so far, and one that the Opposition want to address, is how we should move out into the next band after we have regenerated the centre. We should adopt some of the proposals that we used with the urban development corporations, which might supersede some of the local authority's powers by putting all those people together in partnership and coming up with a scheme to manage and regenerate those areas.

What else would we do if we were elected to power? I have already outlined our proposal for a single Minister to bring together all Departments to develop an effective, united strategy to regenerate some of the worst areas. It is a disgrace that a civilised country with the fourth biggest economy in the world still has some of the most deprived areas in Europe. We should all concentrate on that. A debate such as this is valuable in bringing the subject to the fore, so that we can discover what useful ideas can be culled from it.

During the election, we advocated spending at least £200 million on new tax cuts for deprived areas. Regeneration companies would be able to choose which tax cuts to implement, and fund a tax credit budget. Such tax cuts could, for example, take the form of lower VAT on brownfield development and conversion. It is a huge anomaly in our tax system that there is no VAT on new building on greenfield sites, yet the full rate is charged on the refurbishment of buildings on brownfield sites. We need to address that anomaly, because it sends out the wrong signal to developers.

Indeed, it is so much easier to develop greenfield sites than brownfield sites that the tax system should be skewed in favour of refurbishment and the cleaning up of our polluted areas. Many brownfield sites are polluted and difficult to develop, and no Government have so far come to grips with that problem. Having put the infrastructure into the dome site, for example, and having, at long last, started to regenerate it and clean it up, it would have been better to demolish the dome and use the area for much-needed social housing. For goodness' sake, we all recognise that there is a chronic shortage of social housing in London—there was a debate on the subject in Westminster Hall earlier this week—so why should an edifice such as the dome prevent much-needed building on a site that could be made suitable for housing?

Mr. Gray: My hon. Friend made an important point about the differential between VAT on new build and on regeneration. Lord Rogers made the same point when he suggested that VAT should be reduced to zero in areas of regeneration. Does my hon. Friend agree that to do the opposite and increase VAT on construction on greenfield sites would send out the wrong signal, and would in fact be a tax on housing that we would not want to encourage?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend is interpreting my remarks as I wished them to be interpreted. I chose my words carefully in saying that the tax differential should be closed. What I had in mind was that the tax on brownfield sites should be reduced to zero, and I would certainly not advocate a wholesale increase in tax on greenfield sites. Our 17.5 per cent. VAT rate is plenty high enough compared to that of some of our international competitors. I certainly would not want it to be increased.

We want to look at business rates for firms locating into regeneration areas. Some of our imaginative schemes during the 1980s included the single regeneration bid and the city challenge. We gave business rate holidays to a number of firms moving into such areas. When the new town of Milton Keynes was built, for example, the business rate holiday was a key factor in bringing businesses into the area, and Milton Keynes has been one of our most successful new build and regeneration projects since the war. We need to learn lessons from that and, perhaps, consider more carefully how we apply business rates.

Ms Debra Shipley (Stourbridge): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I will happily give way in a minute.

It is also an anomaly that shops in many city centres pay a higher business rate per square foot than a new build development on a greenfield site would pay. That is wrong. Those who operate similar types of business, whether in a city centre or on a greenfield site, should pay the same business rate per square foot. That would help to redress the balance. I shall now give way to the hon. Lady from Shipley.

Ms Shipley: I am not actually from Shipley. Will the hon. Gentleman refresh my memory? Was Milton Keynes—where all those companies enjoyed a tax holiday under the Conservative Government—a greenfield site or a brownfield site?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Well, it was part and part. It was a new-build city, but it also took over some previously under-utilised and under-developed brownfield sites. It was not entirely green belt land. It involved a new development corporation and it has been one of our great successes. The hon. Lady may knock that, but she will probably find that her Government will come up with similar proposals. We shall have to build new towns like Milton Keynes to accommodate the increase in housing that we need, and the only way to do that will be to have a similar structure to the one developed there.

There is too much empty housing. We would consider lowering the council tax on housing that had previously been empty. There are 750,000 empty flats and houses in this country, of which 150,000 are in the public sector. That is an utter disgrace when, at a conservative estimate, at least 150,000 people are homeless. We need to come up with imaginative proposals to regenerate the empty housing in our inner cities, where row after row of flats

[Mr. Clifton-Brown]

over shops stand empty. One way of tackling the problem would be to encourage the private rented sector to let such properties by making it simpler to deal with tenants who misbehave and do not pay their rent. Every Government proposal to regulate residential lettings and make things more difficult for private landlords makes it more difficult to bring those empty properties back into use.

We have heard a lot of bluster from the Government about urban regeneration. They produced an urban White Paper, spawned by the architect Lord Rogers, which was immediately denigrated on the basis that many of his recommendations were not followed. That was a pity. The Government had employed someone who truly knows about the problems of regenerating our inner cities and it would have been nice to have seen some of his recommendations followed.

The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has spent £2 billion less on regeneration than the Department of the Environment spent in the last four years of the previous Conservative Administration. Expenditure on the new deal for communities has been offset by the end of programmes such as the urban development corporations and city challenge funds that were so successful in the 1980s and 1990s under a Conservative Government.

Between 1993 and 1997, the Department of the Environment spent £6.1 billion on regeneration. Between 1997 and 2001, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and then the DTLR spent just £4.8 billion. Adjusting for inflation at 2001 prices, that is equivalent to a cut of £1.9 billion. Money in the rate support grant settlement is being taken away from London, which, as the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) said, has some of our most deprived areas. Why are funds being taken away from London and given to the rest of the country?

We still have a huge challenge to regenerate some of our worst areas of deprivation. Conservative Members want to come up with constructive policies—we will get back to the situation that existed in the 1980s and 1990s when we had a proud record of doing just that.

10.31 am

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): May I declare a non-pecuniary interest as a member of the board of the New Life for Paddington urban regeneration scheme?

I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Daisley) on his maiden speech. It has been some time in coming because he has been bravely battling against illness, but his speech showed the characteristic passion for his community that he has displayed for many years as a councillor and as leader of Brent council. His constituents will be extremely well served by him here.

My hon. Friend is my neighbour in parliamentary terms. I look out of my front window on to the South Kilburn estate. The fact that his constituency qualifies for a parliamentary additional cost allowance and mine does not is a scab that has never healed. To make matters worse, phone numbers in his constituency are prefixed by 0207, which, as every Londoner knows, is the true mark of metropolitan prestige. However, I will not hold that against my hon. Friend and I look forward to working with him as a neighbour and colleague on local issues as well as to seeing the contribution that he will make in Parliament.

I warmly welcome the Government's strategic approach to regeneration and the fact that it is linked, as it must be, to a strategy tackling social exclusion and poverty. The establishment and work of the social exclusion unit and the neighbourhood renewal strategies introduced an analysis into those serious social problems that had been lacking and allowed the development of an approach that considers multiple indicators as a way of tackling them. That is the only way to deal with them; social exclusion and the decline of some of our urban areas are rooted in multidimensional problems, and no single solution can turn them around.

I know from local experience that the Government have, over recent years, invested significantly and imaginatively in policies that will help us to tackle those problems. My constituency now benefits from four sure start programmes, which I regard as the single best and most imaginative regeneration tool, targeted at parents with very young children. Sadly, I do not have a new deal for communities programme, and I would love to have a few of those. However, we have the £13.5 million single regeneration budget for Paddington—as I said, I am a member of the board for the scheme—and an education action zone. We benefit in both Kensington and Westminster from neighbourhood renewal funding and from the neighbourhood nurseries initiative. So serious money has been invested, targeted particularly at wards and small areas with severe deprivation. The approach and the money are very welcome.

I want to talk particularly about the case for London. There is no doubt in my mind, from listening to colleagues and reading about the problems in the north, the midlands and in areas of low housing demand, that a catastrophe is taking place. I support those areas and wish them well in dealing with those problems. However, their problems are entirely different from those that we face in the capital, which require a different solution and at least proportionate support. We have had that in some cases, but not in every area.

We have already touched on the particular problems of communities with high levels of deprivation that exist cheek by jowl with areas of extreme wealth. My constituency probably exemplifies that more than anywhere else in the country. The Church Street ward, which is one of the most deprived in the country according to the index of multiple deprivation, is within 100 yd of St. John's Wood, which includes some of the most valuable real estate in the country. That not only enhances the residents' sense of inequality, but causes us a problem in applying for resources.

One of London's difficulties is what I have described in previous debates as the tyranny of the average. If a local authority area includes prosperous areas, prosperous wards and high value housing alongside areas of acute deprivation, the funding formulas will be worked out on the basis of an average. As a consequence, we are not able to secure the resources that I believe are necessary to deal with our problems. This is particularly the case, as my hon. Friend the Minister knows well from the representations that we have made, in respect of the index of multiple deprivation and the various sources of funding that flow from it. London Members will continue to lobby on that issue to see whether further refinements can be made to the index to recognise the reality of London's problems. Perhaps my hon. Friend will tell us when we can expect a crime domain to be introduced into the index, because that is an aspect of urban deprivation that needs to be recognised.

I want to put on record again the characteristics of London that deserve our attention. We have some of the highest indicators of poverty and deprivation in the country. In inner London, more than half of all children live in households on low income compared with one third for England as a whole. We have the highest proportion of children in workless households of any region in England. We have double the national average of lone-parent families, which we know to be a key indicator of poverty. We have an acute housing shortage; it has been rehearsed many times, so I will not talk about it other than to say that I believe it to be one of the most serious barriers to the city's continuing economic success and to overcoming the problems of urban deprivation.

Challenges as well as opportunities arise from the capital's cultural diversity. More than half the United Kingdom's ethnic minority and black populations live in London. Unfortunately, many of those communities experience levels of unemployment and poverty that are up to three times higher those of the white population. I believe that a Cabinet Office report, reported in the newspapers last summer, warned that unless further and faster action is taken, the gap in income and opportunities between the black and ethnic minority populations and the white population is set to widen over the next 20 years. That is a real challenge.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Given those appalling statistics, which we all condemn, how does the hon. Lady feel about the fact that £100 million has been taken away from London in the local revenue support grant settlement over the past three years? If the estimates using the current indicators are correct, that trend will continue over the next three years at the same rate. Surely the opposite should apply—London should be getting extra money compared with the major urban corporations in the rest of the country so that it can deal with some of the worst poverty and deprivation in the country.

Ms Buck: Yes and no. I do not disagree. It is no secret that Labour Members lobby extremely hard to make the case for London. We did not do badly in the grant settlement that was announced recently. In fact, both my boroughs received a 7 per cent. increase, which was the joint highest increase in the country. Although there is always a case to be made for London's resources—I am making it now and will continue to do so—I do not think, considering the revenue support grant settlement for the past year and the year before, that London boroughs have done badly.

London has high social mobility, and I want the Government to take on board the fact that that indicator is not properly recognised in any funding formula. Turnover in London schools is 50 per cent. higher than in the rest of the country, which puts enormous financial pressure on them and huge psychological pressure on teachers and classmates, as well has having a knock-on effect on school standards.

London also has poor health indicators, particularly because of the disproportionate concentration of people who have mental health problems. Again, almost all funding formulas fail to recognise that, but it has vast implications for the delivery of services from policing to social services. There is a strong case for London, and I want more resources to help London to deal with its problems, including those shown by the index of multiple deprivation.

Local regeneration has been a recent success story following many years of failure. I pay tribute to everyone involved: community activists and participants, and officers in highly successful schemes ranging from sure start programmes to the New Life for Paddington scheme. The latter is a marvellous example of a regeneration scheme that works with a range of public agencies and community organisations, including tenants and residents organisations, as well as the private sector.

The Paddington regeneration partnership, which represents the private businesses involved in rebuilding the Paddington basin—an urban redevelopment zone three times bigger than the dome—has been a considerable success. The private sector has helped through a local recruitment strategy, particularly with new jobs for the Heathrow express, and we are about to issue a jobs brokerage linked to the next phase, in which new companies moving into the basin will start to recruit. I hope that that will go from strength to strength. The scheme is a tribute to the Employment Service. A few years ago, it was a deadly bureaucracy, but it has genuinely been enlivened by its new responsibilities and has become a real partner in the regeneration of the Paddington area.

The Dalgarno single regeneration budget—a small project across the large estates of north Kensington—has done exciting work in partnership with youth justice boards and young offender teams. That is welcome and shows that new sets of partnerships are being built across different agencies. A small and successful scheme also operates in the Golborne ward.

The recent success of those people-based, participatory schemes stands in stark contrast to the experience of previous schemes, which, though I am not making a party political point here, were developed under the Conservative Government and implemented by Conservative councils. Two examples spring to mind. The first is the Wornington Green estate in north Kensington, which received a large funding injection from the city challenge programme. That brought about some design changes on the estate which were not properly consulted on. Those changes are the reason for the estate's downward spiral further into urban decline and high crime and youth disorder in recent years.

That investment was entirely wasted. The money might as well have been put down the drain. The estate is still seriously blighted, and we need a new partnership between Kensington housing trust and another housing association. We also need substantial funds to try to turn the estate around. I would not live there, and one of the main urban regeneration indicators has to be whether we ourselves would live on the estates to which we condemn thousands of people. I should be delighted to live on some of the redeveloped estates in my constituency; nothing would give me greater pleasure, but I cannot afford them. There are others, however, where the programmes developed during the 1980s and early 1990s have made the problems worse rather than relieving them.

The second major example is Lisson Green estate in the London borough of Westminster. To my amazement, it received investment totalling around £65 million

[Ms Buck]

through the estate action programme—roughly the same as the new deal for communities. Yet conditions were so bad during that programme in the mid to late-1990s that I had to write my first ever class complaint to the local authority ombudsman on behalf of the residents, who were put through a living hell as a result of bad building management.

A bricks-and-mortar solution to regeneration failed to tackle the need for community participation and social and economic regeneration. We needed to provide proper youth facilities and to get the people who live on the estate into work. A little has been done, and very welcome it is. Many people have worked hard to turn the estate around, but it was structurally badly managed from the beginning, and it is a good example of a scheme that failed.

A great deal has been achieved in urban regeneration, but we are not yet able to say that inner-city living is an attractive option, particularly for low-income households. There is a great deal to do. We need to back regeneration funding by tackling the housing crisis. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will do all that she can during the comprehensive spending review to make a case for investment in London's housing. If that housing is chronically overcrowded, all the investment in the world to improve the physical condition of the stock will not make those houses desirable and attractive places to live.

London faces complex labour market issues, which were addressed in yesterday's debates on the Tax Credits Bill, and I shall address the same points in an Adjournment debate next week. Alongside London's economic success and dynamic growth there are serious problems of poverty and unemployment. There is also a mismatch between the jobs available and the skills of the people who live in London. Several anti-poverty measures, such as those in the Tax Credits Bill, are not yet reaching London's poorest and most deprived communities. We must understand why that is so and hone our policies to help London's unemployed.

Many of the schemes to which I have referred are excellent. They are doing good and valuable work, but they are too small. I would happily double the number of regeneration schemes in my constituency and the investment that they are bringing. The bid-driven nature of those programmes can involve people too much in the paperwork of writing and monitoring bids. There is a need to streamline some bids.

Local councils have a critical role. Many are doing marvellous work across London, on their own and in partnership, including partnership with the private sector. That is not always the case, however. In Westminster, despite improvements over the past year or two, there has been a failure properly to engage in urban regeneration, in spite of huge poverty and need in the borough. Even now, when negotiations under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 are continuing for the Paddington basin, there are problems with the priority list. The refurbishment of a public toilet in Little Venice has been placed ahead of investment in a youth project in Queen's Park, one of the most deprived and poorly served wards in the whole of London.

Local councils need both to be given their heads and watched carefully by the Government office for London to ensure that authorities such as Westminster are seriously behind urban regeneration. I wish the Minister well in her negotiations over the comprehensive spending review. We could all do with a little more investment along the lines of that which has already come.

10.48 am

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I welcome the debate, and I echo the comments made by the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) about the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Daisley). It was an excellent speech in difficult circumstances, and I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on making it. I urge his Whips to go easy on him over the coming weeks. That might give him the chance, for instance, to speak out against the public-private partnership. However, that will be up to him.

The hon. Gentleman managed to convince me that Brent has improved slightly, but he did not convince me that it is the best council in London, as that is, of course, the Liberal Democrat-controlled London borough of Sutton. I congratulate him, none the less, on the fact that he did not make a partisan speech and did not criticise Ken Livingstone. It was an entirely apolitical speech, and that is welcome.

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): The hon. Gentleman has just extolled the virtues of his Liberal Democrat-controlled council, but does he agree that the Liberal Democrats' commitment to tackling deprivation in our cities is shown by the number of Liberal Democrat Members who are in the Chamber?

Tom Brake: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I have no doubt that many of my colleagues are touring the most disadvantaged areas of their constituencies as this moment.

I thank the Urban Forum, Groundwork, the Centre for Local Economic Strategies, the Country Land and Business Association and the London borough of Sutton for their assistance in providing briefings for the debate. Reference to those organisations will, I hope, take away the partisan aspect of the debate, because they are actively involved on the front line in delivering regeneration. I will be inviting the Minister to respond to their comments.

Clearly, regeneration is not just about bricks and mortar but covers a range of areas: policing, access to good health services, housing and policies to tackle graffiti and to deal with abandoned cars, as well as regeneration policies. There is some optimism and there have been some success stories. The Minister and hon. Members have referred to those and I welcome them, but there are also some threats.

The Government's Green Paper on planning is perhaps one of those threats. There are proposals to abolish urban development plans. I am not sure how that will contribute to involving local communities actively in regeneration schemes. New business zones are being introduced that do not need planning consent, but I am not convinced that that is the best way to involve local communities in regeneration. Some of the organisations to which I have referred believe that one of the key problems is that it is difficult to get local communities involved in schemes such as the new deal for communities, and that there is still too great an emphasis on professionals or the local authority running schemes. I hope that the Minister will respond to that point in her winding-up speech.

I do not think any other Member has referred to regeneration in the rural environment. The concern of the Country Land and Business Association is that many rural communities have been badly hit by foot and mouth. There is perhaps a need to prop up many of the rural services on which those communities depend. The association provided some interesting figures: 78 per cent. of rural settlements do not have a general store, 72 per cent. do not have a small village shop and 53 per cent. are without a public house. Clearly the Government need to assist the process of ensuring the long-term viability of rural services and post offices.

Affordable housing is another of the association's key concerns. That is also an issue in the rural environment—hon. Members have already referred to it in the context of the urban environment, particularly London. According to the Countryside Agency, there is a growing problem of rural homelessness and insufficient affordable housing. The Government need to work with local authorities, private business and other providers to ensure that there is sufficient affordable housing in rural areas.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham) *rose—*

Tom Brake: I give way for what I am sure will be another constructive intervention.

Mr. Atkinson: The hon. Gentleman talks about rural society and rural problems. Does he agree that rural crime is one of the big issues?

Tom Brake: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, which was entirely constructive. As I said earlier, policing is a critical issue and although it does not have a direct impact on regenerating a particular area, we need to be aware of and to make constructive proposals about local communities' fear of crime.

The Urban Forum, which is an umbrella body for community and voluntary groups that have an interest in urban and regional policy and which was established in 1994, expresses concern, echoing comments by hon. Members, that Government programmes are on occasions so targeted that they exclude groups that are not geographically centred in a particular area: for example, people with disabilities and members of the black and ethnic minority communities, who are then unable to access funds. Because the targeting is so area-focused, it may end up assisting people who are less disadvantaged than people immediately outside that particular area. The Urban Forum has suggested that the focus on a very specific small area perhaps contributed to the problems last year with riots, where one community could look at another across the street, see that very large sums of money had been invested in that community but that nothing had spread literally across the road to their community. Targeting needs to be more sophisticated.

Some of the measures that the Government have put in place—for example, tax credits—can help, although the Urban Forum is concerned that the system is complex and that the interpretation of the rules varies from place to place, making it perhaps not as helpful as it could be to people on lower incomes and to disadvantaged areas.

The Government must ensure that the assessment of the viability of projects is conducted thoroughly before they or organisations such as the Housing Corporation agree to fund certain schemes. I am sure that other hon. Members will have seen the Heriot-Watt report, which talks about literally millions of pounds being spent since 1998, so it is not something that happened under a Conservative Administration. I am surprised that no Member has yet referred to this. Over the past four years, the Housing Corporation has built 10,000 affordable homes for people on low incomes, mainly in the north, but either those homes are empty or the tenants want to move out.

If there are limited funds, let us at least ensure that the money is spent in the right place and that homes are not being built that are not needed. An article on the report refers to the 20,000 to 30,000 houses that are needed in London to meet demand from key workers. I represent a London constituency, and many social workers and teachers have been to see me about the enormous difficulties they face in finding accommodation in and around the London borough of Sutton.

There are very few affordable homes. Under criteria for being able to access affordable homes, people are required to earn a certain income, which often they do not earn even though they are in work. I am sure that the Minister has studied the Heriot-Watt report. I hope she will say what the Government intend to do to ensure that what money is available is spent well and provides homes and regeneration projects that are successful.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for mentioning that report. Does he agree that the real scandal is that the Housing Corporation had adequate evidence that the homes were not going to be wanted, yet it still carried on funding them?

Tom Brake: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. It is clear from the article on the report that in the area where homes were built, there was already a large number of empty homes. Had the Housing Corporation looked around the surrounding area, it could probably have easily deduced that the homes were not going to be used and would remain empty. That is a crucial point, to which I hope the Minister will respond. We need to ensure that there is effective assessment of the viability of projects before they proceed.

We also need more community involvement. A report by Cambridge university—I understand that it is available on the DTLR website—assessed the success, or otherwise, of single regeneration budget projects. It clearly demonstrates the link between the degree of local community involvement in SRBs and the benefit that communities feel they have derived from such projects. In the view of the Urban Forum, even more community involvement is needed. As a counterpoint, perhaps there should be less Government involvement, or at least less controlling, centralising influence over the projects.

The Urban Forum raised the key issue of the provision of support for voluntary groups in deprived or disadvantaged areas. I am sure that hon. Members who have an active council for voluntary service in their constituency will concur with the view of the forum that where there is an active CVS—in my case, the Sutton CVS—which has core funding, ensuring continued voluntary support for voluntary and community groups year after year after year, there is much greater involvement in and activity to assist with regeneration projects.

Ms Shipley: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that charities can also make a contribution? In my

[Ms Shipley]

constituency, Barnardos has a long-term commitment to a wheels project for young men, so that they can make cars from scratch and race them. Those young men are known as the wall group, because they used to sit on walls with nothing to do, but now they are busy as part of the community.

Tom Brake: I agree entirely with the hon. Lady. Charities do have a major role, and they can benefit from the assistance provided by organisations such as the CVS.

Many people sit on community boards as volunteers, and the Urban Forum suggested that consideration should be given to paying them an honorarium, given the time commitment. Obviously, if people were unemployed or on benefit, that would have to be addressed, but some financial assistance might encourage people to make the necessary time commitment.

The Centre for Local Economic Strategies serves a network of local authorities, regional development agencies, partnerships and other organisations. The centre's view of the new deal for local communities is that it is not working too well. For example, in the Braunstone project in Leicestershire there seemed to be acrimony between the local community and the professionals. It is possible that the local community was not sufficiently involved—the project was top-down rather than bottom-up. Furthermore, the CLES found that the projects themselves were not imaginative enough—a point echoed by the Urban Forum.

The hon. Member for Cotswold referred to the plethora of initiatives. That was not a partisan point; it was a large list. The hon. Gentleman did not read all the names, but the list included the Millennium Commission, the new opportunities fund, green spaces and heritage organisations, Sport England and so on. I am sure that there are many more bodies on the list.

The hon. Gentleman's point was not partisan. Small organisations trying to bid for funds do not have the necessary skills and do not know what funding is available so they are not as well able to access funds as bigger organisations such as local authorities which have staff who are experienced in putting bids together. The very people whom the Government presumably want to access those funds are unable to do so, owing to the complexity of the process. We want the establishment of a one-stop shop organisation so that funds could be accessed without dealing with a variety of bodies.

The CLES felt that the single regeneration projects had worked well and that they had matured to such an extent that the bidding organisations knew what was expected and how to go about the process. The CLES was sorry that the projects were coming to an end.

I do not want to exaggerate the problems that we face in the London borough of Sutton. Statistics occasionally show that Sutton is the most affluent borough in London, although I think that may be incorrect and that Richmond might be more affluent. Sutton does not have problems on the scale that I attempted to address as a councillor in Hackney in the early 1990s. I regret that during the 12 years that have passed since then those problems do not yet seem to have been tackled.

None the less, Sutton has problems. One of the major difficulties is that so many of the schemes are narrowly targeted and miss out pockets of deprivation in a relatively affluent area. Durand Close offers a good example. The council carried out some research on the estate in the 1990s; I doubt that the housing stock has changed much since then. It is the only estate in the borough with large four or five-bedroom properties where the council can house large families. During the 1990s, the estate had the highest child density in the south-east, with many single-parent families. It needs regeneration, but of course Sutton appears nowhere on any of the requisite indices. The local authority cannot provide the funds needed to meet the requests of local residents that the estate should be demolished and rebuilt.

The Minister did not say how the Government would make the targeting system more flexible so that pockets of deprivation are not missed out. I hope that she can address that point when she sums up the debate.

We were successful in our SRB bid for the Roundshaw regeneration project—the second-largest such project in London—which will be finished in a couple of years. There is one concern, however. As the funds are time-limited and all the money has to be spent by the end of the seven-year period, the local community feels driven by a timetable that is not of its choosing or making.

By comparison, the Durand Close project has an advantage because there is no timetable. If funding is awarded, it will be made available progressively over a longer period so the community will be able to work to a timetable over which it has a certain degree of control.

It is clear from the comments of hon. Members that a simple bricks-and-mortar approach will not offer a solution. The Heriot-Watt report confirms that. Reference has been made to policies that could address the problems. We need a single regeneration grant system to get rid of that plethora of pots of money. Organisations that lack the administration to tap into the funds could then apply through a single point of contact.

As other hon. Members have said, there is a need to boost the level of policing in rural and urban areas, to address the fear of crime, which clearly has a significant, and disproportionate, impact on disadvantaged communities. Proposals such as a community safe force that would involve traffic wardens and estate and other park attendants could play a role. We would support the idea of a "safer front doors for all" initiative, which would ensure that people—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Corby (Phil Hope) will wait, I will tell him. Such an initiative would mean that people who lived in communities that were subject to high crime levels could at least ensure they were safe in their own home. There are other proposals such as promoting local exchange trading system schemes, and ensuring that in unemployment black spots funds are transferred to a much more local level, from the Government's equal opportunities fund to finance local initiatives.

As I said at the start of my speech, there is a degree of optimism out there, but the patchwork quilt of regeneration budgets, which has created confusion and red tape, is not helpful. It needs to be streamlined and made more flexible, so that the pockets of deprivation, in rural or urban areas, that are currently excluded from bidding for funds may have much greater access to them.

11.11 am

Ms Debra Shipley (Stourbridge): I welcome today's debate. There can be no more compelling issue for a Labour Government than the regeneration of disadvantaged areas and there is a moral imperative to tackle the problems that our people in disadvantaged areas face in their day-to-day lives. Whole communities throughout Britain are in desperate need of regeneration. Housing, education, health, infrastructure and policing are all major components that have to be drawn together for regeneration to be achieved in the first instance and subsequently sustained.

Whole communities have been neglected for decades. In my west midlands constituency, the urban village of Lye has been blighted by the demise of manufacturing. Many traditional metal-bashing jobs, where son would follow father into the local factory, have been lost. Schools have crumbled, starved of cash and resources. Under-invested health and social services have struggled valiantly to deal with a host of problems. The infrastructure has gradually decayed, but the people have remained. The soul of the community is alive and well; Lye is still a viable urban village, and potentially a proud one.

Many of Lye's families have lived in the area for generations. The Cartwrights, the Partridges, the Newtons and the Hindleys have names that date from the industrial revolution, when the air of Lye was thick with fumes and the sky was darkened with smoke. It is a hard-working community and it has a vision for itself that I believe will surprise the House—a vision of a place of excellence in the very heart of Britain.

The people of Lye have decided that their urban village will be regenerated in a very modern way. They have rejected initial council plans for extensive housing development on brownfield sites; instead they have formed a community action group called LARA—the Lye Area Regeneration Alliance. It includes local churches, the mosque, the allotment association—many members have tended those plots for 50 years—and local children, who want to know, quite reasonably, why there are no trees where they live. It also includes plenty of individuals who are determined to improve their surroundings.

LARA is unusual in that its vision is big and it is special. Yes, its members want to see more housing, but they also want to create a place of modern architectural excellence. They want to construct a set of community buildings that will, in their words, be a "flagship for the future", not just for Lye, not just for the industrial black country and the west midlands, but for Britain. They want their new buildings to bring hope back to an area that has been neglected and blighted and they want to do it with modern architecture of the highest possible quality. As one local woman, Carol Partridge, said, "Why can't we have the best?"

Under the LARA community vision, its members' children will have a way to reach out to Britain as a whole. I am sure that hon. Members will agree that that is a very big vision, and a brave one. We in Westminster should salute it, because it will undoubtedly be a long, hard road to achieve such a landmark project.

People in Lye desperately need the investment that, as the Minister pointed out, has been denied them for decades under Conservative Governments. Moreover, they will need to be backed by an equal amount of political willpower; I wonder whether it actually exists.

The Government have said that they will champion good design in building. A Minister in every Department has been made a design champion. We now have a ministerial design champion for health, education and so on. But with the best will in the world, can a busy Health Minister tackling myriad national health service problems really be expected to be a true champion of construction? Would such a Minister, indeed, have the expertise to read complicated plans or understand detailed specifications? Are Departments equipped to facilitate the championing of good design? I would suggest that the answer is no, and perhaps I may demonstrate why I think so.

As joint chair of the parliamentary planning and architecture group, I was interested to discover how many new schools had been built since 1997 and what would be built in the next couple of years. I was planning—there was nothing sinister in it—to visit schools that had recently been built and to keep an eye on the new ones that were built. I therefore tabled a parliamentary question about that. I was pretty surprised to receive from the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (John Healey), a written answer to say:

> "We do not hold the information in the form requested."

All that I had asked for was a list of the new schools. I was told:

> "It is for local education authorities to determine the need for additional school places in the maintained sector and, where necessary, to build or support the provision of new schools. The Department makes available capital funding for new school places; many of these are provided in existing schools."—[*Official Report*, 4 February 2002; Vol. 379, c. 720W.]

Well, if the Education Minister who is entrusted with delivering design excellence in new school construction cannot even locate the new schools that have been built in the past few years and has no idea where they will be built in the next few years, I fail to see how the Government can hope to ensure that design and construction is of the highest quality.

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): I share the hon. Lady's frustration with the answers given by the Department for Education and Skills about new schools. I have tried the same questions myself and received a similar response. What I have been able to establish is that, under the provisions of the Education Bill, there is an opportunity for new schools to be set up by new promoters. In her response to me the Secretary of State said that no more than 10 schools a year might be built.

Ms Shipley: The hon. Gentleman makes a supportive point to mine about trying to obtain information on new schools, but I believe that our Government should be proud that we are building schools and that we are investing—massively, as I shall show—in school buildings. It was the Conservative party, of which the hon. Gentleman is a member, that left our built education structures—schools, classrooms and the playgrounds that our children play on—in an absolutely disgraceful state. Throughout my constituency, children were literally falling over in playgrounds where the tarmac was crumbling over on itself. They were in schools where the temporary buildings were disintegrating and were damp. These are gradually being replaced by the Labour Government, but in order to reach design excellence there needs to be a much greater awareness of what that is and what is going on. Good enough is not good enough.

The Government are to be congratulated on establishing the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment. CABE could point the Minister in the right

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direction for school buildings, because it seems to have sniffed out quite a few of them. There seems to be a particular problem with the PFI-funded school buildings initiative. According to a recent report in the journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects, some 500 schools have now

"experienced life under the initiative from total rebuild to minor refurbishment"

and, apparently, the

"government has invested a further £1.2 billion in 43 further projects which are currently at planning or procurement stage."

The good thing is that, at last, money is being invested in schools after years of under-investment by the Conservative party. The bad news is that the opportunity to produce buildings of architectural excellence is being squandered. According to CABE's commissioner, Richard Fielden,

"mediocrity is closer to the norm".

It is a sad waste that communities that desperately need their schools to be replaced or refurbished are receiving buildings that, although adequate, are far from life enhancing.

In disadvantaged areas, schools may well be the only public buildings and, as such, are the community focus, but instead of a new construction providing a much-needed catalyst for rejuvenation, they are merely good enough. They are better than that which they replace, but far from good enough to enhance young lives. *The Architects' Journal* suggests that the Department for Education and Skills is addressing certain aspects of school-building design, but I contend that a Department that, only last week, could not supply a simple list of new schools will struggle in its task to champion design excellence in the built environment.

So what is good design? I emphasise that I am not talking about personal aesthetic taste. CABE has produced some worthwhile guidelines for good school design. To design-conscious people most of the points are extraordinarily obvious, but the truly shocking thing is that most new building work fails to address some basic principles. Those principles include, first, good, clear organisation with an easily legible plan and full accessibility; secondly, spaces that are well proportioned, efficient and fit their purposes; thirdly, circulation that is well organised and generous; fourthly, appropriate levels of natural light and ventilation; fifthly, attractiveness in design to inspire pupils, staff and parents; sixthly, good use of site; seventhly, attractive external spaces with appropriate security; eighthly, a lay-out that encourages community access and facilitates use out of school hours; ninthly, robust materials, which weather and wear well; and tenthly, scope for future adaptation. Finally—this is hugely important—the building should transcend the sum of those parts to produce genuine delight for all who use it and a sense of lasting quality.

I make a plea for environmentally sensitive construction. As I have already said, some £1.2 billion-worth of school building projects are at the planning and procurement stages. In addition, billions of pounds will go into the construction of new hospitals and housing in the next few years. That represents massive buying power, and I urge the Government to decide to require high environmental standards as part of all new building works specifications. The combined political pressures and financial considerations could be galvanised to ensure the mass production of energy-efficient devices, which would, in turn, drive down unit costs.

The Government should use their massive spending power to stimulate and support a rigorous environmental strategy. It is, frankly, scandalous that new buildings are constructed that do not utilise the best practices available to reduce energy consumption. Moreover, deprived areas surely deserve the best in terms of energy efficiency. I very much welcome the Government's fuel poverty strategy. Because of poor building insulation and inefficient heating systems, many people in Britain, particularly in disadvantaged areas, cannot afford to keep their homes warm in winter, so I am very pleased that the Government are working hard to upgrade existing housing stock.

Much stronger legislation is needed to require new buildings to be low in fuel consumption and high in insulation values. I am aware that guidelines on that matter exist, but I suggest that requirements would be more appropriate to create a level playing field. I should like the Government to commit themselves to requiring new houses, hospitals, schools and other buildings to reach the highest standards of insulation and to use alternative power sources. That would enable the Government to take a massive step towards meeting their welcome and well-meant environmental targets.

To conclude, this really is a vision thing. Could Ministers, perhaps led by the Prime Minister—the issue is as serious as that—envisage the rejuvenation of the disadvantaged urban village of Lye to the point where it becomes a centre of excellence in design and environmental standards? Could our disadvantaged areas become places of national pride, civic pride and local pride? In fact, the money is already being made available; the need is very obvious, so it is surely now a matter of political will power.

11.25 am

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stourbridge (Ms Shipley) in the debate. I nearly called her the hon. Member for Shipley. She speaks with much knowledge and experience, especially of art and architecture. I took the opportunity of reading "Dod's" while she was finishing her speech, and I see that she not only has a postgraduate degree in architectural history, but is the author of 17 books, several of which are on architecture.

It is not good enough just to regenerate and provide help for the disadvantaged areas of Britain; we must find ways to do so in a decently designed environment. One of the great errors of the 1960s and 1970s was that huge tower blocks were thrown up. They were quite ghastly and horrible places in which to live. That creates some of the disadvantages that we now see in some areas, so I hope that the Minister will bear in mind what the hon. Lady said about design in the inner cities.

I was interested to hear the hon. Lady talk about Lye. In my constituency, there is a place the name of which is pronounced in the same way, but it is spelt Lea. It is probably the leafiest area in England. It is a tiny hamlet in the middle of the countryside, surrounded entirely by trees, so hon. Members may think that it would be difficult for someone from a constituency such as mine to imagine the situation in Lye, which the hon. Lady described. As I shall explain in a moment, there are definitely areas of deprivation even in a leafy area such as North Wiltshire, as well as in more obviously disadvantaged areas, such as her constituency.

Hon. Members have already asked whether we should adopt what many describe as the bricks-and-mortar approach to the disadvantaged areas of Britain, or whether there should be a much broader approach to correcting deprivation. Of course, the latter approach must be the right one to take. We must consider crime, traffic, education and health. All those are vital, and there is no point in having a regeneration strategy unless due account is taken of those difficult problems. But I fear that I shall fall into the traditional trap and address myself only to the bricks-and-mortar approach because, as the hon. Lady said, if we do not get that approach right, it is no good putting the other things in place. Hon. Members will expand on those other areas in a moment.

I should like to think from scratch for a second. The problem with planning and regeneration over the years has been that we have not paid attention to the obvious and basic physical fact that we are 55 million people living on an extraordinarily small island. We do not have the advantages of America, for example, where planning restrictions are lax and people can build and regenerate as much as they like. We cannot do that; we are incredibly short of space, especially in the south-east and south-west of England, although perhaps less so in the north. Our planning policies in the post-war years have resulted in some of the worst areas being in the north of England, as well as in the south.

The key to regeneration, not only in our inner cities but in the suburbs and rural areas, is to realise that, given the an ever-increasing population—55 million, but growing—and, more importantly, an ever-increasing number of households, we need to find a way for those people to live in the style to which they wish to become accustomed or to which they are accustomed already. They will often live in more densely populated inner cities than has traditionally been the case. We need to provide them with the sort of infrastructure, educational facilities and so on that we now all have a right to expect.

In the past 20 or 30 years, a curious mindset among town planners has prevented the regeneration and the high-density building in the inner cities that we all demand. That results from the fact that the British people seem to believe that the ideal place in which to live is a cul-de-sac. For many years, town planners have drawn their street plans and dotted the houses around the streets. The streets are therefore entirely dominated by the motor car.

In the Prince of Wales's interesting development in Dorset, that approach has been turned on its head. He has put all the houses along the streets, with facilities for the cars behind the houses. Mixed in with the houses are schools, shops, factories, churches and the rest of it. To some degree, the development has replicated the excellent model of an English village, which has a variety of different houses. There are big and small houses for rich and poor people altogether in one place. The car is not given priority; it is relegated to other places. Rather than creating more and more suburbs that consist entirely of cul-de-sacs with houses dotted round them, we should perhaps adopt the approach that the Prince of Wales's planning gurus have promoted over the years.

If we adopted such an approach, we would create a mixed environment in which the young, single mothers and the elderly would be able to do what they often want, which is to live in small flats on the same level as the shops. We cannot do that at present, because our planners have traditionally expected us to leave the inner cities and to move to the suburbs and to bigger and bigger houses that we might not need. Planners do not provide the accommodation that we need in town centres.

The approach taken in this country stands in sharp contrast to what occurs in many European cities, such as Paris. The more prosperous people move into the centre of Paris. Strangely, the outer suburbs are the poorer areas while the centre of Paris is the richest part of the city. In Britain, the opposite is the case.

The figures tell us starkly what has occurred. In 1951, 19.3 million people lived in conurbations, but the figure has gone down to 17.3 million today. By contrast, the number living in out-of-town areas—in the south, in particular—has gone up from 3.4 million in 1951 to 4.8 million today. The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions acknowledged that when it said that migration flows have

> "principally . . . been down the urban hierarchy"—

as it rather patronisingly calls it—

> "from the bigger urban areas to the suburbs, the smaller urban areas and the shire towns and rural areas".

We are progressively allowing our people to move from the inner cities. One of the first messages that we should learn from the debate is that we should seek a way of reversing that trend if we are to save areas, such as mine, from extensive rebuilding and extensive use of greenfield sites. If we are to provide the housing that people want, we must find a way of building it in the centre of towns.

Lord Rogers clearly sent that message and one of the great disappointments of the Labour Government is that, having appointed him to produce a first-class report with about 130 recommendations, they have—principally, I suspect, because of the Treasury—decided that they are unable to implement his proposals. Ministers in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions might argue passionately in favour of Lord Rogers' proposals in Cabinet Committees, but they are constrained by their colleagues in the Treasury. We must consider Lord Rogers' views and seek to create his image of an urban renaissance in the nation.

We should be extraordinarily worried by the destruction of greenfield sites. North Wiltshire is already suffering from Labour's regional house building policy, which means that an estimated 1.5 million buildings will be constructed on greenfield sites during the next 20 years. To put that figure into context, that is the equivalent of building 40 towns the size of Slough. I would not be as unkind as Mr. Betjeman in calling for friendly bombs to fall on Slough. However, if 40 Sloughs were replicated across the nation, friendly bombs might have a role to play.

As the hon. Lady said, we face the problems of declining schools, closing shops, rising crime and wrecked cars on the streets. We should be concerned about such problems, which form the centre of this debate. I have already mentioned the Prince of Wales's development at Poundbury in Dorset. It is an exemplar that we should follow. We must find a way of rehousing

[Mr. James Gray]

our young and elderly people in cities as much as possible. That is the first lesson that we must learn from this debate.

Docklands was mentioned earlier, but the Barbican was the first such development after the war. Different kinds of housing with the appropriate infrastructure were built on a huge bomb site. The windy corridors of the Barbican are perhaps an example of how not to solve the problem, but a good attempt was made to do so.

Another such development is likely to take place shortly and I should declare an interest in that my flat overlooks the area. I hope that the Government will act shortly to remove the ghastly Government buildings in the three huge tower blocks in Marsham street and replace them with something that can be considered best practice. It should be a mixed development with different kinds of housing, shops and business. We should try to use the development in Marsham street to show what can be done to regenerate a pretty scruffy area. The buildings have been vacant since I was a special adviser there seven years ago, but I hope that the Government will move quickly to get rid of those ghastly excrescences on the landscape and that they will construct something that will act as an exemplar for the rest of the nation.

I accept that there are problems with the approach that I have outlined and I wish to touch on a couple of them. In many inner cities and deprived areas, there is a pattern of diffuse ownership. We do not know who owns the properties. One individual may own one patch of a site and someone else may own other bits. I therefore hope that the Government will consider changing the arrangements for compulsory purchase orders so that we can find a way of bringing land together and creating a worthwhile scheme as a result.

VAT on housing constructed on the derelict areas of inner cities has been mentioned and it is an important point. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has suggested that he intends to act. If he can bring the rate of VAT for such housing down to at least 5 per cent. and if he can persuade his colleagues in the European Union to do what he has not so far allowed them to do—which is to bring the rate down to zero—that would be great. It is bizarre that our Chancellor can put the rate of VAT on a particular good or service up but, if he wishes to abolish it, he cannot do so. That is a strange aspect of European law, but he should be ready to bring the rate of VAT on regeneration projects down to zero.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend describes the situation as bizarre. It is particularly bizarre since the VAT rate for such schemes in most European countries is in single figures. This country faces a peculiar anomaly.

Mr. Gray: Indeed, we face a strange anomaly. I hope that the Government will address the issue.

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): Will the hon. Gentleman remind the House which Chancellor raised the rate of VAT in this country from 15 to 17.5 per cent? That happened after the rate had been raised from 8 per cent. to 15 per cent. in 1979. Will the hon. Gentleman remind us who did that?

Mr. Gray: The hon. Gentleman may have misunderstood the thrust of my remarks. I was not talking about the rate of VAT, but he is right to suggest that we raised it to 17.5 per cent. He will recall that we did that to do away with the poll tax. Perhaps he would prefer the poll tax still to be in existence and VAT to be at 15 per cent. My remarks had nothing to do with the level of VAT. I was referring to the differential in the rate of VAT for rebuilding on inner-city sites and for brand-new building on greenfield sites. That differential has remarkably unfortunate effects on planning decisions.

I know that my hon. Friends will focus on other issues, but I should like briefly to focus on the problem of housing. If we can get the bricks and mortar right, we can get the rest right. The Labour party has been bold in its comments about what it will do for housing. When I was a special adviser to a Minister with responsibility for housing, we were constantly placed under pressure because people said that we were not building enough council houses. Shelter and others shouted at us, and Labour Members spent much time telling us how disgraceful our housing policy was.

However, the House will recall that, between 1993 and 1996, we built precisely 150,600 new social dwellings. In the equivalent three years between 1997 and 2000, the Labour Government have built 95,500 new social dwellings. Their provision of social housing has fallen by 37 per cent. compared with ours, but they said that the figure that we achieved was lamentably low. If that is their view, they must put their money where their mouth is.

We have housing problems throughout the nation. People with homelessness problems come to my surgery all the time. The Government are not building new housing. They say they are doing all sorts of things and they blame us for the problems. The truth is that we have a significant homelessness problem and the Government are doing nothing to address it.

Mr. Tom Harris *rose—*

Mr. Gray: The hon. Gentleman may be about to tell us what the Government are doing about it.

Mr. Harris: I am delighted that the Conservative party has suddenly discovered the value of social housing. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we have a major problem with council house stocks because his Government sold off so many council houses and refused to allow local councils to use the receipts to build new ones?

Mr. Gray: The country will note that the hon. Gentleman opposes the right to buy. Some 2.5 million families now live in a house that they own. Previously, they would have been tenants of pretty useless landlords in Labour local authorities. They will have heard what he said and will be thankful to the Conservative Government for allowing them to determine their own future.

Ms Oona King: Although everyone would agree that it is proper that people, and low-income families in particular, have the right to buy their houses, does the hon. Gentleman agree that we should move towards the equity-based approach that the Government are trying to introduce? Although 3,000 new houses were built in London last year, 11,000 were sold off through the right to buy.

Mr. Gray: The hon. Lady makes my point for me. It is a disgrace that the Government are building so few new houses. She is right and must address her remarks to her Front-Bench spokesmen. We cannot understand the situation. In our years in government we built countless new social housing units, but her Government are failing to do so.

Tom Brake *rose—*

Mr. Gray: I have taken enough interventions. Labour Members do not seem to understand that they are not building sufficient social housing.

The Labour party is also failing badly with regard to empty council houses. All the time that we were in power, we were under attack by Labour Members who said that it was scandalous that so many council houses were empty. The fact is that when they came to power, there were 81,200 empty council houses in England. In April 2000, there were 87,186 empty council houses. The figure has increased enormously. One has only to glance at the political control of the local authorities where those empty homes are to discover that in Conservative-controlled councils 1.5 per cent. of the stock is vacant and in Liberal Democrat-controlled councils, to do them a favour, 1.9 per cent. is vacant. Labour-controlled councils, however, have 2.7 per cent. management vacant, as they are called. I suspect that the local authority that covers the constituency of the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King), Tower Hamlets, is one of the worst offenders.

Mr. Harris: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gray: I am sorry, but the hon. Gentleman has intervened twice, neither time with much effect.

Ms Oona King *rose—*

Mr. Gray: I shall give way to the hon. Lady as I mentioned her constituency.

Ms King: To put the record straight, Tower Hamlets has one of the lowest voids of properties in London.

Mr. Gray: I accept the correction, and no doubt we can look at the figures later on. It is true, however, that Labour authorities across the nation, perhaps partly because of the type of authority that they are—

Mr. Harris *rose—*

Mr. Gray: Oh, all right.

Mr. Harris: I understand the hon. Gentleman's criticisms of Labour local authorities. Does he think that they could learn from the example of Dame Shirley Porter?

Mr. Gray: That is the hon. Gentleman's third intervention. He seems to think that this is a party political debate. I do not think that it is. We must find a way to accommodate 55 million people in this small island of ours in the most satisfactory way. To make constant party political points reduces the level of debate unnecessarily.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Perhaps I can bring the debate back to a more sensible level. My hon. Friend will know that we introduced large-scale voluntary transfers, a policy that this Government have continued. Is he aware of the Library figures? They state that between 1998 and 1999, the stock transfer of 400,000 council houses has resulted in £5.9 billion of private investment being levered into the housing sector. Despite that huge amount of money, the Government have managed to build fewer social housing units than we did.

Mr. Gray: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The excellent Westlea housing association in North Wiltshire is a key example of what can happen when we transfer housing from bad local government landlords into the hands of true housing professionals. That was a great triumph of the Conservative Government.

We have mainly talked about inner cities, but rural areas also have problems. It is easy for people to look at North Wiltshire and think that we have it easy. They see it as full of millionaires and people who live in leafy suburbs. It is easy for them to think that people there are lucky and that people in inner-city areas are disadvantaged. Labour Members would be surprised by the cases that come into my surgery in Chippenham. They often involve problems with housing and benefits. Although we do not have as much overall deprivation, our individual cases of deprivation are as severe.

Ms Shipley: Will the hon. Gentleman take if from me that Labour—myself excluded, because I represent an urban constituency—is well represented by MPs for rural constituencies? I believe that we represent more rural constituencies than the Conservatives and my hon. Friends have held their seats through two general elections because their constituents know what it is like to be under a Conservative Government. It is our rural MPs who are fighting to regenerate those rural areas that the Conservative party failed so badly.

Mr. Gray: The hon. Lady may well be right about constituency representation. I invite Labour Members who claim to represent rural constituencies to put their hands up, because there are not an awful lot of them. Remarkably few Labour Members of Parliament truly represent rural seats. For example, on the list of so-called rural seats are my neighbouring constituencies of North Swindon and South Swindon. No one who really knows about the countryside would describe them as rural. However, Labour does represent some rural constituencies in the north of England. I welcome the fact that her hon. Friends who represent them are ready to argue the case on behalf of rural deprivation just as much as her urban colleagues are prepared to argue the case on behalf of urban deprivation. Rural deprivation is just as bad in many ways.

We know about agriculture. Tourism in my area was decimated by foot and mouth disease. As I mentioned in Prime Minister's Question Time this week, Malmesbury, which is a Cotswold town that one would think was in a prosperous area, has been decimated. Lucent Technologies has closed, with 150 jobs being laid off just before Christmas. In addition, Mr. Dyson laid off 180 at Christmas and has announced that 820 more jobs are to go because he is moving his manufacturing base to the far east. Some 1,200 to 1,500 jobs have gone in the past few months in a town with a population of 4,500. I hope that we find ways to avoid the worst effects of that, but I

[Mr. Gray]

anticipate a significant level of poverty and difficulty in the town, which on the face of it seems an extremely pleasant place to live.

That problem is compounded by something that the Government can put right, but they are taking a lamentably long time to do so. We heard how the standard spending assessment grant in London has been reduced by £100 million, but the grant in the rural shire areas has been reduced by £300 million. North Wiltshire spends £2,500 per secondary pupil per year. The neighbouring county of Berkshire and a similar county such as Kent spend about £3,500 per pupil per year. In inner London, about £5,000 is spent per pupil per year. Although those figures are indicative rather than accurate, about twice as much is spent on educating children in central London than is spent in North Wiltshire.

The SSA system is badly skewed. It needs to be put right. The Government have said that they will do that, but the review is taking a long time. When it is complete, I hope that they will find ways to take funds back from some of the areas that do not need them, in the inner cities and elsewhere, and return them to the shire counties that have been so badly treated for such a long time.

My hon. Friends will have things to say about the fragmented nature of what the Labour party is trying to do with regard to the inner cities and funding, which is very low. After four years of a Government who came to power with such great claims that they would put right the wrongs and the ills of the inner cities, it is disappointing to see the figures that demonstrate that things are significantly worse since then. I say, "Come back, the Conservative Government. All is forgiven. What you did in the inner cities was a great deal better than what this lot are doing." All Labour Members are good at is initiatives and spin, and targets and bragging. The only regeneration that our inner cities have seen was in the 18 years when we were in power.

11.49 am

Mr. Iain Coleman (Hammersmith and Fulham): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me in this important debate on a motion for the Adjournment of the House. I shall talk briefly about a major Government-funded regeneration scheme in my constituency, which is in year 1 of its 10-year programme, and discuss briefly the issue of regeneration for London.

The regeneration scheme that I want to talk about is one of the 39 new deal for communities projects located in various areas of the country. The NDC for north Fulham is home to a population of 8,000. It lies in the west of the London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, and has 4,000 households, which are predominantly in social housing. As for the exact geographical location, the area is bounded by the nice, discreet and posh Queens tennis club, Barons Court underground station to the west, Earl's Court to the east, Talgarth road to the north and Fulham broadway to the south.

The area has five quite large housing estates, which were built between 1912 and 1977. Housing tenure in the area is 67 per cent. social housing, 13 per cent. privately rented and 19 per cent. owner occupied, and the average price of a two-bedroom flat or maisonette is £190,000. That compares with a borough average of £206,000 and a rate of owner occupation of 43 per cent. Much to my regret, the area has been in long-term decline and the rate of unemployment is well over 10 per cent. Twelve per cent. of households have an annual income of less than £5,000, and 25 per cent. of households have an annual income of under £10,000.

I am talking about a highly mixed area, much like the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck), where high levels of poverty and deprivation mix somewhat uneasily with wealth and significant affluence. By itself, that brings particular problems that are complex and difficult to manage. Thirty-five per cent. of households in the area have an income of over £25,000 a year, and many have a great deal more than that. That distorts the average income in the NDC area to one of £23,000 per annum per household, which is obviously well above the regional and national average.

Nearly 15 per cent. of the families living in the area are headed by single parents. The area has a significant non-white population, well above the Greater London and national average. Eighteen per cent. of the population have English as a second language, of whom 15 per cent. have no or very little English. Educational attainment in the area is significantly below the borough and the regional average. Interestingly, while at key stages 1 and 2 attainment is in line with the borough average, there is a noticeable drop in performance at key stage 3. Thirty-six per cent. of residents of working age have no recognised qualification compared with a borough average of 15 per cent.

I am trying to paint a picture of the area. Crime is high—nearly 50 per cent. higher than the regional average. Victims of crime are much more likely to be elderly, black or from an ethnic minority. Poor health is another fact of life for far too many people in the NDC area. The social services mental health case load is substantial, and the area has a disproportionately large number of children on the child protection register. As a result of poor diet, very high levels of smoking and drug and alcohol abuse, life expectancy is well below the national average.

When after careful consideration the local authority selected the area for its bid for funding under the NDC programme, the first task was to put together the key elements of the bid—the delivery plan for north Fulham. At this stage, a steering group, comprising a range of local partners, residents and tenants' representatives and other interested agencies was formed, and I chaired it. It met on a fortnightly basis for several months.

Consultants were employed by the local authority to prepare the bid and, after considerable debate and more than a few problems and interesting discussions within the steering group, the bid was submitted to the Department last year. As I have said, the bid was for a 10-year programme of £44 million. I am pleased to report that the bid was successful in achieving that level of funding.

Having secured the funding, we formed a shadow community board consisting of community representatives drawn from a number of small geographical areas. The community representatives meet monthly and elect one or two representatives to serve on the shadow board, which I now chair.

A number of strategic partners who also sit on the board are drawn from key local agencies such as the local authority, the health service and the Benefits Agency, and include the chief executive of a major local registered social landlord. There is also a representative from the local black and ethnic minority forum. All those representatives have voting rights at the shadow board. Again, the board meets on a monthly basis and considers a range of issues related to the implementation of the NDC programme. These include recommendations from appraisal panels, which meet to consider the relative strengths and weaknesses of different funding proposals.

Community representatives on the board have attended training programmes to assist them with the monitoring and evaluation of those proposals. The management of the staff employed to date by the NDC has comprised consultants and secondees from agencies such as the local authority and the national health service. I am pleased to report that last week the permanent director of the programme was appointed, and the recruitment of the rest of the permanent delivery team will commence shortly.

The success or otherwise of the NDC programme for north Fulham will not be possible to evaluate for several years to come. To be frank, our early spending programme has been modest but has included the recruitment of a team of five extra police officers, headed by a sergeant, to work exclusively in the north Fulham NDC area. Their role is to act as a highly visible police presence in the area, where the fear of crime has been constantly raised as a major concern for local residents. Early signs are that the level of crime has been significantly reduced.

Three new learning mentors have been funded to work in the local primary schools that score highest on levels of deprivation. One of these primary schools has 78 per cent. of children in receipt of free school meals, and in another primary school, 39 separate languages are spoken. We have also agreed proposals to appoint special co-ordinators in the areas of health, youth and employment. The NDC, in partnership with the local authority, has funded a project called Operation Fresh Start, which has provided for projects to undertake a major clean of the streets in the NDC area, the removal of fly-tipped items and a service offering one-off removal of all unwanted household goods and the removal of graffiti. It has also provided for two refuse service enforcement officers to patrol the area, which suffers the dumping of all sorts of detritus.

Early feedback has been positive. A business network development programme has been set up and a community chest fund started for small grants for which local community groups can bid. A highly successful community carnival was held last year and a shop frontage improvement grant has been established. These are early days, but we have had a successful year in that we have spent 95 per cent. of our projected budget in the first year of the programme. In time, we will need to establish a full community board with democratic elections for all community representative posts. For the next two years we have set a much more ambitious programme of spending, including at least one major new capital scheme for the area.

The NDC programme has not been without its problems, its tensions and its rows, but so far we have been largely successful in establishing a genuine spirit of community engagement in the area. For far too long this part of an affluent area—indeed, it is one of the wealthiest in London—has been neglected. Many people have been left isolated and vulnerable and the area has fallen into decline. The NDC programme represents the best opportunity for the poor and the socially excluded to have a share of what they deserve but have been denied for too long.

Too many regeneration projects in the past dealt with the physical fabric of the local area and failed to challenge social problems in the community. Fear of crime, poor health, lack of access to proper facilities and a high incidence of drug and alcohol abuse have allowed areas such as north Fulham to lose confidence. The NDC represents a new approach to tackling decline. It genuinely seeks to allow the local community to work in partnership to challenge that sense of lethargy and helplessness. It is an exciting time to be in north Fulham.

North Fulham is a classic example of many areas in London where there are huge disparities between economic and social prosperity. Too often, out-of-date notions about the north-south divide mask the reality. It is not a matter of geography: the real issues are poverty, deprivation, unemployment and social exclusion.

The real picture on the ground is far more complex then some regional indicators may show. However, hon. Members may be surprised by a few of them. London has the highest number of unemployed people of all UK regions. There are more unemployed people in London than in Scotland and Wales combined. Of the 74 parliamentary constituencies in London, 20 have employment rates of 65 per cent. or less and nine have employment rates of less than 60 per cent. In addition, 26 per cent. of the London-employed work force have very low qualifications and 40 per cent. of the unemployed have no qualifications. Three out of the five most deprived boroughs in England are in London, and 2.7 million London residents live in one of the 20 most deprived wards in England. Those stark facts show that parts of London are far different from the exclusively affluent picture that some may wish to paint.

I recognise the problems that my colleagues representing other regions may face. I sympathise with them and I would not deny them the support that they deserve, but it is the duty of Members representing constituencies with high levels of need and deprivation to argue our case in the coming months and years, and we believe that we have the facts to back up our call for our share of the regeneration cake.

12.2 pm

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): Let me say in his absence how much of a pleasure it was to listen to the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Daisley). He need not worry about having made such a late maiden speech. Historically, new Members were told not to make a maiden speech for at least six months to a year. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman has let himself down and I appreciate why he has not spoken before. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman shares his predecessor's fondness for toads—or newts—but I hope that he will be as independent as his predecessor and not become just another Labour toady, but we shall have to wait and see.

It is also a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hammersmith and Fulham (Mr. Coleman). I lived happily in Fulham for many years. I enjoyed my time there

[Mr. Peter Atkinson]

greatly, but one thing I could never say about Fulham was that it was an exciting place. It was very nice, but I would hardly describe it as one of the country's hot spots. I am glad to hear that it is doing well.

The hon. Gentleman made an interesting point about the high rates of unemployment in London. This brings us to the theme of today's debate. Everyone knows that our capital city would not function without the large numbers of people coming from abroad to work here—many of them asylum seekers or refugees working illegally. New Zealanders, South Africans and Australians are found serving in many pubs in London. The city is drawing in tens of thousands of workers to help it survive, yet there is enormous unemployment among the native population. That skills gap needs to be addressed. It is nonsensical that people should come from abroad and get jobs, while people in the east end of London and other problem areas such as north Fulham remain unemployed. Solving that problem is a challenge to us all.

In reading out her prepared text, rather hurriedly, the Minister broke a convention of our Friday debates, which we try to make more thoughtful and restrained than our mid-week ones. Once again, she promoted the myth that all the problems that exist today are something to do with 18 years of Tory misrule. That is absolute nonsense. Every commentator knows that the tough economic decisions taken by Conservative Governments in that time laid the foundations for the prosperity that we have today. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond) may laugh, but independent commentators will substantiate that.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Minister's remarks are an insult to the good sense of the British people, who elected, re-elected and re-elected again Conservative Governments, presumably because they thought that they were doing rather a good job?

Mr. Atkinson: Indeed, that is precisely why the British people re-elected Conservative Governments. They knew that they were taking tough decisions that needed to be taken.

I can see those Governments' legacy in my region in the north-east of England. Under our stewardship, failing industries closed and derelict land was cleared. Newcastle upon Tyne now has one of the best cityscapes in this country, because of the Tyne and Wear development corporation, set up by a Conservative Government, which did so much to regenerate a rundown area on the riverside. The development corporations were good and efficient organisations, and the Government should learn some lessons from them when they redraft their regeneration projects.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend is making an important point. Labour Members always denigrate our record on urban regeneration. He has mentioned the west end of Newcastle, but many other major city sites were transformed by the urban development corporations, including the centre of Glasgow, Leeds, London docklands and the Albert dock in Liverpool.

Mr. Atkinson: Yes, our record is extremely good indeed, and we had a much tougher time, with much greater problems to deal with, than the present Government.

The hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) put her finger on it when she mentioned Canary Wharf. Here was a tremendously successful urban regeneration scheme cheek by jowl with pockets of extreme poverty. That is the problem that we face. It is the same in the north-east of England. People say that the north is depressed, and it is true that we have a lower than average percentage of gross domestic product and some more social problems, but to write it off as a depressed area gives the wrong impression entirely.

Much of the region is affluent, with content, healthy and well-educated people, and we have a most beautiful and wonderful landscape, but there are pockets of severe deprivation, especially in the old coalfield areas, that certainly need help. Are the Government targeting the areas of poverty efficiently? I suggest that they are not. I had hoped that the Minister would give us some better ideas about what they intend to do, but all I heard were the usual words: "top-down strategy", "framework", "planning".

Ms Keeble: I mentioned £24 million being spent on one development, a regeneration trust to deal with a whole range of refurbishment and a housing trust. Can the hon. Gentleman tell us anything that the Conservatives did for the coalfield areas other than shutting the pits?

Mr. Atkinson: Yes, I can. We invested millions and millions of pounds in clearing—

Ms Keeble: You shut the pits.

Mr. Atkinson: Was the hon. Lady going to keep them open? She has her history utterly confused. She may remember that it was her former colleague, Tony Benn, who closed more collieries in the north-east of England than anyone else: more than 1,000 collieries were closed by a Labour Government because they were uneconomic. We did precisely the same thing. Is she saying that she and her Government would have kept all those pits open?

Ms Keeble: We are talking about what we have done to regenerate the coalfields, the pits having been shut down by the Conservative party. We have taken action, while the Conservative party profoundly did not.

Mr. Atkinson: Nonsense again. The Minister clearly has not been to the north-east for a while; if she had she would have seen the regeneration effected under a Conservative Government in those coalfield areas. If she drives down to the coast from the city of Newcastle, she will see the industrial landscape on both sides of the Tyne, transformed as a result of Conservative initiatives. To say that we did nothing is nonsense: we did immeasurably more than the Labour Government have done. As far as I can see, we have a plethora of initiatives with very little happening on the ground.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) referred to rural poverty and disadvantage. I have a striking example of that in my constituency: a community called Haltwhistle, a little settlement midway between Newcastle and Carlisle. It is actually in the centre of Britain, a feature the local tourist board makes something of.

As well as being a very old border town, Haltwhistle was also a small industrial town. It made a living off the local coalfield—which more or less collapsed in the 1930s—but it had an industrial base. In the last few months, there have been job losses in the town, with the consequence that, according to the local press, nearly half the working population of a town of 3,500 people is either currently unemployed or will be unemployed in the next few months. A paint factory that has been there for generations is closing and production has been moved away. The last coal mine is closing down, with 100 jobs going, and a construction company has gone bankrupt. All the associated jobs, in transport and elsewhere, are suffering and that is devastating for a town such as Haltwhistle.

I was hoping to find out from the Minister what the Government will do to address the problems of rural areas. We have the rural development plan and the market town initiative, neither of which is capable of reviving a town such as Haltwhistle unless the Government make some proper infrastructure improvements. Isolated communities depend on infrastructure.

Because of the Government's continual refusal to upgrade main highways in the north-east of England, such communities are hugely disadvantaged. We ask for the roads to be improved but the Government reply that traffic flows do not justify it in value-for-money terms. However, it is value for money if we build roads to open up and develop areas that need that. I appeal to the Government, the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and the Highways Agency to make the improvements to the roads for the community of Haltwhistle.

Mr. Tom Harris: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the deregulation of bus services in 1996 had a catastrophic effect on the travelling public? Would he like to see some modification of that, such as the franchising of local bus routes?

Mr. Atkinson: I would not, and I disagree fundamentally with that idea. I know that the hon. Gentleman—who likes to intervene so much—was a Labour spin doctor for many years, but he must look at the facts. Deregulated bus services have vastly improved services in city areas, but in areas such as mine—the most sparsely populated constituency in England—running buses is an impracticality. It is not practical to leave Haltwhistle to travel 13 miles by bus to work and then return that day. Jobs need to be found for people in the areas where they need them, which the Government are singularly failing to do.

I wish to refer to the regional development agencies set up by the Government. The situation reminds me of the old joke about the lost traveller who asks the rustic for directions to the nearest town and is told, "If I were you, I would not be starting from this point." Like my right hon. and hon. Friends, I would not be starting from this point because we oppose regional development agencies. It was wrong to spread a network of agencies across the whole of the country. It is important for disadvantaged areas such as the north-east of England to get some additional advantage by having development agencies, and we used to have a development corporation. But if every area has a development agency, it simply means that other parts of the country will compete for funds out of the same pot, to the disadvantage of the genuinely disadvantaged areas.

I have no complaint about the staff or the board of my local agency, One NorthEast, which does the best job it can. However, it has no real power. Every decision it takes depends on somebody else. It has no power over education, planning, economic policy or highways. All the action needed to regenerate an area depends on somebody else doing something. The agency does not have enough priority. If we are to make the RDAs better, they should concentrate on fewer things, such as economic regeneration, and not on peripheral things that local authorities can do better.

Finally, I want to discuss regional government, which is another threat to the north-east. As we know, many Labour Members are frightfully keen on regional government. They want to balkanise England and turn it into a series of regions—an idea that is being pursued with great vehemence in the north-east. Fortunately, as I understand it, the move towards regionalism was torpedoed by No. 10 Downing street. According to leaked reports, the Government's White Paper will insist on dismantling an entire tier of local government if regional government in the north-east is to go ahead. That will involve abolishing Durham and Northumberland county councils.

I should tell the House and the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington, East (Mr. Kemp)—he is not allowed to speak because he is a Whip—that people in the north-east will not vote for a regional assembly in those circumstances. They do not want their local county councils or district councils to be taken away and replaced by a regional assembly that is located far away from their communities. We should bring government closer to people, not move it further away. In effect, the Government have sabotaged regionalism—probably deliberately—by demanding the withdrawal of an entire layer of local government.

Dr. Julian Lewis: In spite of what my hon. Friend said, Opposition Whips are allowed to intervene, fortunately. I recently asked the Minister for Local Government how many letters he had received requesting the introduction of regional government in the south-east, and the answer was not a single one.

Mr. Atkinson: There we are. That is right—the British people are not at all anxious to go down that path.

Regional government in the north-east has been a monstrous distraction. The northern assembly, which has taken on a self-appointed role as a campaigner for regional government—funded, of course, by the taxpayer—would do far better to concentrate on regenerating the region and addressing bread-and-butter problems such as under-achievement in education. That is what the people of the north-east want; they do not want regional government consisting of another talking shop, full of Labour cronies.

12.17 pm

Mr. Anthony D. Wright (Great Yarmouth): I am very pleased to be able to contribute to this debate, because the regeneration of disadvantaged areas is certainly crucial to the people of Great Yarmouth, whom I represent. My comments will probably mirror what could be said of many other seaside resorts around the country.

If this Government are to be judged, as they should be, on whether they deliver improvements to the quality of life of those in greatest need, Great Yarmouth is precisely the type of place in which they must deliver such improvements. It gives me no great pleasure to say that Great Yarmouth suffers from one of the highest unemployment levels in this country, and from some of the worst social deprivation. There are a number of reasons why, some of them historical, and others more connected to the present. Among the historical reasons are the ending of the herring fishing industry, and the decline of the traditional seaside holiday destinations in the face of competition from cheap foreign package deals. Although the offshore oil and gas industry remains a major employer in the borough, it is a mature industry, rather than the rapidly growing enterprise of the 1970s.

A shortage of skills in certain areas definitely numbers among the current reasons for economic and social deprivation in Great Yarmouth. All too often, local employers in the engineering sector have told me that they have had to look far beyond Great Yarmouth for employees with the necessary training and qualifications. However, in my view the single biggest factor negatively affecting Great Yarmouth is its totally inadequate transport infrastructure. Great Yarmouth is often referred to in terms of its peripherality, which is both real and perceived, but the fact is that poor transport links are severely hindering economic development and job creation in the town, and there is an urgent need for real improvements. I shall return to that issue later in my speech.

Before I talk about the Government initiatives that have already helped the regeneration process, and their future role in regenerating my constituency, I want to describe the current situation there. Hon. Members will be aware of the travel-to-work-area method of measuring unemployment. According to figures released by the Office for National Statistics for December 2001—the most recent figures available—Great Yarmouth had an unemployment rate of 6.6 per cent., the third highest travel-to-work-area rate in England. There, as in other towns with a large seaside holiday industry, unemployment peaks in the winter months and falls in summer.

Recent history has shown that the unemployment rate in Yarmouth usually reaches its maximum in February. When this month's figures are eventually released, we may well regain our unwanted spot at the top of the English league table for unemployment. The borough had the unwelcome distinction of being top of that table between December 2000 and March 2001. The availability of short-term summer jobs removes a number of people from the unemployment statistics who return a few months later. That undoubtedly masks the true picture of long-term unemployment in the borough.

It is now widely accepted—I certainly believe it to be the case—that unemployment and economic deprivation have a direct causal link to social problems. The Government have endorsed this view by making their drive to improve employment opportunities and to make work pay a central plank of their policy to fight poverty. I agree with that approach, but Great Yarmouth unfortunately remains a prime example of that link, and has a range of social problems to mirror its economic ones.

Those problems were highlighted by the national index of multiple deprivation drawn up by the then Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions in 1998 and in 2000. This study examined 8,414 borough council wards in England, using the following indicators: income deprivation; employment deprivation; health deprivation; education, skills, and training deprivation; housing deprivation; and geographical access to services. In the overall ranking, the borough of Great Yarmouth was the fifth most deprived borough in England, placing it alongside the worst and most deprived of the major inner-city areas that have been well documented today. In fact, I have often heard Great Yarmouth described as the equivalent of an inner-city area, but without any of the surrounding suburbs.

The situation regarding deprivation in education, skills and training is particularly acute in Great Yarmouth. Half the council wards are in the bottom 10 per cent. for education nationally, and one fifth are in the bottom 1 per cent. Our Regent ward is rated the 19th most deprived ward in England, out of 8,414, and Nelson ward is rated 37th. Great Yarmouth also has problems in areas that were not used as indicators in the DETR's study, such as drugs, crime, high rates of teenage pregnancy and environmental concerns such as litter, rubbish in the streets and abandoned cars.

I want to draw to the attention of hon. Members the disparity between Great Yarmouth and other parts of East Anglia. Much has been said recently about the disparity between regions, particularly in the context of the north and south. But a classic example of how these disparities can exist on a smaller scale within regions is the comparison between Great Yarmouth, Norwich and Cambridge.

When I draw attention to the economic and social problems of Great Yarmouth, I sometimes feel that people think I am exaggerating. After all, Great Yarmouth is part of East Anglia, and it is widely accepted that East Anglia is a relatively wealthy region with high employment and a good standard of living. However, the latest unemployment figure for Great Yarmouth is 6.6 per cent. of the population, while the figure for the county of Norfolk is only 2.6 per cent. and for East Anglia as a whole, 2.2 per cent. In other words, unemployment in Great Yarmouth is three times the rate for the rest of the region.

Conditions in the city of Norwich, only 20 miles from Great Yarmouth, are very different. Norwich is a booming city that has had hundreds of million of pounds of inward investment in the last few years and is renowned for its quality of life. A further 50 miles south-west is the city of Cambridge, whose economy is growing almost exponentially and threatening to overheat. While Great Yarmouth is the fifth worst borough in England in terms of social deprivation, Cambridge ranks 204th on the same list. I do not for a moment begrudge Norwich and Cambridge their success, but the contrast between them and nearby Great Yarmouth is indeed stark.

Having spoken of the present situation in Great Yarmouth and its regional context, I also want to consider what has happened in the recent past. From the outset, it must be said that things have improved significantly in the past few years, particularly in respect of employment. For example, in January 1997, the rate of unemployment in the borough stood at more than 10 per cent., as opposed to 6.6 per cent. today. There is no doubt that the Government's new deal programme has been a major factor in reducing unemployment in Great Yarmouth in the past few years.

It is far harder to quantify the figures across the range of indicators for social deprivation. None the less, I am hopeful that when the next study is carried out by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the situation in Great Yarmouth will have improved.

As for education, where Great Yarmouth has had particular problems, I am happy to say that exam and test results for pupils across the borough last summer showed a step forward in quantity and quality—a tribute to both the pupils and their teachers.

The situation is far from one of doom and gloom. I wish to pay tribute to the support and resources that Great Yarmouth has received from the Government to help alleviate some of the problems that we face. The funding comes in a variety of guises, with the largest single grant being the £4.5 million that the borough received from the neighbourhood renewal fund. I know that the "no strings attached" nature of the grant was appreciated locally and that discussions are under way as to how this large sum of money can best be spent.

Another Government initiative from which Great Yarmouth has benefited has been sure start. Funding started in 1999 and has already been extended until 2004, making a total cash injection of £4.2 million. Initial research has shown that sure start in Great Yarmouth is already succeeding in its goal of working in a new way with families who have children under four to give them the best possible start in life. Next week I will be attending the opening a new £500,000 nursery on one of Great Yarmouth's most deprived estates, which is part of the sure start initiative.

Only this week it was announced that from April 2005, Great Yarmouth's education action zone will become an excellence cluster. As a result, it will receive about £1.8 million a year in funding, compared with the present total sum of £150,000. Those in charge of the education action zone are particularly pleased with this early commitment, as it allows them to plan for the long term.

There has been some controversy over the achievements of education action zones in some parts of the country, but the one in Great Yarmouth has been a great success. Key stage 3 and 4 results are now higher than the national average, attendance levels have improved at many schools and 80 per cent. of pupils have shown measurable progress in reading. The Great Yarmouth education action zone has also been successful in setting up partnerships with a number of local businesses for sponsorship and workplace training.

I have highlighted three major funding boosts that Great Yarmouth has received from the Government, but there have been many others. They have included assisted area status and single regeneration budget moneys for Regent, Nelson and Colholm and Lichfield, three of the most deprived wards in the area. In addition, the East of England development agency has invested about £3.6 million in projects in the town since 1997, with more to come.

We have also received one of the largest grants for closed circuit television in response to the need to reduce crime. It has been a huge success, and I hope that more bids from other parts of my constituency will be looked on favourably by the Minister at the appropriate time.

The borough has benefited recently from a number of major lottery funding awards, such as that given to Tower Curing Works, a museum that will celebrate Great Yarmouth's rich maritime heritage. Heritage regeneration has also been boosted by grants from the heritage economic regeneration strategy and the town heritage initiative. These, together with a range of public and private funding partners, have paid for the Nelson museum, a major new attraction which will open on the town's south quay in April.

Finally, there have been funds from Europe in the shape of objective 2 and objective 3 grants. For example, £771,000 was given in October last year under objective 2 towards the Innovation Centre, a high-quality and high-tech centre for the energy industry, currently under construction on the South Gorleston business park.

Improvement must come from within the area, and that is happening in Great Yarmouth. Perhaps the single most important example is the development of the Great Yarmouth outer harbour. Should the project go ahead, it will undoubtedly safeguard thousands of jobs in Great Yarmouth and, I hope, create hundreds of new ones. The scheme has been talked about for more than 30 years, but today I believe that it is closer to becoming a reality than at any other time.

A company called EastPort has been set up to drive the project through. It is talking with four private operators which have tendered to run the ferry service from Great Yarmouth to Holland three times a day. The bulk of the cash for the project will be raised by the private sector, with some money coming from public sources. I am pleased that the Government have agreed that public funding for the outer harbour can be considered, so long as certain conditions are met.

Great Yarmouth is closer to Amsterdam than to London, and the port has a long history of trade with Europe and Scandinavia. Development of the outer harbour will, I hope, be a catalyst in establishing Great Yarmouth as a gateway to Europe as well as creating new jobs in a regeneration area.

The sea front partnership is another important local initiative. That joint bid, under the heading "InteGreat Yarmouth", is intended to invigorate and upgrade the town's seafront and town centre, improve the local environment, and stimulate tourism. It is a comprehensive plan that covers building improvements, traffic management, public spaces, the beach, the town centre's heritage, the environment, and information and communications technology. A funding package of £32 million—again both public and private money—has been proposed, and it will, if it goes ahead, provide a massive boost for tourism and the Great Yarmouth economy.

Those are two of the major local projects but there are many others, including the Great Yarmouth recommissioning partnership, a body formed to try to

[Mr. Anthony D. Wright]

ensure that Great Yarmouth has the infrastructure and skills base to deal with recommissioning and decommissioning of huge oil and gas rig structures as they reach the end of their working lives in the southern part of the North sea.

The Scroby sands wind farm project is another exciting local development. It will provide up to 38 wind turbines on a sandbank about two miles off the Great Yarmouth coast. The plan is already well advanced, and if the scheme goes ahead, it will be the largest offshore wind farm in Great Britain, generating clean, green power and creating new jobs.

In spite of Great Yarmouth's serious problems, much is being done, both by the Government and by the people of the area. An issue remains, however, that could be characterised as a spectre at the feast. Our transport infrastructure is one of the most important matters that the Government must address if they are to help with further regeneration. For many years, Great Yarmouth has been the largest seaside town and resort not to be connected to the national motorway network by a dual carriageway. That is exacerbated by the fact that the rail connection between the town and Norwich—the nearest city—is mostly single-tracked.

Improvements have been made to various parts of the road network over the past few years, but the overall picture is patchy. One section of the network has become a cause for significant local concern. The dualling of the section of the A47 that links Acle with Great Yarmouth, commonly called the Acle straight, is probably the single biggest issue facing the area. Discussions about dualling that stretch began in earnest in 1971: today, it remains a single carriageway. The overwhelming majority of my constituents feel that that is not good enough.

The Acle straight is about eight miles long. It is not much different today than it was when it was built in the 19th century. It is particularly narrow for an A road, and it is banked on both sides by water-filled dykes. It is totally inadequate for the volume of traffic that uses it. Regrettably, its safety record over the years has been poor. Judging the distance and speed of oncoming vehicles is notoriously difficult because the road is so straight and because it has no landmarks on either side to act as reference points. Accidents on the Acle straight are not a lot more common than on other roads, but when they occur, they are often head-on crashes that result in death or serious injury.

The terrible safety record is not the only concern about that stretch of road. Delays are commonplace. That is particularly true in the summer months at the height of the tourist season, but it happens at any time. The overwhelming opinion of the people of Great Yarmouth is that the report commissioned by the Government from the consultants Maunsell failed to draw a sensible balance between environmental concerns and safety, economic regeneration and social concern. Huge weight was given to the marshland environment beside the road, but little to the population of 90,000 people. I have received 177 letters about the report from people in Great Yarmouth, Norfolk and further afield. Of those, 175 supported dualling the road, and two were against it.

Among the supporters of dualling the road are all the local authorities in Norfolk as well as the local chamber of commerce and Norfolk police authority, which believes that there is a strong case on safety grounds for making the Acle straight a dual carriageway. Surely they cannot all be wrong.

Recently there have been further developments. At its meeting on 17 January, the east of England local government conference considered the issue and instead of endorsing the consultants' report in full called for further studies to consider the economic, social and environmental impact of dualling the Acle straight. Although the prospect of further delay is frustrating, I generally support that decision, because any study that objectively considers all these matters cannot fail to support dualling. I will do all that I can to continue making that case, and I hope that when the matter finally reaches my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, he will come to the same conclusion.

Much has already been done to regenerate the town of Great Yarmouth but sadly there is still much work to do. There is no better place for that work to start than on the Acle straight and the development of our new harbour.

12.35 pm

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Wright). I know that part of the world very well, and I can well understand the problems to which he refers. I was particularly interested to hear his remarks about the A47. I know the stretch of road to which he refers. It is indeed a bad stretch. It reminds me of the A36 that runs through my constituency.

This debate will inevitably focus on the regeneration of disadvantaged urban areas but cities do not exist in isolation. What goes on in them affects small towns and the countryside, whether it is the middle classes relocating from decaying city centres, or highly mobile criminals fleeing closed circuit television and the lean pickings of their urban bases. We must not suppose that disadvantage is an exclusively urban phenomenon, or that the effects of urban deprivation are confined to city centres. I was pleased to hear comments to that effect by my hon. Friends the Members for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) and for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray).

I intend to slate the Government for their unfair treatment of Wiltshire and for their failure to lift deprivation in my constituency but I am happy that the Government are attempting, so they say, to deal with urban deprivation, by which they largely mean deprivation in city centres, I think.

Ms Keeble: The deprivation strategy that I set out applies to every area.

Dr. Murrison: I am grateful to the Minister for clearing up that point. In west Wiltshire, it sometimes seems that that is not the case. I shall explain our concerns over things such as homelessness, which is a particular problem in my district.

West Wiltshire does not exist in a vacuum. Our interests interdigitate with those of urban areas. To that extent I have a parochial as well as a general interest in the regeneration of large urban areas.

If cities have high crime rates, badly performing schools, unacceptable pollution, high mortality and poor morbidity, people who are able to will choose to live elsewhere, particularly when they are sold leafy life styles by developers, who will be delighted by the Government's recent Green Paper, which will give them carte blanche to develop in the countryside against the wishes of local people. Urban deprivation leads inexorably to pressure on rural areas and more concrete countryside.

In November 2000, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions put out a useful publication called "The State of English Cities". It suggested that migration trends reinforce the picture of decline in our cities, with only four moving in for every five who move out. We are told that there are two flows of migration: flows from the north to the south; and down the urban hierarchy, to which my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire has already referred, from cities to suburbs to shire towns and the countryside. In most conurbations, rates of net migration are highest for high-status professional, technical and managerial workers. That is certainly evident in the south-west.

Clearly that has implications for house prices in rural areas, pricing out those who wish to live in villages not because they are searching for a developer-fuelled rural idyll but because of work or family ties. That leads to the ludicrous situation whereby poorer rural dwellers are obliged to swap places with well-off commuters from the cities. The incomer rarely gets the satisfaction that he desires from his moving, because it destroys the very thing that he is trying to achieve for himself and his family—life in a rural area. The ex-villager also loses out because he is cut off from work, family and social ties.

That all adds more grief to a creaking transport system and means that formerly healthy and vibrant communities in city centres are increasingly socially polarised. In a written answer I was informed that

> "332 households in west Wiltshire were accepted as being homeless in 2000-01. As at 31 March 2001 there were 90 households in temporary accommodation and 15 households in bed and breakfast accommodation."—[*Official Report*, 14 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 731W.]

Homelessness, especially priority homelessness, has risen in England during the past four years, but disproportionately so in my constituency.

The true picture may be worse than the official statistics show. Homelessness charities claim that people were put in hostels or even threatened with arrest overnight while counts were being made in order to meet Government targets. The charity Shelter observed:

> "During the election, a lot of attention was given to improving education and health services. We hear much less about the thousands of families stuck in grotty B and Bs . . . The current crisis-driven approach to homelessness is not working."

Homelessness charities in and around my constituency would echo those remarks.

I represent green and pleasant Wiltshire, a beautiful part of the country that many Labour Members might suppose to be untouched by their problems of homelessness and deprivation. The problem faced by my constituency, in common with many others with a similar urban-rural mix, is that although we are by and large spared the remorselessness of vast post-war estates, our deprivation is scattered. It is there for sure, but because it is diffuse it is hidden and is difficult and relatively expensive to get at, so it is ignored.

The ludicrous local government funding formula that acts against the interests of shire counties in general, and mine in particular, as well as the Government's manifest failure to act—despite their admission that there is a problem—strongly suggests that the Government cannot or will not rid themselves of the mindset that holds that constituencies such as mine are populated exclusively by the well-to-do and must be tapped to distribute largesse to what are seen as more needy urban areas.

When I was listening to some of the comments of the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) I thought that I had heard them somewhere before. Indeed, I and many hon. Members have heard them before, because they were in this morning's mailbag in a letter from the Country Land and Business Association.

The third paragraph of that letter is especially apposite, and sums up quite well the attitude towards deprivation that is held by many people who live in rural areas. It states that

> "rural poverty and deprivation is all too often sidelined while the inner-city slums and estates grab the headlines. Homelessness exists in rural areas, a lack of adequate (indeed a basic lack) services and facilities—education, transport, policing—pervades many rural areas. Such problems are less visible and therefore more easily ignored."

I fear that that is what is happening.

A local primary school head teacher told me this week that at a recent conference she had bearded the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on the funding formula for Wiltshire. We should remember that at the beginning of last year we heard in the House that funding for Wiltshire was inadequate. When faced with my primary school head teacher the right hon. Lady apparently threw up her hands, rolled her eyes to the heavens and said, "Do not ask me to defend the indefensible with respect to Wiltshire."

Well, I ask the Government to defend their position. When Secretaries of State admit an inequity but carry on regardless, disadvantaged people in my constituency have every right to ask what on earth is going on. Is not the truth of the matter that spending Ministers, for all their warm words and good intentions, are merely onlookers who are powerless to act against the shire-county-averse long screwdriver of the Treasury?

12.44 pm

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): Given the crucial importance of regeneration, it is amazing how easily it can send us all to sleep. I am delighted to detect some signs of consciousness among the remaining Members in the Chamber, although I fear for those in the Public Gallery. However, I shall press on because, in my view, no British Government have ever invested as much time and energy as the present Government have in tackling, reducing and eradicating poverty and deprivation. That is reflected in the Government's regeneration policy, which leaves no stone unturned in its search for a comprehensive and effective route out of poverty.

We have learned some lessons. We have learned over the last two decades that simply changing the way that communities look will not change the way that communities live. However, failing to change the poor and brutal quality of the built environment condemns disadvantaged communities to live in concrete cages, which is equally deplorable and unacceptable. Therefore it is crucial that we have a balance.

[Ms Oona King]

In Tower Hamlets, inner-city regeneration is make or break. Unfortunately, during the '80s and '90s, many people felt that regeneration broke apart, and even supplanted, their local communities. As the Minister said at the start of the debate, there was too much emphasis on physical regeneration and not enough on communities, and even when physical regeneration did take place it often went over the heads of local people, who remained untouched by the money that was ploughed in. In fact, the '80s and '90s were the greatest period of degeneration that this country's housing estates have ever known.

We have done two things since. First, we have massively increased investment in the fabric of those estates. Secondly, we have recognised that local problems best respond to local solutions, not Whitehall prescriptions. That means local people deciding where the money is ploughed in and having responsibility for disbursing public money. Regeneration policy also focuses on better delivery of mainstream services to disadvantaged areas, and there is no better example of that than the new deal for communities programme.

I listened with interest to the comments of the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake). However, my experience as chair for two years of the new deal for communities programme in Tower Hamlets was utterly different from that which he described, because our NDC programme genuinely engaged local communities. Do not take my word for it—obviously, the hon. Gentleman never would—but take the word of the people who have engaged in the programme themselves.

Tom Brake: I would just like to ensure that the hon. Lady understands that those comments were not mine but those of the Centre for Local Economic Strategies, which is at the coal face of delivering regeneration strategies.

Ms King: I would just like to ensure that the hon. Gentleman understands that no single programme has made a bigger difference to the life of people on one of the poorest estates in the country than the NDC programme. It was introduced on the Ocean estate in Tower Hamlets to improve the life of more than 6,000 residents there. We had one of the highest rates of infant mortality in Britain, and the sure start programme—which is integrated with a range of other programmes to challenge and reverse those appalling statistics—is making inroads. I have been honoured to work with many people who used to be in permanent confrontational mode with every form of authority, and I have found it incredibly inspiring to see their energy transformed into constructive engagement in the decision-making process.

There were problems, however, and one of the biggest problems that we had in our area surrounded the right to buy. Although the Government allocated Ocean NDC £56 million, as soon as people on that incredibly run-down estate heard that literally loads of money would be pumped into their estate after they had received nothing—not a bean—for decades, the first reaction for many of them was to make a right-to-buy application because they thought that they could make money on their properties.

One estimate is that, as a result, 80 per cent. of the £25 million earmarked for the housing element of the project will have to be spent buying up houses sold under the right-to-buy scheme. I do not believe that any hon. Member—whether in the Opposition or the Labour party—could possibly think that a good idea. I hope that, in the interests of regeneration, the Minister and the Government might consider suspending the right to buy in regeneration programmes if that right negates the entire regeneration programme so that no one is enabled to have a better quality local environment.

On right-to-buy schemes, I tell Opposition Members that I agree with the sentiment behind giving people, many from low income families, the opportunity to buy their houses. I fundamentally disagree with them that the price of handing over that opportunity is to remove vast swathes of social housing. Hon. Members will know that, for whatever reason—I shall try to say this diplomatically—after 20 years during which many present Conservative Members were in government, we were left with a £19 billion repair backlog.

The hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) suggested that fewer houses have been built under Labour. That is not true. Hon. Members should remember that the right to buy is about social housing, and more social housing units are being built in London than were ever built in any comparable time frame under the previous Administration. However, we are having to spend a huge amount of money repairing the damage that occurred as a result of degeneration. That is where a lot of money is spent.

It is appalling to think that, last year, 11,000 social housing units were sold off, but only 3,000 have been built to replace them. We need to take measures to deal with that problem. The maximum right-to-buy discount could be limited to £25,000, and the time before people were able to sell on those properties for a quick buck could be lengthened. Those sales create more sink estates. For example, people in Tower Hamlets are selling on their right-to-buy properties to rather disreputable private landlords. There are many reputable private landlords, but those properties have been sold to companies that put leaflets through the door, saying, "Let us buy your property", because they know that house prices in Tower Hamlets have exploded.

A year and a half ago, a four-bedroom terraced house in Wapping sold for £600,000. The same property was inhabited by a teacher in the 1970s—not even a Member of Parliament could afford it now, never mind a teacher. So we obviously have to consider key-worker housing in our regeneration strategies. Most of all, we have to increase the provision of affordable housing, so that those people on average and below average incomes can afford to live in areas such as Tower Hamlets.

What has the council done? It has engaged in many specific regeneration projects. It has also engaged in a variety of private-public sector partnerships with Canary Wharf. I gave an example earlier of the skills match employment brokerage agency, which has helped 1,500 local people into jobs in the last year alone. I also mentioned the Will Crooks estate, which is one of the estates closest to Canary Wharf—it is within spitting distance. Of the 400 adults of employment age living there, only two have managed to obtain employment in the metropolis that overshadows them. The local Member of Parliament, my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Canning Town (Jim Fitzpatrick)—two Members represent Tower Hamlets—is working hard to ensure that people on that estate enjoy the fruits of regeneration.

That takes us back to the issue that we discussed earlier. How do we enable local people who live in the shadow of vast regeneration projects to benefit from them? One of the answers is through community-led regeneration organisations such as the Isle of Dogs community foundation and the Bromley-by-Bow centre, which is a nationally recognised social enterprise that serves as a role model for many newer voluntary and community organisations gaining a foothold on the regeneration ladder. I pay tribute to Tower Hamlets education and business partnership, which is nationally recognised as a model of good practice.

I also want to mention some of the innovation that has been taking place. There has been a great willingness to test out new approaches and take risks. For instance, networks of community-based access and vocational training providers offer courses that reflect the specialist finance, banking and knowledge economies of Canary Wharf and the City fringe. Specialist enterprise support agencies have emerged and they range from the cultural industries development agency to the ethnic minority enterprise project. Such agencies have helped more than 250 businesses to start up and grow. I also pay tribute to the work of the Prince's Trust in east London. It has helped many young people who have often been in long-term unemployment into jobs, which is a wonderful achievement.

I hope that the continuing wave of regeneration will take into account the needs and wishes of local communities. Some huge projects are involved and they have an influence far beyond Tower Hamlets or east London. For example, the Bishopsgate goods yard, to where the East London line will be extended, will open up transport opportunities for an entire region. In Spitalfields, another very large regeneration project has yet to receive the support of all residents, although many local businesses write to me to say how much they welcome such new development. However, an equal number of correspondents who are local residents are terrorised by the idea of this development project. We do not need more bland, enormous, dehumanising slabs of corporate office blocks, which add no character to the neighbourhood. We need projects that bring together the community's aspirations and reflect some of the community's character. Unfortunately, that has not happened in the past.

I want to sum up by looking at how much has been achieved. In Tower Hamlets in 1997, the unemployment rate was 16.6 per cent. As a result of the projects, local efforts—especially by the local council and the community—and the Government's strategy, our unemployment rate has fallen in five years to 11.6 per cent. That is a fantastic achievement. However, we still have one of the highest unemployment rates in London and, indeed, in the country.

My hon. Friends the Members for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) and for Hammersmith and Fulham (Mr. Coleman) made the case for London. I know that people outside London get infuriated because they think that all its streets are paved with gold, but I wish that they would recognise this one fact: there are more poor people proportionately in London than in any other region. That fact seems to have been lost in the same way as Londoners once did not recognise the extent of rural poverty, which we must acknowledge. I hope that people outside the capital realise that although some of the richest people in Britain live in London, some of the poorest also live here. We must ensure that our regeneration policy takes that into account. We must use planning gain agreements—section 106 agreements—to promote the regeneration that helps the poorest people.

I hope that the comprehensive spending review will give a significant boost to investment in social housing. The Labour Government have trebled the amount of money for social housing and, as I said in a debate on Tuesday, we are millions of pounds better off under Labour. However, we also know that we need more. We have to ensure that regeneration benefits all stakeholders—residents, businesses, schools and school children, faith organisations and the voluntary sector—because we have to eradicate the poverty that stalks the capital and this country.

1.2 pm

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): I declare an interest as a director of a family building and property company, in case anything that I say relates to that.

The debate is important; we know that from the number of hon. Members present and from what they have said about their communities. Regeneration impacts on all of us. Hon. Members on both sides of the House come into politics to do some good or make a difference. Political action on regeneration, especially in disadvantaged areas, can make a difference providing that it is sensible and measured and that it involves the communities.

We have heard much about the built environment and individuals in communities. The key factor is that community leaders need to have a vision and set out the way forward. We all know about cycles of decline: firms move out of an area, housing deteriorates and the most enterprising people decide to leave; public services are not at their best, and people struggle with inadequate health, education and transport infrastructures. That creates terrible problems, resulting in crime and lawlessness. It is frustrating for people who live in such areas, and who have known their communities in better times, to see that happen. Ministers and politicians have to put regeneration high up the political agenda. It must be a priority. We need to put our efforts into ensuring that we provide leadership and a vision so that communities can pull themselves out of those circumstances.

A few years ago I visited the Heritage Foundation in Washington. I talked to some fairly right-wing individuals who said that for a long time they were relaxed about the fact that most of America's problems were in the ghettos and inner cities until they realised that being indifferent to them meant that they spread. The problems had a cultural impact on adjacent districts, and the rising crime rates spread there. It is beneficial for everyone in society to tackle such problems because they can easily move into other areas. Sometimes that will require more public investment, but overall that would be to our benefit.

In most of our major cities—Manchester, Birmingham or wherever—many of the prosperous suburbs feed off what happens in the city centres. There is great interlinkage. No politician can be indifferent about the fate of people who are left in our inner cities.

The Government have a surprisingly wide range of measures to deal with the matters that we are discussing; indeed, I agree with those who say that there are probably too many measures that are too complex. Perhaps much more should be done to publicise all the grants and other

[Mr. Robert Syms]

schemes that are available. I was unaware of many of the schemes that could be accessed, and I suspect that many people in many communities are similarly unaware.

There are some measures that I welcome. In the past, I fought the seat of Walsall, North. In doing so, I noticed that there were many contaminated sites. The accelerated tax credit of 150 per cent. to encourage owners and investors to get contaminated land back into the system is a positive move. The private sector will not do that; however, it can take advantage of the scheme for the benefit of communities.

I welcome also the 100 per cent. capital allowance for putting flats over shops. One of the problems is that when people move out of cities, we cease to have communities. People are no longer looking down the street to see what is going on. We must repopulate some areas of our cities. Some business districts depopulate in the evenings, which is not good. Anything that encourages more people to live over the shop may be good for the general community.

I am not enthusiastic about the recent Budget announcements of reductions in stamp duty for people who buy houses in some deprived wards. It is a rough-and-ready approach. There is expensive and prosperous housing in some extremely deprived wards. People will have to apply for discounts in areas where they are likely to be available, and the scheme will be a minor part of any regeneration activity.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend has raised an important point about the reduction of stamp duty in deprived areas, which will ghettoise them. That will be one effect of the scheme. Is my hon. Friend aware that if the Government bring forward their seller's pack proposals, they will replicate the ghettoising, making it even more difficult to sell houses in some areas?

Mr. Syms: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. Stigma is important. People's perceptions of an area can do an area a great deal of harm.

I have concerns about what the Government are aiming to do following publication of the White Paper on local government. For example, they are aiming to introduce corporate performance assessments of local councils. They have four classifications: high performing, striving, coasting and failing. That system takes no account of whether a council is trying to improve, for example. It is a broad-brush approach. I fear that an authority that may be improving will still be classified as failing. In an inner-city area, that in itself may lead to stigma and send out the wrong signals to a potential investor.

We must be careful about targeting measures such as tax relief on an area because that area is perceived as being deprived. We must be careful also about measures that the Government have in mind to try to improve the performance of local government. That could lead to concern that local government in some areas is not working as well as it is.

I know that the Government whom I supported were keen on league tables, but those tables and classifications can confuse as much as inform people. I have concerns about the direction the Government are taking. Although the language concerning change in local government is one of freedom of opportunity, there is still a substantial degree of ministerial control. We seem to be going down the road of rather more specific grants, which will diminish local autonomy.

I spent a long time in local government. One of my deepest regrets was that the Conservative Government did not trust local government more but sought to interfere. The present Government, despite the language, seem to be moving in the same direction. If we had let local authorities have more freedom, I doubt whether some of the problems in some major conurbations would be as great. In the great days of local government—the Victorian era—a great deal was produced and built by local business men and leaders of local communities who had a great deal of independence and authority. The way forward is to give local government a lot more support and latitude and to encourage local leaders to get involved in local government.

Like many of my hon. Friends, I am not a great enthusiast for regions. I can see no great benefit in the South West of England regional development agency. No doubt one day I shall change my mind and surprise myself. I would prefer the emphasis to be at local government level—with the people on the ground who know their communities—and I hope that the Government will give local authorities more support.

We are dealing with a complex matter. We may not be able to solve all the problems of inner cities, but we should do our best to improve local communities. *The Economist* has drawn attention to current trends. The economy is growing and there is evidence of repopulation of many of our inner-city areas. Houses are being done up and there is a certain vitality in many parts of central London as young people move in and there are more nightclubs and so on. There are, however, problems in certain suburban areas that are not as well served by transport links and do not offer the opportunities that people saw there 20 or 30 years ago. There is a trend whereby people are moving back into inner cities, but, as has been pointed out repeatedly today, there is a great deal of inequality. There are extremes of wealth and poverty and many local job opportunities are taken by Australians, New Zealanders and others travelling across the world. We have to do more to improve the skills base to match local potential with the jobs available, instead of looking to people who travel long distances to take advantage of the opportunities in London.

London Members have highlighted the problems facing London. London has always had high unemployment and areas of deprivation, often in areas that are a little off the beaten track—the ones that we do not see on the way into town. We have a great opportunity for the renaissance of our capital. Hon. Members see a great deal of London and we can do more to reverse these trends, but we have to make it a priority.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) pointed out when he described the regeneration in Newcastle upon Tyne, there are many opportunities for improvement providing that there is vision, that the private sector and local communities are involved and that there is a long-term strategy so that people do not think that politicians will walk away. I do not have to tell Labour Members that politicians are often tempted to change schemes and to rebrand and relaunch them, but this can undermine regeneration schemes as people think that they are here today and gone tomorrow. Long-term commitment is required.

We are discussing an important issue. As a Conservative I feel strongly that as one nation we have to do the best for all our citizens, particularly those who do not have the ability to help themselves. With leadership, vision and Government help, and by enhancing the great talents of our people, I believe that we can create a better Britain in which all our people can be proud of their communities.

1.14 pm

Phil Hope (Corby): I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in this important debate. I represent 60 villages in my constituency, together with the town of Corby. I have often spoken on rural policy, but today I shall focus on the urban regeneration that is so desperately needed.

It was interesting to hear Conservative Members talk about a non-partisan approach, promptly criticise the Government and Labour councils for failing to tackle the problems that we have inherited and then complain when we remind them of the cause of those problems—18 years of Tory rule.

It does not help when the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) declares himself to have been a political adviser to the Tory Government on those policies. In sharp contrast, the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms), made a very different kind of one-nation Conservative speech, praising a lot of Labour policies and criticising those of the former Conservative Administration. We will not let the Conservatives airbrush out their record of abandoning our disadvantaged areas, because we, in government, now have to clear up the mess that they left behind.

I listened carefully to the proposals. Let us have some constructive options, said the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown). What did he offer? He said that we should streamline the money and appoint another Minister, have some more tax cuts, and protect greenfield sites. In my book that does not add up to much of a policy for improving disadvantaged areas.

Perhaps we should not be surprised that Madame Tussauds has today decided not to make or display a waxwork model of the Leader of the Opposition—arguably, we already have one here—and said, "We've always done the three party leaders, but we thought, hang on, is this guy really going to provoke any excitement in the people?" Clearly, as with the absence of any regeneration policies, the answer is no.

We must recognise the problems, and the work that the Government have done to overcome them. Our programmes are providing tremendous opportunities for towns such as Corby, hit hard in the Conservative 1980s and 1990s with massive unemployment and disinvestment in housing, health and education. The local economy is now recovering. With Labour, the spirit of Corby has come to the fore. We are all proud of our constituencies, but Corby really is special. It is the town that would not die, despite the tremendous challenges that it faced. I hope that, with Government help for regeneration, it will not just survive but flourish and grow.

We have problems, though. We have low unemployment—less than 3 per cent., as a result of the Government's policies—but we have a low-skill, low-wage economy. Public transport is still woefully inadequate: we are possibly the largest town in Europe without a passenger railway station. We have more than our share of health problems, with the highest incidence of coronary heart disease in the country. The legacy of poor 1960s urban design has left us with rundown housing estates and a town centre in urgent need of new investment.

We have done a good deal, but we cannot be complacent. I want to set out some particular highlights and challenges. As part of the massive extra public and private investment in our first term, children in Corby have benefited from the education action zone, which the Government have just extended with £5 million of extra investment targeted on schools and children in the areas of greatest need.

Education is a mixed story in Corby: we have one of the top-performing comprehensives in the country, but we also have a few schools struggling to give pupils the best start in life. The education action zone is pulling those schools together to get co-operation and common endeavour in the interests of all the children in Corby, not just a few.

I want to record my appreciation of the tremendous commitment and dedication of teachers, classroom assistants, ancillary staff, and especially the heads, who are working together to raise standards. We are now giving them the tools to do the job: repairing the roofs, providing new equipment for science laboratories and building new classrooms and facilities. Results are improving as a consequence, particularly in the primary sector, and now increasingly in the secondary sector, too.

A key feature of the debate about regeneration is having what the Deputy Prime Minister called a progressive universalism in our approach. We need to fund education and health for the whole community while taking a progressive approach and doing more for those people and areas that need it most. That is what we are doing through the new deal for communities. That targeted help is raising standards and pulling people together in a way that no other scheme has achieved.

The urban regeneration company and the neighbourhood renewal strategy are further examples of how we are doing something for everyone but more for those who need it most. Sure start has been mentioned today. We have an excellent scheme in Corby, targeted at children and families in some of our poorest neighbourhoods. We have good nursery and playgroup provision for three and four-year-olds but sure start targets the most disadvantaged areas and gives them an extra boost just when they need it most.

One of Corby's greatest success stories is the Pen Green centre—my own children went there, some 15 or 16 years ago—which is now a centre of excellence, working with children and families. Sure start is based at that centre, working in the most disadvantaged communities. I describe it as a success story, but I have concerns that my county council, in reshaping its budget, is proposing a significant reduction in funding for Pen Green. I am having a good dialogue with the council—officers and members—to ensure that they listen to my representations not to proceed with that cut and to listen to the hundreds of local parents who rely on the centre for support.

[Phil Hope]

In regeneration, it is the holistic approach that really counts. In Corby, we have established an urban regeneration company called Catalyst Corby. Ministers know of our regeneration plans; the Deputy Prime Minister visited Corby a year ago this month and launched the company. Since then, the Minister for Employment and the Regions, the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Nigel Griffiths), and the Minister for Sport have visited Corby to see our successes. These include Rockingham Speedway, a massive new investment of £48 million in an Indy-style racetrack—one of the first of its kind in Europe—which is located in Corby.

Catalyst Corby is building on that investment. In every sense, it is a public-private partnership, directly involving on the board the private sector, regional government agencies, local councils and the voluntary sector. It is a board that I am proud to be a member of as well.

We have some small ambitions for our town. We want to double the size of Corby and introduce a far wider range of housing. We want to transform Corby town centre and provide a much better shopping centre and a fuller range of leisure opportunities. Crucially, we want to secure the re-opening of a good-quality train service to put Corby on the map and open up its potential as a place from which to commute to London and elsewhere. We want to widen the employment base by ensuring an adequate supply of land and by using some of the tax credits that have been mentioned by Conservative Members—another effective Government measure to promote regeneration.

We need a new image for Corby, and we need to promote it throughout the country as a place of growth and regeneration for the future. The board is up and running and we have a group of talented individuals. Our baseline study has been completed and staff are working to deliver the process.

One issue that is related to public confidence in Corby is public transport. Corby's bus services are clearly inadequate and have reached a level where they are no longer viable. I have had lengthy discussions with the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my noble friend Lord Falconer, the Minister of State responsible for regeneration, and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, who is on the Front Bench today. I know that there is a willingness to assist.

I know also that there are many demands on Ministers, particularly in relation to transport, but it is absolutely vital that we get this right. I am looking to Ministers to help to make sure that the Government play their part, along with the county council, to ensure that we have a viable integrated transport network of buses and trains in the town. Without that, we cannot succeed in our endeavours.

The regeneration of a town such as Corby is a microcosm of what we want to achieve for the country. We are putting together public and private sectors; involving the community in decision making; identifying key areas for strategic investment; and backing that all the way with political will and Government resources to achieve outcomes. We are working on that in Corby and we are moving forward. I hope that we can hear good news from Ministers in the weeks to come as Corby goes into the future.

1.25 pm

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): Although my constituency is not deprived and the region in which it is located is not poor, I have a particular interest in today's topic because of my background. I was born and brought up in the north-east of England. I lived there for the first 18 years of my life before coming to London to attend university, and I have a strong commitment to what I consider my home region.

The north-east is the most deprived region in this country, as measured by household disposable income. In 1998, disposable income per head was £8,080, or 86 per cent. of the UK average. The local newspaper, *The Northern Echo*, which was referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson), described the scale of the problem when it recorded that, according to almost every key economic and social indicator, the region is lagging behind other UK regions.

One important way to tackle the problems in deprived areas in the north-east and elsewhere is through education, which provides a ladder, enabling people to rise from a background of low skill and poor education and improve themselves. I know that the Government share the view that education is important to regeneration. In a White Paper published in July 1998, the Deputy Prime Minister highlighted the importance of education as a means of regeneration.

Reference has been made to the many schemes that the Government have introduced, such as education action zones, to which the hon. Member for Corby (Phil Hope) referred. However, my concern is that those schemes have not been successful in narrowing the gap in exam results between poor and wealthy areas of the country—a point that was highlighted in this week's report on the north-east by Ofsted. I shall quote some figures from it that perhaps illustrate the point, but I should first declare an interest, in that in 1997 I stood as a parliamentary candidate in South Shields, which formed part of south Tyneside.

In terms of 15-year-olds who achieved five or more A* to C GCSE grades, the gap between south Tyneside and the rest of England in 1997 was 9.4 per cent. By 2001, that gap had widened to 10.9 per cent. In 2001, some 39.1 per cent. of children in south Tyneside achieved five or more A* to C grades, but in England as a whole, 50 per cent. achieved the same result.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the best ways to address the regional disparities that he is outlining is through an elected regional assembly for the north-east?

Mr. Hoban: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point. My hon. Friend the Member for Hexham made particular reference to the role of regional government, but I chose not to intervene as I did not wish to steal his thunder. I visit the north-east, where virtually all my family live, some four or five times a year and, as I said, I stood as a parliamentary candidate in South Shields in 1997. However, in my many visits I have heard nobody demand an extra layer of regional government. Nobody has told me that they want a regional assembly in the north-east. People are not rioting on the streets of the north-east, demanding a regional assembly to address the disparity in regional performance. The argument that a regional assembly can improve regional performance is bogus.

I took care to check that south Tyneside was not an isolated example of those regional disparities in exam results, and was not the only area affected. In Newcastle, for example, the gap has widened from 13.5 per cent. in 1997 to 14.3 per cent. in 2001. Indeed, in the north-east as whole the gap has widened from 7.3 per cent. in 1997 to 8.5 per cent. in 2001. The gap in results between the most deprived region and the country as a whole is therefore widening.

The Government have introduced a number of schemes such as excellence in cities and the education action zones, and we hope that they will produce results. The hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Wright) identified the achievements in his constituency arising from the EAZs. I shall quote from the Ofsted report that was published earlier this week to give its perception of the success of the zones. Mike Tomlinson states:

> "Effective initiatives have contributed to an improvement in primary schools in the zones, although attainment remains generally below the national average . . . the gap between schools in zones and schools nationally"—

at key stages other than key stage 1—

> "has not reduced significantly."

That is a sad indictment of the policy introduced by the Labour Government to improve education in those areas. It certainly is not working for the country as a whole.

The hon. Member for Corby mentioned the success of education action zones, but we know that they have not achieved the financial results that had been hoped. They have not raised the amount of private money that they had been targeted to attract, which is why some have been closed and rolled into the excellence in cities programme. An announcement to that effect was made by the Government last year.

The excellence in cities programme has not achieved that many improvements itself. The Ofsted report states of schools in the programme:

> "At this early stage, the initiatives had not yet resulted in rates of improvement in attainment, attendance or teaching quality significantly higher than in schools nationally, although improvement in Key Stage 3 results in mathematics were encouraging."

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my hon. Friend agree that education is part of an overall picture in the inner cities, and that one of the reasons that it is so important is that it can encourage potential investors into this country? For example, Toyota created a huge number of jobs in Tyne and Wear, and the knock-on effect for the regeneration of the north-east was very large.

Mr. Hoban: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention, although it was Nissan, not Toyota, that invested in Sunderland. The contribution that that has made to the region has been enormously beneficial, and a number of other businesses have moved to the area to service that industry. It is important, when attracting inward investment, to have a pool of talented, skilled employees. We need to focus on that, because—as my hon. Friend says—education is one of many facets of regeneration. It is a particularly important facet for individuals, but for the entire north-east it is vital for achieving economic success.

One of the problems that the Government are trying to resolve by tackling the educational problems in the north-east is the historical legacy not of 18 years of Conservative Government but of the fact that the local education authorities—all of which operated under a high degree of autonomy while we were in power, although that autonomy has subsequently been eroded by this Government—were Labour-controlled. The results in education authorities such as South Tyneside, Newcastle and Sunderland are a consequence of years of Labour control. There is much to be done to improve the results in those areas, and I am not sure that central Government initiatives are the only way of achieving that.

We need to ensure that there is more choice in schools. We must move away from a monochrome mix of schools towards more variety and innovation, to attract teachers into schools in deprived areas. The Ofsted report comments that it is difficult to attract teachers to schools in those areas. Perhaps we need to be more innovative in terms of the type of education that those schools offer, to excite and challenge teachers to come and work in them.

We also need to consider parental choice in deprived areas, where there is, unfortunately, not a wide diversity of choice in terms of the range of schools on offer. People in the north-east who can afford to do so will send their children to the private schools. I attended a comprehensive school in Durham, and I benefited from that. Escaping poor schools should not be an opportunity open only to those who can afford to go to private schools. We must therefore ensure that the state schools system is attractive and that we can offer more choice to parents on low incomes. One of the retrograde steps taken by the Government in their first term was to abolish the assisted places scheme, which had provided an opportunity for parents to escape the state sector and for those in less well-off areas to benefit from a different type of education.

In the United States, George Bush has focused on the need to allow parents in areas where schools are poor to have an effective choice in education through a form of education voucher. It will be interesting to see the product of that reform and how it will change the lives of the people in those areas.

I am conscious that time is short and many Labour Members wish to speak. I do not wish to deprive them of that opportunity, but I have one more point to make. The other aspects of policy to which we need to pay close attention are planning and development, which have been touched on frequently in the debate. Living in the south-east and representing a seat in Hampshire, which will see a great increase in its population in the next 10 to 15 years, I am acutely conscious that by building more homes in the south-east, we are in danger of encouraging economic migration from the north to the south. My hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) referred to the migration population being primarily among skilled and senior technical staff in businesses.

My concern is that by increasing significantly the number of houses to be built in the south—an increase significantly greater than that in the north-east—we are in danger of impoverishing the north-east by dragging its skilled, technically able people to the south. Although I wish my constituency to develop well economically, I do not want that to happen at the expense of the one nation to which my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) referred in his remarks. Our planning and development policies need to reflect and consider the impact of greater house building in the south-east on the impoverishment of areas in the north.

[Mr. Hoban]

The hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) referred to community-led initiatives. The Portsmouth housing association is trying to develop a bond to finance a project called Fusion. It will combine public and private investment in a wide range of skills to tackle the poverty and deprivation that exist along the south coast, in Portsmouth and the neighbouring boroughs, including Fareham. I welcome that scheme, because it demonstrates the need to look at the fabric of our environment and to provide the education and skills that people need to lift themselves out of deprivation. It also demonstrates how the public and private sectors can work together. To use a housing association as a facilitator is an excellent idea.

In conclusion, we must ensure that all the Government's policies are directed towards improving the lot of those living in deprived areas. I am concerned that their policies on education and planning will work against the interests of those people, not in their favour.

1.38 pm

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): The hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) started his speech with an appeal for a bipartisan approach. I am not sure how his ancestor, whom I am informed was a former Speaker of the House, would have viewed the hon. Gentleman's definition of bipartisan. However, in the spirit of his redefinition of the word, I should like to respond to the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray), who said that the message the Conservative party is receiving from the electorate is, "Come back, all is forgiven." I am not a theologian, but my understanding is that for forgiveness to be offered it must be asked for, and not one Conservative Member has apologised for a single policy adopted by the previous Tory Government. Therefore, I cannot see forgiveness being offered or forthcoming from the electorate.

I am one of nine Members—at the moment, anyway—representing the city of Glasgow. [*Laughter.*] There is no hidden agenda in my speech.

Glasgow is Scotland's first city, though not its capital. I need not go over in detail the often tragic history of Glasgow's 20th century decline from being a city of more than 1 million citizens and the home of the world's finest shipbuilding industry to a city of barely 600,000 people with high unemployment and some of the worst ill health and deprivation in the country. If poverty was Glasgow's only problem, however, the plight of some of my constituents would be less serious than it is. As Labour Members know, poverty leads to many other social ills, a fact repeatedly denied by the Conservative party when it was in Government.

Poverty leads directly to crime, drug abuse and poor health. As unemployment and poverty in Glasgow have reached new heights, so have crime, drug abuse, drug dealing, money laundering and violence. I served for three months—it felt much longer—on the Standing Committee that scrutinised the Proceeds of Crime Bill. Many of its provisions will tackle those who seek to capitalise on others' misery, but grinding poverty can be tackled only by giving people real jobs.

The House should be in no doubt about the seriousness of Glasgow's predicament. I referred earlier to Glasgow being Scotland's first city, but not its capital. I should prefer Glasgow to be the capital of Scotland, and I feel an early-day motion coming on. It may not be helpful if I go down that road now; others might follow me, and I can imagine my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy) making a strong case if we give him half a chance. That said, Glasgow is the first city of Scotland, capital or not, and Scotland cannot thrive while its largest city struggles. Just one example of the problems is the fact that 19 per cent. of the working age population claimed sickness or disability benefits in August 2000.

I do not want to dwell entirely on the negative side of my city. A great deal is happening that is positive, and I pay tribute to the members of Glasgow city council and their energetic leader, Councillor Charlie Gordon. A sense of optimism can be felt in a large part of the city. The council inherited a difficult situation when it was created from the ashes of Strathclyde regional council and Glasgow city council in 1996. The administration has shown imagination and creativity in addressing Glasgow's problems. The prospective wholesale transfer of the council's housing stock is a good example of that.

Notwithstanding the mess that resulted from the then Tory Government's utterly cynical reorganisation of local government in 1996, Governments of different political persuasion have contributed to a gradual, if fitful, regeneration of the city over the past 30 years. I welcome, as did the city council, the abolition by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in November of stamp duty on all residential and business property transactions worth between £60,000 and £150,000 in designated disadvantaged areas. Castlemilk in my constituency has benefited from that, and I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his imaginative initiative.

That said, I must agree with the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) that the benefits of the initiative may not be widely felt, at least in the short term. Glasgow city council concluded that

> "while Stamp Duty exemption may be seen as an additional incentive, considerations such as access to markets and suppliers and high quality transport links, are likely to prove of more fundamental significance".

Glasgow benefits from better transport links than anywhere else in Scotland. West-central Scotland has the largest commuter rail network in the UK outside London. Glasgow underground, operated by my former employer, Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive, carries 15 million passengers a year.

Even so, bus services, which are crucial to the mobility of any work force, remain the most popular form of public transport in Scotland. The Government have an opportunity to make a real difference and a major improvement in that respect. The Conservative Government's deregulation of the bus industry in 1986 was an unmitigated disaster for the travelling public, though I accept that it was not so for those who own shares in private bus companies. There is no evidence yet that quality partnerships—voluntary agreements between local authorities and private bus companies—can deliver the improvements in local bus services that are essential to the economic well-being of our country. That is a particular problem in Glasgow, where car ownership is well below the national average.

I hope that this Government—I cannot speak for the Scottish Executive—have not missed the opportunity to introduce quality contracts: exclusive franchises to give ordinary members of the public a proper, regular and dependable bus service. Glasgow is rare among post-industrial British cities in that it has inherited a decent road network, despite having depended on its rail network for many years. I welcome the building of the M74 motorway extension because of the number of jobs that it will create and because there is a missing link in the motorway network around Glasgow, which must be filled if we are to regenerate the city.

Computer models have shown that the chance of creating local jobs for local people beyond a three-mile radius decreases exponentially, so one of the keys to unlocking the potential for job creation in cities such as Glasgow—it was mentioned by the hon. Member for Poole—is derelict land reclamation. Writing in the "Oxford Review of Economic Policy", one of my constituents, the economist David Webster, points out that cities' brownfield land is

"the great asset that most areas of high unemployment have in abundance."

He refers to the success of Leeds, which, although it is known for its service industry, has done remarkably well in attracting manufacturing jobs. That is no accident. It is because of its proactive policy on land reclamation.

The key is bringing derelict land back into use, particularly contaminated land. Nine per cent. of Glasgow's total land area is currently vacant or derelict, yet unfortunately the importance of that issue has been downgraded by Scottish Enterprise in particular and by the Scottish Executive. It is crucial that we not only identify those parts of the city but invest enough money to rehabilitate them. That is the only way in which to get new companies to come into cities to set up factories and distribution centres that will employ local people.

As I have said, Scottish Enterprise is the main agency in that respect. It needs to push land reclamation to the top of the local economic agenda. I accept that it will involve serious amounts of money. I hope that the Government will see it as a serious enough problem to contribute that money.

I understand that there is a lack of time in this debate and I want to give colleagues a chance to speak. Not only am I extremely proud of the history of my city but I believe that it has a great future. Politicians leading it at city council and national levels are committed to it. We can look forward to a brighter economic future.

1.47 pm

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris) talked about the optimism for the future of his constituency. I want to say a few words about the experience of regeneration in my constituency and some of the principles on which that is based, and to underline the optimism there.

Gravesham has a proud history. As I take every opportunity to remind the House, Dickens lived there and Pocahontas died there. It has the oldest cast iron pier in the world and the oldest chartered market in the south of England. People used to come in their droves to Gravesham to promenade along the river or in Rosherville gardens, but for much of the previous century it went through a sadder time. The older heavy industries, such as paper manufacturing and cement quarrying, declined, unemployment rose, prosperity fell and the local environment suffered. During the 1980s and 1990s the area was hard hit by both rising unemployment and negative equity. Now things are changing. There is growing prosperity in that part of north Kent, in particular in Kent Thameside. Crime has fallen by 10 per cent. in the past year alone. It has become one of the most dynamic areas of the country.

Gravesham borough council has won beacon status for its work in town centre regeneration, which was based on several principles. The first is partnership, which has been mentioned by several speakers. As my hon. Friend the Minister underlined in her opening remarks—I apologise for missing the first few moments of her speech—regeneration used to be something that was done to local people and local communities; it was not done by them and with them. Before embarking on the regeneration of Gravesham town centre, Gravesham borough council and its partners in the private sector, the voluntary organisations and the public services undertook a major public consultation exercise to find out exactly what people wanted from their town centre and their borough.

The main message that came through was that local people are proud of their history and heritage, but ambitious for their future. Regeneration of Gravesham as a whole, and of the town centre in particular, was based on plans to revitalise that heritage but also to ensure that we have a living and vibrant community, with repopulation of the town centre to bring the whole borough back to life.

We are proud of our history, but we are not nostalgic. We shall ensure that we can build that vibrant and prosperous future. Many of the challenges that we have faced recently have stimulated our determination to do that—not least the fact that two of the largest shopping centres in Europe are close to our borders. Thurrock is just across the river, while the new Bluewater shopping centre—the largest in Europe—is five miles away along the A2.

In Gravesham, we could have rolled over and said, "Well that's the end of our town centre in Gravesend." The competition with our retailers could have been seen as a threat: we saw it as an opportunity. Every year, 30 million people visit Bluewater, but the 1,750 people who work in the complex provide the mechanism for bringing regeneration and spending power into the borough.

We have worked in partnership, not only locally with the private, voluntary and public sectors in Gravesham, but with those key strategic elements that are so important in the Government's approach to regeneration. We are making sure that we build a future that meets the needs of local communities and local people.

We are not talking only about economic regeneration. The second important principle is social regeneration. In the past, regeneration too often left local communities and local people behind. Sustainable development requires the benefits to be shared throughout the community.

One of the reasons that my constituency—like those of many Members on both sides of the House—has experienced growing prosperity is due to the range of national policies that helped to ensure that the poorer sections of the community were able to share in that general rising prosperity. The national minimum wage, the working families tax credit, the new deal and the new tax credits that we debated yesterday all ensure not only that the proceeds of regeneration are more fairly shared,

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but that, due to the extra spending power of those sections of the community, regeneration itself becomes a driving force for sustainable economic renewal.

Economic, social and environmental regeneration are all important. Lord Rogers pointed out that

"urban policies are not just about bricks and mortar, but about improving the prosperity and quality of life for the people who live there".

I warmly welcome the Government's emphasis on ensuring that, wherever possible, new housing developments are on brownfield sites and we avoid developments on greenfield sites. In my constituency—as in Glasgow—we have more than enough brownfield sites for those developments. By using town centre sites for social housing and for housing for our much-needed key workers we can revitalise the town centre while ensuring that we do not eat further into greenfield sites and thus into the quality of life of people in the community as a whole.

My constituency is a mixed rural and urban community. It is mainly urban, but there are some important rural parts and many attractive villages. We need to preserve the quality of the rural areas, for both parts of the community. As many hon. Members have said, we must ensure that, in debate on this subject, we talk about rural as well as urban regeneration. There is not a trade-off between those two. To bring about sustainable regeneration, they must go hand in hand.

We also need to improve the quality of the environment and the quality of life for those living in urban areas, which is why schemes such as home zones are so important. I am pleased that a £400,000 home zone project was recently announced for one of the most deprived parts of my constituency, in Denton and the Northcourt estate. It will mean environmental improvement, better play areas, traffic calming and a general improvement in the quality of life for people living in that area.

Finally, as other hon. Members have suggested, regeneration is also about the quality of public services. Transport, as we all know, is important. One of the driving forces of regeneration in my part of the country will of course be the channel tunnel rail link. Its Ebbsfleet station, which will be in my constituency, will be a major source of economic dynamism in the years ahead. Local transport projects such as fast track will ensure that we have accessible and affordable transport links to draw together the different parts of Kent Thameside and to ensure that everyone can share in prosperity.

Regeneration is also about other forms of public services, such as the health service. Many hon. Members have spoken about education. Regeneration is about the healthy living centre that we are about to establish, the new community hospital that we are in the process of building, and the new medical centre. All these things are a way of ensuring that regeneration has a real impact on the quality of people's lives.

With the optimism that I spoke about at the start of my speech, we can look forward in our part of Kent—previously a deprived area—to real dynamism, growth and prosperity in the years ahead, and a real improvement in the quality of people's lives, assisted by £14 million of European Union urban funding. We will ensure that that funding is spent in such a way that it meets the needs of local people and communities, and ensures regeneration not only of the economy but of the environment and the community.

1.57 pm

Jon Cruddas (Dagenham): Today's discussion covers important territory in terms of the needs of the people whom I represent in Dagenham. I want to examine the issues with reference both to my constituency and developments across east London.

Let us consider some of the basic characteristics of the community that I represent. It is the lowest-wage economy in Greater London and one of the most deprived boroughs in the capital. Adult numeracy is the second lowest in the country, literacy the fourth lowest. The number of residents with higher educational qualifications is the lowest in the country. Heart and lung disease, infant mortality and life expectancy are among the worst in the capital. Fear of crime dominates all community surveys. Police numbers are chronically low.

Questions surrounding public services cannot be separated from issues of regeneration. The national public services strategy is starting to have an effect locally. The borough has some of the most improved schools in the country. The early-years agenda has resulted in major investments. A new private finance initiative hospital in Romford is expected to open in 2005. Seventy-nine new police officers are to enter the borough in the next 18 months. Overall we are starting to witness change, yet the needs of the community are immense.

However, the real challenges in east London are more profound. The analysis contained in the London development agency's London plan shows that for 30 years after the second world war, business and populations emigrated from London through new town development. By 1983, London's population had dropped by some 1.2 million. What followed was a fall in housebuilding and an abandonment of strategic planning in London. Therefore, as London developed rapidly over the past 20 years, it was ill prepared to handle growth in terms of strategic guidance, infrastructure, housing, transport and public services.

The population is set to grow by another 1 million over the next 10 to 15 years, and the London plan sets out two options: either we witness a new period of externalisation out of London or we accept that economic growth and create an adequate infrastructure to enable the city to achieve sustainable development. The plan proposes the latter.

Huge issues are thrown up by that conclusion. How do we handle some 500,000 extra households over the next 15 years? Where is the brownfield development? Where do we physically build the houses? Where are these new communities employed? What are the consequences for education, health and transport?

When we consider how London will strategically manage those changes, we see that all roads lead east. Dagenham sits at the centre of the sub-region that will have to accommodate much of that growth—the Thames gateway. East London is an exciting place to be at the moment. In terms of London's economic development, the centre of gravity is moving eastwards. The Mayor talks of shifting priorities from west to east and of building a new city to the east.

In Dagenham, the sheer scale of brownfield land will lead to massive development in the next 10 years. For example, one site in the borough, Barking Reach, will handle some 6,000 new homes—a population of 12,000 to 15,000 people. To the south of the borough, including in parts of Beckton, we have a regeneration site the size of Islington. That has huge implications for public services in the borough. The new communities will require schools and health care, and they will have to be policed. Many of the people who will live in these new communities will be public sector workers. They must be transported into and throughout the city. They cannot just start their cars and turn left on to the A13.

The proposed crossrail, for example, should not just shuttle commuters in and out of London; it must link new communities in London with key job generation sites. For example, it is estimated that some 40,000 people will be employed in the Royal Docks and 100,000 in Canary Wharf in 10 years. That is only part of the regeneration agenda. So far I have mentioned housing, public services and managing growth in this city. We also have to rebuild the manufacturing and economic centre of east London.

As I have said, Dagenham sits at the centre of the Thames gateway—an increasingly integrated area covering 13 boroughs and 2 million people in some of the most deprived areas in the country. Historically, because of the location of the Ford Motor Company, Dagenham has been the centre of manufacturing for east London. We must, and we are, rebuilding that, in partnership with the Government, the devolved agencies and local authorities.

On 20 February, the last Fiesta will roll off the line in Dagenham—the end of car assembly in the area. That will be a sad day. However, as one door shuts another opens—soon, a new high technology engine manufacturing plant will be built. It will be one of the most modern manufacturing facilities in Europe. Annual engine production will rise to about 900,000 units by 2004. Car assembly will end, but more than 5,000 people will still be employed on the Dagenham estate. It will continue to be London's largest industrial centre and will become Europe's premium manufacturing facility for diesel technology.

In addition, a new supplier park will be created in Dagenham, on London development agency land, to support that new diesel facility. That will attract small and medium-sized, high-tech businesses, on top of which a new centre for manufacturing excellence on the Ford estate will provide education and training, from basic skills right through to advanced postgraduate degrees for local people.

To rebuild east London's manufacturing base, we need more infrastructure. The scarcity of river crossings over the east Thames remains a major impediment to successful economic regeneration. The proposed package of three new river crossings will have a major impact, by creating employment and development opportunities.

The channel tunnel rail link, which will go underground in Dagenham, is vital if international and domestic connections to London and the south-east are to be created and major hubs for new investment established. I hope that the docklands light railway will be extended into the borough, linking it to the major job generation sites to the north of the Thames.

Overall, we are engaged in a genuinely radical attempt to confront deprivation and boost public services in this city and this country. The task that faces us in London is massive—to build a new city with a new economic centre to the east, with the infrastructure and services needed to build strong communities. That will involve the Government working hand in hand with the devolved agencies to forge an agenda for change that will materially alter the lives of the people whom I represent.

The process cannot descend into a financial dogfight, based on simplistic assumptions of the north-south divide, while ignoring the economic outflows from London to the rest of the United Kingdom. The people whom I represent deserve mature political governance by our national figures and the devolved agencies. That should be based on a clear understanding of the economic and social problems that confront London, not on a partial analysis of its economic prosperity forged in the Westminster beltway.

There are some promising signs. For example, the strategic partnership in the DTLR for the Thames gateway is creatively confronting some of those issues. This is a key turning point for the Government and London. All the participants should rise to the challenges that will be produced, and I welcome the opportunity to contribute today.

2.4 pm

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Jon Cruddas), who cut short his remarks, and other hon. Members for the opportunity to take part in this debate.

Regeneration in Preston requires both public and private finance along with a vision of economic development underpinned by major employment prospects, educational and skills opportunities, community development and partnership with the local authority. I pay tribute to Preston borough council—under the stewardship of its leader, Councillor Ian Hall, and the portfolio holder for regeneration, Councillor Veronica Afrin—and to the businesses, voluntary groups and local communities that have an important role to play in the regeneration process.

Preston sees its future economic growth coming from three main sources. The first is its establishment as the major regional shopping centre for the north-west outside the Manchester and Liverpool conurbations. The Tithbarn project will bring in £300 million of private investment to Preston for the development of shopping facilities and the town centre generally. The second is as the tertiary education centre for the sub-region, and the third is the establishment of the town as a centre for art, culture and design.

Preston's assets include a relatively young and expanding population, its role as an access gateway into much of the sub-region and region, and the fact that it is a private and public decision-making and administrative centre and a seat of learning that is seeking to develop its expertise in the technologies of the future and to take advantage of its locational attributes. Taken together, those assets contribute to the development of a competitive business environment and of an area that is potentially attractive to investors in the high value-added, knowledge-based sectors of the economy that are at the centre of the regional economic strategy as well as national economic policy.

Economic development and regeneration are key aspirations of the local Preston partnership. To achieve long-term and effective regeneration, it is necessary to

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recognise and minimise the constraints affecting economic development. The constraints include the increasing polarisation of growth in the large cities and towns. Such growth is due in part to the huge improvement in the facilities in, and the environment of, major town centres; the economic growth that acts as a magnate for the young professional and entrepreneur; the concentration of the "ideas" culture in the cities and towns; and the cosmopolitan lifestyle now available because of the rapid growth of city centre and residential areas. If those trends continue unabated, there will be a growing population and employment shift to the regional cities and that will result in the economic, social and cultural decline of their urban hinterlands.

If regional towns such as Preston are to prosper in the new century, they need to develop into micro-cities that incorporate many of the benefits of the mega-city and blend them with the unique feature of a large town. The economic regeneration of Preston in the years up to the next Preston guild in 2012 will take place in an unprecedented period of organisational change and new initiatives. The Northwest development agency's regional prospectus of October 2001 said:

> "The Northwest Development Agency, with an office based in Preston, places the town as one of the key hubs of North West development. Regeneration is a key element of NWDA's activities."

The Government, through their single regeneration budget funding and neighbourhood renewal strategy, support and will continue to support organisations throughout the community. Areas of Preston receiving significant amounts of support are Fishwick, Ribbleton, Deepdale, St. Mathew's, Brookfield, Avenham and Central wards.

An example of an agency in Preston working towards regeneration is the Avenquest community regeneration trust, the annual general meeting of which I shall attend next week on Thursday 14 February. It is a community-led organisation that is working towards the economic and social regeneration of one of the most deprived areas in the north-west, with many poor and deprived white and ethnic minority residents. The trust is developing a range of programmes, partnerships and initiatives to tackle deprivation and to build the capacity of individuals, households and communities to participate effectively in, and to benefit from, the process of regeneration.

The trust is working with Avenham ward residents to create opportunities and pathways away from poverty and disadvantage and into jobs, education and training. The trust has been in existence for almost two years and it has made significant progress. The focus of current activity is to target those communities that have not been able to access mainstream opportunities. The goals are: creating employment, promoting community education and developing training opportunities. The chief purpose of the trust is to attack the root causes of poverty by meeting the problems of unemployment and providing assistance and support to those who seek employment, together with the advancement of education, training or re-training and the provision of work experience.

The trust works in the community by providing drop-in facilities in information and communications technology, arts activities, volunteer activities, informal education, support activities and enabling opportunities. Key projects include local labour in construction, the health for all partnership, the new Avenham centre, community access to ICT and a community resource room. Success is coming from partnerships that are committed to new ways of working with different communities. The trust's future priorities are job creation and job growth; developing training opportunities; working with communities and agencies; developing volunteers and activities; becoming financially self-sufficient; and continuing to be community-based and accountable.

In addition, Preston borough council has developed a policy in pursuit of establishing Preston town centre as an economic development zone. The projects and information compiled for the bid will act as guiding messages for a 10-year action plan, whether the EDZ application is successful or not. The improved wealth shown by improvements in gross domestic product will be brought about only by the growing ambitions of existing and new start-ups and inward investing companies. The competitiveness of the Greater Preston economy depends on the concerted and co-ordinated actions of the local partners, as well as a city region that both companies and residents are proud to belong to and represent as ambassadors.

Preston is in the process of developing and consulting on targets for regeneration. Suggested starting points for discussion with partners are improvement of GDP from £9,000 to £18,000 a year over the period of the strategy; unemployment in the priority 2 area to be reduced from 1,700 to under 1,000; workspace provision to be improved by 400 workspace units; the number of creative businesses in the Preston area to increase by an agreed amount; museum visitors to increase over a fixed period by a certain amount; transport improvements to increase non-car movements by a target amount; graduate retention measures; and an inward investment measure. Those are the targets of an ambitious town hopefully, one day soon, to become a city and the third major conurbation in the north-west after Manchester and Liverpool.

Preston is a thriving town and the pockets of severe deprivation will be dealt with by the measures that I have outlined. I look forward to a bright future for that proud town.

2.12 pm

Ms Keeble: With the leave of the House, I will respond to the debate.

We have heard a wide range of speeches in what has been an important and excellent debate that highlighted the policies and initiatives that the Government are using to give hope to millions. Hon. Members also set out the difficult issues with which we have to grapple as we regenerate different regions and communities. For many, protection against poverty is created by a strong and stable economy, which the Government have produced through careful economic management. Our regeneration policies will ensure that all regions and local communities benefit from that sound economy. What a contrast that is to previous policies that sometimes dealt with the symptoms but not the causes of poverty and economic disadvantage.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Daisley) made a welcome and outstanding maiden speech. I pay tribute to his work as a council leader in which he had to deal with some of the difficult issues that have been raised today. That role will have given him an insight into the needs of disadvantaged communities and the way in which we can regenerate them.

My hon. Friend spoke in particular of health and its role in regeneration. I agree that that is often overlooked, but the Government have identified it as a key policy. Our substantial efforts have included providing £100,000 to Hyndburn as part of the neighbourhood renewal fund to tackle the high level of coronary heart disease in that community. It is fundamental that sound health is the basis for a stable community and a sound economy. The Labour party has always supported that approach. That is why we set up the national health service.

My hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) was one of a number of Members who set out the case for London. London Members have been outstanding in their advocacy on behalf of their city. My hon. Friend showed the breadth of the measures that have been taken by the Government to tackle disadvantage—for example, sure start and the new deal. There are many other such programmes. She raised two specific points about the needs index, one being about crime. Currently, we have a lack of standardised data, but the neighbourhood renewal unit is working on that with the Home Office.

My hon. Friend also mentioned mobility. Sometimes mobility can be difficult to interpret. A lack of mobility can be a symptom of people being trapped in a cycle of poverty. She is right to say that the needs of London are different from those elsewhere. All Members who have contributed to the debate have spoken about the needs of their communities. The Government recognise that different communities have different needs. That is why we have proposed a strategy that ensures that particular needs are recognised and met.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge (Ms Shipley) spoke eloquently about the economic changes in the area that she represents, and the good results that are being achieved by partnership working. I assure her that the Government have a ministerial design group. We also have good practice guides to reinforce the important role that good-quality design has to play in regeneration. There are some outstanding examples, such as the library in Peckham, the art gallery in Walsall, public art in Birmingham, the new school on the Greenwich peninsula and some demonstration housing projects in Liverpool. These examples underpin the role of good design.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith and Fulham (Mr. Coleman) spoke of the excellent work that is being undertaken by the new deal for communities. He underlined the scale of disadvantage in London.

I pay tribute to the work that a number of London boroughs have done through imaginative and innovative regeneration policies and programmes. In many respects, they have pioneered some of the work in turning around disadvantaged areas. They have taken on some of the macro problems of which my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Jon Cruddas) spoke, as well as some small-scale schemes that will turn their areas around.

My hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Wright) spoke of the impact of the education action zones, sure start and European money. He demonstrated that there are a plethora of schemes, and that can itself be a problem. I shall come to that later. These schemes are designed to turn difficult areas around.

The Government recognise the problems of some seaside towns. I pay tribute to the work that my hon. Friend and other Members who represent seaside towns are undertaking to find solutions to some of the problems that affect their constituencies.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) made a typically eloquent speech. She rightly identified the need for community involvement. Her chairing of her local partnership for the new deal for communities is well recognised as a major factor in its success.

My hon. Friend talked about housing and its role in regeneration. She will know that today a conference is sitting that is considering the housing strategy for London. I am sure that there will be a lively and informative debate. I hope it will deal with some of the strategic needs for housing in the capital.

My hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Phil Hope), who is my close parliamentary neighbour, spoke of the success of Government strategies. He was one of several Members who identified the importance of transport for regeneration. His constituency did well in the rural bus challenge. Work is continuing to find solutions to the transport needs of the town.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris) outlined developments north of the border where a social justice strategy prioritises the elimination of child poverty and the establishment of full employment. Regeneration work in Scotland is being undertaken by the new housing and regeneration agency, which emphasises, among other issues, the partnership working that we have supported so strongly in London.

I assure my hon. Friend that local authorities can introduce quality contracts. The Government recognise the importance of local transport, particularly bus transport, to regeneration, combating social exclusion and giving people access to jobs. That is one reason why we have put money into the rural and urban bus challenges, which have produced imaginative schemes.

We have also provided financial incentives for land decontamination, an important issue that was also raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham, and one that is crucial for successful brownfield site development.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond) gave a good example from his own constituency of the way in which town centre development can act as a driver for regeneration. He gave a careful analysis of the role played by work undertaken in his locality in improving the whole borough. It is well recognised that retail-led regeneration can be very effective. That is one reason behind the proposals for business improvement districts, which we hope will be on stream by 2004 as they require primary legislation. In some areas people are already building partnerships and introducing measures that will pave the way for successful business improvement districts.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham referred to the grim statistics of failure and underlined the need for mainstream services to address those disadvantages, setting out the enormous scale of the task of regenerating east London. Essentially, he made the case for the regional dimension in economic development and pointed out that east London represents a major development project. That has been well recognised by the Government—less so by the Conservative party—through

[Ms Keeble]

the establishment of the regional development agencies and the careful work that is being undertaken in relation to the development of the Thames gateway. We recognise the importance of providing a sound transport infrastructure.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The Minister referred to a plethora of schemes relating to regeneration. Is she therefore admitting that there are too many schemes; and if so, will she undertake to study the whole regeneration process and simplify it?

Ms Keeble: I shall address that in my response to the points raised by the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms). There is an issue about the number of schemes. The hon. Gentleman will have noticed that in my opening speech I did not refer to them all.

My hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) referred to the important development of the regional economy and gave an effective rationale for and defence of the regional development agencies and the important role that they can play in partnership with local authorities and the private sector.

The hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) said that poverty did not begin in 1979 and end in 1997 and of course he is right. We recognise that there is still too much poverty in Britain today and it is one of our primary aims to eliminate child poverty in particular. Our argument with the Conservatives is that when they were in government their policies contributed to the distress of the impoverished communities and failed to put in place policies that tackled the structural inequalities in our society. They failed to do that because it was not a priority for them, but it is a priority for us.

In 1979, 10 per cent. of children lived in households with below half the average income, and in 1994-95 that had risen to almost a third.

Mr. Gray: Why are Labour's policies not working?

Ms Keeble: There are no quick fixes to regenerating communities, eliminating poverty or dealing with the issues that my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham raised. We have set a 10 or 20-year target, because we recognise that it will take more than a generation to end the cycle of disadvantage that has blighted the lives of so many people and communities.

Mr. Gray: Of course more households had less than half the average wage in 1994-95 than in 1979. That is because the average wage became so much higher. More people had more money then than they have ever had under Labour.

Ms Keeble: All the agencies that deal with child poverty and similar issues recognise that by the end of 18 years of Conservative government the proportion of children growing up in poverty was an absolute scandal. That has been well recognised by this Government, and we are determined to end it.

Virtually all the policies proposed by the hon. Member for Cotswold are already in place: fiscal incentives for regeneration; use of the planning system to prioritise redevelopment of brownfield sites; involving the business community; and creating partnerships. We are very much committed to those policies. Our argument with the docklands and UDC model is not that it locked businesses in—which of course it did—but that it locked the communities out.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) talked about rural crime and disadvantage, which indeed we recognise. Throughout my opening speech, I stressed the fact that we do not say that disadvantage is the exclusive preserve of the towns and cities. It can have a terrible impact on the lives of people in rural communities, too. Our policies are designed, through the role of local partnerships and the assessment of local needs, to ensure that the needs of all disadvantaged communities are properly met.

The hon. Gentleman also outlined the impact of low demand. He was right to bring up the appalling scale of low demand and the tragedy of all those empty properties. All sectors of housing are affected in similar ways by low demand, be they housing association, council or private sector. We are currently considering proposals for a market renewal fund to deal with those issues. We are also considering targeting. We have national minimum floor standards but we are also trying to ensure that communities assess and meet their own needs.

The hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) talked about the need to get the built environment right. He is absolutely right about that, although we may disagree on the details. We are actively pursuing the urban renaissance. The Rogers report recommendations have been accepted and are being implemented.

The hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) also spoke about rural poverty. I remind him that we have provided extra funding for rural housing and transport and dealt carefully with issues of rural planning.

The hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) highlighted the problems of homelessness. We have set up a homelessness directorate.

I am sorry that I missed the speech of the hon. Member for Poole, who spoke about the plethora of schemes. We are working to simplify the current range of schemes and to ensure that they are better known and that the communities can get involved.

To the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) I would say that we have also recognised the importance of education in regeneration and made it one of our key targets.

It is by results on the ground that our strategy to transform our poorest neighbourhoods must be judged. We know that there is still a lot to do. We believe that our strategy and our goals are right and that, working in partnership with our poorest communities, we can defeat poverty and regenerate the most disadvantaged areas of this country.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Stoke Mandeville Hospital

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the future of Stoke Mandeville hospital in my constituency. The Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears)—who I am delighted to see in her place—will know that Stoke Mandeville has a national and international reputation, the latter deriving in particular from the record of its famous spinal injuries unit.

But to my constituents, it is, above all, their local hospital; the district general hospital on which they rely for their treatment and that of their families. I should declare a personal, as well as a constituency interest, as my family use Stoke Mandeville, although I have now reached that stage of family life when my visits are no longer to the maternity unit but more to the accident and emergency and paediatric units.

The hospital employs more than 2,000 staff, making it one of the biggest employers in my constituency and in Buckinghamshire as a whole. I want to spend most of my speech talking about the proposals for the future redevelopment of Stoke Mandeville hospital, but first I want to refer briefly to some serious allegations made in *The Observer* on 27 January.

Much of that article dealt with matters that were to do with the employment of individual doctors or with the removal of previous executives and directors of the trust. Those matters either still are, or have recently been, the subject of disciplinary proceedings or an industrial tribunal. I do not think that it would be right for me to comment on those in any detail now. The point is that, as the Under-Secretary will know, the article made public and serious allegations that patient safety within the accident and emergency unit was at risk.

The Under-Secretary will know that I have received assurances from the trust management that those allegations have been thoroughly investigated and that no evidence has been found to suggest that patients are at risk. I should be grateful for her assurance this afternoon that the Department is also satisfied that everything possible has been done to give patients confidence that they will continue to be well treated in the accident and emergency unit.

I wish to refer to the rebuilding project for Stoke Mandeville, something with which I feel I have been living ever since I was first elected to the House a decade ago. Stoke Mandeville is renowned, but it still relies, in part, on isolation units that were built in the 1940s. The hospital as a whole occupies a ramshackle complex of buildings spread out over a vast site. Patients and staff often have to walk—or, in the case of some patients, be transported—long distances between one unit and another. Inevitably, this means that the quality of treatment is not what one would expect in a modern 21st century hospital, despite all the professionalism and efforts of the staff, to whom I am most willing to pay tribute.

The site also creates economic inefficiency because the costs of heating, cleaning and maintaining such a ramshackle spread of buildings add to the unit costs of the treatments provided by the hospital. That inevitably has an impact on the health care that the hospital can offer to local people within the money allocated to it. The present plan, which is slowly moving forward, is for a £25 million redevelopment to include new medical and paediatric wards, a day procedures unit, an admissions ward and assessment unit and the refurbishment of other trust buildings. The rebuilding is long overdue.

There has been some new building on the Stoke Mandeville site, under this Government and their predecessor, but the current plan for major redevelopment has been subject, over the last decade, to repeated delays, causing increasing frustration to staff and the wider local community. It might be helpful for me to sketch in brief the chronology of the story during my time as Member of Parliament for Aylesbury.

As far back as 27 June 1994, the Department of Health said that the business case for a Treasury-funded scheme for Stoke Mandeville's redevelopment had Government approval. A written answer in 6 June 1995 informed me that the scheme

> "has received full business case approval."—*[Official Report*, 6 June 1995; Vol. 261, c. 34W.]

Yet in the late summer of 1995, the trust was informed that the Treasury scheme had to be tested against a PFI alternative. By October of that year, the trust was informed that no Treasury money could be forthcoming, and that it must look to a PFI scheme or to nothing.

In 1996, the first PFI consortium collapsed and the project was re-advertised. By the summer of 1997, the trust had reconstituted its bid and was ready to proceed to preferred bidder status with the second consortium. At that stage, of course, a new Government were elected, who decided to put all PFI schemes on hold, at least temporarily, pending a reassessment. After a period of reassessment, 12 were allowed to proceed as a first tranche, but Stoke Mandeville's scheme was not included.

In 1998, when I last secured an Adjournment debate on this topic, Stoke Mandeville was allowed to advertise for the third time for a PFI partner. By March 2001, the trust's annual report was able to say:

> "Construction of the new facilities is due to begin in 2002 and will take two years to complete."

Last autumn, however, the Government picked Stoke Mandeville as one of three pilot projects for the new policy of contracting out the management of ancillary staff at acute hospitals. That has led to yet another delay.

The trust hopes to move to the next stage in March, but the Minister needs to understand that, in the light of events under Governments of both major political parties—I am being non-partisan—there is considerable cynicism among the general public, and among staff and the wider medical community in Buckinghamshire in particular, as to whether this much-needed and much-wanted redevelopment will ever take place. A great deal of money has been spent, but to little conspicuous purpose. About £3.5 million was spent on new internal roads and utilities, and on a brand-new roundabout outside the hospital that is ready to serve the new buildings, for which we are still waiting. In the past eight to 10 years, a considerable sum must also have been spent on consultancy fees, let alone on trust management time, as four different schemes were worked through.

Inevitably, those events have demoralised the hospital's doctors and nurses. General practitioners have told me that, in their view, there is a hidden agenda to run down

[Mr. David Lidington]

Stoke Mandeville and make it little more than a cottage hospital—an outpost of either Wycombe general hospital or one of the Oxford hospitals. Despite repeated assurances from the health authority and the NHS regional executive that that is not their agenda, I must tell the Minister that such assurances are received with scepticism because of what has happened in the past 10 years.

To raise morale locally, the bulldozers need to be on-site as soon as possible, so that reconstruction can get under way. I hope that the Minister can assure me that that will happen soon and that the Government do indeed treat the redevelopment of Stoke Mandeville as a priority. I hope, too, that she can offer a time scale, so that my constituents will know when work on the site will begin and when the new services will be completed and in operation, providing modern health care for the people of Buckinghamshire.

Local concern has also been aroused by the way in which the goalposts for the redevelopment scheme have been shifted from time to time to take account of real changes in the administration and organisation of health care, or in the development of clinical practice. I hope that the Minister will take account in her response of some of the issues that continue to cause worry.

One is the future nature of the relationship between the Stoke Mandeville hospital and Wycombe general hospital, which is part of the South Buckinghamshire NHS trust. A review of acute services in mid-Buckinghamshire is being carried out at the moment, and I understand the clinical reasons for that, including the arguments being put forward by the royal colleges, and the new deal on junior doctors' hours. It is right to examine how services are provided and what the correct configuration should be over the next 20 or 30 years. We must not be hidebound by the pattern of provision that was best in the past.

I hope, however, that the Minister will be able to assure me that the review and the pending decision about a possible merger between the trusts will not cause any further delay to the redevelopment at Stoke. I also hope that she will be able completely to deny the suggestion that these reviews and discussions conceal a secret agenda to move acute services away from Stoke and to concentrate them in High Wycombe because, locally, some people believe that that is what is going to happen.

I hope that the Minister will also tell me where the Government stand on a possible merger between the two trusts. My understanding is that a decision has been on the Secretary of State's desk for two or three months now as to whether to go out to public consultation over a trust merger, and I would be interested to know the Government's view on that proposal.

The second cause for concern relates to the creation of the new strategic health authorities and the consequent abolition of Buckinghamshire health authority. I am worried that the new SHA might wish to go back to square one, to re-examine anew the case for Stoke Mandeville's redevelopment, and to review acute services provision on a sub-regional Thames Valley basis, rather than accepting the agenda as it has developed over the last decade. I hope the Minister will say that that is not the case, and that the SHA, when it comes into being, will remain committed to a good district general hospital in Aylesbury, and give its full backing to the Stoke Mandeville redevelopment plan.

I want to say something about the financial resources available for health services at Stoke Mandeville and in Buckinghamshire generally. I also want to question the Minister about the number of beds provided for in the current redevelopment plan for Stoke Mandeville. A recent written answer that I received from the Minister, confirmed that Buckinghamshire will still get some £12.2 million less in the forthcoming financial year than the Government's formula—the so-called weighted capitation formula—suggests that the county ought to receive from the NHS pot. That is a continuing source of concern and frustration locally. I understand that the Government are now considering replacing the weighted capitation system altogether. I would like to hope that that means that our deficit will not simply be brushed aside and forgotten, and that the problem of Buckinghamshire getting less than the Government's formula suggests it should receive will be addressed by the funding reforms.

On bed provision, Buckinghamshire health authority's consultation document published in 1998 envisaged that redevelopment would mean a fall in the number of acute beds from 378 to 320, and a fall in the number of spinal beds from 115 to 108. Again, I acknowledge that there are clinical reasons for different judgments about bed numbers being appropriate now, compared with 20 or 30 years ago. Advances in day surgery and improvements in anaesthetics are two obvious reasons.

Against that, we must balance the increased demand that will be placed on Stoke Mandeville by the major increase in the local population, particularly in the town of Aylesbury, envisaged in the local plan. We are looking at the prospect of the population of Aylesbury increasing by about one third over the next 10 years or so. Will the new-look Stoke Mandeville have adequate bed capacity under present plans to deal with those numbers of people, or will the Government review the situation?

The need for a review is made even more marked by the conspicuous pressure on beds. I know from a constituency case that on one day at least this week, Stoke Mandeville hospital was on divert. Patients were being sent to Wycombe general, which was itself on red alert and finding it difficult to accommodate all the patients whom general practitioners wished to refer there. I have been told of at least one weekend last month when Oxford was diverting to Milton Keynes, Milton Keynes was diverting in part to Stoke Mandeville, which was in part diverting to Wycombe general, which again had to close its doors to some additional patients whom doctors wished to refer there. There is great strain on accident and emergency provision, and I hope that the Government will examine the issue, particularly in the context of Stoke Mandeville, but also in the sub-regional context.

I hope that the Minister will be able to give my constituents cause for hope and optimism. For example, a large chunk of the Stoke Mandeville site is in the ownership of the Secretary of State and designated for housing development. I hope that at least some of the capital receipts that the Department will gain might be used for the provision of services to my constituents.

Above all, I go back to the previous debate on this subject on 29 January 1998. It may be some consolation to the Minister to know that the junior Minister who had the dubious privilege of replying to me at the time is now Secretary of State for Health. The right hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) said then:

> "Stoke Mandeville is a hospital with a bright future. It has the strong support of its local population and of the Government."—[*Official Report*, 29 January 1998; Vol. 305, c. 618.]

The hospital still has the very strong support of the local population in and around Aylesbury. I hope that the Minister will be able to reassure me that it still has her support and that of the Government.

2.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I congratulate the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) on securing the debate. It is a matter of considerable importance to him, to other Members and, most importantly, to the people of Buckinghamshire. I also thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of the issues that he would be raising. That always makes it easier to have a more focused debate. I hope that it will provide his constituents with reassurance, hope and optimism, and confirm to them the original comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) that Stoke Mandeville hospital has a bright future.

The hon. Gentleman has a keen interest in the hospital. He is, quite rightly, eager to ensure that the highest possible standards of health care services are secured for his constituents. I assure him that the Government are committed to providing high-quality services for everyone, no matter where they live.

More than 35,000 patients were admitted to Stoke Mandeville hospital last year, 11,000 of whom were emergency cases. Some 39,000 patients attended the accident and emergency department and 76 per cent. of those were seen in less than four hours. More than 200,000 patients were seen in out-patient appointments last year, with 93 per cent. seen in less than 30 minutes. Those figures reflect the nature of Stoke Mandeville as a typically busy and hard-working hospital.

The future of the hospital has been the subject of extensive debate. as the hon. Gentleman said. I am delighted to put on record the Government's plans for the future, not just of Stoke Mandeville but of acute services across the sub-regional area.

On the private finance initiative scheme, I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that contracts will be signed later this year and that building works will commence either late this year or very early next year. I understand that the building works will take some two years to complete, so the new facilities for local people should operate from 2005 if everything goes smoothly and according to plan. That perhaps offers a firmer timetable than it has been possible to give before. I am also delighted to say that the advent of the new strategic health authority will not take us back to square one. Planning is well under way, and the scheme is much wanted by local people.

Plans for services are still subject to consultation, and I want to ensure that no comments that I make can be taken to pre-judge that consultation, on which a decision will be taken shortly. Buckinghamshire health authority and the Stoke Mandeville and South Buckinghamshire NHS trusts have proposed that the two trusts should merge. Those who support the merger have advanced good reasons for it. First, they refer to the need to protect and develop clinical services at the two trusts. Hospitals, such as Stoke Mandeville, that serve relatively small populations may find it increasingly difficult to meet standards set by the royal colleges, as the hon. Gentleman said. It is felt that a merger would give the successor organisation more scope to meet and maintain those standards so that local people may be assured that they will receive excellent services.

Secondly, there can be no doubt that maintaining and developing high standards depends crucially on the recruitment and retention of staff with the right skills. As the hon. Gentleman is no doubt aware, skilled NHS staff are a scarce resource, particularly in the south of England. There is evidence that more people are likely to be attracted to organisations that offer personal opportunities for professional development. The feeling that they are participating in the development of excellent clinical services is a real draw for staff. New staff need enough variety and experience to allow them to develop their potential to play a key part in providing good services in future. Larger organisations sometimes find it easier to recruit and develop staff than small organisations that may find it difficult to offer the same development opportunities. That is not the case in every organisation; some excellent smaller organisations take the trouble to develop their staff, but it is usually true that if there is more going on, there are more opportunities for staff.

Technology is developing at an incredible rate. New drugs, therapies and equipment are being used, and that means more training and specialisation for the staff involved. Increasing specialisation can create problems for smaller hospitals that work in isolation. Specialist units need a regular stream of patients to keep staff skills at a high level.

It has been suggested that a merger could maximise the efficient use of resources. I understand the parties involved to mean that having two trusts ties up significant resources in running parallel management structures and processes. A merger could offer the opportunity to reduce those costs, and any consequent saving could be reinvested in direct patient care, which is a matter of concern to us all.

I reassure local people that the proposal relates only to management arrangements, not changes in clinical service provision. The three hospitals—Amersham, Stoke Mandeville and Wycombe—will continue to provide the same range of high-quality services that are now available. I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that there is certainly no question of a secret agenda or conspiracy to take away services. The proposal has to do with building up local services and acknowledging both that there are pressures on capacity and that people in Aylesbury are entitled to a high-quality national health service. The proposal would not affect the configuration of primary care services. Over the next few years, primary care will become increasingly significant in the configuration of health services in every area.

I reassure the hon. Gentleman with regard to bed numbers in the private finance initiative scheme. He mentioned the review of the local authority plan. Originally it was predicted that there would a growth in population of 3 per cent. over the next six years. I understand that the prediction now is that Aylesbury's population will grow by 10 per cent. but that there will be a corresponding 10 per cent. drop in the population of the rest of Buckinghamshire. Therefore, there is an increase in the population not of Buckinghamshire overall but of parts of it.

[Ms Hazel Blears]

The proposals are still under discussion at local authority level, but clearly Stoke Mandeville is considering their impact and remodelling its plans within the context of the whole of Buckinghamshire. The outcome of the remodelling will be reflected in the full business case. If necessary, plans can be adjusted.

Where there are significant changes in capacity, it is sensible and logical to look at that. Perhaps one reason why there is such strain on many NHS organisations is that planning in previous years was not as closely aligned as it should have been. Getting the right beds in the right place at the right time, with the right number of staff to give people appropriate treatment, is the biggest challenge that all of us face.

I am pleased to deal with the investment issues that the hon. Gentleman raised. Investment in Stoke Mandeville has been considerable in the past few years. The trust has had an extra £302,000 to increase capacity, some of which is to provide 15 extra beds in the hospital to help to reduce the number of cancelled operations. A total of £73,000 has been allocated this year for extra nurses in the accident and emergency department, and an extra £300,000 will be made available for extra A and E nurses next year, recognising the pressure there.

There is extra investment to meet waiting times for in-patient treatment. The trust will receive a share of the £713,000 for delayed discharges in Buckinghamshire. Next year that money will be more than doubled. A total of £413,000 has been provided to modernise diagnostic facilities, including X-ray equipment in A and E, and £165,000 has been spent to improve cataract services. Various other sums have been made available to improve the physical environment and to modernise services, particularly in relation to booked admissions, so that patients get an appointment that is convenient to them and that meets their needs.

In relation to investment in Buckinghamshire, I note what the hon. Gentleman says about Buckinghamshire's distance from the capitation formula. That must be set in the context of the vast increase in resources that Buckinghamshire, with every other health authority in this country, has received during the past four years. Since 1997, I understand that funding for Buckinghamshire has literally doubled, a massive increase in resources. Although I take the point that he makes about the comparison with others and the formula, investment in Buckinghamshire has resulted in real improvements for local people.

I wish to put on record the improvements at Stoke Mandeville. Obviously the trust has struggled. It received a zero star rating and under-achieved on five of the nine targets, but in the past few months in-patient waiting lists have been down, waits of more than 12 months have been reduced by 58 per cent. and waits of more than 15 months by 71 per cent. Last-minute cancelled operations are down to below the regional average of 2 per cent. Good progress has been made in tackling delayed transfers of care. In the past two months, the hospital has appointed a discharge co-ordinator and the number of blocked beds has been reduced from 28 to 17—quite a dramatic improvement. I thank the staff and managers who have been involved in achieving those improvements.

I hope that I have reassured the hon. Gentleman and his constituents. I can give the final assurance in relation to patient safety, which he raised. That matter has been considered by an independent review. All the evidence has been examined. I understand that agreements have been reached for the future smooth running of the department. I and the interim chief executive do not believe that patient care has been compromised. Current practices are in line with A and E faculty guidance. The service is, I understand, working well.

I hope that what I have said has confirmed that Stoke Mandeville hospital has a bright future, and will serve its constituents by providing high-quality and excellent NHS services. It is right that we all pay tribute to the hard work and dedication of the staff. I hope that the hospital continues to serve patients in such a good way for many years to come.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Three o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 29 January 2002

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Asylum Seekers

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): I am grateful for the opportunity to debate the issue of asylum seekers from France.

Mrs. Thatcher said of Lord Young of Graffham that most people brought her problems, but he brought solutions. Most people bring to the Chamber problems and issues that they want to highlight. I want to emulate Lord Young and bring a solution, or at least a partial remedy, to a problem. I do not need simply to highlight the problem and issue of asylum seekers from France, as that is constantly before us in the newspapers. We are aware of a continuous stream of people who often risk their lives and great hardship to get to this country across the channel from France. We know stories of attempted mass breakthroughs at Christmas. Only the other day, gangs' attempts were discovered to rig the signals so that people could stow away on Eurostar trains. People are conscious that the flow has become one way. Asylum seekers come from France to this country and they are not returned.

I want to make a practical proposal, which I hope that the Government will take seriously. They should have taken this measure four years ago to alleviate the problem, but they could still implement it if they set about it with a will. I will set the scene in relation to asylum seekers. The House of Commons believes that we should be and remain a safe haven for that minority of asylum seekers who genuinely suffered persecution and torture in their home countries, or who face persecution and torture should they return. I go further: we should be sympathetic to most asylum seekers, although they are "bogus"—a word that the Prime Minister used—and are not genuine asylum seekers. *[Interruption.]* I assure the Minister that the Prime Minister described them as bogus. They are economic migrants who seek to enter this country to better their conditions and those of their families. They are often admirable people who would be of great benefit to this country. However, hon. Members from all parties recognise that this country is simply not in a position to become a country of mass immigration. We cannot alleviate the problems of economic migrants or of the troubled, disturbed and impoverished countries from which they come simply by allowing them unlimited entry.

The most humane thing that we can do is speedily to return economic migrants whence they came. That is humane to them, as it avoids the prolonged anguish and agony of a long drawn-out process during which they put down roots. We have to uproot them to return them or we create an unsustainable position in this country. It is also humane, as it sends the message down the chain that it is pointless for others to try to enter this country—an attempt that, sooner or later, we must render impossible.

In principle, the easiest group to return rapidly whence they came are those who have crossed the channel from another safe country. The Geneva convention, under which we operate and by which we are bound, specifies that asylum seekers should seek sanctuary in the first safe country that they come to; they do not have the right to shop around for the country offering the most favourable conditions. Consequently, if they pass through one safe country to another, the end recipient has the right to return them under the Geneva convention, yet people pour in from France in significant numbers and are not returned.

From 1995 to 1997, many asylum seekers were returned to France under a bilateral agreement that was negotiated by the Conservative Government but allowed to lapse in autumn 1977. My modest proposal is that the Government should renegotiate the agreement. They should have done so four years ago, but it is far more important that they do so now than that I try to lay blame for the past. They would have my support and, I believe, the support of the House of Commons and the country.

The bilateral agreement between the United Kingdom and France specified that we had not only the right to return unacceptable asylum seekers to France within 24 hours but the obligation to do so or, if there were practical obstacles to overcome, to state within 24 hours that that was our intention. The agreement reflected the cordial relations that prevailed then between the United Kingdom and France. It was reciprocal and allowed movement both ways on equal terms, although in practice the flow was largely one way. We were able to return large numbers of asylum seekers who had entered the country from France.

As I said, the agreement reflected the cordial relations that existed between the United Kingdom and France, and which happened to be dear to my heart: I am a registered, paid-up and leading Francophile of long standing. It worked well: both sides had the right to terminate it with two months' notice but neither did so, because they were satisfied with it and accepted that it was a logical, sensible arrangement. I believe that the agreement remains in force for non asylum seekers; according to the Home Secretary, some 6,000 have been sent back under the agreement. However, it contained a clause that allowed the arrangements for asylum seekers to be superseded by the Dublin convention, which came into effect in September 1997. The asylum seeker aspects were allowed to lapse at that point and have not been renewed.

The Dublin convention was intended to make general what the bilateral agreement had achieved for Britain and France; namely, the return of asylum seekers to the first safe country that they reached in the European Union. In practice, the convention failed to achieve that. Instead, it makes the return of asylum seekers more difficult and complex than was previously the case. It was negotiated in the late 1980s and signed in 1990. Since then, asylum seeking has grown out of all proportion and out of all recognition in scale and sophistication. A large industry, which has grown on the

[Mr. Peter Lilley]

back of asylum seeking, has learned how to exploit legal complexities in a way that no one envisaged when the Dublin convention was negotiated.

With the benefit of 20:20 hindsight, we can criticise the 12 or so Governments, including ours, who signed the Dublin convention for failing to foresee the situation 10 years later when it came into force. However, if the Minister wants to rest on criticism of the past, it should apply even more strongly to those who, in 1997, let the Dublin convention supersede the bilateral agreement between Britain and France without foreseeing that, in practice, it would remove our ability to return asylum seekers to France.

It was certainly inexcusable that, once the problems emerged, the Government did not renegotiate the bilateral agreement with France, within the terms of the Dublin convention, to restore speedy "refoulement", as the conventions call the return of asylum seekers to previous safe countries. Labour Ministers have defended their inaction by saying that the rules of the Dublin convention rule out such bilateral agreements, but that is nonsense. Since the Dublin convention came into force, Germany and Denmark have agreed a similar bilateral agreement to the one that we had with France, and it works well. It enables Denmark to send back 18 per cent. of the asylum seekers who make their claims in Denmark. In contrast, under the arrangements that have been established in this country, we send back only 1 per cent. to all safe countries, not just France.

I hope that the Minister will answer the following questions. First, have the Government attempted to renegotiate the bilateral agreement between France and the United Kingdom to extend it again to include asylum seekers? Secondly, if so, will they place a paper in the Library that details the renegotiation process: the dates of meetings, participants, proposals, where and when things were discussed and why the negotiations failed?

Thirdly, if the Government have not tried to renegotiate the agreement, will they do so forthwith? I believe that that would have the wholehearted support of the House of Commons, including, I hope, my party. I look forward with interest to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Malins). If the Government seek to renegotiate the agreement, we will certainly be there to help them.

If the answer to those questions is no, why are the Government not taking steps to renegotiate the bilateral agreement? They sometimes give a second reason for not re-establishing the bilateral accord, which is that the French would not want it. However, they wanted it in 1995 and continued with it, even though they had the right to withdraw from it. The fact that the Government say that re-establishment is impossible is all the odder when they constantly caricature the relations that prevailed between Britain and our European partners in the past as hostile. In fact, as our success in negotiating the agreement revealed, our relations then were extremely cordial.

The Government say that they are now at the heart of Europe, have warm, friendly relations with our continental partners and have made a range of unilateral concessions—from signing the Amsterdam treaty and the social chapter to agreeing to a European defence force—in the belief that that will give them greater influence. If that is so, let them call in their chips. If the Government have greater influence and better relations with our partners on the continent, let them turn that influence into something that is useful for Britain, in the shape of a renegotiated bilateral treaty for the rapid and speedy return of asylum seekers who reach our shores from France—a safe country.

A longer-term issue relates to the flow of asylum seekers from France. To be fair to the Government, one factor that aggravated the problem of refoulement was the decision of the British courts to rule that France and Germany were not safe countries to which we could return asylum seekers. They said that we interpreted the Geneva convention to include persecution not just by states but by rebel and opposition groups in the countries from which people came, so that people from Algeria, for example, which has endemic civil disturbance, could claim either to have been persecuted by the Government or to face persecution by the opposition. Continental courts and Governments who do not interpret the Geneva convention so widely believe that it applies only to persecution by a foreign state. The courts reached the conclusion that the foreign courts' narrow interpretation was not correct and therefore that those foreign countries were not safe countries to which we could return asylum seekers.

I am not here to make party political points. I support what the Government did in 1999 in overriding that ruling by introducing the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, which specified that all EU countries were deemed to be safe places to which to return asylum seekers. We hoped that that nonsense had been put to an end. However, that decision is open to challenge under the Government's own legislation—the Human Rights Act 1998. The court, in a case last Friday, ruled that the Home Secretary cannot rely on the 1999 Act alone to rebut such claims under the Human Rights Act; it upheld him in that case, but it was a worrying caveat that the 1999 Act alone cannot provide a rebuttal of human rights claims. How do the Government interpret that case, and will they need further legislation to prevent that loophole from reopening if, indeed, it is possible without amending the Human Rights Act?

Meanwhile, however, an absurd situation arises: while our courts have ruled that French and German courts are not safe places to which to send asylum seekers, we are invited to introduce a European arrest warrant that will allow UK citizens who are not asylum seekers to be arrested at the behest of those courts and sent, without any real right of review under habeas corpus, to France and Germany to face trial in courts that we have been told are not safe for asylum seekers.

The Government's justification is that those courts are bound by the European convention on human rights; yet if our courts have said that continental courts cannot be trusted to interpret the Geneva convention safely, how can they be relied on to interpret the European convention on human rights accurately or safely if British citizens are to be sent back to them? I ask the Minister to think again about creating the extraordinary anomaly that the Government propose to introduce in the extradition Bill.

I said that I came here in the spirit of David Young, offering solutions rather than problems; I have become something of a purveyor of policy to Her Majesty's Government in recent months. I made proposals on reform of the cannabis laws, which were initially rubbished, but then the Home Secretary acknowledged that there was sufficient truth in them to move some way in the direction that I proposed. Earlier, I made proposals for reform of the health service that were initially rubbished, but now the Secretary of State for Health has adopted the rhetoric of patient choice and patient power that I proposed.

In all modesty, therefore, I make my proposal for the Government to renegotiate with France an agreement that will enable us to return to that country asylum seekers who arrive at our ports. People will welcome that essential step to stem the unsustainable flow of immigrants from the continent to this country. I remind the Minister why they come here: it is because this country is a more attractive place and a softer touch for immigrants than other continental countries. The judge in the court case that gave rise to the conclusion that France and Germany were not safe countries noted that the evidence showed that 80 per cent. of asylum claims by Algerians in France were rejected and the claimants were liable to be sent back to Algeria. Only 5 per cent. of Algerians who made claims in this country were refused asylum and sent back to Algeria.

Britain is therefore a magnet for asylum seekers. It is only right that we should try to restore the bulwarks against that excessive flow of people seeking to enter the country and return those who should, in all conscience, make their claims elsewhere. I hope that the Minister responds positively to that proposal.

9.50 am

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) on securing the debate and raising, in measured terms, concerns that are shared by many hon. Members on both sides of the House, some of whom are unable to be present, and shared particularly by those who, like myself, represent what I would describe as a front-line constituency.

I represent the seat of North Thanet, which is, with Dover and South Thanet, the recipient of considerable numbers of those crossing the channel by legal or other means to seek asylum in Britain. The county of Kent—of which I am proud to represent a small part—has paid a considerable price, literally and metaphorically, because of the number of people coming into the country from the other side of the channel to claim asylum. The Minister and the Government should not underestimate the real concerns of the people of most of the constituencies in Kent, who are paying through their council tax to provide education services, health services, policing services and social services that are already overstretched. The demands on housing are already too great for us to meet. The additional burden is considerable.

When I raise the subject, I am normally branded as racist. I am not. As I have mentioned before, I think that I am still the only hon. Member who has entertained and looked after an asylum seeker in his own home and who, under those circumstances, sought and won from a Minister in the previous Conservative Government leave for that asylum seeker who was under my care—a young Romanian—to remain permanently.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Angela Eagle): I want to place it on the record immediately that I do not regard the hon. Gentleman as racist. I would not bandy such words about, in an attempt to create a low debate, when we have to deal with difficult and serious issues to which there are no easy answers.

Mr. Gale: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for that measured response to my concerns. She will know that people outside the House read the reports of our debate in the *Official Report* and may think otherwise. It is for that reason alone that I feel obliged to put my position clearly on the record.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden said, this country has a proud and honourable tradition dating back not just many decades but many centuries. The United Kingdom has for hundreds of years played host to refugees from all over the world, fleeing from all manner of persecution. Long may we conduct our business in a manner that continues that proud tradition. However, if that is to happen and the British people are to welcome with open arms those in genuine need of relief, succour and a safe haven, we must exercise proper controls to ensure that our systems are not exploited by those whose demands are other than asylum and safe haven.

My right hon. Friend referred to economic migrants. It is a fact that the overwhelming majority of those reaching our shores from across the channel, sometimes from halfway around the world—whether by container lorry, car, bus or truck—are economic migrants rather than asylum seekers.

We all understand the desire of people from impoverished, developing countries to better their lot and, by working over here, to send money home to support their extended family in their own countries. We also understand and sympathise with the desperation with which they seek—by almost any means, even at the risk of their own life—to come here to what they regard as a better, more prosperous and more advantaged nation.

It is impossible, however, for a small island to continue to take all comers from anywhere under any circumstances so that our ratepayers and taxpayers see their money spent to fund people working in the black economy who are not paying taxes, have no right to be here and no work permit and who, too frequently, disappear into the black economy from the registers of asylum seekers. I do not have the up-to-date figures—the Minister will be able to tell us—but a guesstimate for a two-year period is that between 20,000 and 30,000 people simply disappeared into the system. Those were people who could and should have been sent back whence they came once their cases had been determined, but of whom there is no trace. Some of those people are therefore living in the United Kingdom under entirely false pretences and circumstances.

It is incredibly easy not just to cross the channel, but to cross and re-cross it. A young man released from prison into my care, for whom I had accepted responsibility, managed to cross the channel three times

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with no documentation whatever. He not only came into the United Kingdom but left it to go and see a girlfriend in Germany, where he claimed that he was being persecuted, and returned to the United Kingdom. I discovered that rather later in my representations than earlier, but it did not colour my judgment in respect of his particular need.

We have a very real problem. Arguments about the Geneva convention have been well rehearsed, as have arguments about the origins and paternity of the Dublin convention. Successive Ministers of both parties have sought to blame each other. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden said, the Dublin convention has done more harm than good: it has not achieved what it set out to achieve, it has undermined the bilateral agreement with France and, with the wonderful gift of hindsight, it has been proved not to do the job.

I am not here to score party political points this morning, but I must tell the Minister that her party, now in power for five years, has had considerable opportunity to observe the effects of the problem and to seek to effect change. I agree with my right hon. Friend that moves must be made to renegotiate a bilateral agreement. He is absolutely right that the argument that it cannot be done because of the Dublin convention is nonsense. It can be done. It has been done between Denmark and Germany and there is no reason—give or take the willingness of the French Government—why we cannot renegotiate a bilateral agreement with France.

I believe that certain things must be done swiftly. The previous Home Secretary sought to introduce a system of dispersal, to ease the burden on counties such as Kent and constituencies such as my own, by placing asylum seekers in communities of their own kind around the country. That system simply has not worked. The recipient local authorities have been few in number and considerably unwilling. The placements place a demand on their limited resources, and there is no record of the number of people who have been dispersed under the scheme. The Home Secretary said recently that it had been a great success. Having challenged him and been challenged by him on the Floor of the House, I tabled a parliamentary question to find out the measure of that success, but the Home Office had no statistics to say how many people had been dispersed, from where or where to.

Angela Eagle: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gale: I will give way to the Minister, but she may want to comment on my next point. In answer to either another parliamentary question or a letter—I cannot remember which—the Home Office said that people were being dispersed and one place that they were going was Thanet. We thought that Thanet was one of the places from where they were being dispersed.

Angela Eagle: We have numbers on the cluster areas from where people have been dispersed in the National Asylum Support Service scheme, which is post 1999 and the relevant legislation. However, we have difficulty with the pre-1999 situation, in which local authorities often organised dispersal themselves. It is possible to have an area that has no NASS dispersals but does have asylum seekers who have been dispersed there by local authorities that had made arrangements with other authorities. We are trying to get a handle on the situation by conducting surveys and contacting local authorities to establish the position, bring the different schemes together and obtain a better idea of the overall situation. The work is continuing, but at the moment, our figures cover NASS dispersal, rather than the interim scheme dispersals that have gone on with bilateral agreements between local authorities.

Mr. Gale: That is very helpful, and I thank the Minister. I wish only that some small part of that helpfulness had been reflected in the parliamentary answer. I do not want her to disavow the Home Secretary—and nor would she—but none of that information was forthcoming when I asked my question. I shall be delighted to table a further parliamentary question on the statistics that are available post 1999. I think that I am right in saying that the scheme was first introduced on all fools' day which, with hindsight, seems appropriate.

It is too early to say whether the introduction of identity cards will help, and I would welcome any measure that began to address the problem, however late in the day. I fear that we are sticking a small plaster over a large wound. The fact that the Home Secretary met a French Employment Minister begs the question: what is the Foreign Secretary doing about the situation?

I turn to the thorny issue of Sangatte and the Red Cross centre. I recently visited the migrant helpline service in Dover. It has grown like Topsy, and consists of dedicated people doing their level best to assist those coming to this country in need. They try to meet increasing demand under tremendous pressure and in difficult circumstances with limited resources, and provide, for example, basic tuition in English, so that the people who come to this country to claim asylum have at least a tentative foothold in the language that they must deploy to go about their everyday life. I pay tribute to those people, as they are doing a tremendous job, but they recognise that we are being exploited and taken for a ride.

Prior to Christmas, we saw the invasion of the channel tunnel centre close to Sangatte. Eurotunnel has made it plain that it believes that the presence of the Red Cross centre at Sangatte is an open invitation to asylum seekers from throughout the European Union and beyond to come, gather and try to cross the channel illegally by ferry or, more probably, through the channel tunnel. Eurotunnel owns the property that the French Government have appropriated to give to the Red Cross to use as a centre and, as I have described before, little more than a waiting room for illegal immigrants. While that is happening, the French Government are turning a blind eye because it suits them so to do. That is inexcusable, and whatever else the Minister defends this morning, I hope that she will not try to defend the appalling record of the French Government. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden, I am a Francophile. I spend a great deal of time in France, where I have many friends, and I am the proud owner of a tumbledown barn. However, that does not prevent me from looking with honest eyes rather than rose-coloured glasses at the actions of the Government just across the Channel.

The asylum seekers and economic migrants coming through the port of Dover to these shores have travelled across not one but probably half a dozen safe havens within the European Union. In any one of those countries, they could and should have claimed asylum under the terms of the Geneva convention if they were genuine asylum seekers—although, as we know, most of them are not. That they have not done so is reprehensible but perhaps understandable if they are travelling, as many of them sadly are, and sometimes with fatal consequences, in sealed containers. However, when they arrive at Sangatte and Nord-Pas de Calais, they are released frequently into the open air to find their way across the channel. The French Government know precisely what they are doing and why they are there. Because they are on French soil as illegally as they later are on English soil, the French Government have the opportunity to return them whence they came, or process their cases and demand that they either return to their country of origin or claim asylum in France.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): This is a very important issue, and I hope to have the chance to elaborate later. When I put that point to the French ambassador here, he made the persuasive argument that many asylum seekers will not tell officials the route by which they came through Europe or own up to the first country in which they arrived. Therefore, the French do not have a greater obligation to take them than any other country through which they travelled. When asylum seekers are asked whether they want to apply for asylum in France, the small percentage who say that they do have their applications processed, but the rest say that they want to apply elsewhere. The French cannot make them apply to stay in France.

Mr. Gale: The French ambassador is charming and persuasive, but wrong. Unless he believes in magic carpets, it must be abundantly plain to him that the people arrived in France from a third country and safe haven. When they arrive in a container lorry and its route is shown on the tachograph, as it is throughout the European Union, there is proof of the countries through which they have travelled. It is absolute nonsense to say, first, that they cannot be returned to another country in most cases—although not all—and secondly, that they cannot or should not claim asylum in France if they are illegally on French soil. If they have no documentation, visa, means or willingness to demonstrate their entry into or their right to be in the European Union, the French have the absolute right to deport them to their country of origin or insist that they claim asylum. The fact is that it suits the French Government to allow them not only to use a building at Sangatte that has been appropriated from Eurotunnel, but to use and reuse it, having tried on many and successive occasions to enter the United Kingdom illegally via the channel tunnel or one of the channel ports.

Angela Eagle: I share the hon. Gentleman's frustration, but it is not always possible to find illegal immigrants with the lorries on which they have been trafficked to the European Union when they claim asylum in-country. It is not easy to obtain proof of where they came from, the routes they used and often their nationality. That makes it difficult to send them back, in addition to which there are some countries to which we cannot send them. Most of the people at Sangatte are Iraqis and Afghanis and almost all—80 per cent.—are single young men, and they cannot be returned to those countries at the moment. I share the hon. Gentleman's frustration and wish that it was a matter of simply sending them back, but in practice it is not always that easy.

Mr. Gale: I understand what the Minister is saying, but that is a problem for the French, not us. The buck is passed smartly across the channel with the total connivance of the French Government. People live openly in the Red Cross centre at Sangatte. They are not there clandestinely; they do not hide. They walk around the town. The French Government know that they are there and they are not yet in the United Kingdom, but with the connivance of the French Government, they are effectively encouraged to move out.

The problem is even slightly worse, because although other countries in the Schengen area do not deport asylum seekers, they tell them to move on to anywhere outside that area, and of course the United Kingdom is outside it. If the Belgians, Dutch or Germans want to get rid of someone, they say, "Off to England, please. It is outside the Schengen area, so you will have left our territory and no longer be our problem." That is serious and real nonsense and we must get to grips with it.

I have not always seen eye to eye with Eurotunnel, as it well knows, but I share its anger and frustration that the French and now the British Governments are not dealing with the problem properly. It is all very well for the Home Secretary to meet a French Employment Minister and for him to try to introduce identity cards, but the root of the problem lies with the lack of bilateral agreement between this country and France. Unless and until the Foreign Secretary meets and discusses seriously with his counterparts in the French Government, and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom meets, if necessary, the President and Prime Minister of France to resolve the issue, there will not be a solution.

Angela Eagle: There have been meetings, but given the hon. Gentleman's analysis of French indifference, does he believe that a bilateral agreement is possible in the circumstances in which he has painted the French approach?

Mr. Gale: If necessary, I think we must tell the French Government that unless there is a bilateral agreement we will simply send straight back to France anyone coming into the United Kingdom.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden raised the issue this morning not from malice, mischief or spite, but to put forward a serious proposition that a bilateral agreement must be renegotiated and agreed. As a precursor to that and as a Member of Parliament representing a front-line constituency in Kent, I suggest that we must prevail upon the International Red Cross and the French Government, at the very least, swiftly to close the reception centre at Sangatte and move it to a more

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distant place, if necessary within Nord-Pas de Calais. I know that the argument is that people must go somewhere and if there was no centre they would be milling around the streets of Sangatte. However, the fact is that that facility on the doorstep of the channel tunnel makes it possible for dozens of would-be economic migrants, literally nightly, to mount assaults on the defences—that is what they now are—of the entrance to the channel tunnel. Therefore, as a first step, if the French Government wanted to demonstrate any good will, they could immediately close that centre and return to Eurotunnel the use of its lawful property for lawful purposes.

Secondly, there is an organisation, with which I wish to have little truck, called the Euro-region, which comprises the county of Kent, Nord-Pas de Calais and Wallonia. Every now and then this rather peculiar institution holds meetings of dignitaries from Kent, Nord-Pas de Calais and Wallonia. I attended one of those meetings and I attended a workshop on the social issues affecting the Euro-region. Because we are used in the House to introducing measures and to negotiation, I persuaded the working group that I was on to put forward to the plenary session a proposal for consideration by the European Union that there should be established, within the Euro-region—which I do not recognise—a holding centre for all asylum seekers entering that region. It will not surprise the Minister to know that I suggested that that holding centre should be based somewhere in Nord-Pas de Calais.

The working group adopted that resolution, and it went to the plenary session and was adopted by the plenary session. Therefore, an agreement was reached by the elected representatives of Nord-Pas de Calais, Kent and Wallonia that, somewhere in that Euro-region, there should be a holding centre for asylum seekers—for economic migrants. They agreed that they would approach the European Union for support and funding for that purpose. It will not surprise anyone in the Chamber to know that precisely nothing has happened since, and that was about four years ago.

I believe that there are ways in which this problem can and should humanely be solved. I believe that there should be a centre to which people are sent, wherever they are found in the area, and that we should then seriously consider how the genuine claimants of asylum should be dispersed throughout those counties and beyond and how the rest should be returned. I hope that the Minister will take on board in her reply my concerns on behalf of my constituents and the people of Kent—the wider Kent—in the context of the measures raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Edward O'Hara): Order. Given that there are no Back-Bench speakers seeking to catch my eye, it would be equitable if, as closely as feasible, the remaining time were divided equally between the three Front-Bench speakers.

10.17 am

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I was doing my maths as you rose to speak, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I welcome the opportunity for debate that we have been given by the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley). I welcome his constructive approach to this matter, as to others. From the freedom of the Back Benches one can often put forward such solutions. I come to the debate in the same way and in the same context: we are grappling here with difficult issues, and it behoves us all to try to find practical and workable ways forward.

I also want to add a couple of words of context and to preface those by saying, as I mentioned in my question to the hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale), that over the months I have had conversations not only with the French ambassador and his staff but with Eurotunnel and many others who are involved. Indeed, within the next two weeks I shall visit Calais, Sangatte and the Eurotunnel site to bring myself up to speed with the situation there. I make these comments in advance of that visit.

I want to rehearse some of the most recent figures that put this problem in context. Of the approximately 21 million people in the world who are refugees, asylum seekers or internally displaced, 12 million are refugees. An assessment that equates the numbers found in different countries with wealth shows that some of the poorest countries in the world have much greater problems to grapple with than we do. The figures, which were produced this month, show by league table the financial implications for developing countries hosting refugees. Guinea has 130 people of concern for every $1million of gross domestic product and Tanzania has 80. In comparison, the United Kingdom has 0.2. I hope that we can start considering the issue in context.

The other measure that places the issue in context is the number of people who arrive here or in France. I have checked the statistics concerning asylum applicants in European Union countries during the past 10 years. Germany came top, with nearly 2 million, the United Kingdom second, with nearly 450,000, and France third, with about 330,000. According to last year's figures for asylum applications per head of population, Belgium was top in the European Union, followed by Ireland, the Netherlands, Austria, Denmark, Sweden and Luxembourg. The UK is eighth and France is 10th. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, we received 80,315 asylum seekers: 1.37 per 1,000 inhabitants. France had 38,590: 0.65 per 1,000 inhabitants.

According to the figures compiled by the migrant helpline referred to by the hon. Member for North Thanet, the number of people arriving via the channel tunnel or illegal routes through the channel tunnel into Kent from northern France is decreasing. That is the latest information that I have, as of autumn 2001, but the Minister may have more accurate information. The figures are encouraging because no one wants people to seek illegal entry at risk to themselves and others.

The Home Office and the university of Wales have published research detailing asylum seekers' reasons for coming to the United Kingdom. I had heard that many had found that many of the asylum seekers found in northern France cited language and reputation as their reasons for coming here. Surprisingly, however, the research shows that people are less bothered about the particular country that they travel to than they are by what they have been told by those arranging their travel.

Many asylum seekers in northern France can apply for asylum in France: most are asked and few have said yes. The Minister is right that over 80 per cent. of people in Sangatte are from three national groups: the Afghans, the Iranians and the Kurds. That situation has persisted for some time.

I have also talked to the refugee agencies. They have met Ministers regularly and made suggestions about how to proceed. First, I do not believe that the Dublin convention ever worked, or ever will, and it is the widespread view of others in the field that it will never succeed. For the reasons cited in my intervention on the hon. Gentleman, most people have already crossed other EU borders when they come to the attention of the authorities. Most will have no documentation evidencing the route that they have taken, or be unwilling to explain the route—if they know it. Whether undertaken by the French or British authorities, it is impractical and a waste of resources to send them back to Austria, Germany, Greece, Italy, or wherever they first arrived in the EU. That is a nonsensical system. I understand why it was conceived, but it has not worked. It is understandable that the Government are seeking a new system.

Secondly, I understand the point made by the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden about bilateral agreements between countries. However, such agreements do not solve the problem that many of these people come back again and again. That was evidenced by the example given by the hon. Member for North Thanet about his Romanian house guest. A bilateral agreement that simply says, "We're going to send back to France people who arrive here illegally," is not sufficient to deter people. In every interview that I have seen people give, whether they are waiting in Tangier to cross to Spain, or in Calais to cross to the United Kingdom, they make it clear that if at first they do not succeed, they will try and try again. If they are sent back from the UK to France, that does not mean that they will automatically go back whence they came.

Of course, if there is a settlement in Afghanistan that enables people to go back, they will start to do so, and we have a duty to ensure that that happens. However—with respect, because the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden makes a perfectly proper constitutional and political suggestion—I do not believe that that will significantly reduce the numbers of people returning.

Thirdly, I welcome the fact that the Government have at last recognised that there are always two categories of people in places like Sangatte. Some are genuine, honest asylum seekers who have been persecuted and left afraid for their lives. On Friday, I saw in my surgery an Afghan man who had lost his child, his wife, his mother and his whole family and was still terrified about whether it would be safe for him to go back. He was justified in being here and putting his case. Other people are economic migrants. The Government now realise that there must be a legal route for people in both queues—the asylum queue, which has never provided a legal route in to enable people to put their case, and the queue for economic migrants, who must also be able to put their case.

Mr. Lilley: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman thinks that the fact that terrible things happened in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime and during the conflict justifies anyone's remaining here, instead of a presumption that in future refugees from Afghanistan should be returnable there. In that case, what have we been fighting for? The same applies to Kosovo.

Simon Hughes: There is no disagreement between us. The same applies in Sierra Leone, where at last all the territory has been recaptured by the Government. After a settlement there comes a time, after a short but decent interval, when the Government must make an assessment to decide whether it is safe for people to return. Some places in Afghanistan are still not yet fully under control. I accept the proposition that as soon as a civil war ends and a place is again at peace and under control—as in Kosovo—people should be free and able to go back. It is never quite as daunting a prospect as is sometimes painted. It is not a one-way traffic or an unchanging situation. Places with turmoil, conflict and persecution cease, mercifully, to be like that, and it is right that we should be able to tell people that they are now free to go home to help to rebuild the country from which they came.

Fourthly, the way forward, which is endorsed by refugee agencies in Europe and elsewhere, is to seek not merely a bilateral solution that may or may not be practical, but one that brings in all the countries of the European Union. As the hon. Member for North Thanet said, in the Schengen territories, where there are no frontier controls, it is difficult to monitor where people came from and where they are going. The reason for the queue at our front door is that we are not part of Schengen; we have separate border controls. Liberal Democrats hold to the view that we should continue to keep those, and it is my personal view that that should remain one of the ways in which we regulate matters in the UK.

Mr. Gale: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is considerable cynicism within Schengen? The approach tends to be, "As long as you're not in Schengen, you're not a problem."

Simon Hughes: I agree. There has been much passive, if not active, connivance at the attitude that says, "As long as you leave our territory, we're happy." That is not a satisfactory solution, because people will still be wandering around Europe, legally or illegally seeking to obtain established status.

I believe that the way forward is to seek to agree on a common process of application in the EU for people once they have come to the attention of the authorities. It should not follow that because someone, for example, came to the Austrian authorities' attention, they have to end up in Austria. The burden should be shared across the EU. If someone has a particular case for coming to the UK—because they speak English, for example, or are from a Commonwealth country with community links with the UK—provided they are within the fair quota of people for the UK, it should be possible for their application to be dealt with on behalf of the UK authorities, even if it is processed in Austria.

If they were working with the collaboration of bodies such as the Red Cross, under the auspices of the UNHCR, British officials in Sangatte, for example, could process applications there and then. There would not then be the risk to lives of people trying to cross the

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channel. I understand that that would require a common basis for the definition of refugee, and common systems thereafter.

Can the Minister tell us whether a final agreement has been reached on the Eurodat database, which will allow the sharing of information about whether people have applied before and had their applications dealt with? Have we come to an agreement, or are we on the way to one, on the European Commission proposal for a common definition of refugee? That picks up on the question of the different definitions of refugee used by the Germans, the French and ourselves, for example over persecution by Government or others, to which other hon. Members have referred.

Do the Government anticipate that it will be possible by bilateral agreement or, more usefully this year, by European Union-wide agreement to examine a system that will accept in principle my proposal that the processing of applications should happen when a person first comes to the authorities' attention, irrespective of where that person is eventually given asylum if their claim is granted? I believe that that would be a sensible way forward and I urge the Minister and her colleagues to consider it positively.

10.32 am

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) on securing the debate, and on the thoughtful and constructive way in which he made his persuasive argument. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale), whose expertise is well known and who has a strong constituency interest and the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes), who speaks with experience, care and compassion on such matters.

I have had a long interest in matters to do with asylum. In 1992, I was privileged to found the Immigration Advisory Service, which provides free legal help and advice to those with rights of appeal under immigration law. I was the first chairman of its trustees, and I pay tribute to its work throughout the country.

I begin with a proposition on which we can all agree. Any decent country—ours is a decent country—must speedily and happily grant refugee status to those entitled to it. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden made that point. We must always display good sense and humanity, not only in what we do but in what we say and how we say it.

One date should be engraved on the minds of those of us with an interest in the subject: 19 June 2000. On that day, 58 Chinese people were found suffocated in a van in Dover. Those poor souls suffered a dreadful death. They may have been illegal immigrants, but never let it be forgotten that they were ordinary, decent people with families, desperate for a new life.

What has happened to our asylum system? Where do we stand in 2002? It is fair to say that after four years of Labour Government, from 1997 to 2001, the system had nearly collapsed and had descended into chaos. The number of asylum applications rose from 26,000 a year in 1990 to approximately 80,000 a year in the year 2000. By August 2001 the backlog of applications awaiting an initial decision had risen to 43,000.

My right hon. Friend made the sad point that things were so slow that many people established roots in this country. Indeed, children were born and had almost gone to school. The longer one leaves asylum seekers who will fail to gain asylum in limbo, settling into a country, the more unkind it is at the end of the day to remove them. Although there are approximately 60,000 refusals a year, in 2000 there were only 9,000 removals from this country.

The Labour Government did not know, and do not know, how many people refused asylum leave this country of their own accord, and the Home Office does not know the whereabouts of tens of thousands of failed and current asylum seekers. No wonder the Labour-dominated Select Committee on Home Affairs concluded in 2001 that the Home Office had been dilatory in enforcing the removal of people whose asylum claims had been refused and others who had gained illegal entry to the UK, and that that had attracted more people.

Dealing specifically with France, the principal means of illegal entry into this country has been lorries, 4,000 of which pass through Dover every day of the week, ferries, and trains, which, as a result of the abuse of ticketing arrangements, at one stage allowed as many as 1,000 people a month to arrive on Eurostar as illegal entrants.

The Government have done good work in the past two or three years as far as Eurostar is concerned, and many of those problems have been overcome. However, the problem remains of a customer who buys a single ticket from Brussels to Lille and remains on the train to Waterloo, unimpeded and untouched by immigration controls.

We know the principal methods by which people have got into this country from France, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden and my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet have mentioned the Red Cross centre at Sangatte, where I saw up to 1,000 people when I visited it with the Home Affairs Committee. Those people were in a safe place, they were in a safe country, and to get to Sangatte they had passed through a series of safe countries. The French authorities were well aware of their existence but they did nothing about it. Those people were poised in their jumping-off point illegally to enter this country.

It was a sorry situation, and a question occurred to me, to other members of the Home Affairs Committee and to others in this country: how can it be that those people did not claim, or were not obliged to claim, asylum either in the first safe country that they reached or in France, which is obviously a safe country? That is a blindingly obvious question, to which there seems to be no real answer. That brings me to the bilateral agreement. The Conservative party agrees with those who say that the Government should urge the French to close Sangatte. It is a mistake in principle for the French to allow a jumping-off point for illegal immigrants into this country. If such a centre is necessary, it should be moved many miles from the coast.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden forcefully pointed out that the bilateral agreement of 1995 worked well. It was negotiated by a

Conservative Government and was in force for two years or more, even though the French had an opportunity to stop it at any time at two months' notice. They did not, which says a great deal for the strong relationship between the previous Conservative Government and the French. If we refused entry to anyone coming here illegally from France, the agreement enabled us to send them back to France within 24 hours. We could and we did, and it worked well.

I agree with those who say that the Minister should explain what her Government have done to try to renegotiate the bilateral agreement. It is a tragedy that that has not been done. The Dublin convention is said to have superseded the agreement, but it has not worked well. The current Foreign Secretary told the Home Affairs Committee that it was in good company if it did not understand the Dublin convention. The key point is that the readmission agreement enabled us to return illegal entrants within 24 hours. Those who say that the Dublin convention superseded the bilateral agreement miss the obvious point that the bilateral agreement between Germany and Denmark allows for the return of asylum seekers who cross the border between those two countries, even though those countries are signatories to the convention. If that bilateral agreement can work, which it does, there is no reason why our bilateral agreement with France, which proved so effective in returning asylum seekers to that country, could not have continued after September 1997, or why a similar bilateral agreement could not operate alongside the convention.

I ask the Minister specifically what the Government have done in the past four years to try to renegotiate the bilateral agreement. If they have done nothing, why have they done nothing? If they have done something, will they tell the House of Commons in detail what they have done and the French response to it? I point again to the strong relationship between the previous Conservative Government and the French that enabled that bilateral agreement to work so well.

Life seems unreal to those who work in immigration and customs in Dover. However many people they detect entering Dover, nothing can be done about it once the word "asylum" is mentioned. It does not matter if there is one dog sniffing for illegal immigrants, two carbon dioxide probes, or three X-ray machines. The best method of finding and stopping people is the single heartbeat machine, of which there is only one. On Friday, the doors of the hangar broke, and it is not working. Even if it were, what is the point of such methods? Real work must be done on the French side of the Channel to stop people using Sangatte and the French ports to jump into this country.

We need a policy that includes a streamlined process of asylum applications and which enables quick decisions and a fair, quick removal system. We need to be able to negotiate more bilateral agreements and we urgently need to renegotiate the existing agreement with France, putting back a system that worked so well. Goodness knows what can be done throughout the EU. The Laeken summit concluded with EU heads of government asking the European Commission to draw up new and strengthened proposals on asylum procedures in three or four months. Amen to that, but I may not be alone in lacking confidence in the EU's ability to come up with an understandable, workable and effective system.

10.46 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Angela Eagle): I welcome the debate. We are dealing with a series of difficult and interrelated issues. It has been hinted at but not explicitly stated today that we are also dealing with sophisticated international criminal smuggling gangs who make large profits from the exploitation and misery of human beings who are trafficked across borders. They have increasingly sophisticated methods. All Governments within the EU and internationally, including this one, are increasingly aware of the huge profits made from that trade and realise that an important way to disrupt it is to bring about greater cross-border police co-operation. We must deal with some of the main smuggling routes into the European Union by strengthening the EU's outer borders, whether or not we are dealing with Schengen countries; such a policy should include the sharing at police level of information, and intelligence-based work to try to disrupt the trafficking routes. I assure hon. Members that we are working hard to put more such protections in place to disrupt that trade.

The right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) made much of what he called the bilateral agreement. As I discovered when I investigated the matter, the Home Office called it a gentlemen's agreement with France, which, as the right hon. Gentleman rightly said, was signed at an official level in 1995. It covered arrangements for the return of refused passengers and illegal entrants arriving at the channel ports or via the channel tunnel, although it was signed before the channel tunnel operated in the way that it does today. It was understood by both parties that the section on asylum applicants, rather than refused passengers, would be superseded by the Dublin convention.

As soon as the Dublin convention came into being, therefore, the asylum part of that original gentlemen's agreement with France was superseded. The right hon. Gentleman is correct that the rest of the agreement continues in place and works well. He had figures on that. In 2000, for example, 5,831 people were refused entry and returned from Dover to France as part of that agreement. However, the plain fact is that both signatories, France and Britain, explicitly said that for asylum purposes the agreement would be superseded by the Dublin convention.

For reasons that we have debated this morning, the Dublin convention is not working as well as those who drew it up would have liked. I suspect that when it was being negotiated, no one realised the extent and the sophistication of people-smuggling that countries in the European Union would have to face. That is not a criticism but a reflection of the way in which asylum and immigration issues have developed—they are likely to continue to do so. We can guard our frontiers only by continuing to move as the threat moves. When we close off one method of entry, the focus switches to others and the immigration service and the police do all that they can to respond and react—co-operating with their French counterparts—to tackle the problems.

[Angela Eagle]

Other bilateral agreements, particularly the German-Danish agreement, have been mentioned. It is open to any two parties within the Dublin framework to decide on a bilateral agreement, but by definition such agreements must be agreed between two parties. The German-Danish agreement works mainly because the Germans recognise that geography makes theirs the source country, and they agreed to take back most of those who end up in Denmark who must have come through Germany. France, however, is in most cases a transit country, rather than the first source of entry for asylum seekers. Hence a bilateral agreement between France and Britain is different from one between Germany and Denmark.

In seeking to develop arrangements with the French, we have our eye on transforming the Dublin convention. Currently negotiations are in progress for Dublin II. As hon. Members know, a draft was proposed by the European Commission working party, which seeks to improve on the first Dublin arrangements, particularly provisions that stymied the convention's effectiveness—those making it necessary to prove where individuals came from before sending them back to the immediate EU country. As seen in earlier exchanges, it is often impossible to prove where individuals entered the EU because the trafficking routes are hidden, because people often possess no papers and because it is not easy to establish their nationality. Some claim to be of a nationality other than their own.

Mr. Malins: I understand the Minister, but what have the Government done in the past four years to persuade France to enter another bilateral agreement?

Angela Eagle: The hon. Gentleman should be aware that we have done considerable bilateral work with France, centring mainly on the Sangatte issue. We have focused on areas where large numbers of people gather to make an attack on our borders. Part of the Dublin II text—still only in draft form and requiring unanimous agreement—proposes a different approach to dealing with the illegal presence of individuals in different countries. At present Dublin does not recognise that but merely talks about first safe countries, which is not practically useful when we cannot prove in which first safe country individuals arrived.

On bilateral contacts with the French Government, we meet regularly to discuss immigration issues. We fully recognise the difficulties caused by illegal immigration, particularly the problem of clandestine immigrants gathering around Calais in northern France. Co-operation is important.

I congratulate the French authorities on their success last weekend in disrupting the gang of Romanians who had been interfering with signalling on the rail line to allow clandestine boarding of freight trains. Those who boarded were taken off at Fréthun, which is the freight yard, and did not get through to Britain. However, for weeks organised attempts to board by interfering with the signals put the safety of trains at risk. The work of the French in dealing with the problem is a major success story.

The juxtaposed controls at the Eurostar stations have also been extremely effective. On the point that the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) raised, the Belgian authorities conduct effective entry and exit checks on passengers before they board the Eurostar at Lille and when they leave it at Waterloo. If he has been on Eurostar recently, he will know that the checks are reinforced by our immigration officers, who go through the train checking people's information, passports and identity. We put controls in place to deal with issues as they are identified, and we are in constant contact with our Belgian and French counterparts to deal with new problems as they emerge or if we have intelligence that traffickers are focusing on a new area.

We have a biannual UK-French summit. In February 2001 we established the Cross-Channel Commission, which promotes bilateral discussion of cross-channel issues, including illegal immigration. The excellent progress that has been made on a range of issues is a clear indication of the commission's usefulness. We are dealing with the problem of illegal immigration across the channel by increasing controls and law enforcement in the Calais area.

On 12 September, the Home Secretary agreed with Daniel Vaillant, his opposite number, on several practical measures to tighten controls further at the channel ports and reduce the flow of illegal immigrants into the Calais area, including sending more immigration officers to Coquelles. France agreed to toughen up legal action against those who gain unauthorised access to the Eurotunnel site at Coquelles, and we are grateful for their action in dealing with facilitators and racketeers who operate at Sangatte. They have quickly secured several prosecutions for the mass intrusions into the Eurotunnel site at Christmas; about 40 more court cases are pending. As has been pointed out, the Home Secretary had a private meeting with Mrs. Guigou, the French Social Affairs Minister, who has responsibility for funding of the Red Cross centre at Sangatte. I understand that their constructive meeting built on our excellent working relationships and was part of the continuing process of working with the French to find a solution.

We have been perfectly open with the French about the fact that we wish the Sangatte centre to be closed; they are under no illusion that we have any other view. The Government take every opportunity to discuss the situation at Calais with our French counterparts, and it is clear that that bilateral co-operation has led to a sharp overall drop in the number of people crossing illegally from northern France to the UK. According to Eurotunnel figures, there were 27 clandestine crossings in December 2000. The route was targeted and, for example, in July 2001, 808 people arrived. The number is now down to virtually zero.

Some of the controls that we have put in place have resulted in routes being closed, which is why the Sangatte camp now has more people in it than before. They are not getting through, but we are not complacent that they will not seek other routes. That is why the routes at Fréthun and the work of the SNCF and English Welsh and Scottish Railway are so important. I assure hon. Members that we are doing all that we can and will continue to do so. I am happy that we have been able to debate the matter today.

New Towns

10.59 am

Peter Bradley (The Wrekin): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this important debate and to join a chorus from the new towns and elsewhere calling for the radical reform of English Partnerships' remit.

I take it to be a good sign of the Government's intentions that the current, timely review, which was launched in October, was brought forward by two years. The new towns are maturing rapidly; the development corporations have done their job and the new towns are mostly well established as centres of population and economic growth. Their local authorities, including my own—Telford and Wrekin—are keenly aware of what needs to be done to secure their future but far from being helped they are more often hampered and thwarted by English Partnerships.

Telford and the other new towns of the 1960s and 1970s are at a crossroads. Economically, the momentum of their development as major sub-regional centres needs to be renewed. Socially, estates that were designed to accommodate overspill from London or, as in Telford's case, from Birmingham and the black country, were often flung up and jerry-built in the 1960s and are in urgent need of regeneration, as my hon. Friend the Member for Telford (David Wright) will make clear if he has the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

Tower blocks were not the only mistakes planners made in the 1960s and 1970s. Sprawling residential estates in the new towns are isolated from employment zones, dependent on the car, with inadequate district centres and poor public services. There is a pressing need to attend to their needs.

New towns such as Telford often lack the cultural and recreational qualities that they need if they are to mature and to generate the sense of civic identity that improves the quality of life and adds to the attraction for inward investors. Telford continues to be a new town success story, but the price we pay for our low unemployment has traditionally been a low-skilled, low-wage economy; three wards in Telford are among the 10 per cent. most deprived in the country. More than 3,000 people live on Telford Development Corporation housing estates, which were regarded in the 1960s as experimental, but 30 years on are regarded as experiments that failed. The town centre is little more than a covered shopping centre, albeit a good one, surrounded by car parks and ring roads.

We urgently need to address all those problems and we have a right to expect that English Partnerships has a key role in solving them. In a letter to Telford and Wrekin council in December last year, the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions outlined what he thinks English Partnerships is, or should be, doing for the new towns. He said:

> "EP's current remit in the new towns is to use its assets to the benefit of those who live, work or carry on business in the area."

But that is not what English Partnerships is doing in Telford. It takes its cue not so much from the Government's commitment to urban regeneration and social inclusion as from the edict issued by the previous Government that it should serve as a residuary body disposing of land as efficiently as possible and with the maximum return to the Treasury. That is Telford's current experience. English Partnerships holds all the assets; Telford and Wrekin council is lumbered with the liabilities.

As of September last year, English Partnerships controlled 5,700 hectares of land nationwide, and 820 hectares—14 per cent., its largest holding—was in Telford. More to the point, English Partnerships holds 80 per cent. of all developable land in Telford. While EP has 144 hectares set aside for housing, and 148 hectares for employment purposes, Telford and Wrekin has just 6.5 hectares of developable land and even 4.5 hectares of that is subject to clawback: if it were to develop that land it would have to pay English Partnerships up to 100 per cent. of its new, developed value.

Like most local authorities, for better or worse, Telford and Wrekin council has a vision statement, which talks about building

> "an inclusive, prosperous and healthy community which offers a good quality of life for all".

Unfortunately, the council is too often in conflict with English Partnerships' remit, which is to realise asset values. Too often, English Partnerships does not help to fulfil the ambitions of the Government and local authorities for economic development, urban regeneration, social inclusion and democratic accountability; it actively frustrates them.

Most local authorities have land banks, but Telford and Wrekin has almost none. Most local authorities have a degree of control over strategic and master planning, but because of English Partnerships' section 7.1 planning exemptions, Telford and Wrekin and its community have precious little influence or control over much of the development that takes place in and around the town. Most local authorities can secure important social infrastructure through the development process, but because of those exemptions, Telford and Wrekin cannot negotiate section 106 agreements and the community benefits that they often bring. As I said, it is subject to a clawback on land that it has inherited, even in providing social housing.

Most local authorities are at least compensated for the contributions that their planning departments make to the development process, but to cap it all, even though Telford and Wrekin has to dedicate resources to English Partnerships' development ambitions, it cannot claim the standard planning fees that every other local authority collects. The council estimates that, over the lifetime of the development of land left with English Partnerships in Telford, it will forgo £1.5 million in planning fees—a substantial amount. Indeed, the estimate that the council gave me just this morning is that, if it were not for the exemptions that English Partnerships enjoys on planning fees alone, it could cut the increase in its council tax by 1 per cent. a year. That may not sound like much money, but it will mean a great deal to council tax payers. In addition, that calculation does not take into account the value of land that the council can neither use for the provision of public services, nor dispose of so that the capital receipts can be invested in those services.

Ironically, despite the need for social and economic regeneration, Telford and Wrekin is a net contributor in meeting the needs of others. Assets realised in Telford

[Peter Bradley]

are recycled through English Partnerships' other functions—not least that of the Urban Regeneration Agency, from which it took over some years ago—into regeneration activity in just about every corner of the country except Telford and the other new towns.

Telford and Wrekin council has a policy to establish 32 per cent. of housing development as social housing, but in the first two years of its existence as a unitary authority, English Partnerships' contribution was just 91 units of social housing. It has a major role to play and huge potential, given the land that it owns, but it makes a very modest contribution to the local authority's legitimate aims. On top of that, the council does not have access to the same regeneration funds—those are much needed on the estates that I mentioned—as other urban authorities.

The problem is not only what the presence of English Partnerships in Telford withholds from the council, but the additional burdens that it imposes. The population of Telford and Wrekin has grown by 8 per cent. since 1991 and is set to continue at roughly the same rate. Some 13,500 houses are being built over 10 to 15 years. The electorate in my constituency increased by 5,500 between 1997 and 2001—9 per cent. in four years. Incidentally, the considerable population growth is happening so rapidly that it is too often unrecognised by the Office for National Statistics and, consequently, in our standard spending assessments.

The new communities that are springing up on land disposed of for residential development by English Partnerships place a huge and growing strain on our social infrastructure and public services, to which English Partnerships contributes little. English Partnerships is at the heart of the problems faced by Telford and Wrekin council. However, it does not regard itself as part of the solution. The most obvious example relates to school provision. The Secretary of State's letter to the council stated that

> "in formulating development plans for their sites, EP takes into account the relevant aspects of Government policy, such as socially and economically sustainable neighbourhoods, the provision of sites for schools, local centres, health facilities".

However, that has not been Telford's experience. I referred to the considerable growth of Telford's population, which has given rise to the need not only for primary schools, but for a secondary school. There is plenty of land on which to build that secondary school, but none is forthcoming from English Partnerships.

In February 2000, Christine Davies, corporate director of education and training at Telford and Wrekin council, wrote to me that despite the pressing needs of increasing residential populations, unfortunately English Partnerships'

> "operational parameters require them to maximise income...This means that often they are only able to offer us the worst sites, inadequately located, unsuitable ground and difficult to build on.
>
> If Telford were not a new town then the granting of planning permission for new housing would carry with it the option for funds to be generated from the private sector through planning gain."

As Christine Davies pointed out, the problem has not been the lack of sites. In her letter, she said:

> "The remit that EP work to would require them to charge the Council residential values for the land. The DfEE do not provide funding for the purchase of school sites and at a potential £1m or more a site this makes it impossible to build schools where they were needed, if at all."

In July 2000, I took up the case with the Minister's predecessor, who is now the Chief Whip. She accepted the argument and said that the Government agreed that

> "in areas such as Telford where EP authorises development under powers contained in the New Towns Act, it can provide sites for primary schools at no cost to the education authority, where the demand for schools is a direct result of its activities."

That was a welcome change of policy, but it puzzled me. I wrote to the Minister seeking clarification, as she specifically identified primary but not secondary schools. That is nonsense. Families who move to English Partnerships estates bring not only four-year-olds but 11-year-olds. Pupils at the primary schools that English Partnerships can build have a habit of becoming the secondary school students in schools that English Partnerships cannot provide. I heard in August that the Minister was awaiting advice from English Partnerships, and she may be able to cast some light on the issue today.

Our children cannot wait. Telford and Wrekin council recently announced plans for a new secondary school in my constituency that were widely welcomed. However, the funding will be a huge burden on the LEA, which looks as if it will go for a private finance initiative scheme—not from choice but because it has little option despite huge tracts of land and a cash-rich agency on its doorstep. There are other examples of English Partnerships' inability to contribute to the strategic planning of Telford's future.

I do not want to denigrate English Partnerships, which has made, and continues to make, a considerable contribution to Telford's growth. I have had good experiences in my dealings with the organisation and its officers in Telford. The problem is the constraints under which it works and which I hope will be radically reformed as a result of the current review. English Partnerships belatedly co-operated with the council in producing a master plan for the town centre, but it cannot, or will not be able to, contribute to its implementation. We have a fine plan that would immeasurably enhance the quality of life of Telford's people, improve the town's standing and image, and boost the value of English Partnerships' assets, yet there is currently little prospect of delivering it.

The council has to work around English Partnerships to achieve its strategic objectives, but when it comes to the accountability of the planning system to the community, English Partnerships too often works around the community. It is a constant source of frustration and grievance to councillors and communities alike. Any hon. Member representing a new town will know about that from their postbags.

What can be done? I am confident that other hon. Members in the debate will bear me out when I say that the status quo is no longer tenable. New towns have achieved critical mass and largely outgrown the development corporation-led push for growth. They are fully fledged communities with the same needs as other urban centres for regeneration, sustainability and economic growth, all of which demand solutions and require choices. These strategic decisions must be taken by elected local authorities with a popular mandate and accountability to the communities that they represent and serve. The narrowness of English Partnerships' remit frustrates not only local authorities and local democracy but the Government's commitment to devolved decision taking, economic regeneration and social inclusion.

Various models have been put forward for consideration during consultation. I suggest a fairly modest five-point plan. All problems demand a five-point plan, and this is mine: first, an end to section 7.1 consents and the restoration to local authorities of planning powers, the right to charge fees and to negotiate section 106 agreements; secondly, a requirement for genuine partnerships between local authorities and English Partnerships in both developing and implementing strategic local plans; thirdly, the cancellation of clawbacks and covenants that prevent local authorities from developing their own land for community benefit; fourthly, an obligation for English Partnerships to provide social and public service infrastructure to support commercial development on its own land; fifthly, the recycling of receipts—it already occurs in coalfield new towns—to support local regeneration.

Other hon. Members may have other solutions, perhaps involving regional development agencies or the passing of sites from English Partnerships to local authorities. Such counter-arguments may have their merits, but those five points could form the basis of a more constructive relationship between English Partnerships and local authorities.

New towns are unfinished business. It could be argued that old development corporations, the Commission for the New Towns and the English Partnerships' involvement was necessary in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, to make those towns come out of the ground. Now that they have, we need a new approach that acknowledges the rights and needs of the people who live there, that affords new towns the same status as other towns, that no longer discriminates against them on the basis of their age and that balances the interests of the Treasury with those of other Departments, including the Minister's.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): My hon. Friend has said that new towns need the same status as other towns. Does he agree that because the infrastructure ages at approximately the same rate, new towns have additional needs over and above those of other towns?

Peter Bradley: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I referred at the outset to the problems visited on local authorities by the deterioration of estates that are considered young by most standards, but because of inherent design faults, have pressing needs that cannot be solved solely through access to urban regeneration funding. That is a fair point, but my argument is that we should examine the claims of local authorities and their communities on the basis of need, irrespective of whether communities are based in new towns, old towns or in the middle of nowhere.

I am glad that that important point has been made. I am arguing for a rebalancing of the Treasury's interests with those of other Departments. I am not denying that English Partnerships represents a good income stream to the Treasury that is capable of being used wisely. I am not saying that the Treasury should be denied that income source. I am simply arguing for its duties and responsibilities to be rebalanced to represent the interests of other Departments too. That is why I look forward to hearing how the Minister will respond to the consensus that I believe will emerge among hon. Members today.

11.20 am

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): I apologise through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the Minister for the fact that I have escaped from a Select Committee meeting this morning to participate briefly in this debate, so I hope that she will forgive me if I cannot hear her remarks at the end of the debate.

This is an important issue and I am grateful to the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Bradley) for securing the debate. He has provided an opportunity to highlight a number of issues that have become apparent to me during my work with the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions and its Urban Affairs Sub-Committee over the past six months or so.

The hon. Gentleman has introduced the debate at a time of unprecedented pressure on many communities, many of which are the original new towns. I speak from direct experience. I was involved politically in Warrington during the mid-1990s when English Partnerships was still the Commission for the New Towns and there was already pressure of growth on land around Warrington, partly for the reasons highlighted by the hon. Gentleman and partly as a result of the Government's admirable desire to bring derelict land back into commercial, residential or other use. I have felt strongly since then that the role of what is now English Partnerships needs to be looked at thoughtfully and carefully, particularly in the context of the impact that the development of those towns is having and has had on nearby communities.

That became starkly clear to me when the Select Committee visited the north-west last autumn to examine the issue of empty housing. The hon. Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh), whom I see in the Chamber, was also on that visit. We went to Liverpool and Bootle, as well as to Burnley and parts of Manchester, but it was Liverpool and Bootle that brought home to me the need to balance the expansion of new towns with protecting much longer-standing communities.

In Liverpool we visited an area of considerable dereliction in what was once an attractive Victorian, middle-class area with substantial properties. In many parts of the north-west empty homes are in the classic terraces, with back yards and alleyways leading between two rows of houses, but that is not the case in Liverpool. If the derelict houses in that part of Liverpool were in Greater London, they would fetch many hundreds of thousands of pounds on the open market.

We also learned that there is considerable business activity in Liverpool and a significant flow of commuters into the commercial centre from places such

[Chris Grayling]

as Warrington that have grown over the past 20 years. The growth of Warrington has been startling. At the time of the famous by-election in the early 1980s, when Lord Jenkins, as he is now, was the candidate for the Social Democratic party, Warrington had one parliamentary seat. Today it has two, and even with two, the boundaries are beginning to burst at the seams in the way that the hon. Member for The Wrekin described. It has grown and grown so much that it is unrecognisable from the town it was 20 or 30 years ago.

The consequence of that growth is only too visible in the rundown and derelict areas of Liverpool. We must realise that encouraging the continued growth of the new towns can have a significant adverse effect on older communities. We must think about that issue carefully when we address the future planning policies and role of English Partnerships. We must take dramatic steps to curtail the relentless growth of development into green spaces, open fields and the green belt. We need to focus on bringing people back into derelict inner-city areas, which should be attractive places to live. They are close to the places in which people work and better for public transport, given today's congested roads.

David Wright (Telford): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the issue concerns not only new development for new towns, but ensuring that existing communities in new towns are sustainable? My hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley) made the point that much investment in new towns is 30 or 40 years old. We must revisit large urban estates in new towns to ensure that they are sustainable. It is not only about pressure for new housing development.

Chris Grayling: I listened with interest to the hon. Gentleman's remarks. He is undoubtedly correct. Milton Keynes plans to expand dramatically in the next 20 years. Will the existing infrastructure be able to withstand such a dramatic development? We must be careful before we expand an area for the sake of disposing of land, which is often green countryside. With some new towns, sites were derelict and have been brought into use but in many cases there is pressure to continue developing on green, open-space farmland that has been acquired by English Partnerships. If such development were to proceed at a relentless pace there would be a loss to the amenity of the countryside around those towns.

The past two generations' focus on new towns involved the creation of new communities at Skelmersdale in the 1960s and at Milton Keynes, Warrington, Telford and others. English Partnerships and other agencies have built up considerable expertise in bringing land into use to secure the development of property. I should like more of that expertise to be brought into our inner cities because there are some good precedents.

The Hulme estate in Manchester, which we also visited, is a startling example of how to turn a rundown council estate into a mixed development that has genuine attractions, adequate affordable housing for those who need it and an environment that will bring professionals back into the city centre. It provides an interesting example of the steps that we must take to bring life back into inner-city areas.

East Manchester has set out a programme that it describes as an east Manchester new town. It is perfectly plausible to approach the construction of a new town in an existing city area in the same way as we approached creating places such as Milton Keynes on greenfield sites and green belt areas. Radical surgery to an inner-city area such as east Manchester that has become run down may mean taking painful decisions. Several individual housing estates were supported over 20 years but the money achieved nothing because it was poured into a sieve. We may need to take painful decisions about demolishing and reconstructing communities, creating diverse types of housing and bringing the things that take people out to Warrington new town into east Manchester.

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): The thrust of the hon. Gentleman's remarks may be encapsulated in the statement that we want a coherent outlook from English Partnerships. The English Partnerships that is taking over greenfield sites in Warrington is bolted on to regeneration through Liverpool Vision. We are collectively searching for a proper coherence of outlook, stretching not just to one town but across the whole region.

Chris Grayling: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that comment. He is right. My view is that English Partnerships has a wealth of expertise, built up during a good many years, but although it has a presence in some areas that need regeneration, more of its expertise could be brought to bear in places such as Liverpool, east Manchester and other parts of Manchester to try to bring life back to those urban communities.

Our society must not develop almost like a doughnut, so that it has a vacuum in the centre where our traditional cities are, and dozens and dozens of new communities, new developments and new towns further out, which creates some of the problems that the hon. Member for The Wrekin highlighted. That threatens to destroy out traditional cities. We must be careful about that.

That is my contribution to the debate and my message to the Minister. English Partnerships has done an important job over the years in bringing back into use derelict sites with potential for economic development. The hon. Member for The Wrekin has made important points about the need for English Partnerships to be more community focused. In one or two cases in Warrington, I would have liked to see the Commission for the New Towns, as it was then, do more within the local community and be more thoughtful about what it was creating. There are lessons to be learnt.

I want the expertise of English Partnerships to help to bring about a new generation of new towns in existing cities. I would like to see real radical thinking in Government, in the agencies that work with Government and in Britain as a whole about how to breathe life back into our inner cities. The lessons of our new towns and of organisations such as English Partnerships can be brought to bear to achieve that.

11.31 am

David Wright (Telford): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley) on securing the debate.

I would like to dwell on the context. As the Member representing Telford, I have a significant interest in the role that English Partnerships has played over the years and in the activities of its predecessors in my area, the Telford Development Corporation and the Commission for the New Towns. Telford was created in the late 1960s and designated in 1968. It drew together a range of towns on the old east Shropshire coalfield, including Oakengates, Dawley and Madeley. It also picked up, as my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin said, a large influx of people from the west midlands and the black country. Communities from the west midlands conurbation largely populated some of the large estates placed between old towns and communities that the Telford Development Corporation built. It has taken a long time for some of those estates to integrate with the wider framework of the Telford area.

We must accept that the rapid expansion of the town in the 1960s and 1970s created a number of serious problems. The town's main shopping centre, as my hon. Friend has already pointed out, was intended to be a short-term building to be replaced in about 10 years, but it is still there. It has very little architectural merit. One of my friends describes it as a nuclear power station in the middle of the town. Short-term decisions and rapid investment decisions were made to try to provide retail facilities for a community arriving from the west midlands.

One of the biggest problems was the design and layout of some of the estates in south Telford, such as Woodside, Sutton Hill, Stirchley, Brookside and Malinslee. They were built very quickly, often using rapid manufacturing techniques, on what is classically called a Radburn layout, in which the structure of properties is not good for the maintenance of social order. The design is such that people gain access to their properties at the front and park vehicles at the back. There are large areas of unkempt open space, which creates problems on those estates.

When we consider new towns, it is important to remember the positive legacy of organisations such as the Telford Development Corporation and the Commission for the New Towns, which did a tremendous job. Telford was one of the biggest land reclamation projects ever undertaken in western Europe. It is a fantastic and vibrant town, but it is 30 years old and no longer a new town. That is part of the problem with using that title for such communities. They are new towns that are not new any more. Because they were built in one phase of development during a 10-year period from the late 1960s onwards, a lot of the initial investment has come to the end of its useful life. Communities living in large housing estates, or using services and facilities in the town are commenting on how tired parts of the town look. People are not racing into my surgery every fortnight and raising the issue of whether English Partnerships could do more in Telford. However, many communities involved in regeneration projects are beginning to realise the role that English Partnerships should play.

My hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin covered the issues relating to English Partnerships that we need to tackle in Telford. I would like to focus on three specific areas: first, housing regeneration, secondly, the sustainability of the wider urban environment, and thirdly, ensuring that Telford is the economic engine for the future of the west midlands. It has been in the past, and we need to ensure that it is in the future. Before doing so, I return to the issue of English Partnerships' landholdings.

Telford is not a traditional town in the sense that many other towns are. Many local authorities are able to deploy land resources and assets to facilitate regeneration activity. They assemble wide-scale partnership schemes, using land assets accumulated throughout many decades, to lever investment into local communities. That is my experience of working on housing regeneration activity in the west midlands. We do not have that luxury in Telford, because we do not have the same level of land supply available for deployment by the local authority in a strategic context. I would like to quote from the submission of Telford and Wrekin council to the part 1 EP review process:

> "EP's remaining uncontracted stock of consented s7:1 land for housing development is 144ha (360ac) and 158ha (390ac) for employment development. In comparison the Council's total committed development land is 16ha (39ac) and of this 11ha is subject to EP clawback. The above starkly illustrates the imbalance of assets held by the respective organisations and that the Council is essentially bereft of assets to reinvest in the development and regeneration of the town."

Unlike other cities, Telford is hampered by the fact that land is largely held, controlled and disposed of by English Partnerships, whose remit is not to be strategic, but to secure maximum income for the Treasury from the disposal of sites in the town.

On the issue of housing-led regeneration, many 1960s estates, often on the Radburn layout, hold communities together through strange road patterns and pedestrian networks, with large areas of unkempt open space. They have their own local centres, which were developed at the time. Housing was often poorly designed and running into disrepair, and many estates experienced housing abandonment and the decline of retail premises.

Woodside estate in the south of my constituency was developed using Radburn principles. At its centre are several walk-up flats that are experiencing severe levels of abandonment. Communities in those areas are starting to recognise, through the engagement of the council with community organisations, that English Partnerships needs to play a role in the redevelopment of their areas. The disposal processes and policies employed by Telford Development Corporation have made large parts of those estates fairly unmanageable.

In the last few years of the TDC, there was a significant push to dispose of social housing. The *Shropshire Star* carried advertisements saying, "Buy your house at a knock-down price before the end of the month, or the price will go up and you'll have to pay more." A very aggressive disposal strategy was pursued during the 1980s. Of course, that fitted into the ideology of the Government of the time. That strategy led to the desperate problem of dispersed land ownership. On many estates, people do not know who is responsible for their maintenance, and many small-scale private landlords do not manage and maintain their property. That problem was compounded by the transfer of the council's housing stock to a new registered social landlord. Essentially, I supported that move because it brought new investment into the town, but it has created a problem on estates such as Woodside, which has a range of property owners with little co-ordinated activity.

[David Wright]

Over the years, Government policy created many of the problems that we see on our estates in south Telford. English Partnerships does not acknowledge its role in dealing with the mistakes that were made. After all, its prime duty is to dispose of land effectively to generate receipts. If we are to sustain, redevelop and regenerate the large estates in south Telford, English Partnerships must begin to engage strategically in the process.

Because Telford is called a new town, it tends not to figure in debates about the urban renaissance, but there is a significant opportunity for us to engage in that debate and to facilitate large-scale investment in many estates in south Telford. We should be radical and use the best principles of quality design to help to alleviate some of the mistakes that were made at the end of the 1960s. That requires the promotion of genuine partnerships.

English Partnerships, its successor organisation or, as my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin suggested, the local authority, will need to engage with the Housing Corporation, local communities and developers to deploy assets collectively across south Telford. Part of the problem is that English Partnerships does not have a significant interest in estates such as Woodside—it divested itself of that interest through the policies of its predecessors—but it does hold some of the best sites around south Telford. Those resources must be drawn together into an approachable housing market renewal strategy across south Telford, which could be piloted with the use of English Partnerships' current assets.

As a minimum, we require the recycling of receipts from disposals by English Partnerships into local communities. That happens in coalfield communities, and I do not see why it cannot happen more generally in new town communities. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer would be pleased to hear that this is a spend-save principle. If we do not deal with the problem now we shall have to return to it in 10 or 20 years' time, when the bill will be much bigger and the problem much more complex. We can either decide to invest strategically now, using land resources and assets to create sustainable communities, or walk away, only to have to return to the problem later and spend more money to alleviate problems that we are encountering now and will in future.

That leads me on to sustainability, which should be at the core of any proposal to develop a new town. The principle of sustainability was not comprehensive and was perhaps too advanced for some of the planners in the late 1960s. Much of the development in Telford was short term and its urban environment is uninspiring in places. We should knit English Partnerships' landholding more closely into the strategic framework and deploy its assets more effectively. Its landholdings are dominated by 7.1 consents and its disposals tend to be project-specific and not strategic. It is time for that framework to disappear.

I used to be a member of the local authority in Telford and 7.1 consents were sometimes convenient because, when a difficult planning decision was required, we did not have to make it. That was a luxury, but did not help because we were not properly engaged in the strategy for the future of our town. We have reached the point at which 7.1 consents in a mature community of 30 years are no longer acceptable. Local communities should be given the right and the power to take control of the destiny of their towns. EP disposes of its assets on a one-off basis far too often and should integrate its approach with that of the local authority and other players.

I welcome some of the investment that EP has committed to Telford recently. I have met the staff and, as my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin said, they are co-operative and positive but are held back by EP's general principles and rules, which must be modified. I have met the chief executive of EP, who is committed to seeing Telford grow, but her hands are tied by the remit laid down by central Government. I should like some of the skills in the organisation to be deployed more effectively in Telford.

EP has recently funded feasibility studies into redevelopment of the shopping centre to which I referred, and it has put resources into development of a master plan for the area. That positive move was welcomed by the community, but no resources will be made available to implement the plan. We have some fantastic proposals, but no contribution from EP to implement them. They should be implemented.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I want to probe the hon. Gentleman's thinking. Does he envisage that all regeneration schemes in Telford will be entirely publicly funded, or does he anticipate new regimes levering in private sector finance to help to make the development projects more economically sustainable?

David Wright: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his helpful intervention. I envisage the involvement of private sector finance through the regeneration vehicles. It is clear that public funding cannot alone deal with the issues that arise on housing estates in south Telford and the shopping centre. Private finance will be at the core of regenerating the south of the town. That is why I referred to a housing market renewal area not just focusing on social housing but deploying private sector resources to diversify and change the housing market to make it more sustainable and effective in the long term. I envisage private finance playing a major and probably leading role in terms of the percentage of resources drawn into the town for regeneration. That does not clash with the broad principles of English Partnerships, which are to lever in private sector investment. At the moment it is not doing so strategically enough for the needs of the wider community.

My hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin said that in terms of promoting sustainability, we should consider transferring planning powers, particularly to allow the use of section 106 agreements. That is a major problem for the town in promoting sustainability. In many areas, local authorities use section 106 agreements to secure myriad advantages and opportunities for local communities through the planning process. At the moment we do not have that luxury in Telford. A large proportion of the land supply is disposed of and little community gain is drawn back through such arrangements. We could secure significant improvements for local communities on their estates if we were able to deploy those powers.

Some hon. Members mentioned that the regional development agency—in our case Advantage West Midlands—could get involved in the future of English Partnerships' assets in Telford. I would be somewhat concerned by such a development. I can the see the logic, but Advantage West Midlands is committed to drawing significant resources into regenerating the conurbation. That is important, but I do not want resources from Telford that go into the wider Exchequer pot to go into the black country conurbation. We need a different role and perspective in which local authorities take the lead.

My next point concerns Telford's role as an economic engine. It was a growth point and must be again. We must ensure that investment is made across the whole regeneration agenda, not just through site-by-site disposals or asset realisation. English Partnerships is good at devoloping industrial sites, and we should praise it for that. It provides a range of opportunities for economic growth in the town, but should fit into the wider strategic framework.

Finally, how do we move forward? I support the quality five-point plan of my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin. I like such things, and it was excellent. We must examine the possibility of local strategic partnerships leading on new town regeneration using EP assets. Perhaps local authorities should not have a dominant role; perhaps the system should be more widespread. I have said already that there could be opportunities to use structures such as housing market renewal areas or company structures to deliver change. I would prefer English Partnerships' assets to be in the local authority's control. We must see the recycling of receipts into the new towns and allow Telford and other towns access to the asset base that traditional communities have for the regeneration of their areas. As a minimum, we want a stronger strategic commitment to the new towns from English Partnerships. I look forward to the Minister's response.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Edward O'Hara): It may be helpful for hon. Members to know that the winding-up speeches will start not later than 12 o'clock, with a 10-minute allocation to each Front Bencher.

11.52 am

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is a great pleasure both to call a fellow north-west MP Mr. Deputy Speaker and to participate in the debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley) on securing the debate, as will every other Member who represents a new town. I agree with my hon. Friend's five-point plan—eerily, it reminds me of five-year plans. He and my hon. Friend the Member for Telford (David Wright) allow me to be brief because they covered most of the major points.

I represent Skelmersdale, which was built in the 1960s and 1970s on the Radburn principle of design layout that my hon. Friend the Member for Telford described. Indeed, in describing his estates, he described mine in Skelmersdale. The town was designed largely for the Liverpool overspill population and to separate vehicles from pedestrians with a system of courtyard layouts and cul-de-sacs emerging off spine streets. That leads to hugely disproportionate costs in street cleaning, refuse collection, ground and street furniture maintenance and, particularly, policing. It was built on an old coalfield that was exhausted long before Skelmersdale new town was started, which leads to an enormous need for ground remediation and rehabilitation for any development that takes place. It was built around a series of cloughs—in Cumbria they are called gills—which are deep clefts in the moorside that go down into the middle of the town. They are a great environmental asset but are extremely costly, as they disrupt transport systems and so on.

Skelmersdale was built using every innovative and experimental building technique known to man and a few that were not. Some of them were catastrophic and need expensive remedies. For example, many houses were built with central heating outlets in the ceiling. The fact that heat rises seemed to be ignored, so the bedrooms were heated moderately well but not the downstairs rooms. Even now, hon. Members could put their hands through the wall and pick flowers from the garden because the houses' metal frames are corroded and the concrete slabs have collapsed.

Skelmersdale was handed over to West Lancashire district council in the late 1980s incomplete, especially the town centre, but already in desperate need of refurbishment. There are about 42,000 people in Skelmersdale with no cinema, hospital, town hall, or civic assembly rooms. Despite its palpable needs, the council is unable to secure access to assets to help to remedy problems and to regenerate the town and the sub-region. The assets, formerly in the hands of the Commission for the New Towns, are now in the hands of English Partnerships.

Fifteen years ago, I organised a series of all-party petitions and attacks on the Secretary of State who was then responsible for the matter, Michael Heseltine. The reply every time was that over the years Governments had spent a lot of money building the new towns and wanted as much of that money back as possible.

Our experience in West Lancashire is that English Partnerships must realise its land assets in isolation, even if that queers the pitch for strategic development. It is a major problem in my town. Much of the available land asset is subject to clawback, depriving the local authority of the use of assets from the area for necessary regeneration.

At present, the district council holds 10 hectares of land, seven of which are affected by clawback; English Partnership currently has 62 hectares of land in the town, which will give hon. Members some idea of the disparity in power in the area. Furthermore, as a good council following the Government's edicts, West Lancashire has set up a local strategic partnership, which I chair for my sins. It is limited in its capacity to regenerate Skelmersdale because of the complex circumstances relating to land holdings in the town.

Skelmersdale's problems need sorting out. First, the democratically elected council requires overall planning powers and the power to realise public assets to allow it effectively to regenerate the town and especially to put together a strategic plan for the area surrounding the town centre—I, too, recognise the description of the nuclear power station. The land is owned by several different interests, including two councils and, substantially, English Partnerships. Secondly, coherent

[Mr. Colin Pickthall]

planning is impossible when English Partnerships has a separate planning remit. A national organisation such as English Partnerships cannot sensibly be aware of, and party to, the detailed planning and regeneration needs of a community such as Skelmersdale. Such plans should be subject to democratic local scrutiny and control.

English Partnerships has not absorbed Skelmersdale's special needs or those of other new towns. It lacks focus; it has many disparate responsibilities and its expertise lies more and more in inner-city regeneration. West Lancashire council is working with the original development agency, which has a grasp of the implications of land assets in the town for the regeneration of West Lancashire and the sub-region.

English Partnerships in Skelmersdale, with the best will in the world, is out of step, undemocratic and sometimes obstructive. That is not a criticism of individual staff with whom I have had to work, who have been excellent.

Like most new towns, Skelmersdale was built in a hurry, so all its problems arose simultaneously; housing, layout and infrastructure difficulties bring many social problems in their wake. We need every possible asset and inch of planning gain to fund developments and to turn the problems around. I strongly support the recent case that was made by the new town local authorities that the land assets of English Partnerships in new towns should go to the relevant LEAs without the powers of clawback.

12 noon

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): I congratulate the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley) on securing the debate. I apologise for not being able to rival his expertise in the subject, or that of other hon. Members who have spoken. The hon. Gentleman raised an important subject, to which the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions will turn soon. I largely accept his argument that new towns are peculiarly disadvantaged.

The debate is timely because the Government are reviewing the role of English Partnerships. The hon. Gentleman is right: this state of affairs has not been scheduled, as it were, or thought out. It is not part of a plan of one particular Government. The situation evolved, beginning with the Commission for the New Towns. The urban regeneration companies and authorities were then set up, followed by the regional development agencies. The template is more a patchwork than anything else.

Importantly, some of the objectives of English Partnerships coincide with those of the regional development agencies. I recently came across a copy of the old Buchanan report, which was published in 1962, priced 10s 6d, in which the notion of the regional development agency was first mooted. It was modelled on the Commission for the New Towns.

I feel sorry for any authority operating in the new towns because it is obliged by Government to implement a community plan and to work hard for service improvements of various sorts but handicapped in delivering the service improvements and changes. The hon. Member for The Wrekin and other hon. Members representing new towns have spoken about the peculiar transport problems of new towns, which were designed on the basis of Mr. Buchanan's ideas. Visitors to a new town have no difficulty getting into it but tremendous difficulty finding their way out ; that is particularly true of the town represented by the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall). In new towns, much of the industry is itinerant. It moves away rapidly, leading to high unemployment.

No one has argued that the new towns are assisted in the discharge of their duties by having on the scene a powerful player with sizeable assets that is able to impose sizeable burdens on the local authority, and that has appreciable and rather strange planning powers—the Government described them in their own review document as increasingly anachronistic. A natural conclusion may be that English Partnerships should relinquish its current role in the new towns and concentrate on other areas, as the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) said, such as regenerating the core of inner cities. One could argue that new towns have reached maturity, but do not forget that new towns and English Partnerships began as an aspect of Government, or national, planning policy. New towns are not organic creations. They are a planned entity and the policy imperatives that led to them still operate. English Partnerships conducts an appreciable amount of research and provides resources for regeneration. The regional development agencies appear to be set on the same mission.

On the review, we must bear it in mind that regional development agencies are precisely that: they are regional in scope. There will still be a residual role for an organisation that ensures that local regeneration aligns with national policy, and can act as a catalyst, partner and funder of forward-looking initiatives that dovetail happily with national imperatives. I draw attention to the good role that English Partnerships plays with Liverpool Vision. It adds extra impetus to that initiative, which is pan-regional in scope.

To agree with all that is not to conclude that new towns are in any way assisted by having a massive landowner with enormous planning authority on their doorstep. I sympathise with all hon. Members who represent new towns because, fundamentally, such communities are disempowered and disadvantaged. The hon. Member for West Lancashire referred to local strategic partnerships, but I do not understand how they can perform the same function for new towns as they do elsewhere. English Partnerships is left with all its power in place.

Eventually, new towns must become towns. There must be disengagement, and the Minister's thoughts would be best addressed to how that may take place. There is a fear , unmerited or merited, that there will be a land bonanza for new town local authorities and misuse of precious resources that could be used for development. The Government are on the horns of a dilemma. The discussion document states:

> "at present receipts from CNT disposals can only be used to support other CNT activities and not wider regeneration. A recent internal review found no easy solution to this issue."

The big problems have been highlighted today: a degree of planning anarchy in new towns that does not exist elsewhere; a serious democratic deficit, in which locally elected representatives cannot guarantee results for their community; and—this applies across the country, not just to new towns—a lack of joined-up government on regeneration while the role of English Partnerships is not defined. I support the thrust of what hon. Members have said.

12.7 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I am grateful to you for allowing me to catch your eye, Mrs. Adams. Before I go any further, I should declare my registered interest as a chartered surveyor, although I do not think that I stand to gain any pecuniary advantage from the debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley) on securing the debate. So far, there has been a lot of consensus. However, we may begin to differ when I propose some solutions.

The hon. Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh) outlined the genesis of English Partnerships. It is probably time that we reviewed its role to determine whether we can return to local authorities some of the control that it exercises. Regeneration schemes work best if local people are involved in the decision making, because they have a sense of ownership of such schemes. The 7.1 planning exemptions that have been mentioned so often seem like the dead hand of the state imposing control over new town corporations. That is an outdated concept that we should begin to dismantle. Therefore, I warmly welcome what has been said and agree that we should consider the future role of English Partnerships.

Having said that, we must consider the Government's role in urban regeneration. We should examine the recently published White Paper entitled "Our Towns and Cities: The Future—Delivering an Urban Renaissance", which was trumpeted by the Deputy Prime Minister recently. On the whole, it was a damp squib. For example, on 17 November 2000, *The Independent* said:

> "After a delay of three years, John Prescott published his Urban White Paper to a disappointing response. Most of Lord Rogers' Urban Task Force recommendations were barely addressed. Indeed, as Lord Rogers himself remarked, 'this... White Paper falls short of what is going to be required to engender a real urban renaissance.'"

We all agree that there are significant problems, but the question is how to solve them.

In preparation for today's debate, I examined the number of quangos set up to deal with the problem of urban regeneration. It is worth reading their names out. I shall then invite the Minister to reflect on whether we might simplify the process. The more quangos are in operation, the less people understand what they do. The more bureaucracy is created, the less effective they are. Here is the list of quangos: regional development agencies, a neighbourhood renewal unit, the European regional development fund, the single regeneration budget, the neighbourhood renewal fund encompassing a national strategy action plan, local strategic partnerships, the new deal for communities, urban regeneration companies, the English cities fund and a host of tax incentives for regeneration. Since the present Government came to power, new quangos have further fragmented the process.

David Wright: That list is a mix of organisations delivering funding initiatives on the ground. They are not quangos in the context of the Housing Corporation, for example.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Some are initiatives on the ground and some are quangos. Reading out the list illustrates how the entire system is too complicated and too bureaucratic.

Having to bid for public funding is another serious problem. Bidding raises the standard of preparation of individual projects. It is fine for the urban corporation or borough council whose bid is successful; it obtains the public money. For those bodies whose bids are not successful, however, considerable time is wasted by officialdom.

Peter Bradley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I will give way—it is the hon. Gentleman's debate—but will he allow me to finish?

Failed bids involve much wasted time. If the Government want to move closer to a bidding system, they need a much more streamlined process. Those who are unlikely to succeed should be told earlier and given a chance to improve their bid and to reach a standard that may succeed. People's time should not be wasted preparing bids that will never succeed, which breeds a culture of disappointment and stops people bothering in future. We should encourage imaginative, well-designed schemes, not replicate the mistakes of the 1960s when both Governments vied with each other to produce the maximum number of houses without being sufficiently concerned about design and durability.

Peter Bradley: The hon. Gentleman has suggested how active the Government are in urban regeneration, but I am unsure what that has to do with the title of the debate. Is not his objection to competition an indictment of his own Government's activities during the 1980s and 1990s? Competition was the cornerstone of their efforts to introduce regeneration, and it was one of the key reasons why it failed.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am not going to be tempted down the path of history: I am interested in the future and how the present Government are operating. The planning system is a key part of urban regeneration, and we welcome a number of proposals, particularly on streamlining the system and on moving much more quickly.

Section 106 agreements have been mentioned several times. Hon. Members will be aware that the Government propose to move towards a tariff system, so that many larger developments are not delayed excessively by having to negotiate a 106 agreement. Now, a project receives planning permission but is often delayed for a year or more while that agreement is negotiated. In principle, we welcome the tariff proposals to simplify and streamline the planning system, but they must be defined more carefully.

[Mr. Clifton-Brown]

We called for responsibility for regeneration to be brought under a single Minister. Currently, several Departments play a role, notably the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, but also the Department of Trade and Industry and the Treasury. One Minister should be responsible. I thought that that was to be the Deputy Prime Minister, but sadly he seems to have relinquished the role.

We called for the establishment of local regeneration companies across England and Wales as flagships for urban renewal. Those powerful new bodies would lever in private finance and would be headed by people with significant private sector expertise. The local authority and the community would be involved.

In a Westminster Hall debate last week, I mentioned the concept of town centre management schemes. I wish the Government would seriously consider those schemes, which could be composed of local authorities, English Partnerships, the voluntary sector and, above all, businesses. All sectors need to be involved in urban regeneration if they want it to be a success.

We should like to see research based on enterprise zones, urban development corporations and the city challenge schemes of the 1980s and 1990s, which showed that local regeneration schemes create new investment and business growth in the long term and do not just divert resources from neighbouring areas. My former right hon. Friend Michael Heseltine was criticised, but he introduced development corporations that managed to cut much of the red tape that stifled regeneration in our cities for generations.

I caution the Minister that, if we relinquish the assets of English Partnerships to local authorities, we may return to the monolithic control of the 1960s. Indeed, many local authorities throughout the country are sitting on billions of pounds worth of assets that they are not using.

Finally, I shall suggest a source of money that I suspect the Government will now take up with alacrity. Some hon. Members have mentioned the transfer of local authority housing stock to housing associations through large-scale voluntary transfer schemes, which were initiated by the last Conservative Government. We welcome such schemes, although they could be improved, as could tenant participation in housing associations.

A substantial amount of new money could be levered in if the remaining council houses were transferred in that way. Between 1988 and 1999, 400,000 council houses were transferred, which resulted in proceeds of £5.9 billion of private investment being levered in—the equivalent in 1999 prices of £6.5 billion. If the remaining 3.3 million council houses in England received the same level of private investment as existing LSVT schemes have levered in—let us say £16,400 per dwelling in 1999 prices—in theory up to £54 billion of private new investment could be generated. There is a substantial pot out there, and if the Labour party is looking for a new way of levering funds into urban regeneration, that would be a major way of doing so.

David Wright: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: If the hon. Gentleman does not mind, I will not give way, because I am in the last minute of my speech.

Suffice it to say that urban regeneration is a continuing problem. However, there have been some imaginative schemes, especially those proposed by Michael Heseltine. One has only to consider the imaginative schemes in Leeds and Glasgow city centres and in docklands to see what can be done when red tape is cut. I urge the Government to consider not only how much money they are investing in the schemes but what they are getting for that money and how effective it is in the regeneration of older and newer town centres.

12.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley) on securing the debate, and I assure him that I will address the issues of new towns and English Partnerships.

Many important matters were raised. I may not be able to deal with all the constituency issues, as I want to address issues that relate to the review, but I will respond to my hon. Friend's five points. I ask hon. Members to be tolerant if any constituency issues remain. I will deal with them in writing after the debate.

We must recognise that the creation of the new towns was one of the great achievements of the post-war Labour Government. They provided new residential areas and areas of economic growth for people to live and work in, and transformed the lives of people who made the journey from overcrowded inner cities. We should also recognise the pressures on housing, infrastructure and communities in the new towns, which all hon. Members considered in one way or another. My hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) raised some issues relating to the community and the wider service. What was a great vision of the Attlee Government is starting to show its age, and it is time to look at what is going on.

The Commission for the New Towns' role as a residuary body was not always helpful. Historically, the commission's principal objective was to liquidate its portfolio as quickly as possible, consistent with achieving value for money. Over 50 years, mistakes were made; that was bound to happen. There were mistakes in the handover, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Telford (David Wright) referred, and in engaging with the community. Issues remain, and feelings are strong. However, English Partnerships has tried to change the approach by becoming an investor in, rather than a liquidator of, new towns, using its portfolio to underpin the economic development aspirations of local authorities, regional development agencies and local communities. At the same time, it aims to create value and achieve wider community benefits over the medium term, and to demonstrate the practical application of the Government's urban renaissance agenda. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Telford that it is important that the new towns are part of the Government's agenda for urban renaissance.

I could list the many ways in which English Partnerships has ~~changed its~~ methods of operation, but I will select only a few. In a previous debate, my hon.

Friend the Member for Stevenage (Barbara Follett) raised the issue of town centre renewal, which is an essential component of the Government's approach to urban renaissance. English Partnerships recognises that many central areas of new towns require substantial reinvestment to create vibrant, mixed-use and competitive town centres. It is working with several local authorities on potential schemes in towns such as Bracknell, Harlow and Crawley. I will give my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire some more information about Skelmersdale, which has also been discussed.

English Partnerships and Milton Keynes have some ambitious proposals to transform the centre of Milton Keynes from a familiar low-density, car-dominated environment into a high-density, mixed-use city centre of regional significance. That clearly shows the shift in EP's approach.

I want to deal briefly with housing issues. My hon. Friend the Member for Telford spoke eloquently about some of the problems in his constituency. As he said, about 70 per cent. of the deck-access blocks in the central area of Telford are empty. Some difficulties have been created by the diversity of ownership; small-scale private speculators bought some of the housing at an early stage and they have not managed it well. English Partnerships and the local authority are considering how to deal with the problems, especially on the Woodside estate. There will have to be a development package to put the programme into place. The Bournville Trust is also considering providing a new type of housing in Lightmoor urban village, and is asking the local authority to look at planning consents. Sensitive matters have been raised.

Hon. Members asked whether English Partnerships could apply its expertise elsewhere; the hon. Member for Southport mentioned Liverpool. I flag up the involvement of English Partnerships in the millennium communities in Greenwich, for example, and its work in considering how to regenerate some of the appalling, rundown areas in the coalfield communities.

English Partnerships has changed the way it works. The review, which has been brought forward, will consider EP's role and functions in that context. The terms of reference are to consider its role in delivering the Government's policies and the future ownership of the Commission for the New Towns' assets and liabilities, to recommend any changes that may be necessary in the light of the review, and to examine EP's structure and processes to ensure effective delivery of its wide-ranging remit. We hoped to complete the first part of the review before Christmas, but that was not possible, partly because of the strong interest in it. However, we hope to be able to publish the review shortly.

I cannot prejudge the outcome of the review, but I can say that a number of the five points mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin will be dealt with. We are sympathetic to the restoration of planning rights. I hope that I have shown that English Partnerships is involved in genuine partnerships. The review will deal with substantial issues, including the cancellation of clawbacks and the recycling of receipts. There is already the obligation to provide public service infrastructure. I completely agree with my hon. Friend's points in that respect.

In the past two years, substantial progress has been made in shifting English Partnerships' agenda, taking account of some of the points made by hon. Members in the debate. I do not doubt the validity of the original vision of creating new towns to provide good homes and jobs for people from overcrowded inner cities. However, it is equally clear that mistakes have been made and that we must find a way forward. I believe that the review will enable us to consider those issues carefully, take the matter forward and provide a clear way of realising the Attlee Government's vision of decent homes and jobs for all.

Blackpool Victoria Hospital

12.29 pm

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Thank you, Mrs. Adams, for calling me to put the case for an additional computed tomography scanner at the three-star Blackpool Victoria hospital. May I say at the outset how delighted I am to see the hon. Members for Blackpool, South (Mr. Marsden) and for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble)? I thank them for their support for this initiative.

The hospital was recently praised in the local newspaper, *The Blackpool Gazette*, which said:

> "The Vic hailed as a 'super hospital'."

However, in spite of Herculean efforts by the clinical staff, there is tremendous pressure on the existing scanner facilities. I hope that the debate will make a case on their behalf to ensure that the current capacity is increased.

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way so early in his contribution to this important debate. Is he aware that the Department of Health has not yet determined the criteria for allocating new scanners through the renewal programme? Does he agree that the Blackpool Victoria trust must develop the case-of-need document that it has to submit to the Government and outline how vital additional scanning facilities are for my constituents, his constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South?

Mr. Jack: The hon. Lady makes a valid and relevant point. I shall develop that theme later in my remarks. The purpose of the debate is to accelerate the process that she has carefully described, because the pressures exist now and must be addressed.

The hospital has one CT scanner and one magnetic resonance imaging scanner, both bought as a result of public subscription. There is strong feeling in the area that the time has come for capacity to be expanded, but not by public subscription out of public funds.

I want to put on record my appreciation of the help given to me in preparing for this debate by Dr. Neil Flanagan, the senior radiologist at the hospital, who first drew my attention to this matter, as well as to Mark Lambert, one of the consultant surgeons, Dr. Graham Hoadly, the clinical director for radiology, David Gill, the chief executive, and to my own researcher, Caroline Evans. All of them have managed to put together what I believe is a very good case for the development of scanning facilities at the Blackpool Victoria hospital. The hospital; local Members of Parliament and patient groups are at one in arguing for this case.

How have we reached the point of having to raise this matter in Parliament? In the national cancer plan, the Government have rightly reduced the time between the initial request by a patient to see his or her general practitioner and the granting of an out-patient appointment to a minimum of two weeks. As the consultant radiologist told me, one problem that has arisen, as people come forward more quickly for their out-patient appointment, is that the demands on them to go for urgent scanning treatment have also increased. The result, as I shall demonstrate statistically in a moment, is that urgent cases form an ever-increasing queue, but for those who need routine use of the CT and MRI scanners the wait has become longer as they have been bumped down the list.

Urgent action is needed on this matter because an implication of the national cancer plan is, as I understand it, that by 2005 there should be a two-week time frame for urgent CT scans. Other developments, such as the National Institute for Clinical Excellence and the national service framework for older people, require all patients admitted to hospital with a suspected stroke to receive a CT brain scan within 48 hours by April 2004. That illustrates the pressures building up on scanning facilities at the Victoria hospital. To return to the intervention of the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood, if action is not taken now, we will not have sufficient scanning capacity to meet those very important new requirements and criteria.

Mr. Gordon Marsden (Blackpool, South): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way, and for securing the debate. Although it concerns the hospital in my constituency, it affects all on the Fylde. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood referred to the criteria allocation. Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern that, in deciding the database for allocation in the region, sufficient attention should be given to the peculiar and specific circumstances of the Blackpool Victoria hospital? It treats a large number of visitors and tourists, and the Department of Health is not sufficiently addressing those criteria.

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman raises an important dimension of the work of the Blackpool Victoria hospital, which is not always recognised in formulas for funding and resource allocation. He makes a valid point about the pressure on the hospital, which I am sure the Minister will want to acknowledge when she winds up the debate.

Looking at the matter from the patients' standpoint, I was struck by a letter from the Lymphoma Association. The regional co-ordinator of that association and a patient, Mr. Philip McIntyre, wrote that he was diagnosed four years ago with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. He said:

> "Within 16 days I had undergone X-rays, ultrasound, and biopsy, including a CT scan and started on my first session of chemotherapy.
>
> As you already are aware, the cancer workload at Preston and Chorley hospitals is similar to Blackpool. They have three scanners and Blackpool Victoria hospital has only one, this being provided from charitable donations...To be told you have cancer can be devastating both to the patient and the whole family, to have to wait upwards of 8 weeks for a scan is totally unacceptable.
>
> Four years have gone by, if I was being diagnosed today and having to wait 8 weeks for a CT scan due to only one scanner being available, my outcome does not bear thinking about."

That emphasises the human dimension. It is not something for the cheap headline, nor is it simply about resources; it is about people who are extremely worried and want quick answers to the searching questions, "What's wrong with me and what can be done to deal with it?"

The hospital has not taken the current pressures lying down. On 31 March 2001, the health authority agreed to provide £150,000, and a further £300,000 will be available from 1 April 2002 to increase scanning capacity. I want to put on record my appreciation of the efforts of Dr. Rodger Berry at the hospital. Despite personal injury and illness, he came in to try to help with the work being done to increase the existing system's throughput. Extra scanning sessions have been arranged, some of the work has been moved from the CT scanner to the MRI scanner and work has been undertaken at weekends.

The additional permanent scanning hours have funded much additional work, but have put tremendous pressure on the clinicians and their support staff. There are two vacancies for radiography posts in Blackpool. As the hospital put it to me, there is little chance of bringing more people in despite the fact that those currently there are being worked to the limit.

Mr. Marsden: On that point, I too pay tribute to the diligence of the hospital staff in extending those hours. I raised the issue at the end of last year in correspondence with my noble Friend Lord Hunt and received the response that weekend that extra hours were being worked. Does the right hon. Gentleman share my concern that that inevitably puts pressure on those facilities and that if, God forbid, there were to be problems regarding the overuse of that scanner, it would make the situation at Blackpool Victoria even more urgent and perilous?

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman makes a succinct and relevant point, which I shall not embroider.

While we are looking at the question of patients, I received a copy of a letter from a constituent of the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood—although, looking at the address on the letter, he may be a constituent of the hon. Member for Blackpool, South—who commented on the pressure on patients. He has an orthopaedic problem, but because an X-ray failed to show damage he was told that he must wait 15 to 16 months for a scan. Officially, there is a four-week wait for urgent CT and MRI scans, but more tellingly there is a 10-month wait for routine CT scans and a 15 to 16-month wait for MRI scans.

A local primary care group attempted to introduce direct GP referrals to a hospital in Liverpool to get round those roadblocks. Unfortunately, that did not work out as the GPs had hoped, but the Blackpool Victoria trust took up some of that capacity by moving 500 cases to Liverpool. We have not seen the benefit of the extra hours that are being worked because the more difficult cases reside in Blackpool. That has affected the productivity of the scanning facilities and illustrated the pressures on capacity. The Chorley and South Ribble and Preston Acute Hospitals NHS trust have one scanner per 300 acute beds; Southport, a place similar to Blackpool, has one scanner per 456 acute beds; Blackpool has one scanner per 658 acute beds, which makes it the 11th worst acute hospital trust in the United Kingdom for scanner capacity. That figure is telling.

I acknowledge that the Government are minded to increase national scanning capacity, and their programme to replace the 100 oldest scanners, which are more than 10 years old, is laudable. Their programme to put 15 new MRI and CT scanners in place is also welcome, but the timetable is worrying. If we examine the effect of the extra scanners on CT scans, once the new capacity is introduced, there will be one scanner per 151,500 members of the population. The current situation in the north-west region is one scanner per 153,800 people. If we consider the sub-region of Lancashire and South Cumbria, which includes the excellent Rosemere unit in the Chorley and South Ribble and Preston Acute Hospital NHS trust that has five scanners doing remarkable work in the treatment of cancer, we have one scanner per 181,800 people. Blackpool has one scanner per 347,000 people, which illustrates why we need greater capacity straight away.

There is a good business case for why we should have a new scanner. The question of upgrading the existing scanner was looked at, but there were significant disadvantages, especially from the radiographers' point of view because they feel that this would provide insufficient throughput to meet the forward demands of the new national cancer plan, and the NICE and national service framework recommendations. A second CT scanner would double patient throughput, reduce patient waiting times, provide a better response to in-patient requests, facilitate better training opportunities for staff, allow the department to acquire a modern scanner capable of enhanced functions that are currently not available, provide extra cover in the event of the other machine breaking down, allow additional capacity to be phased in on a sessional basis and, most importantly, anticipate future demand.

The Minister may, rightly, mention the question of resources. I am advised that what is required is capital investment of between £0.5 million and £0.75 million, with additional investment for new radiographers and the associated team. That is a relatively small price to pay in relation to overall expenditure on the health service, bearing in mind that the good people of the Fylde coast have already made their contribution by purchasing the existing CT and MRI scanners by public subscription.

Mr. Marsden: On that point, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the Government have made an entirely laudable commitment to replacing scanners and to upgrading generally, and that it is important that the case for an additional scanner at Blackpool Victoria hospital is not downplayed purely and simply because we have had the good fortune to raise the funding for the initial scanner by public subscription, so that it is not one of the older scanners that might be automatically replaced?

Mr. Jack: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. My purpose in initiating the debate was not to bash the Government, because in fairness they recognise the problem. The case that all three Members for the Fylde coast want to underscore is that, if we go by the timetable given to me by the Minister's Department in parliamentary questions, then before we can even look at the criteria for the allocation of a new scanner we will have to wait for the programme to replace scanners that are more than 10 years old, and with every day that goes by we shall fall behind in our ability to meet the demands on scanning capacity.

[Mr. Jack]

The hon. Member for Blackpool, South is right to draw attention to the worry that the criteria that will be used to determine the allocation of the extra 50 CT scanners are not yet in the public domain. Some people inside the NHS say quietly and privately that there is a nasty smell suggesting that this might be a done deal; that words may have been exchanged behind closed doors about where in general the new scanners are supposed to go, and that any public consultation exercise to determine the criteria will be a sham. As the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood said in her telling intervention, that would deny us the opportunity fully to air the arguments for Blackpool to be a beneficiary of one of the new machines.

I want to close with a paragraph from the consultant haematologist, Dr. Flanagan, whom I earlier accused of being a radiologist. He made some telling comments in a letter to me dated 23 February last year:

> "I am determined to ensure that my patients and others in the Fylde with cancer have an equal availability of diagnostic facilities and that a definite date for the provision of these facilities is published. After all, what is the point of a Governmental edict that all cancer patients should see a Specialist within two weeks if their subsequent diagnostic procedures are delayed for up to three to four months before treatment can start? I would love to find that commonsense prevailed here so that I could quietly fade into the background again. However, if I have to continue to make waves until these patients get their deserved service then so be it."

Blackpool was battered by storms yesterday. I hope that calm will descend on the hospital after the Minister responds to the well-reasoned, moderate, sensible and widely-supported argument that we should press the fast forward button to allow one of the new scanner facilities to be granted to us at the earliest possible opportunity.

12.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) on his success in securing this Adjournment debate on scanning facilities at the Blackpool Victoria hospital and I welcome the comments and support of my hon. Friends the Members for Blackpool, South (Mr. Marsden) and for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble).

The scanning facilities at Blackpool Victoria hospital are a matter of strong feeling on the part of the local Members and their constituents. I welcome the strong support that they have shown for local health services and their improvement. I will try to respond to their points.

Blackpool Victoria hospital is a large acute hospital serving around 350,000 people on the Lancashire coast. That includes those in urban and rural communities, affluent neighbourhoods and areas of social deprivation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South pointed out, the hospital must serve the resident population and millions of holidaymakers every year, placing additional demands on health services. The trust was awarded three stars in September's performance tables, achieving all but one of the nine key targets. Such quality indicators matter to patients and their relatives. Blackpool's star rating is a tribute to everyone who works in the hospital and they deserve our congratulations.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Health has been invited to Blackpool on Friday to open formally phase 5 of the Victoria hospital. That is a major new development, consisting of expanded accident and emergency and critical care facilities, a medical admissions unit, coronary care unit, seven acute medical wards and a cardiology ward.

The right hon. Member for Fylde focused on the need for additional scanning capacity. At present, the hospital has two scanners: one computed tomography, or CT, scanner and one magnetic resonance imaging, or MRI, machine. Both were installed comparatively recently, so neither is due for replacement in the near future. By 2004, we are committed to phasing out all machines used in the diagnosis of cancer that are more than ten years old.

The difficulty at Blackpool has not been old and unreliable equipment, but escalating demand. The signs are that activity will continue to rise for the foreseeable future.

A year ago, waiting times for urgent and routine CT and MRI scans at Blackpool Victoria hospital had risen to what were considered to be unacceptable levels. Consequently, the trust submitted a business case to North West Lancashire health authority, suggesting three alternative strategies to increase capacity. After negotiations with trust management and radiology staff, the health authority agreed to release additional funding for 2001-02 and 2002-03 to pay for additional scanning sessions. That enabled the trust to arrange extra scanning time at weekends, which it hopes will add about 700 scans to the annual total by the end of 2001-02.

Last month, the trust introduced another 10 hours scanning time each week on each machine. That is a permanent arrangement, but its full implementation is conditional on the hospital's successfully recruiting more radiologists. Over a 12-month period, extra operating hours should deliver more than 2,000 CT and MRI scans.

The trust will address staffing in a number of ways. It is reviewing staffing roles and responsibilities, so that radiographers can be trained to carry out certain tasks in place of radiologists. It will recruit a specialist registrar to the radiology team, and promote Blackpool as an attractive location for consultants. The introduction of a booked admissions approach should deliver service planning advantages.

The chief executive, Mr. David Gill, wrote to hon. Members in November, detailing the current position and the actions that had already been taken to alleviate long waits. He outlined the measures proposed for the future, and I am pleased to say that the situation has improved since then.

The latest figures that I have seen are for 10 January, when urgent waiting times stood at three weeks for both types of scan. As that is a week less than in mid-November, some progress is being made. Routine waiting times are 10 months for CT, 16 months for MRI, and five months for brain scans. Provided the necessary staff can be identified, more sessions are planned from 1 April when the 2002-03 money becomes available.

Mr. Jack: What does the Minister's Department think is an acceptable time for a routine scan? If I had been told that I needed such an investigation, it would worry me enormously to wait longer than 10 months. What can be done about that?

Yvette Cooper: Clearly, the right hon. Gentleman is right. There are concerns about long waits for routine scans and we must speed up access to those scans across the board. The evidence of progress is welcome, but hon. Members are right to say that there is still some distance to go before a breakthrough can be achieved. The projected levels calculated by the trust suggest that although the improvements will restrict the rate of increase, they do not amount to a long-term solution.

From April 2004, we expect all patients who are admitted to hospital with suspected strokes to receive a CT brain scan within 48 hours. Hospitals such as the Blackpool Victoria should have plans in place by April this year to meet the new standard.

From David Gill's letter, it is clear that the trust has researched the subject carefully. He correctly says that the north-west as a whole has above average access rates to scanners on a per capita basis, but it is equally correct that overall distribution is patchy with some localities undeniably served better than others. In recognition of that situation, which we inherited, not just in the north-west but throughout the country, we have introduced a series of initiatives aimed at levelling up provision throughout the country to reduce access times and to ensure that patients are not faced with long journeys from home to add to their anxiety. Hon. Members will understand that years of under-investment cannot be put right overnight. It takes time to manufacture and install equipment.

Additional replacement scanners have been or are being delivered through the new opportunities fund, the cancer capital modernisation fund and the NHS and cancer plans, but demand still exceeds supply. The Department's cancer services team, in conjunction with cancer networks throughout England, is drawing up criteria for allocating new machines as equitably as possible, taking account of relevant factors such as existing provision. Any bids presented by the Blackpool Victoria will be evaluated with those from elsewhere in the country against a common set of criteria. That is the fairest way of determining where top priorities lie. Since April 2000, 27 new MRI scanners and 63 CT scanners have been installed and by the end of 2004, a further 123 CT scanners will be delivered as well as additional equipment.

Hon. Members are right to say that discussions are still taking place about allocation of the 50 additional CT scanners and the 50 additional MRI scanners identified in the cancer plan. The cancer networks and regional cancer co-ordinators are, rightly, at the centre of discussions to decide where the additional machines should be located. They are aware of the depth of feeling in Blackpool about lengthening queues, and I shall ensure that they are made aware of the comments made by hon. Members today on behalf of their constituents and the concerns that they have raised.

We are seeing a gradual increase in the number and quality of scanners as old equipment is replaced and new machines are delivered. Geographical coverage is also improving. Hon. Members will understand that I cannot make commitments about individual bids at this stage and the case will need to be considered against the cases made by other areas that also face need.

Mr. Jack: When will the criteria be published, so that we may make representations?

Yvette Cooper: I cannot answer that now, but I shall write to hon. Members.

We must ensure that available scanners and equipment are used in the best possible way. I know that the local trust has done a lot in that context, but we need to do more throughout the country. I note that two out of 10 local consultant radiologist posts are vacant when candidates are in short supply nationwide. The supply of skilled radiographers is also an issue if we are to ensure that we are using existing scanners and equipment to full capacity. Nationally, we are working with the Society of Radiographers and bodies such as the Royal College of Radiologists to improve the radiography work force, including an increase in the number of radiography training places, which have increased by 20 per cent. in the past year and will increase by 55 per cent. by April 2002, extending the careers of radiotherapy staff who are currently working in the NHS and developing new ways of working in radiotherapy to allow staff to develop and extend their roles in the profession.

There is scope for innovative solutions and the right hon. Member for Fylde said that some patients have had knee scans in Merseyside under a pilot scheme agreed between the health authority and the Royal Liverpool university hospital. More innovative solutions will need to be considered throughout the country to deal with capacity problems.

In Blackpool, as in other parts of the country, the conclusion is clear. Yes, we need more scanners. Yes, we need more investment in the NHS. That is already happening, but it must continue fairly throughout the country. We also need reform and modernisation to ensure that we make the best use of facilities in the fairest possible way to improve access and care for local patients.

Cat and Dog Fur Trade

1 pm

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise this issue, which has aroused widespread concern. An early-day motion calling for a ban on the use of cat and dog fur in Britain was signed by 223 hon. Members from all parties. That number is one of the largest for any issue in this and the previous Parliament. A recent public opinion survey showed that a massive majority supports an outright ban on the use of cat and dog fur and those findings are not necessarily based on widespread recognition of the extent and severity of the fur farms involved.

I acknowledge the input of the leading campaign in this matter—the Nottingham-based Respect for Animals. I shall quote from its research and from work done by undercover investigators employed by the Humane Society of the United States, which is the American equivalent of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. I am also grateful for input from Charles Tannock, Member of the European Parliament for London for the initiative that he and others have taken in the European Parliament.

It is estimated that 2 million cats and dogs are slaughtered annually as part of the trade. Typically, around 50 cat or dog skins are used to make one full-length fur coat, although skins are also used for trimming and on coats made of fur from other animals.

Animals are generally kept in a long row of wire cages, like battery chickens, in an open-sided shed. The environmental impact is significant even in well-regulated countries such as Denmark and Finland and even more so in the generally less regulated developing world. Under the World Bank's industrial pollution protection system—IPPS—fur dressing and dyeing rank among the worst five industries for toxic metal pollution. Some products used in the process are banned in the European Union—for example, arsenic, which is a multiple carcinogen. In practice, furs are not biodegradable despite being natural products because the chemicals, including the carcinogens, needed to preserve the coat are not degradable and so add to the issues surrounding landfill sites when coats are discarded.

Fur farms in China and the Philippines were filmed by undercover investigators and showed cats and dogs being treated in ways that the United States Congress report on the subject recently described as gruesome. I shall not go into detail, but animals were filmed in appallingly cramped conditions and being beaten and skinned alive.

With that background, there is no reasonable doubt that very few British consumers would knowingly wear cat or dog fur. However, the fur is often disguised with fraudulent labelling and there is often no description of fur trimming on cloth coats or it is described as "other fur". Furs are bleached and dyed to make them resemble more expensive fur, and that process also uses carcinogens such as benzene.

The trend for using cat and dog fur is increasing for two reasons. First, the intense trapping of wildlife has greatly reduced the supply of other fur. Secondly, the pressure of cost has pushed more and more of the trade to the far east where wages are lower and there is less regulation. The Hong Kong trade and development council noted that most firms in Hong Kong have moved production to the mainland because of its less stringent environmental regulations.

There is a tradition in China of eating cat and, in particular, dog meat and people there are more desensitised to the issues involved than those in other countries. The trend to move fur production to China, the Philippines and other east Asian countries increases the likelihood that low-cost cat and dog furs will be used. The current estimate is that around 2 million cats and dogs are being used.

I have several concrete questions. First, does that affect Britain? In 2000, more than 21 metric tonnes of "other fur", which is the category that includes cat and dog fur, was imported into the UK from China and Hong Kong. As the figure is not broken down further, and as we know that there is substantial evasion of labelling, it is difficult to be more precise than that, but we are discussing a substantial block.

Secondly, is this an issue for the European Union or for us? We have had a ruling on that from Pascal Lamy, the relevant Commissioner, who says that it is a matter for subsidiarity—in other words, that each country should decide for itself. That has been borne out by the Italian Parliament's recent decision to ban fur imports.

It is important to consider whether a ban would be legal. Britain, as a major trading nation, has an interest in ensuring that we do not set a bad example by violating international trade agreements and that we support the need for sensible and responsible free trade. World Trade Organisation rules specify that we may not interfere in the way in which a product is produced, but we may ban a particular product. The classic example of that is battery hens: we could ban eggs, but we cannot ban battery hen eggs. In this case we are, however, discussing a specific product that we do not produce in Britain, and there is no question of attempting surreptitiously to protect our home industry in cat and dog fur because we would be banning an entire product range. In addition, no countries openly admit to the trade. The likelihood of someone bringing an action under the WTO rules is small because they would first have to admit that they conducted the trade.

The United States, which is as sensitive to the issue as we are, has implemented a full ban with stringent regulations covering what happens if one attempts to evade it. We can reasonably ask whether there is a need for a ban given that the British Fur Trade Association has promised not to deal in cat and dog fur. As Baroness Symons noted in another place, some traders are outside the BFTA and are not bound by its rules.

A "Newsnight" investigation showed a reputable member of the fur trade who was prepared systematically to mislabel dog fur imports. We must be careful about accepting the word of a trade association on behalf of its members and all non-members. With the best will in the world, such an association is unable to back up such statements in practice.

I welcome Baroness Symons's comments in another place on 11 December in which she described the trade in domestic dog and cat fur as "abhorrent", and said:

> "It is not illegal per se to import cat and dog fur...we are exploring what proportionate and enforceable steps we might take to ban any such imports."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 11 December 2001; Vol. 629, c. 1234.]

That is what people who are concerned were anxious to hear. I hope that the Minister will be able to respond to the widespread feelings on this matter and to tell us more.

1.9 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) for securing this Adjournment debate and for his interest in the trade in domestic cat and dog fur. I am of course aware that he is the primary sponsor of early-day motion 11 on the subject.

My noble Friend the Minister for Trade and Investment recently answered an oral question and subsequently wrote to all hon. Members explaining how the Government propose to proceed. As she said, the Government share people's concerns about cruelty to animals overseas and practices in those countries that do not observe the same high standards of animal welfare that we have in the United Kingdom. We shall continue to raise animal welfare standards wherever possible.

Let me be clear that the Government believe that the import and export of and trade in domestic cat and dog fur is abhorrent, and we are exploring whether proportionate and enforceable steps can be taken to discourage such trade, both to and from this country and domestically.

If we are to consider a ban on imports we must satisfy ourselves as to the extent of any imports that are taking place, so our starting point must be the import trade statistics. As I explained to the House last November, in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen), our trade statistics do not separately identify cat and dog fur. Any imports of such fur would be classified under the catch-all heading of "other fur"—that is, furs that are not separately classified elsewhere. More recent figures for 2001 suggest a slight upwards trend towards cheaper fur imports. However, that may be as much to do with fashion trends as with anything else. Certainly, at this stage there is not enough evidence to identify the animal composition of such imports.

Over coming months we will examine the trade statistics in more detail to try to determine how much, if any, domestic cat and dog fur is being imported into and exported from the UK. For the classification reasons that I mentioned, that will necessarily take some time as we will need to ascertain the facts behind the trade statistics.

An additional related problem is that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for Customs and Excise officers to identify by sight at the point of entry any imports of cat and dog fur separately from other unidentified fur, especially if it is mixed with fur from other animals. As my hon. Friend pointed out, furs can be bleached or dyed to disguise their origins and to simulate more expensive furs. Ultimately, forensic examination of all consignments containing fur would be required to identify any cat and dog fur that may be included in them. That would be disproportionate, given that we are not aware of the scale of any problem, and would be ultra vires where the importation is not illegal per se.

In addition to a closer study of the trade figures, we will pursue other sources of information and consult more widely among interested parties. We have already spoken to the British Fur Trade Association and to several non-governmental organisations. The BFTA told the Government that none of its members deals in domestic cat or dog fur.

The second problem of identification is that no fur is required to be labelled as cat or dog fur in this country. The only fur for which there is such a legal requirement in the UK is sealskin. Some fur is labelled simply as fur or exotic fur. It is not illegal to do that.

Hon. Members will note that the UK import statistics that I gave to my hon. Friend identify made-up garments containing fur separately from sealskins and those of sheep or lambskin or other such garments containing fur. It is illegal to misrepresent fur as coming from rabbit or wolf, for example, when it is not from those animals. Should that happen, legislation already exists to prevent consumers from being misled. Under the Trade Descriptions Act 1968, it is a criminal offence to apply false or misleading statements to goods by any means.

The United States ban on the import, production and use of cat and dog fur was referred to in the early-day motion. It is clear to the United States authorities that large quantities of cat and dog fur were being imported and mislabelled, which was misleading consumers. We understand that the United States Government took into account a video by the Humane Society of the United States when considering whether to ban the trade in domestic cat and dog fur. The video was made two years ago and focused on trade in the United States. In November 2000, the United States passed legislation banning the import, export, marketing, sale, and use of domestic dog and cat fur. The ban cites mislabelling of imports from China, which could mislead consumers, as the primary reason, and a further justification was that trade in cat and dog fur products is aesthetically abhorrent to United States citizens. That is the first time that aesthetics have been introduced in aid of an import ban.

The Act in the United States takes a blanket approach, requiring any product that contains even the smallest amount of fur to be DNA checked. That is an expensive exercise that requires enforcement personnel to be trained and equipped with state of the art technology, and the accreditation of special laboratories.

Dr. Palmer: Does my hon. Friend agree that British consumers probably feel similarly to American consumers, regardless of the quantities involved? The permission to import cat and dog fur is in itself abhorrent. Would he agree that the fur trade is damaged by the suspicion that legitimate furs are being sold that might yet be cat or dog fur?

Nigel Griffiths: Everyone knows that the practice is abhorrent. What we are getting to the heart of is the principled reason underlying the United States' ban, which concerned a volume of imports designed to mislead consumers and reflected a terrible scale of animal cruelty in countries from which the animals originated. That contrasts with the difficulty that we

[Nigel Griffiths]

have had in securing evidence of such practices in the United Kingdom. There is no evidence of anything on the scale of what has been experienced in the United States. Nevertheless, I have undertaken to pursue such evidence and collect it where possible. I realise that my hon. Friend has heightened awareness of the practice, and for that we are grateful. However, I am concerned—I know that he will share my concern—that legislation applicable to the United States could be difficult to transfer here, for a number of reasons

The situation in the United Kingdom is different. First, in the United States there was, as I have said, clear evidence of an import trade in this type of fur. So far, we have found no similar evidence in imports into the UK. Second, the aim of the United States measure was primarily to control the mislabelling problem. That raises the question whether, if applied to the UK, it would constitute a proportionate response in relation to the amount of trade involved and the availability of other remedies. In the UK we normally consider the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 as sufficient. Clearly the United States has no comparable legislation.

Third, as I am sure we are all aware, the United Kingdom cannot, unlike the United States, act unilaterally in regard to imports and exports with third countries, as this is a matter of exclusive community competence. Any measures that we may consider would therefore have to be discussed first with our European partners, and, for that discussion to be credible, we would first need clear evidence of a problem in this country, which we do not have at present. I know from bilateral meetings with colleagues in Europe and Ministers in each of the European countries that, in advancing any change or improvement in legislation, they look for the evidence. That is why we have undertaken to evaluate any evidence that emerges. Without such evidence, we are not likely to have fruitful dialogue with our colleagues in the European member states.

Dr. Palmer: Can my hon. Friend the Minister clarify the application of subsidiarity? I understand that Pascal Lamy has said that the EU would not wish to deal with the matter at a European level but that it was a matter for individual countries. Is that not my hon. Friend's understanding?

Nigel Griffiths: My hon. Friend will find that Pascal Lamy did not address imports and exports but internal production and marketing.

As I have said, we need to investigate further the present situation in the United Kingdom when we consider whether to introduce a similar import ban. Furthermore, any regime introduced in this country as a result of our current investigations must have a strong possibility of working in practice and must be proportionate: we must ensure that the resources that we commit to tackling it are in proportion to evidence of abuse. As I said, the United States has clearer evidence than has been supplied to us of widespread abuse and the perpetration of consumer fraud. Thirdly, any regime must be enforceable, an issue that I shall touch on in a minute. Those are reasonable parameters—I see my hon. Friend nodding assent—which my noble Friend has outlined, and we shall consider the issue on that basis.

We have noted a newspaper article published just before Christmas stating that the Government will ban the trade in cat and dog fur in the coming months. The House will realise from my comments that we are not yet at a stage when we can make that decision. Our investigations continue, and we must consider action that is enforceable and proportionate. We shall report further in due course.

The newspaper article stated that a fur collar obtained from a large London store was found to contain DNA traces of Canidae. However, that is not conclusive proof that domestic dog fur is being imported into the UK, because Canidae is the Latin term for the canine family, which covers no fewer than 14 genera and 34 species. About half those species are on the lists of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of wild fauna and flora and therefore need CITES documentation to enter the country. The domestic dog, otherwise known as canis lupus familiaris, is only one of those 34 species. Others are the coyote, the dingo, the jackal, the wolf, the fox and the dhole. Some of those species are even culled as pests in other parts of the world.

Having begun our investigations into the trade in domestic cat and dog fur in the UK, we must proceed with the further work being urged on us by my hon. Friend. The Government view it as an emotive matter. I hope that what I have said will reassure him that we take the issue seriously through our investigations. We have looked in some detail at the position in the United States, so we do not lag behind it in the ability to carry out any necessary detection. However, the scale of the problem in the United States appeared, from my hon. Friend's and other comments, to be so horrendous that action was needed, and not just to protect consumers, although I understand that that was the primary reason for introducing the ban in the United States.

I hope that I have also demonstrated that we are aware of the issues surrounding Pascal Lamy's powers and desires and are more than willing, if pan-European action is needed on the basis of evidence that we do not yet have, to enter into a dialogue with the Commission and other countries. Before we consider introducing legislation, it is essential that we have the evidence that does not at present exist. If we or the groups with whom my hon. Friend is in touch can do anything to help to collect that evidence, that would be especially welcome.

I understand that our officials have viewed the video from the United States, which, as I said earlier, applies only to that country, and are in dialogue with colleagues there about the issue. However, as the problem is not as large in the UK or the European Union, that sort of evidence will be necessary to change minds. Without it, we shall not succeed. I realise that, for consumers, this is an ethical and not an economic issue and that in other cases, such as cosmetics, the Government have left the moral decision to consumers but have ensured that they are fully informed.

The Government hope to make suggestions towards the end of this year on advancing the issue. I assure my hon. Friend that they will write to all hon. Members on the outcome of the investigations.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote to all Members of Parliament about early-day motion 11 setting out succinctly some issues on which I have touched in this Adjournment debate. I hope that hon. Members found that information useful, and that what I have said today has reassured them that we take the issue seriously.

Young Female Offenders

1.30 pm

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): I was pleased to secure this debate, which was motivated by an urgent case involving one of my constituents.

I shall begin by making a couple of remarks about the spirit in which I am raising the matter. I shall refer to a particular constituency case, but I do not intend to use it as a stick with which to beat the Government. Following last week's events, I have a clear understanding of how we should raise constituency matters, which is to seek a constructive dialogue with the relevant Minister about the way in which improvements can be made. I shall listen to the Minister in a positive frame of mind and look for signs that things are being improved.

The fact that debate should be conducted in that manner was brought home to me on Sunday when I visited a Jewish hospital service on holocaust memorial day to raise money for Sheffield's hospitals. The curate from Sheffield's Royal Hallamshire hospital pointed to the way in which we currently conduct political debate, and there was some resonance from the audience at the idea that politicians should always seek to improve matters rather than raising cases in a way that is destructive rather than constructive. I shall raise a particular case, but I expect general comments from the Minister because it is difficult to comment on a case that is in progress. I shall look for helpful and hopeful signs about preventing such situations from occurring again.

The other reason why I want to raise a particular case is that my constituent's father, who has been heavily involved with it—he first came to me in 1997, soon after my election to Parliament—has analysed the system and passed his conclusions on to me, and I have found his comments about the difficulties of working with the system to be informative. Rather than concentrating on his specific case, he sees a wider public function in [illegible]ng the matter, trying to learn some lessons and seeking improvements for the future. I have spoken to him, and he has spoken to my constituent who is currently in secure accommodation. They are happy that I should raise the matter in the spirit of seeking to improve matters for the future.

The case involves a constituent called Claire who turned 18 at the end of last year. She was convicted in 2000 at the age of 16 of threatening someone with a knife. It is clear that the event took place, and she was properly sentenced to secure accommodation through the criminal justice system. Her background of problems goes back to when she was 13, when she was off school for a period with clear behavioural problems that meant that no school in the local authority would take her. There was a long delay as the LEA sorted things out, during which she became involved with the kind of people who, sadly, seek to take advantage of young women in our society.

In spite of the best efforts of her parents—anyone who has sought to control a difficult 13 or 14-year-old will know that no parent can maintain 24-hour supervision—she had time on her hands and became involved with people against whom there was evidence of sexual abuse. She began self-harming, and a lot of her subsequent behaviour has a psychiatric component,

[Mr. Richard Allan]

which is clearly a large element in the way in which she has approached life. She has a lot of frustration and anger, much of which she has taken out on herself.

Claire went through two years of seeking to find appropriate accommodation, which takes us to the point at which I became involved. Her father tried to get various agencies to find the right accommodation for her, and other cases have since been referred to me that also fall on the borderline of not yet being a criminal justice problem: the individuals concerned have not yet committed the kind of offences that mean that they can go through the courts and be sentenced, yet they are clearly at risk and could put others at risk by some of their behaviour.

The difficulty is that that problem sits in the border between social services and education and health providers. In my constituency case, wherever my constituent's father turned, the matter seemed to be somebody else's responsibility. If the youngster was deemed to be at risk, the issue fell largely within the domain of social services; if the problem was that the youngster was deemed to require something to occupy them educationally, the focus fell on the LEA and whether it could find a suitable placement; if the problem was deemed psychiatric, it fell to health. A great deal of debate took place about trying to find a suitable placement. What the parents and the young lady needed was a secure environment in which a difficult youngster could develop and perhaps avoid some of what occurred later.

For a couple of years, when she was between 14 and 16, the young lady was held in various forms of accommodation—some psychiatric, some in the Sheffield area, some outside—but the difficulties continued. Her behaviour was tough, there were further suggestions of sexual abuse, and she returned to Sheffield in 1999, still clearly disturbed, and with none of the fundamental problems addressed. A few months later in 2000, having again become involved with inappropriate people and having acquired a heroin habit in the meantime—there were also suggestions of informal prostitution—she went over the top and threatened somebody with a knife. While no physical assault occurred, the attempt had clearly taken place and was properly prosecuted.

The young lady, then 16, was sentenced to secure accommodation. The judge had difficulty in finding a suitable placement for her and felt, he said, that there was nowhere he could send her. Indeed, he delayed sentencing and held her on remand in New Hall prison. While there, unfortunately, she attempted suicide, and the difficulties clearly continued. Eventually, a place became available, and she was transferred to Medway secure training centre. I was pleased to find from the Youth Justice Board proposals, to which I shall refer later, that the expansion of secure training centre places for young women is part of its agenda for the coming year. After the difficulties in finding appropriate accommodation in the non-criminal justice system—I recognise that that is not the Minister's responsibility, although the borderlines are often blurred—there were further difficulties in finding appropriate placement in secure accommodation once that became necessary.

The young lady spent some time in Medway. She committed violent offences while she was there, and there is no doubt that it was a difficult time. She has been transferred again to New Hall prison, awaiting the end of her sentence, which is approaching. That is another reason for my raising the matter now. The catalogue of events is disturbing, but we need to think through some of the difficult cases and see how people, particularly young women, arrive in such circumstances.

The case brought to mind another, which again was raised with me soon after I had first been elected to Parliament. A Sheffield woman called Irene Ivison campaigned for a long time after the death of her daughter, and wrote a book, "Fiona's Story". Fiona Ivison was 16 when she was murdered while working as a prostitute in Doncaster. In a sense she had followed a similar trajectory to Claire's—her home environment had been such that her parents were keen to keep her and were doing all they could, but she rebelled comprehensively, became engaged with the wrong people, and turned her back on home. At a vulnerable and difficult age, she took the path towards drugs—heroin addiction—and casual prostitution, and she ended up murdered in a car park in Doncaster. Irene Ivison, who has since passed away, properly spent some years asking how a civilised society can prevent our youngsters from being drawn down that path. From her account to me, I know that the difficulty lay in finding someone with the authority to intervene and who could find the appropriate placement for that youngster. That is not a universal problem, but cases are occurring and have occurred for many years. As a civilised society, we should deal with such difficult cases and find appropriate placements in the system.

In terms of the Government's response, I was pleased to see that the Youth Justice Board issued a statement last March about its four-year plan. One of the three main priorities was the provision of more appropriate accommodation for young women outside the prison service so that they were not placed with adult offenders. It is important to draw a clear distinction in that respect. The new deal for young women includes several welcome proposals about placing people appropriately, especially girls, including phasing in new units in the secure training centre. What progress has been made on that? Some individuals who are going through the system cannot wait any longer. My constituent is reaching a different stage, but other Claires and Fionas will come into the system, and I hope that we can offer them more hope for the future through the kind of care that could put them back into society as individuals who have broken the cycle of self-destructive behaviour.

My constituent raised several key points about the way in which the system works. First, progress must be made on appropriate placements. The transfer from Medway back to Newhall was unwelcome, and some time was spent struggling against it. There is a lack of flexibility in the system, especially in relation to difficult youngsters who also have psychiatric problems. That is a risk in the Medway environment as it is currently configured.

Secondly, it is important to facilitate joined-up working. Many agencies, including social services, education, housing authorities and criminal justice authorities, are already involved in such cases, and now we have the Youth Justice Board and the youth offending teams. I understand that the underlying logic of the latter two agencies is to bring everything together. However, there still is not the necessary authority to deal with a situation in which, for example, an educational placement is required. As teenagers get older, such placements may be in local colleges of further education, which are now outside local education authority control. From a youth justice point of view, someone should have the authority to say, "It is vital that this individual has a placement at college and therefore we will secure it", or, "It is essential that we get a certain form of housing so we will secure it." That is left to the parent of the youngster or to the professionals involved.

My constituent said that all the professionals involved in the case have been utterly committed to trying to resolve it; they have been excellent, and no problems have arisen in that respect. However, although they are trying to do their best, they do not have the necessary authority. Joined-up working can fall apart if there is no authority to tell agencies that a service must be provided and agencies have no reciprocal commitment to do so. That one element can endanger the whole situation. A youngster who has been placed in the right housing with the right probation support may fall apart because they do not have the college place that they need. If one brick is taken out, the wall is not stable.

Thirdly, we must try to remove delays in the system. Delays of several months may be relatively insignificant in cases involving older people, but very significant in rapidly evolving situations involving 13 to 16-year-olds. I have heard about two such delays. One concerned the provision of education at the crucial time when Claire first started having major difficulties at around 13 or 14. The second was an inappropriate delay in the provision of psychiatric assessments, which were essential at the time that they were requested. She has now had the assessments, but there was a long wait, which affected the decisions that were taken about her future placement. We want to remove delays in the system in all Government services, but in dealing with vulnerable youngsters, those delays can be the difference between a constructive and a difficult future.

The final element was the involvement of psychiatric care in the criminal justice system. If one digs under the surface of such cases, one finds that many young women who end up in secure accommodation have psychiatric problems related to drug abuse, self-harm and other forms of abuse, particularly sexual. There is concern that such care has been slow to develop. The criminal justice system has reacted, but the necessary psychiatric involvement has been slower than is helpful.

I recognise that the Minister, quite properly, will not comment on a specific case that is still going through the system, but I would like to discuss the case in private, if there are difficulties. We are dealing with a situation that is critical for the youngster involved. One of the options is long-term detention in a secure hospital such as Rampton, but there are not sufficient facilities to safeguard both the individual and others. Once someone has undergone formal sentencing and comes out, how do we progress? Do we need placements in society where help can be provided? An 18-year-old coming out of custody would have to choose between a long-term secure non-therapeutic hospital and a social placement with inadequate support. Both options would cause fear.

As well as addressing the teenager's case, I hope that the Minister will consider individuals who have come through the system. They may settle down, but they need a soft landing, which will require more intensive work than is currently offered. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response, and I hope that we can offer a future that will ensure that my constituents' problems will not arise again, although I accept that there is no easy solution.

1.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Beverley Hughes): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) for enabling us to draw conclusions about a disturbing case. I am also grateful for the way in which he has dealt with it. I feel more constrained than he did because he has permission to give the details that he has given us today. We must be careful when referring to individual cases, but I want to deal thoroughly with his points, and the issues that arise from the case.

I assure the hon. Gentleman, the young person concerned and her parents that I have read all their recent letters, including the detailed history that outlines the difficult circumstances with which they have had to contend and the difficult experiences that the young person has had, which undoubtedly have had a bearing on her current difficulty. I have also had reports from the Youth Justice Board, the probation service, the Prison Service, and the Home Office. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, in dealing with the problems presented by the child, the parents have felt badly let down by a fractured system. They felt that no one was prepared to take responsibility for the issue, and they were grappling with some serious issues, largely on their own. They are very well-meaning people, as I remember from the father's most recent letter. The hon. Gentleman said that, and praised the father's recent efforts in the current situation on behalf of his daughter, but, as he says, what counts is results. I understand that he is looking for those.

There will be a case conference in the next week, and the Home Secretary and I have asked to be kept fully informed. We shall closely monitor the situation. The hon. Gentleman is welcome to speak to me at any time on the specifics of the case on behalf of the parents.

The hon. Gentleman raised general issues from the case, with which I would like to deal. He asked what progress had been made towards a variety of different kinds of placement to meet the needs of different young people and towards the provision of appropriate placements. I shall deal with that later, if I can. Other issues that he raised include: whether lack of co-ordination, such as that which the family experienced early on, is improving; the fact that no one appeared to have authority to take the lead and make sure that things happened; delays in the system, especially in relation to psychiatric assessment; and the involvement of psychiatric care in the prison and criminal justice system.

On the core of the hon. Gentleman's argument, the Government's position is that the use of custody for juveniles under 18 should be a last resort. We have done a lot—I am glad that the hon. Gentleman referred to this—through our youth justice reforms to try to

[Beverley Hughes]

strengthen, and widen the variety of, effective non-custodial options for the courts. That is continuing, and is very important. However, as he outlined, a small number of young people are serious risks to themselves and to others, and they present a variety of difficult and complex problems. We are dealing with such a situation in this case.

At the moment, about 170 girls are in custody. The hon. Gentleman may know that there is a ministerial commitment to remove all 15 and 16-year-old girls from Prison Service custody by the summer. I am glad that he referred to the Youth Justice Board's commitment to create 64 new places for girls in secure training centres during this year. That will help us to achieve our objective.

Obviously, the provision of secure psychiatric health sector accommodation for young people is especially relevant to this case. I share, as does the Home Secretary, the hon. Gentleman's concern about the need for sufficient secure psychiatric facilities for young people with mental health problems in custody. In any given area, as he will know from the details of the case, securing those resources for young people needing psychiatric treatment in secure facilities is the local authority's role. However, the Government clearly have a responsibility to see that the level and quality of that provision is sufficient, and I would not pretend otherwise. The Home Office, the Youth Justice Board and the Department of Health are trying hard to address that.

There is a scarcity of such provision. Although we are trying to address the problem, it arises largely because we started from a very low base in 1997. Sufficient attention had not been given to children and adolescent mental health services in general nor to the specialist services that the young people who end up in custody need in particular.

The Youth Justice Board is making great inroads into the general quality of the secure estate. As the hon. Gentleman will know, it now commissions secure places for young people in custody. General standards and provision in custody, including access to mental health services, are beginning to change significantly. I hope that that the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that.

Through the Department of Health, the Government have also put in an extra £85 million between 1999 and 2002 to develop a national approach to those services. I know that we must do more, but we had to start somewhere. The Department of Health is considering whether a national commissioning route for adolescent forensic mental health services is the best way forward. Although the cases are serious, they are relatively few in number. Does it make sense for individual local areas to have to go all over the country to find something suitable? Should there not instead be a national system? As well as looking at the case for such a system, the Department of Health is commissioning an extra 28 beds in 2002, 24 beds in 2003 and a further unit for London after that.

There is progress. Resources have been allocated, the problem is being carefully considered and there are plans to increase the number of beds for adolescent forensic services. As a result of my visits to youth offender institutions and skill training centres, I am aware of the need. There is still unmet need in the system, and I accept that we must make more progress. I assure the hon. Gentleman that there is no lack of political will or attention; the problem is the size of the gap that we are trying to fill and the fact that it cannot be filled in a short time. However, we are resolved, jointly, to do it.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned lack of co-ordination, authority and so on. We have tried to address that through the Youth Justice Board, which is beginning to work for people now in the system. I accept that the system was entirely different during the late 80s and early 90s for the young woman to whom the hon. Gentleman referred. That is why we changed it. The youth justice reforms were instituted to introduce effective multidisciplinary working. We have some way to go in making sure that the connections between custodial and non-custodial routes exist, because that is the route that an offender will take—from the community into custody and back into the community. We focus on the need to ensure that the connections between the agencies, which in a sense are artificial boundaries, do not allow young people to fall through the gaps. The hon. Gentleman will know that the inspectors of probation and prisons have produced a report called "Through the Prison Gate". We are working on a report being done by the social exclusion unit, which again points to the need for effective case management, because we need to strengthen those links.

I accept the hon. Gentleman's points, which raise general issues that we need to address and are addressing, but this is such a difficult case that it would be hard even in a perfect system to deal with some of the issues. For instance, there was a delay in the psychiatric assessment. There were also a number of points at which different psychiatrists could not agree on the root of the young person's problems. That had knock-on effects in relation to where she could appropriately be placed and within the law. Was the problem fundamentally one of mental health? Was it a treatable mental health illness? We need psychiatrists to help us to answer those questions, but until we have a view we cannot legally decide on the most appropriate placement. Since the hon. Gentleman is nodding, I appreciate that he is aware of those problems without my going into further detail.

In conclusion, I shall do what I can on this case and the hon. Gentleman will keep me informed. In general, by transforming the approach to youth justice, focusing on multi-agency working, developing custodial provision in all sectors and developing child and adolescent psychiatric services—in particular forensic secure psychiatric services—in the way that I have outlined, we are trying to make progress. I agree that we would like progress to be faster, but we are going in the right direction. I am sorry that this family has had a very difficult experience. I hope that families will not have the same experience in the future. That is my intention.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 30 January 2002

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Football Club Funding

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Ben Chapman.]*

9.30 am

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): I have called this debate because, like the Football Foundation, I believe that football clubs belong in their local communities. I believe also that the foundation may have a role to play in helping my local team, Wimbledon FC, come home to my local community of Wimbledon.

Since it was launched in July 2000, the Football Foundation has helped clubs and communities across Britain to improve their grass-roots facilities, purchase new equipment and develop a broader base for their activities. The foundation is the United Kingdom's largest sports charity. Its annual budget of £53 million is made available by the Government, Sport England, the Premier League and the Football Association itself. The foundation is responsible also for the football stadia improvement fund, an independent funding body that is continuing the stadium development work of the Football Trust.

In 2001, the foundation gave grants that ranged from £2,000 to help a football in the community scheme achieve charitable status in Walsall, to £221,151 to establish a youth development programme at West Bromwich Albion. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich Albion, East (Mr. Watson) is here today. He will be able to tell us a little more about that excellent scheme.

Grants as large as £2 million and loans of as much as £800,000 may be available through the football stadia improvement fund to build a new stadium for Wimbledon FC. By itself, even £2.8 million would not be enough to build a new stadium there, but it would certainly help. The money would be a massive public subsidy to the owners of the club. It would represent the premium to be paid for bringing the Dons back home, instead of allowing them to sever their links with the local community. I believe that such an investment by the Football Foundation could tip the balance towards building a new stadium in Merton and away from the club moving to Milton Keynes.

Over the past few months, the plight of Wimbledon FC has become something of a cause célèbre. For instance, 105 Members of Parliament have signed early-day motion 570, including the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), who speaks for the Opposition. I tabled the motion in protest at the club's refusal to accept a Football League decision not to allow it to move to Milton Keynes. While preparing for the debate, I looked through the last 250 or so early-day motions, and only those relating to the tension between India and Pakistan raised a similar level of interest and concern.

The motion has the full support of my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Alan Keen), who is chairman of the all-party football group. I take this opportunity to thank him publicly for his courtesy in inviting the officers of the Wimbledon independent supporters association to put their case against the relocation of the club to the all-party football group. The parliamentary campaign that we have been building together has complemented and built upon the groundswell of support for Wimbledon's cause among football fans across the country. More than 80 clubs were represented at a Fans United day that Wimbledon independent supporters association organised at Selhurst park in November. The passion, energy and sheer resilience that Wimbledon fans have shown week in, week out are a credit to the game. Under the chairmanship of Kris Stewart, they continue to fight a remarkable campaign to stop the move to Milton Keynes. They produce their own quality alternative programme each match day and have drawn up plans for a new stadium. On 10 February, they will set up a new supporters trust—the Dons Trust—to promote the club's return to Wimbledon. They have been ground down by the club's campaign to move to Milton Keynes, but they will not be worn out, and the fight will go on.

Football lovers everywhere understand that allowing clubs to move to areas beyond their traditional fan-base creates a dangerous precedent.

Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): My hon. Friend may be aware that many famous clubs have moved. The logic of his argument is that Arsenal should return to Woolwich and—God forbid!—that Manchester United should return to Manchester.

Roger Casale: I am sure that we shall have many variations on that theme during the debate.

Wimbledon is a wonderful club, and everyone understands why people would want it in their community. In today's circumstances, the link between football clubs and their local communities is more important than ever. We have limited influence over clubs' plans and decision-making processes, but we should do everything that we can to influence decisions through the Government and organisations such as the Football Foundation. We should promote the return of football clubs to their traditional fan-bases, their local and historic homes and their local communities.

Allowing clubs to move could lead to football franchising. Teams would be hawked around the country to the highest bidder, with scant regard to supporters' interests or clubs' long-term well-being. In a statement issued yesterday, the Football Supporters Association said that it hoped that the Football League would remain as implacably opposed to franchise football as it has been up until now.

A striking number of parliamentary colleagues lent their signatures to the early-day motion, even though they had no direct interest in football. They did so because they understood that football clubs belong in their respective local communities, whose identity is often inextricably linked to the memory of a club, to its history and traditions and to the role that it played in the area.

Wimbledon's FA cup triumph over Liverpool in 1988—I look cautiously around the Room to see whether any Liverpool supporters are present—is still as fresh as a rose in the minds of local people. It represents

[Roger Casale]

an unrivalled high point in our civic and community life in recent years. It is difficult to talk about the history of my constituency without mentioning the ups and downs in the life of Wimbledon FC, and I am sure that many parliamentary colleagues with football clubs in their constituencies will feel the same.

Wimbledon FC has strong roots in the local community and has one of the most extensive community programmes in the Football League. It recently won a prestigious sports match award for its outstanding work over many years with young people across south-west London. I always enjoy my discussions with the Chief Whip, my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong), about who has the best "football in the community" scheme.

The argument about clubs and their local communities resonates strongly with the Football Foundation, which was set up to promote that link. That argument should also resonate strongly with the Government. After all, it was the Government who set up the Football Trust and, later, the Football Foundation to strengthen the links between football clubs and their local communities.

The Government's football taskforce, which was chaired by David Mellor, recommended in paragraph 1.9 of its report that there was a need to balance the interests of all those in or touched by football, and for the game to promote to as wide a community as possible its sporting aims and key values. On whether football clubs could be run like any other business, the report said that the essential premise of the taskforce was that football, and indeed sport, was different from other business sectors. As a business, the club belongs to its shareholders and owners, but in a powerful sense the club belongs to the supporters and local communities too.

I am sorry if my argument does not chime with that of my hon. Friends the Members for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) and for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White). I hope that the Milton Keynes football club, Milton Keynes City, will hear of the debate and realise that the Football Foundation and the Government are on the side of football in the community, whether the clubs are large or small.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): I simply want to point out that Milton Keynes City wholly supports the move of Wimbledon FC to Milton Keynes. It sees the move as extremely advantageous to all existing football teams in the town, and wants to work with a professional club.

Roger Casale: I have received no representations from Milton Keynes City. I have tried to contact it, but I am delighted, and not surprised, that my hon. Friend is in touch with the club. Some members of that club may want, in the great snakes and ladders of competitive football, to advance suddenly from the Conference into the Nationwide first division. They should recall the proud tradition, history, struggle and achievements of a club such as Wimbledon. More than 20 years ago, outside support, investment and encouragement set Wimbledon FC on the road that took it to Wembley and more than 10 years in the Premiership as a top-flight club. That was not an easy road, but every club can still try to take it, including Milton Keynes City.

Yesterday, an arbitration panel referred the decision about the future of Wimbledon FC back to the Football League. That decision will add to the agony of Wimbledon supporters who have campaigned against the move, and I hope that the Football League will now move swiftly to solve the problem once and for all. I tend to take a positive view of what happened yesterday because, with that decision, we have won a period of respite. We have an opportunity to regroup the parties interested in bringing Wimbledon FC back home to Wimbledon where it belongs, and to find a solution to the problem.

It is important that all those who want the club to return to its local community use the time properly while the Football League reconsiders the matter. The community, Merton borough council—and its leader, Andrew Judge—Wimbledon fans and, perhaps, new investors should come together to find a way for each to contribute to bringing the Dons back home. If a suitable site can be found in or near Merton, I am sure that the Football Foundation will want to help. Such a site does exist. It is the site in Plough lane, where the Dons had their original stadium.

Wimbledon has an extraordinary history, rising from the Southern League to lift the FA cup at Wembley and to gain promotion to the Premiership. It caught the imagination and the hearts of millions of football lovers, and millions of people across the land who did not follow or know too much about football. Throughout its meteoric rise, Wimbledon football club played at its modest Plough lane stadium, a site that was bought for the club's use as long ago as 1948 by the then Wimbledon borough council before it became Merton borough council.

In order to comply with the recommendations of the Taylor report, it was necessary to upgrade the stadium. There were inconclusive negotiations with Merton council about alternatives. Sam Hamman, the previous owner and the inspiration for the club's successes, moved Wimbledon football club out of Plough lane; the last game was played there on 4 May 1991. That led to years of inconclusive ground sharing with Crystal Palace at Selhurst park. It is difficult to assess the prospects for the club to return to the borough because the current owners seem so set against such a move.

However, the context is changing. From my perspective—not yet, sadly, from that of the club—it seems that, in some respects, the prospects for a return have never been so good. First, the Plough lane site is back on the market, following a series of unsuccessful planning applications by the present owners, Safeway, to build a supermarket there. Secondly, Merton council is being very supportive and enthusiastic, although that has found little favour with the club. It is worth remembering that, with the changes that have been proposed to local government financing, it will be open to Merton council in the future to invest directly in such a project and to shoulder a proportion of the risk. Thirdly, there might be scope for the Government, acting through the Football Foundation, to offer the campaign to bring the Dons back home some practical and financial support.

Those of us who wish to see the club return to Wimbledon should be looking to the foundation for five things: short-term financial support to run, as a matter of urgency, an independent feasibility study on the Plough lane site; help with the establishment of Wimbledon FC's planned football academy to develop home-grown talent on the Prince George's playing fields in Raynes Park; assistance in developing further the club's football in the community scheme in local schools; and providing funding—either as a grant or as a loan, or as both—to move the electricity pylon that currently makes the Plough lane site unfeasible, because it overshadows the place where the intended centre circle should be, off the field and out of sight. That would cost around £500,000, but it is not an insurmountable objection in the context of the total amount of money that would be invested in the stadium.

Lastly, and possibly most importantly, we should be finding out how to apply for the £2 million that has been set aside since the Taylor report for Wimbledon FC to upgrade its stadium; that money could be invested in a new stadium site. Of all the clubs for whom such grants were set aside, Wimbledon is the only one that has not spent the money, for the simple reason that, since that time, it has been without a home.

As Members of Parliament, we should examine critically, as we are doing today, the public interest arguments that relate to the award of public money for football clubs, through the foundation and through the football stadiums improvement scheme. It is right that we should ask what the criteria are for allocating such grants, how the grants are followed up and how the decisions are made about where the money is spent. Those criteria are, and must be seen to be, fair and objective. It is not the case, nor is it my purpose in introducing today's debate, that he or she who shouts loudest should be heard. Through their support of the Football Foundation and of the football stadiums improvement scheme, the Government are recognising that football can be a powerful force for good in our society, and looking to harness that power by strengthening and supporting the bond between football clubs and the communities where they belong.

In the case of Wimbledon football club, that will not be achieved by moving the club from south-west London to south-west Milton Keynes. Such a move would not be in the long-term interests of football either. Nor do I believe that it would be in the public interest, and it certainly should not be eligible for Football Foundation support. By contrast, there is a strong case for seeking funding from the foundation to pursue the aim of returning the club to a stadium in or near Merton. The foundation is currently carrying out an audit of football stadiums, pitches and facilities across the country with the aim of compiling a register. No site is too big or too small to be included in the register, which will even include Old Trafford. I want to make sure that the old site of Wimbledon football club, where we could build a stadium in the future, is included on that register.

As I have said, I hope that the register will include Plough lane, and that the strength of feeling among the fans and in the local community for a return to Plough lane will be taken into account. When I pass the site at Plough lane, I am reminded of a photograph of a jet plane that was once shown to me by a psychologist from the Royal Air Force. He said that the only thing wrong with the plane was that it did not have a pilot. Because of some psychological flaw, the pilot had lost his will and pulled the lever of the ejector seat, with the result that the plane had crashed. So I ask Mr. Koppel and the owners of Wimbledon FC not to pull the lever and not to take Wimbledon FC away from Wimbledon. I ask them to reconsider the situation because there are plenty of avenues worth exploring and plenty of organisations and individuals, including myself, who will support them if they try to bring the club back home.

This is a timely debate, as it occurs on the day after the arbitration panel announced its decision. I hope that it will be possible to use the debate as a springboard to launch new initiatives to save the club. I look forward to meeting the Minister later this week, or early next week, to discuss possible options. I shall also arrange a meeting next week for all interested parties with Lord Pendry, the chairman of the Football Foundation. We in Wimbledon have waited far too long for our local club, which has covered itself in so much pain and glory and which remains so much a part of our community, proudly to come back home. It has been left out in the cold for far too long. It is time for the club to come back to Wimbledon, where it belongs.

9.52 am

Alan Keen (Feltham and Heston): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) on his speech, which typifies his efforts to help his local community. As I wrote my speech between 9.27 am and 9.30 am, I shall not take up too much time. As we are talking about football funding generally, I want to compliment the Football Foundation, which, under the chairmanship of Lord Pendry, allocates its funds with understanding of, and care for, the game that it supports.

I support my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon and the Wimbledon independent supporters association, whose members I have met on several occasions. I am impressed by the professionalism of that association. My hon. Friend mentioned the programme that it produces, which is one of the best that I have ever seen. It outsells the official programme 2:1. It is not a fanzine but a programme, in which fans of visiting clubs provide details about their teams. The association understands the football business very well. I look forward to it being able to help to run Wimbledon at Plough lane.

One of the first political thoughts that I ever had as a teenager came to me when I visited my beloved Ayresome park, where Middlesbrough used to play. I saw the hoardings that read "Middlesbrough Football and Athletic Company Limited" and I could not get home fast enough to ask my mother what that meant. I thought that it must be wrong, but she explained that I did not own the club. I knew that I had equal ownership of the recreation ground where I spent most of my time playing football and cricket, but I was absolutely shocked to find that the club was owned by shareholders. I thought that those people with whom I went to cheer on my club every Saturday and me owned the club equally. That was probably my first political thought.

It is strange that I should have become a Member of Parliament, only to find out what a mistake it was for clubs to be owned by shareholders and not on a one

[Alan Keen]

member, one vote basis. As a Labour and Co-operative Member of Parliament, I understand that. It was probably that visit to Ayresome park that day that made me seek sponsorship by the Co-operative Movement.

I have a special memory of Wimbledon; I must be getting on if I can go back many years, although this memory dates from only 25 years ago. I worked for Middlesbrough then, spying on the opposition as a part-time job. I sat on a bench at Plough lane on 8 January 1977, next to Jack Charlton, when we played Wimbledon, then a non-league side, in the third round of the FA Cup. As we did this year, we scraped a draw in the first game and managed to scrape a win in the replay. That happened at Plough lane, where the Wimbledon fans would like the club to return now.

If the owners of Wimbledon want to have a professional football side in Milton Keynes—I would support them in that—they should fund the creation of a non-league side. I understand that they are billionaires in Norway. They should put money into Milton Keynes and help the people of that town to have their own side. They would find that the supporters of the new club would have much more of a tie to it and would support it to the death, as most of us do our own sides. If it were their own side that came from nothing—as Wimbledon did when it won the FA cup—they would get so much satisfaction.

My hon. Friend mentioned Kris Stewart, the chairman of the Wimbledon independent supporters association. Kris and his colleagues are doing a great job and my hon. Friend is giving them every support. I wish them luck in the future.

I have been to Milton Keynes, once. Many people have never been. About 20 years ago, there was a wonderful series of radio programmes on a weekday afternoon—probably after "Woman's Hour"—called "A Geordie in MK". I am not a Geordie, but viewing Middlesbrough from Milton Keynes, people might think that I am. Other hon. Members present probably think that I am a Geordie. I was impressed by that programme and I have had a special affection for Milton Keynes ever since. I would like to offer my support to the town's efforts to get a football league team. However, in doing so, it should not take an existing club away from the people who care most about it: Wimbledon's local supporters.

Progress is being made everywhere. I am sure that hon. Members will hear about York City football club, which is emerging from its recent trauma. There was a Brentford independent supporters meeting in my local pub recently, 20 yd from where I live. Ron Noades, the owner of Brentford club, was also there. The club is only 50 yd from my house. I believe that the chairman of the independent supporters association has been offered a place on the board, effective immediately. Ron Noades is ready to hand the club over to be run in a democratic way by local people. All those involved have my full support. However, we are here to talk about Wimbledon. I wish the fans well and I thank my hon. Friend for all the support that he has given them.

9.58 am

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) on securing yet another debate on his football club. I did suspect, despite the title that I read in the Order Paper, that the debate would really be about the proposed move of Wimbledon FC to Milton Keynes.

If Wimbledon could have found a base within its own borough during the past 10 years, nobody would have been happier than those of us in Milton Keynes. We are not trying to poach Wimbledon. Milton Keynes is offering a solution to the problem that has faced Wimbledon for the past 10 years and which is highly unlikely to be solved in the next 10—the fact that the club does not operate from its home borough. Not surprisingly, on behalf of my constituents—and with the support, on the whole, of my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White)—I take a different view of Wimbledon FC's move to Milton Keynes from that of my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon. The issue is, as he said, back with the Football League following the ruling by the arbitration panel that the league was wrong to dismiss Wimbledon's proposal to move in the first place and that it should reconsider the proposal.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon has made much play of his early-day motion 570. It contains many misleading statements, with little evidence to support them. The move would not establish a precedent. My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East has already referred to Arsenal, and a more recent precedent is the move of Meadowbank Thistle to Livingston, since Livingston is, like Milton Keynes, a new town. Neither instance established a wholesale move to franchising, and it is wrong to suggest in the early-day motion that a move to Milton Keynes would do so.

The early-day motion contains much about the historic links between football clubs and their communities, and the jeopardising of opportunities for young people. I remind hon. Members of the needs of my constituents and those of my hon. Friend. We, too, need football in our community and the current structures of the Football League—which dictate the structures of funding by the Football Foundation and by Football in the Community—effectively exclude our constituents from the public money and help that goes into building links between Football in the Community and football clubs.

I hope that all hon. Members who are present will agree about the positive role that professional football can play in communities. It clearly encourages young people, both girls and boys, to participate in football. It provides role models for them. It can provide a focus for community identity and, at its best—not always, unfortunately—it can provide a route for ethnic minority communities to participate in and feel part of a corporate community identity. My constituents in Milton Keynes want to share in those positive roles of professional football.

The role of the Football Foundation is important in providing funding for modern football facilities at all levels and strengthening links between football and the community. However, the problem with Football Foundation funding, as with the rest of the Football League structure, is that it is based on history; on the status quo. The rules are designed for established towns and cities and take no account of movements of population. In particular, they effectively exclude from help places such as Milton Keynes. As hon. Members will know, Milton Keynes is a completely new community; it is not an extension of an existing town or city, and was created virtually from scratch in the past 30 years. That huge population movement is ignored by the structures of professional football and the accompanying funding structures.

Roger Casale: My hon. Friend has explained why any community would want a football club, but she seems to be taking a "Blue Peter" approach to football. She wants to offer a community a football club that was made somewhere else. Would not it be better to grow the club from the community, as Wimbledon has shown can happen, and, of course, to look for support for that from the Football Foundation? I believe that hon. Members present today, and probably hon. Members throughout the House, would support that.

Dr. Starkey: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for trying to educate me in the ways of football, but he talks about what happened 25 years ago and ignores the fact that the rules and structures of the Football League have altered. When the Football League was formed, for example, teams were brought straight into it in a way that is not possible now. The rules that pertain now are much stricter; the pyramidal structure of promotion from non-football league into football league is much more difficult, and it would be impossible for Wimbledon to do now what it did 25 years ago. It is ridiculous for my hon. Friend to skate over that and suggest that everything is now as it was, because everything is now much more difficult, and militates against new communities and in favour of established communities. That is the whole point.

My hon. Friend's community is on the upside of the structure and is favoured by it, while our community is heavily disfavoured by the structure. It is insulting for him to suggest that the route that was available for his club 25 years ago is available for us now. Indeed, the rules of the Football League are in the process of being reviewed and changed, which will make it even more difficult for non-league clubs to get into the league than it has been heretofore. The route for currently excluded clubs is becoming even more difficult.

I want to talk about the community that my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East and I serve. Milton Keynes will soon have the largest urban population in the south-east of England outside London, and the largest urban population in Europe without a professional football team. Some 70 per cent. of the population of Milton Keynes have migrated there from elsewhere, and 70 per cent. of that 70 per cent. are from London, including Wimbledon.

When hon. Members talk about the link between football clubs and their communities, they seem to think that communities are set in aspic and that nobody moves anywhere. When they talk about communities, are they talking about places or people? They are not the same thing. Many people in Milton Keynes have contributed to football clubs in London in the past. Is that community contribution to be ignored, and can we take into account the community contribution of only those who currently live within the area of existing football teams? I do not understand why, if populations move, football clubs cannot also move.

Participation in football in Milton Keynes is strong, despite the severe disadvantages from which we suffer. We are a young city, with 40,000 school-age children, and a new school is built every year. Some 46 per cent. of our 250,000 population are under 30 years old. We have 375 youth football teams, with more than 16,500 people participating, either as players, officials or spectators. We have an active Bangladeshi football association, which organises an annual national Asian seven-a-side tournament that it occasionally wins. However, the route for talented youngsters to progress is extremely difficult; the nearest Premiership club is 50 miles away, and the nearest league football team is 20 miles away. Talented youngsters from Milton Keynes travel to eight different league clubs for professional coaching, and only those whose parents can transport them and support them can participate. A large number of young people in Milton Keynes are excluded by distance from progressing in their football careers.

Football Foundation funding can do little to help people in Milton Keynes. They are also unable to access Football in the Community funding or FA-approved academy funding, because of the lack of a football league team. Since the inception of the Milton Keynes development corporation, it has made provision for a professional football stadium in the development plan, because it foresaw that professional football was one of the facilities that a city would want.

In 1978, the then Football League general secretary made it clear that the Football League recognised Milton Keynes as a special case and had no objection to any club moving there, provided that a suitable stadium was available. It is wrong to represent that idea as a precedent for widespread franchising. I referred to the move, in 1995, of Meadowbank Thistle to Livingston, which is a new town. My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East referred to the move made by Arsenal, when it faced economic extinction, from Woolwich to north London in 1913.

The reality is that Wimbledon has not been operating from its borough for the past 10 years. It has made it clear that it needs its own stadium or it will go out of existence financially. It is losing £20,000 a day. Milton Keynes has provided a solution and the club has made it clear that it will continue to provide training in the community within Wimbledon, even after a move. It will also provide such facilities in Milton Keynes. There would be an improvement, not a diminution, in the way in which the club participates in community football development.

The Football Foundation has a valuable role to play in encouraging wider participation in football and facilitating the links between youth football teams and professional football. However, it cannot do that effectively if it and the Football Association refuse to acknowledge the needs of communities such as Milton Keynes and remain frozen in past population patterns.

Mr. Roger Gale (in the Chair): Order. I have no power to impose a time limit on speeches, but four hon. Members wish to speak, in addition to the Liberal Democrat spokesman, the official Opposition spokesman and the Minister. My intention is that the Opposition spokesman's winding-up speech should start at 10.40 am. That leaves each hon. Member who wants to speak about five minutes each.

10.11 am

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I welcome the opportunity, here in Westminster Hall, to debate football. I only wish that we were not playing to the referee's whistle and that we had a first half and second half to discuss it. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) on securing the debate. The Order Paper refers to Football Foundation funding for football clubs, and the matters that have been raised in the debate show what many of us knew already.

We have great difficulties in raising issues concerning football outside the Premiership. Given the way in which finance and broadcasting are determining how the game is progressing, many clubs—not only Wimbledon—are facing financial extinction. I am pleased to see the Minister for Sport in the Chamber, and I pay tribute to him for his work, particularly for the fact that he visited Stoke-on-Trent not all that long ago. While I have the opportunity, I should remind him that we are serious about making a bid for a sport action zone, which, if successful, will aid us with grass-roots football.

Many Football League clubs face either financial extinction or crisis. York and Swansea, for example, have had problems. Football clubs throughout the league face difficulties. Port Vale FC in my constituency is seeking a new buyer, and the club has been on the market for a considerable time. Members of Parliament must work alongside the football authorities to ensure that there is a future for all our football clubs. We should extend league club status to those new towns and areas that do not have it at present. Such issues should be examined. My right hon. Friend the Minister should apply criteria that are equivalent to listed building status to football clubs, so that we do not lose them. They are so much a part and parcel of the local community. Perhaps he could extend the work of Supporters Direct and the ideas of mutuality to which my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Alan Keen) referred and ensure the viability of clubs at all levels.

Brian White: My hon. Friend will be aware that one of the reasons why Northampton Town was able to survive was that the local council took ownership of the ground and was active in ensuring that the interests of supporters and the town were paramount in the club's decisions.

Ms Walley: I absolutely agree. Supporters have a great contribution to make, along with local authorities. My hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon, who introduced the debate, mentioned the new powers that local authorities have to help football clubs.

My right hon. Friend the Minister has a background in urban regeneration. If we can get football right, we can achieve much in urban regeneration. I urge him to move in that direction.

I do not want to participate in a debate about Wimbledon FC, although there is a connection between my constituency and Wimbledon. The scorer of what is possibly Jamaica's most famous goal, who played for Wimbledon, is now a well-known broadcaster. He was originally a constituent of mine who played for Port Vale and, most importantly for this debate, he came up through an organisation called Lads and Dads, which was founded by the late Dougie Brown, who sadly died last week. I mention Lads and Dads because a debate about the Football Foundation is about grass-roots football. A debate about how football stadiums are funded should be about the football stadiums improvement scheme that is part of the Football Foundation, but it is also a separate entity; I understand that the Football Foundation cannot give grants to private companies. We should examine how we fund grass-roots football outside the Football League.

In my five minutes of extra time, I shall give the Chamber more information about the need for investment from the Football Foundation. I, too, pay tribute to the outstanding work that that organisation, and, previously, the Football Trust, has done under the chairmanship of Lord Pendry and the leadership of its chief executive, Peter Lee.

By 15 March last year, 2,838 league games in grass-roots football had been played in my constituency. The leagues involved are the Potteries and District league, the County Minor league, the City Traders league, the Springbank Vending league, the Staffordshire County league, the Lycett, Burslem and Newcastle District league, the Cheadle league, the Marston's Sunday league and the Lads and Dads under-16s league. As of 15 March, 5,480 matches had still not been played because of a lack of pitches and bad drainage on the pitches that have been created. Many of these are not sustainable, having been created out of former coalmining tips. That figure does not even include cup matches. How can people play, between 15 March and the end of the season, an outstanding 5,480 matches?

That is why I have set up a partnership in my constituency that has resulted in applications to the Football Foundation in respect of the Bradeley pitches. I am pleased to say that that is well under way. We are involved in further applications relating to pitches, such as that at Packmore and in other parts of my constituency, that cannot be played on. There are many examples of social exclusion where people cannot play on pitches because the pitches are not fit for the purpose. That is why the work of the Football Foundation is so important.

In Stoke-on-Trent, we have a partnership with the Groundwork Trust that involves the Coalfields Regeneration Trust. I want a rolling programme of money that is funded with the Football Foundation's support. I pay tribute to the two chairmen of the groups that provide that money, because money is needed for proper drainage and football facilities. That is the nuts and bolts of the work of the Football Foundation, although it receives little publicity.

In the final minute of play, I ask the Minister to address our worries about league clubs and clubs that belong to their communities. He could also examine the £60 million funding for the Football Foundation, of which £20 million comes from broadcasting, £20 million from the FA and the remaining £20 million from the Government.

I do not want to repeat the situation of a previous Parliament, when I wrote to every football chairman in the country to urge them to put pressure on the then Government to give money through the pools duty to ensure that the gap in Football Trust funding could be met to allow clubs such as Port Vale to improve their stadiums. I do not want to see a £4 million shortfall from the Government in terms of their funding for the Football Foundation.

I hope that smaller clubs throughout the country that are outside the Premiership and do not have access to funding may find a way to survive. That should be linked to local grass-roots football and adequate support for the Football Foundation.

10.21 am

Hugh Bayley (City of York): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) on raising this important issue. Wimbledon FC's nomadic existence, and the draining effect of that on its supporters, is a real warning for York City football club's supporters, because we face the possibility that we will lose our ground and, therefore, face similar problems.

York City FC has a long and honourable history. The club was founded in 1922, and elected to the Football League in 1929, where it has been ever since. Like all clubs, it has had its ups and downs, but it has enjoyed notable high points. In the 1995-96 season, we beat Manchester United in the Worthington cup and we beat Everton the following year.

Now, York City FC faces its greatest challenge; a fight for survival following the directors' decision to put the club and ground on the market. The people of York rallied to support the club. Plans are going well to establish a supporters' trust to work with the club, and that will be launched on Friday at York's Barbican centre. I shall be there to show my commitment.

On Saturday 2 February—the 10th anniversary of the tragic death on the pitch of the York City player, David Longhurst—there will be a Fans United day for the home game against Lincoln City. That club, incidentally, is managed by a supporters' trust, which shows what supporters can do.

I pay tribute to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport for the role that has been played by Supporters Direct, which is funded by the Government through the Football Foundation. I pay particular tribute to the work of Dave Boyle from Supporters Direct over recent weeks in helping to create and build York's supporters' trust. I also pay tribute to the City of York council, which provided office premises for that work and has been in contact with the various consortia that have made bids for the club.

Of course, York City FC is a business, as my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Alan Keen) said. However, it is not a business like any other. York has many important businesses such as GNER, Nestlé Rowntree and Portakabin. All those companies are important to the city and its economy. However, they do not get thousands of people turning up to support them week after week. A football club is different; it is a business, but a business that has had its assets built up by supporters over decades. Those assets should not be taken away from a club.

There is a long-established tradition in football that directors are the guardians of their clubs. They play a privileged role, and any profits ought to be ploughed back into the clubs. I hope that that will happen in the York City case.

The Football Association always had a rule that, when a club is wound up, its profits are given to a sports charity. The point of that rule was to deter asset stripping. However, in 1999, York City FC hived off its assets—its ground—to a holding company, which is now up for sale. When the holding company was established, the directors stated that its creation was to safeguard the future of the club. If the ground is sold, the assets must be used for that purpose.

That important issue raises a matter of football policy that I wish the Minister to consider. I hope that he will get in touch with Adam Crozier, the chief executive of the Football Association, to ask him to examine its rules, because they should be strengthened. When supporters have built up assets over decades, those assets should remain with the club; they should not be hived off and sold in a property deal. I hope that that will not happen in York, but the Football Association should have rules to prevent that from happening to any football club.

10.26 am

Mr. Tom Watson (West Bromwich, East): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) for securing this debate on the Football Foundation. Following a century of under-investment and neglect, grass-roots football is being kicked into the 21st century by the foundation's regeneration work. Where once there were jumpers in the park, now there are goalposts, good-quality training and decent kits, thanks to the foundation's work.

West Bromwich Albion plays an important role in the community that I represent, and I thank the club for that. It has been enjoying not only a good cup run, but a good run of victories in the league. It also deserves credit for its work with schools and kids across my constituency, and beyond.

This month, its long-standing Football in the Community programme received a welcome cash boost of £221,000 from the foundation. The grant will allow the community programme to fund the Sandwell six towns project. That involves thousands of children in 60 schools across the borough; it helps them to develop teamwork, leadership and communication skills.

That grant will make a real difference in West Bromwich, as such money has made a difference to many of the grass-roots and community projects that hon. Members have mentioned. By encouraging kids to take an active part in football, we give them positive opportunities, and take them away from the temptations of crime and drugs. It is essential that we continue to recognise the foundation's role with regard to that.

Another project in my constituency, the Greets Green ABC club, has recently set up a football team called the Scorpions. It is a mixed club, which works with local kids. Next month, it will play its first away game, in London, against a team from Camden. I hope to welcome the players at the House for their victory celebrations. Dot Jones organises the club, which provides a classic example of grass-roots football at its best. It began when she started taking the kids out on to the local green to kick a ball around, and a good-quality project has developed from that.

[Mr. Tom Watson]

The Football Foundation is all about such projects. Investment must be secured over the long term if we are to discover the David Beckhams of the future, the players for whom every club searches. The foundation is putting something back into the game.

The foundation is also widening access to the game. The National Association of Disabled Supporters has long needed a stronger voice in football. It has received a grant of £23,000 from the foundation, and it is now auditing all of the facilities in the country, so that, with regard to facilities for the disabled, the good clubs will provide a shining example to the poorer clubs.

Most of the current innovative projects in football are linked to the foundation. Its work with the homeless provides a good example of that. It runs the street football league, in partnership with the Rough Sleepers Unit. Football for the homeless has not only been fun, but has helped hundreds of kids off the streets and has given them self-esteem and confidence. There are also training and referee courses to get them on to that first step on the ladder and back into the real world. In my view, sport goes hand in hand with education as a tool for social inclusion.

Top-flight football is all too often criticised for being more concerned with the balance sheet than the score sheet, as today's debate has so amply highlighted. However, we should give credit to the Premiership. It is often knocked because of the way that football is going, but let us not forget that it puts £20 million a year into the foundation. We should also pay tribute to the chairman and the chief executive of the Premiership, who play an active role on the board of the foundation. It is right that some of the big bucks in the game should be channelled into making sure that grass-roots football is revived and improved.

After little more than a year, the foundation is already accessing more than 350 applications from clubs and community schemes, to the tune of £52 million. It is planning for the future and compiling the first register of football facilities in England. That database will enable us to make the first accurate audit of the estimated 70,000 football pitches in England. I hope that the stakeholders, including the Government, will continue to recognise the invaluable work of the Football Foundation, and will keep on providing adequate funding.

My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) mentioned that Wimbledon FC was elected to the league in 1977. That would not happen now; the team would have to win promotion. A team can now win automatic promotion from the Conference, as did my side, the mighty Kidderminster Harriers—once, in 1994, when its ground was not up to scratch, and once under the leadership of big Jan Molby two years ago. It is now in the third division, and could well go up into the second division. There is hope for Milton Keynes. I am sure that if the move does not go the right way, we could always move Milton Keynes.

Dr. Starkey: Would my hon. Friend explain why, if promotion to the league has not happened in the 30 years of Milton Keynes's existence, it is likely to happen in the next 30?

Mr. Watson: I cannot comment on the quality of Milton Keynes's football teams, but if my hon. Friend wants to come to Kidderminster or West Bromwich, we can give her a few coaching tips, which she can take back to her side.

10.32 am

Andy Burnham (Leigh): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) on securing the debate, which is important because, for many people in football, Wimbledon FC embodies the dream factor. For fans everywhere, it is the epitome of the club that can go right to the top and win silverware. As an Evertonian, I have fond memories of 1988 and Lawrie Sanchez's header. Many fellow fans will share my hon. Friend's fondness for Plough lane. I remember being in the open-air away end, and seeing John Fashanu rampaging through our defence.

I support what my hon. Friend is trying to do and I pay tribute to the work that he has done to support and protect his club. I also pay tribute to Lord Falconer, who has helped him. I have nothing against Milton Keynes, and I listened to the arguments of my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey). I, too, would like football to flourish there. We need to help new communities, but I do not think that we should do so by giving them another community's history and heritage. This is a test case. We are discussing whether a temporary owner can uproot a club that was nurtured and nourished by one community and plant it in another.

My hon. Friend the Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) made an interesting speech, full of knowledge and conviction. He talked about FA rules being changed. The point is not so much that rules are being changed; rule 34 is in the FA's rulebook, and we want the FA to enforce its rules to prevent clubs from selling their grounds and moving away from their communities. That is what rule 34 is about.

On the York case, it is wrong that the chairman of York City, who sold the club's assets and put them into a holding company, was one of the very people sitting on the tribunal yesterday that ruled that the Football League decision regarding Wimbledon FC should be reconsidered by the Football League. That is wrong, and it needs to be looked at. I support the foundation's action in helping Wimbledon FC rebuild its home in south London. I also support it buying back Portuguese right-backs from Liverpool, but I suspect that that will not be on the cards.

My main point is about the foundation, which is not about the wealth at the top of the game. It is about the grass roots, about which my hon. Friends the Members for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) and for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Watson) spoke eloquently and passionately. I am probably one of the few Members of Parliament who still plays Sunday morning football. It can be an extremely depressing trotting out at Haydock rec on a Sunday morning in the drizzle and having to avoid the dog excrement that is invariably left all over the pitch.

It is no surprise that we are struggling for players. Throughout the Warrington Sunday league, many teams are struggling for players and for referees, which is a problem that afflicts the whole of football. There is a shortage of referees from the bottom of the game to the top. I posit a very simple reason for that. The facilities provided for amateur footballers in this country are absolutely pitiful and depressing. In Britain, in the year 2002, Sunday morning footballers still have to change in shipping containers. Often, there is no hot or cold water, or toilets. Such a lack of facilities is standard. It is what we expect when we play football on Sunday mornings, and it is unacceptable.

The problem has much to do with local authority funding. I do not want to inject a partisan note into the debate, but local authorities were starved of funding in the 1980s and 1990s and, as a result, our civic fabric, our parks, and our sports facilities have declined.

Throughout my work with the football taskforce and, subsequently, with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, I was closely involved with the setting up of the Football Foundation. Its philosophy was to take some of the new-found wealth at the top of the game and plough it back into the public game at the bottom. Professional football has always redistributed money within the game, from the top to the bottom of the league. The foundation did something important. It went a stage further and took funding from professional football down into the public sphere at the grass roots and to schools and parks.

The Office of Fair Trading challenged the foundation, but the foundation argued that because football acts together and sells its rights collectively, it can make a collective decision to invest its money for the wider public good. That is a crucial element of collective television bargaining that has been under threat both in this country and abroad.

The European Commission is yet again looking at the collective deals of the English Premiership and the Football League. I know that the Minister for Sport understands the issues and is passionate about them, and I urge him to resist moves by the competition authorities to break up the collective bargaining arrangements in football and in sport generally. Such arrangements allow football authorities to put enormous sums into the Football Foundation. Without them, the bigger clubs would simply break away. Smaller clubs would be looking after themselves and the wider game would be left to fend for itself.

People have asked why football is getting all the attention, but the point about the Football Foundation—

Mr Roger Cole (in the Chair): Order. I must advise the hon. Gentleman and others that if they do not recognise the constraints imposed upon them by the Chair, the Chair is likely to be less lenient in future.

Andy Burnham: I was under the impression that I was the last speaker, but I will be brief. The collective television deal is extremely important and it is helping football to be self-sufficient, possibly reducing the amount of lottery funding that it receives from the public purse.

There are two final points that I ask the Minister to consider. Will he look at the role of Supporters Direct and whether the foundation is able to give it more support and work more closely with it to help some of the struggling Football League clubs? I believe that supporters' trusts are the answer to some of the problems in the game. Finally, will my right hon. Friend also consider diverting more lottery funding to the foundation? That would ensure that there was one funding pot for one strategy—created by the register of facilities—and would enable the foundation to create stability and health in football from the bottom of the pyramid right up to the top.

10.39 am

Bob Russell (Colchester): Clearly, 90 minutes is not enough for such an important debate. I regret that the seven speakers from the Government Benches have not played as a team. I will do my best in the minute that is left to me.

I am no fan of Wimbledon FC because it once knocked Colchester United out of the FA Cup when Wimbledon was a non-league side. However, I stand foursquare with Wimbledon and, hopefully, the Football Foundation and others in supporting community-based clubs. If Milton Keynes wishes to have a Football League side, it need do no more than follow the excellent example in the past decade or so of clubs such as Kidderminster Harriers, Wycombe Wanderers, Rushden and Diamonds, Macclesfield Town and Cheltenham Town, or teams as diverse as Halifax Town, Lincoln City, Darlington and Colchester United—which I have supported for the past 46 years—all of which won their places in the Football League by merit.

It is easier than ever for a professional football club to rise to the highest level and it is nonsense to suggest that a club must move around the country, as the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) did. Milton Keynes is an important location and I strongly recommend that any football club can aspire to membership of the league from its own resources.

Clubs may legally belong to the shareholders or to an individual owner, but their hearts and souls belong to their fans, whether they are in the nearby community or have travelled with the club. Good luck to York City and Wimbledon FC, and to Milton Keynes in trying to win its place in the Football League the correct way.

Mr. Roger Gale (in the Chair): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Colchester for his patience and generosity.

10.41 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): In recognition of the generosity of the hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell), I remind hon. Members of the power of football. Last spring, the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey)—the then Minister for Sport—publicly declared that, for the irregularities of which it was guilty, Chesterfield FC should have had more than nine points deducted. The result was that the Liberal Democrats won Chesterfield from Labour in the general election.

I remind the Committee of my interest. I have been president of York City football club since 1988, and probably watch approximately 20 York City matches every season. I have no executive responsibility and it is difficult to say precisely what is happening about the club's future. I spoke to one of the potential new owners,

[Mr. John Greenway]

Mr. John Batchelor, who was at the match last Saturday, and I have high hopes that he will become the future owner.

I am also lending active support to the embryonic supporters' trust, which I will help to launch at the York Barbican centre on Friday; I am glad that the hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) will be there. By virtue of events elsewhere and with the help of Supporters Direct, many supporter trusts have been established, and I am convinced that they have played a vital role in helping clubs in financial difficulty to re-establish their base, although many are not yet out of the woods.

We play Lincoln City on Saturday, which is Fans United day, as the hon. Member for City of York mentioned. I was in the directors' box at York City on the day 10 years ago when David Longhurst collapsed and died of a severe heart condition that nobody knew he had. As president of the club, I chaired the appeal, which, with the help of the Football Foundation's predecessor, the Football Trust, put a roof over the Shipton street end of the ground. We called it the David Longhurst stand.

I remember the night we formally opened the stand. Sadly, the public address system packed up and I had to use a loudhailer, but I said then—enough people heard it—that I regarded it as one of the proudest achievements of my life to have been able to raise the money against the odds. We face much the same situation now.

York does not get the attendances that our performances on the pitch deserve, even though we are 23rd in the third division. We are one place from relegation, although we won last night. There is a contradiction. People say that we must save the club, and we had terrific attendances at our two recent cup games, although the cup run is now at an end for us. At the same time, however, people do not come through the turnstiles regularly enough to provide support for the club. That has to change.

In some respects, my next point about change will go to the heart of what the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) was trying to say. The facilities at many grounds are not up to the job of attracting fans, and are incapable of being used seven days a week, 365 days a year. York race course has 15 race days a year, yet it is busy every night with banquets, and every day with conferences and weddings. We have to make other use of the facilities.

The Conservative party strongly supports the creation of the Football Foundation, which has a big role to play in ensuring that football is adequately funded. It has several tasks to fulfil, but it has huge experience and expertise because, effectively, it was the Football Trust. During the past 10 years, the Football Trust was probably one of the most successful initiatives in British sport. Without it, our Premiership and first division grounds, and even some grounds lower down the league, would not have such fabulous new stadiums to which people are thronging.

That is only part of the role of the Football Foundation. I congratulate the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) on his ingenuity in being able to discuss the future of Wimbledon FC in a debate on the subject of football club funding and the Football Foundation. He was right to say that there would be a limit of £2 million on any grant from the foundation, but that is because its budget is not the £60 million target that was announced. Only 12.5 per cent. of the money—£7.5 million—is available for the football stadia improvement fund. People say that that cannot be enough, given the state of some grounds in the second and third division, but those clubs cannot afford even to think about redevelopment because they effectively face bankruptcy.

The most important element of the funding of the foundation comes from the Premiership. We do not know whether the television money amounts to 5 per cent., although we can argue about that another day, but that money is welcome. Cricket and lawn tennis give 11 per cent. of television money to grass-roots sport, and I hope that the Premiership will in time provide a greater resource.

What politicians can do about the future of football is limited at present. The Government do not own football and can only help to set a framework. I have watched football for 50 years, and many colleagues present have a similar love of the sport. Although I am president of York, I am a fanatical Arsenal fan, and I see what is happening at both extremes. The balance is not right. It is an old saying that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, but that is precisely what is happening. It is happening to York City and to many other clubs, such as Port Vale, which the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) mentioned. I go to boardrooms on a Saturday at away matches, and precisely know the financial restrictions faced.

What is happening to those clubs is a prelude to a serious collapse of the second and third divisions in the foreseeable future. We cannot, in the time available, find a solution today, but I hope that what has been said will have tweaked the minds of those in football who have responsibility for the future.

One of the most heartening things to see during Saturday's game against Fulham was the banner held by Fulham fans that said "Save York City Football Club". I believe that we can save the club, but we must remember that the work of the Football Foundation is to support the grass roots of the game. Another debate on the subject would be useful, because my notes contain a lot about how we should invigorate the grass roots. The foundation has made a good start, but it needs to do more.

Unless we encourage youngsters and give them proper coaching, we can kiss goodbye to our dreams of winning World cups or European championships in years to come. We have seen what coaching on the continent has achieved. The Football Foundation is a vehicle for funding and has the experience to coach our youngsters and give them proper facilities, but it has to be given the resources.

This has not been a partisan debate, except when we have been talking about where Wimbledon FC should go. I, as the shadow Minister, and my party will do all that we can to help. What we are seeing now is the development of many things that were started by the Conservative Government. I congratulate the hon. Member for Wimbledon on securing the debate.

If nothing else, it has provided us with an opportunity to say a little about what is going on in football, and I hope that those in high places will hear what has been said.

10.51 am

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Roger Casale) on securing the debate. It was an innovatory way of getting Wimbledon FC on to the agenda. I went to see last night's derby match where Sheffield United, my team, and Sheffield Wednesday had a no-score draw. After getting up at 5 o'clock this morning to return here, I have to say that listed buildings and club relocation take on a new meaning.

The Football Foundation's achievements since July 2000 have been substantial. I shall deal specifically with the question of relocation of Wimbledon to Milton Keynes. Powerful arguments have been made by both sides but, as I have said on a number of occasions—especially in connection with the early-day motion—the Government do not have a major role to play. I have said to the fans, to the club and to my hon. Friends the Members for Wimbledon and for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) that it is a matter for the Football League. Indeed, yesterday's development clearly puts the matter back in the league's hands. I was able to speak about that to David Burns at last night's match, and the league will take seriously the referral from the Football Association.

The question facing the Football League is whether a club should be permitted to relocate away from a historic location. That is something for the FA to decide, but it is important that it is taken in the context of today's debate. The guidance that is given to the Football League says that it should consider the community interest when deciding the location of a club.

In four or five weeks' time, many of the questions raised today can be taken up with the new independent football commission. Unfortunately, it has taken a little while to get under way. Professor Fraser will be heading that commission, and I hope that some of the questions about ownership and the role of football—and the questions asked directly by supporters—will be taken in a wider context by the commission; that is why it was set up. My hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Alan Keen), the chairman of the all-party group on football, may facilitate that debate because that subject was not properly aired in this morning's 90-minute debate.

There is clearly a lot of concern about ownership, and my hon. Friend the Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) mentioned York City football club. The club is close to my town of Sheffield and to Chesterfield, where Supporters Direct played an active role in setting up a trust. The independent football commission could usefully take up the fundamental issues of the ownership of football clubs' assets and the role that clubs play in the community. I understand that my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Mr. Burnham) will become the chairman of Supporters Direct in the near future, and I wish him well. I hope that Supporters Direct can meet the new independent football commission to work through some of the major problems—they are opportunities, too—that football faces.

I welcome the work of the Football Foundation. Only last week, I had the opportunity to participate in a major conference that was called by local authorities and those interested in football in the north-east, including representatives of the Sunday leagues. Many of the problems that have been raised today were raised there. A new corporate governance is emerging at grass-roots level, aided and abetted by professional football. Clubs are setting up academies and working with the foundation, which suggests that they realise that the fans and the indigenous development of the game are important for its long-term health. That is what the Government and the Opposition believe, and the foundation plays a significant role in that regard. It is putting resources into the grass roots to ensure that we build social inclusion and tackle many of the issues that we encounter in the more difficult areas and estates. Football is a great conduit for bringing people back into society, and I know that those in the game take that role seriously.

It has taken the Football Foundation 12 months to bed down, but it is now moving in the right direction, and hon. Members have given many statistics to illustrate the role that it plays. As an aside, I might mention that I went to the opening of the new ground of the Sheffield club, the first football club in the world. The foundation helped to secure that new location and to renovate the old ground, which is now an excellent park in which to play football. Beyond that, the foundation's activities will help football in general.

As regards Wimbledon, we shall watch this space with interest to see what comes out of the Football League's deliberations. The wider issue of ownership should be taken up with the independent commission, and I hope that Fans Direct can get the debate going and that we can then bring the matter back into this arena. From time to time, the independent football commission will report to the Government on the debate, so it is a serious matter. All the major actors—the FA and others—are on the stage, so I am hopeful that we shall have a thorough debate, without taking a partisan position. We can probably come up with a formula that will lead to football being seen and owned by the communities in which clubs operate so that the game can move from strength to strength.

I congratulate the foundation, with which I work closely, and I hope that we can ensure that progress is made.

Ms Walley: Will my right hon. Friend and the Treasury be looking closely at the gap in the Government's contributions to the Football Foundation?

Mr. Caborn: I am looking closely at the issue with the Treasury. One must look at sport in the round. There are 130-odd sports in the UK, and I am bound to say that football, although very important, gets more than its fair share of the contributions. That is not to say that there is not a dialogue going on with the foundation; there is, and I shall take it up in the next two weeks with the noble Lord Pendry. Let us keep a sense of proportion about all sports in this country.

Congestion Charging (London)

11 am

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): There are two fundamental questions: first, is the congestion charge a good thing or a bad thing; secondly, if we reach the conclusion that it is a bad thing, what can the Government do about it? An ancillary point is what the Labour party said that it was going to do about it and whether it has misled the people of London.

What is the point of the congestion charge? The Mayor of London is telling the people of London that the centre of the city is congested, which is not in London's interests. Accordingly, he will use his powers under the Greater London Authority Act 1999 and impose a road user charge in a small, defined area in the centre. He argues that that will remove the congestion and improve the environment. Let us put aside the alternatives for a second. In my judgment, it is a classic piece of anti-car socialist envy—Red Ken in his finest colours. His true purpose is to tax a certain group of Londoners and raise money to subsidise the underground because the Government are slowly but surely letting it slide into chaos. The congestion charge is a policy that I oppose and I am pleased that the Conservative party opposes it too. It is a policy supported by the Liberal Democrats.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): The hon. Gentleman will remember that I, like other London Members, was involved in the Greater London Authority Bill. Does he accept that, whether he or I support or oppose congestion charges, it is a proper matter for the regional authority to decide—in this case, the Mayor and the Greater London Authority—or is it his position that the Conservative party should not allow it, even if, at a less than national level, it is considered appropriate?

Richard Ottaway: Central Government should intervene and I shall argue that they have the powers to do so. Since the hon. Gentleman and I served on the GLA Bill, then the longest Bill in Parliament, with the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), I have gone to the Opposition Back Benches. I do not speak for the Front Bench, so he will have to put the question—

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. Does he agree that congestion charging was proposed during the election campaign for the Mayor of London in May 2000, but only on the basis that there would be a manifest improvement in public transport before such a charge was introduced? Everyone in London would agree that such an improvement has not been manifest. On that basis, is it not important that we in Parliament, while recognising the importance of devolved London government, have some voice to ensure that an inequitable tax is not foisted upon members of our constituencies and beyond?

Richard Ottaway: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. I shall dwell at some length on the positions of the parties at the time of the mayoral election and the general election. At the time, the Labour party simply said that it was against.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that when his party was in government, the former Minister, the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard), went on record as advocating a form of congestion charging? The issue is not clear-cut. Some people in all parties are against the issue in principle and some are against the specifics of the current proposals—

Richard Ottaway: I think that the hon. Gentleman has the wrong Minister. That idea was floated in a Green Paper. It did not surface in a White Paper. After consultation, it was rejected and certainly never appeared in a manifesto.

As I was saying before I was interrupted, the Conservative party opposes the policy although the Liberal Democrats support it. The Labour party introduced the power to charge, then said that it opposed it, then supported it and now is not sure. That is not so much the third way as all three ways at the same time. Congestion charging would cause chaos. It would hinder rather than help London's economic development. It would tax those who cannot afford it. It would have no beneficial impact on the environment, but might worsen it.

The Government legislated to provide general powers for the introduction of congestion charging inside and outside London. Their current line is that they are waiting to see how the proposed charging works in London before they introduce other schemes. The Government have given themselves powers to veto the introduction of congestion charges outside London, but claim that they do not have such a power in respect of charging in London—the Prime Minister pointed that out at Prime Minister's questions two weeks ago. I shall challenge that stance but, before I do so, it would be helpful to evaluate the merits of congestion charges.

The Mayor says that traffic in London is getting worse, spoiling the environment and must be curtailed. That statement completely ignores the fact that traffic growth in central London in the past 20 years has fallen by 2 per cent. The real growth is occurring in outer London boroughs, where traffic has increased by more than 50 per cent. in the past 20 years. Mercifully, there are no proposals to introduce congestion charging in those boroughs. However, there is an additional factor—the plethora of traffic-calming measures introduced by the Government since 1997 and, more recently, by the GLA. Protection of pedestrians and cyclists is essential but we should accept that such measures will have certain consequences. Traffic in my constituency has been visibly slowed. The zebra crossing has been replaced by the pedestrian light, which often stops traffic for longer than necessary.

We all want less congestion. Those who want clear roads are usually those who simply want to be able to drive down them without frustration. Traffic jams are a regulatory mechanism. Virtually everyone in a traffic jam is there because he or she wants to be. If a road is clear of traffic, more motorists use it, which causes a traffic jam, and so the process continues. The Mayor says that he wants to break that circle and eliminate congestion through taxation. In my judgment, for such a tax to succeed, it must pass three tests. It must be fair, have a purpose and be efficient. The congestion charge is none of those.

On fairness, who will be hit hardest by the charge? Not the fat cat City boss driving his car to the City, who will not be deterred in the slightest because he will add the charge to his office expenses. It is the little man who will be hit hardest—the poorest in society. That will include the evening shift worker who comes into town in the afternoon so that he can drive home late in the evening, the mother on the school run who has no alternative but to pay the charge, the pensioner who wants to go to the shops, and charities. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals estimates that the additional cost will be £5,000 a year.

Even the Mayor's agencies are complaining. The Metropolitan police authority is concerned that the charge will have an impact on recruitment and retention of police officers. Small businesses, such as newsagents, will be affected. The London fire and emergency planning authority estimates that 70 per cent. of its staff drive to work. Those people will be hit hardest.

The puzzling feature of the proposals is that the present incumbent of the mayoralty has always argued for the poorest in society. The measure is a regressive tax and it will affect the poorest in society hardest. Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that motorists in the poorest fifth of the population commit up to 24 per cent. of their total expenditure to running their cars. Low wage earners must be flexible about where they find work. People on low incomes already find it tough enough to find work in the capital and hon. Members of all parties constantly refer to the lack of low-cost housing. To take another £1,250 a year out of income, after taxation, is equivalent to another £25,000 on a mortgage. That will be the impact.

The proposals fail the first test, as the tax will be regressive, and will hit hardest those on the lowest incomes. It is not a fair tax, but a poll tax on wheels. Even more extraordinary is the existence of an alternative. Section 296 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 allows the Mayor to impose a workplace parking levy, which would hit the highest earners in our society, not the lowest. It would be easy to implement and would almost certainly raise a high level of revenue, yet I have heard no one in the Labour or Liberal Democrat parties recommend it. I strongly suspect that the Mayor has a touch of the Prime Minister's radicalism—one can be tough on something, as long as there will be no fighting back. The workplace parking levy would affect big business, which the Mayor is keen to suck up to. The working classes will give him much less trouble.

The second test is whether the charge has a purpose. The claimed purpose is to improve the quality of the environment and to meet the obligation, under section 30 of the 1999 Act, that the Mayor cannot introduce such a measure unless it promotes an improvement of the environment in Greater London. Is the traffic of central London causing pollution? If so, is the congestion charge needed to remove it? The Mayor's proposals pay little attention to technological progress in the production of the clean car. The average car now produces only 5 per cent. of the toxic emissions that it produced 20 years ago. Technology is in the pipeline to lower that figure even more. Hydrogen-fuelled cars are becoming a reality and before long an environmentally clean car will be possible.

Ironically, research has shown that the most polluted street in London is Oxford street, the only one where cars are not permitted. The only vehicles going down it are buses and taxis and we all know the difficulties that they have with their emissions. The irony is that they, the most polluting vehicles in London, will be exempt from the congestion charge. So how effective will the charge be in reducing pollution?

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I agree that great technological advances are being made that affect the cleanness of cars, but however clean a car is, will it not create the same amount of congestion?

Richard Ottaway: Two cars are needed for a traffic jam, but I think I get the drift of the question, which raises an important point. Is a traffic jam pollution? The inference to be drawn from the intervention is that it is.

Tom Brake: Whether a traffic jam created by zero-emission cars produces pollution is debatable, but it is not debatable that traffic jams have a clear and heavy impact on businesses, which must bear the costs of the slowing down of the movement of their goods.

Richard Ottaway: The centre of London seems to be doing all right at the moment without the congestion charge, but with the introduction of the charge the businesses the hon. Gentleman mentioned will be affected. In fact, congestion outside the zone may worsen. Helpfully, Labour-controlled Croydon council issued a press release last week entitled, "Ensuring congestion charge avoiders don't harm Croydon", which says that the Government have given the council £41,000 to carry out a consultation exercise. Multiplied over the 32 London boroughs, that comes to £1.3 million.

Bureaucracy seems to be good business under Labour. The Government introduce a tax and then give moneys to authorities to work out how to avoid its impact. The press release says it all. A congestion-charging zone cannot exist in isolation, as there is bound to be a knock-on effect. For example, plenty of traffic transits London using the Embankment. It would be forced south or north of the charging zone area. The City of London has expressed concern about the environmental impact on Tower bridge, which is just outside the zone and will become a focal artery for traffic trying to avoid it. The bridge is regularly raised, which will hardly ease congestion, as the area will be packed with vehicles avoiding the charge. Congestion outside the area will grow. To make matters worse, the Mayor is introducing no-car lanes on key routes such as the A40 to discourage traffic outside the zone.

The absolute chaos that will follow the introduction of the zone does not bear thinking about. The shambles will be total and gridlock complete. As the Mayor knows from his days in the Greater London council, one needs to shut only the odd key road to have a huge impact on London's traffic. He shut one lane of the A4

[Richard Ottaway]

in Kensington and the tailback stretched back to Heathrow. To cut off a whole swathe of London to traffic will lead to absolute chaos.

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): Will the hon. Gentleman explain why, just before the 1999 Act allowed local government powers to introduce congestion charges, Westminster city council distributed to every household a copy of *Westminster Reporter*, which said that the time had come to introduce congestion charging and that the only barrier was the fact that the Government would not allow the council to do it?

Richard Ottaway: I have absolutely no idea, but perhaps the hon. Lady would like to take the matter up with Westminster council. I take it from that intervention that she is in favour of the congestion charge.

The only purpose of the proposals is to raise revenue; they will do nothing to improve the flow of traffic, so the tax fails the second test.

The third test is whether the tax is efficient. The Mayor has made no secret of the fact that he hopes to impose the charge to subsidise the London underground. That is an obsession with the Mayor—he did that when he ran the GLC and, now that the Government have given him powers to raise extra taxes, the temptation to do it again is irresistible. However, the sums raised for the funding of the underground will be risible and will barely scratch the surface of the extra funding that is needed.

In August 2000, Transport for London estimated that the scheme would raise £200 million a year to give to public transport projects—which is code for the London underground. However, it is now expected that the scheme will raise only £628 million in the first five years of its operation and that, as the budget is revised, projected costs will rise and revenues fall. Although an extra £100 million for the underground will always be welcome, it will not make that much difference. Yesterday's *Evening Standard* said that the Government had cut funding for the underground. People are concerned that, for every pound raised by the charge, the Government will cut their subsidy by £1.

Congestion taxes require significant mitigation measures and a network of cameras and monitoring equipment. Transport for London admits that the total cost of implementing the scheme in London will be up to £560 million in the first year. Roland Berger, the international transport strategy consultants, warned last November that the system had already been rejected as dated by almost every other world capital and that rushing into a system of levying one basic charge over a rigidly defined area would simply push congestion from the centre to other parts of the capital. Will it even reduce congestion inside the zone?

In Singapore, the technology is sophisticated and fine-tuned to control traffic flows. The half a dozen arteries into the city centre have different rates at different times of day. There is one rate for entering during the rush hour. Half an hour later, the sum is reduced. That system is effective and evens out the traffic flows. Technology is actually making a difference. In Singapore, drivers pay every time they enter the zone. Here, the technology will be limited, or virtually non-existent, and the use of season tickets may well encourage more traffic. Here, once drivers have paid their annual fee, they might as well get their money's worth by going in and out at will. Accordingly, I argue that the charge fails the third test. It is an inefficient tax. The sums raised are not worth the chaos that it will cause.

Those are the three tests. The question now is what the Government should do about it. Will the Government intervene to prevent the disaster that will happen? I do not know why I should try to help them out, as the chaos that will result from the proposal is likely to happen just before the next general election. I shall then point out, with some relish, which party introduced the measure. However, I put London first and I would like to give the Minister some advice on the way out of the minefield into which the Government are walking.

Until now, the Government have said that it is a matter for the Mayor. The Prime Minister made that point to me at Prime Minister's questions two weeks ago. They have been saying that they can only tinker with the proceeds of the scheme—that they do not have the power to block it. The tinkering comes under paragraph 16 of schedule 23 of the 1999 Act, and I am sure that the Minister will use his powers with diligence when it becomes necessary. Section 143 of the Act gives the Secretary of State the power to direct the Mayor to change his transport strategy if he considers it to be inconsistent with national policy and likely to have an adverse effect outside London. Personally, I think that gridlock in the capital will have a dramatic effect outside London, and the only astonishing thing is that the Government fail to recognise that fact.

The real power for the Minister, however, is contained in section 30 of the 1999 Act, which relates to the general powers of the authority. The Act says that the authority should have the power to do anything that it considers will further any of its principal purposes. It goes on to define those purposes as

> "promoting economic development and wealth creation in Greater London;...promoting social development in Greater London;...and promoting the improvement of the environment in Greater London."

Although the Act gives the Mayor the power to introduce road user charging, he can do so only if it promotes economic development, wealth creation and social development and improves the environment. In my judgment, the proposals fail on all three counts. Having a zone in the centre of London where traffic is slightly reduced, but with chaos in the surrounding areas, will not promote the economic development of London. It will harm it and it will stifle the process of wealth creation, as investors run a mile. As it is a regressive tax, which will hit those on the lowest income hardest, it will hardly promote social development in London. It seems that it will barely affect the environment. At Mayor's question time last May, the Mayor said:

> "We expect there to be no significant improvement in air quality directly as a result of congestion charging."

It is arguable that, in a city full of grid-locked traffic, the environment may deteriorate.

The proposal breaches the general powers of the authority. The good news for the Minister is that section 30(7) gives the Secretary of State powers to issue guidance to the authority concerning the exercise by the GLA of its powers. That power is unfettered and can be used widely. It is clear that the Government have the power and the grounds to intervene. The only question remaining is whether they have the guts. Frankly, I am not sure that they have. This horrendous issue will have a profound effect on the capital and they are sitting like a rabbit caught in the headlights of an oncoming bus.

During the London mayoral election in May 2000, everyone's positions were clear. The Liberal Democrats were in favour of congestion charging and have remained so. The independent Mayor was in favour of it. The Conservative party was implacably opposed, and we thought that the Labour party was too. It campaigned on a manifesto that said, "New Labour, New London", and "no congestion charges". The Prime Minister endorsed that manifesto—it had his picture on page one and his signature. On 13 April 2000, during the campaign, the Prime Minister made his move. An article in *The Times* of that day stated:

> "Making his long-awaited intervention into the mayoral contest in support of Frank Dobson, Labour's candidate, Mr. Blair drew back from repeating his previous personal attacks against Mr. Livingstone. Instead, he targeted the Brent East MP's policies, insisting they were wrong for the capital, and highlighting transport in particular. Mr. Blair said that Mr. Livingstone's plans to charge drivers entering central London would be costly, and that his pledge to fund improvements to the Tube by issuing bonds would saddle Londoners with debt. However, the impact of the warning was blunted when Mr. Blair suggested that even if Mr. Livingstone were elected, his bond issue would never happen."

That is an interesting aside as the Government still wrestle with proposed public-private partnership and the possible bond issue.

That was the position of the Prime Minister and the Government. Not wishing to fall out with their leader, Assembly candidates fell over themselves to agree. Trevor Philips, leader of the Labour group on the Assembly, and Deputy Mayor, said that he would not support the congestion charge until improvements were made to the underground. It will be a long time before that is put to the test. The Mayor got his mandate. He had been clear, and the electorate responded accordingly. However, he did not have an unfettered right. The London Assembly has the power to overturn the Mayor's budget if there is a 70 per cent. majority against it. It was a good election for the Conservative party, and we came out the biggest party in the London Assembly. Labour were not far behind, and [illegible] came second. That meant that the 70 per cent. needed to prevent the congestion charge was present. Ever resourceful, the Conservative party took the words out of the Labour party manifesto, incorporated them into a motion and invited the Labour party to support it just three weeks after the election.

The high-flying rhetoric of opposition to the congestion charge proved to be nothing but deceit. Labour Assembly Members voted against the motion—hypocrisy of the highest level. They wanted the congestion charge after all. However, Ministers are more wary than naïve Assembly Members. They know that troubled waters lie ahead and they distance themselves, saying that it is not their responsibility. Nevertheless, the powers to intervene exist.

Unless there are substantial improvements in London's public transport, a congestion charge will exacerbate current problems. The right way to make progress is to hold a public inquiry. In about three years, Edinburgh intends to implement a congestion charge, but after a public inquiry. The full impact of the charge should be assessed and the views of boroughs such as Wandsworth, Kensington and Chelsea should be incorporated.

Using central London as a pilot scheme will pose a significant risk to its social, economic and environmental well-being. Of all the places in the United Kingdom, the centre of London is the last place where a pilot scheme of this nature should be held. As the Brett report, commissioned by Westminster council, concludes:

> "The scheme has a number of significant drawbacks which means that a public inquiry would be the most appropriate way of tackling the substantive concerns over the congestion charge."

I agree. The only question is whether the Minister, who is the only one with the power to do anything about it, will do something.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Roger Gale (in the Chair): Order. Four hon. Members have indicated in writing that they want to participate in the debate and a further three are standing. The Liberal Democrat spokesman, the Opposition spokesman and the Minister must also speak. I therefore prevail on hon. Members to keep remarks brief to allow the maximum number to participate.

11.30 am

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): I congratulate the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway) on securing the debate. I, too, tried to secure such a debate. He obviously has better luck than I have had.

I do not think that congestion charging will work. I accept that the Mayor decided that he had a mandate to go ahead with it and is determined to have it, but until we improve our public transport, people will not accept that it is fair.

I want to draw attention to the ridiculousness of the zone. I should like the whole proposal to be dropped and I urge the Minister seriously to consider holding a public inquiry if he has the powers to do so, because real and necessary consultation that allows people to understand what it will mean and how unfair it will be has not yet taken place.

Although there have been exemptions—we welcome those that the Mayor has added after consultation—anomalies will make the situation more expensive for some public services. I draw particular attention to my local hospital, Guy's and St. Thomas's. Staff have recently written to Transport for London pointing out that they were

> "disappointed that more has not been done to ameliorate the effects of the charge on the national health service, its staff and patients. As proposed, large numbers of our staff who use their cars to come to and from work will remain liable for the charge because they will not be using their cars for the very specific, and limited, reasons set out in the scheme order. Examples include staff

[Kate Hoey]

on-call from home...who have to come...out of hours and return home within the charging hours; staff who bring their children into the hospital's nursery facilities."

There is a shortage of staff, they are often dependent on accessing nursery places, and they will be liable to the charge. Many of the staff working in my local hospital have great difficulty in getting to work by public transport. The trust will have to reimburse much of the costs of charges, which will be a considerable extra burden to the national health service. The alternative is not to do that and face the loss of staff and greater recruitment and retention problems.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Is my hon. Friend aware that one exemption that the Mayor proposes is for those who, as Transport for London says, make a

"contribution to wider social or environmental objectives for example, NHS staff providing a essential services"?

Kate Hoey: I understand what my hon. Friend is saying. The problem is that the hospital has found that if that exemption is taken literally, it can say that everyone working in the hospital is exempt, which is clearly not going to be the case. That is why the hospital has drawn up the areas that will be affected by the proposals. Importantly, Transport for London has chosen to operate a reimbursement scheme for staff who will not be entitled to a discount, rather than an exemption scheme. The time and costs associated with the reimbursement scheme, not to mention delays and errors that could occur, could add extra cost for the hospital.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): My understanding is that it is a case of while they are at work, not while getting to work. We could be looking at a £25 million bill a year for hospitals.

Kate Hoey: I have not gone into the detailed costs, I just know that the hospital would not put its serious concerns in writing if it did not feel that the proposal would have a bad effect on it and its services. There is also the question of exemption for dependent patients and their carers. A range of issues is involved. Until the scheme is working we shall be unable to work everything out, and we shall be faced with huge problems afterwards.

When the scheme was proposed and looked as though it would happen, I thought that it would affect central London. However, the boundary has been drawn through the centre of my constituency in Kennington—through the heart of a conservation area and a community that has suffered a huge amount over the years but has managed to keep together and maintain its community feel. Congestion charging would cover Kennington, while Harrods, which in my view is in the centre of London, would not be covered.

I recently attended a meeting of 400 people in Kennington. People are only beginning to realise what charging will mean, which is why we need a public inquiry. When people discover that the powers that be are treating Kennington as central London, but not Harrods, they will think it nonsense. Splitting my community in half will mean that people living on one side of the road will have to pay while others will not. Businesses will also be affected, which will be a big blow to part of my constituency that I am not prepared to accept.

If there is a need for congestion charging, which I dispute, it should have begun with a small pilot scheme in the core of central London. If we were all to draw maps of central London, the scheme should be piloted in the middle of them.

As the hon. Member for Croydon, South said, lights have replaced pedestrian crossings in the past year or two. Cars therefore stop for longer when nobody is crossing the road, which causes pollution that affects people waiting at bus stops for buses that do not come because we have not improved public transport. There is a vendetta against the car. Having a car was something that gave me independence. Many women will not get out of their cars no matter how much public transport improves. Some may use their cars less if public transport improves, but until we see an improvement we shall not force people out of their cars. All that will happen is that people will be prepared to sit for longer.

As the hon. Member for Croydon, South said, charging will not affect people who are rich, who own businesses or who are Members of Parliament because they will pay and continue to use their cars. The people who will suffer will be those in my constituency who have got a job and saved up to buy a car, even if it is a second-hand banger, which they see as an important part of their lifestyle. They will suffer and it is wrong that we are allowing this to happen without a public inquiry.

The Government have the power to intervene and I urge them to do so with reference to my residential constituency—huge numbers of Members of Parliament live there, but I know that that will not influence the Minister, who also lives in the area. We must examine the scheme and stop it before we damage the Mayor's role.

11.39 am

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): It is a great pleasure to follow the common-sense words of the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey). I must apologise to the Minister because I must leave slightly early to attend a constituency engagement, but I shall read *Hansard* in great detail tomorrow. I shall be brief because I know that several other hon. Members want to speak.

I agree with what the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) said. Devolution of power to the regions has led to some momentous decisions, which on face value mean that other matters are outside the remit of the House. Although many Conservative Members were not in favour of a London Mayor, we must now work with that position as it is clearly here to stay, and we must ensure that we put the interests of Londoners first.

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway) made an interesting and thoughtful contribution that covered many of the most important points. I want to touch on a few issues that have not been discussed in great detail.

Like the hon. Member for Vauxhall, I believe that the exemptions issue is a can of worms and entirely arbitrary. Given that London is the economic powerhouse of the country, every last accountant, banker and solicitor going into central London is a key worker. Therefore, the concept of restricting key workers according to some arbitrary lobbying of Ken Livingstone is entirely wrong. It is clear that the key worker concept is open to abuse and uncertainty.

I am also concerned about the financial viability of the proposal. It is agreed that there must be radical improvements to London's infrastructure, and in particular its transport infrastructure, before a road charge can be considered. That applies to the underground system too. As Bob Kylie has made clear, it will take at least 10 years to make any fundamental improvements to the underground system. From the moment when the decision is made on how the investment will work, the tube will get worse for the next three or four years before it gets better. That decision will simply be the first part of the problem.

The Mayor has placed great reliance on London buses, and endless advertisements on the television, radio and billboards talk about the importance of buses. Although there are improvements, they will not make anything like the difference required to ensure that the problems with the congestion charge will not come home to roost.

The proposed scheme was intended to raise about £200 million a year. It now seems clear from all the statistical analysis that the maximum amount will be around £125 million a year. It is difficult to see how that will improve London's public transport. There will also be vast implementation costs. In the past week, there has been the revelation that Ken Livingstone has had to sign a number of preliminary contracts, which means that, even if he decides tomorrow to do away with the scheme, there will inevitably be a cost of about £20 million to London's taxpayers. As there are now 53 weeks until the scheme is due to be implemented, a massive amount of infrastructure work needs to be done. Even if the scheme got the green light, it would not be operational by the beginning of next February, so the congestion charge could become something of a shambles.

I know that I speak for myself; I am not sure that I speak for my party, but I shall allow my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) to make the party view clear. I speak as the Member of Parliament for the constituency most directly affected by the congestion charge, if it is brought into play. It is incumbent on us to put the interests of Londoners first. I shall support the Minister if he now takes the initiative and holds a full public inquiry.

The Government can rest assured that they will have the support of London Conservative Members if the interests of Londoners are put first. I am greatly concerned that the Mayor of London does not want to incur the wrath of environmentalists by cancelling the charge himself, although my hunch is that, given the political situation, he is as keen as anybody to ensure that he does not have a congestion charge nightmare on his hands during his re-election campaign in the run-up to May 2004.

11.44 am

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): I, too, applied for a debate on this subject and I am delighted to congratulate the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway) on his success in securing this timely debate. Like him, I speak as an outer-London Member but, unlike the two previous speakers, the scheme does not include my constituency. My assessment on behalf of my constituents in Ilford and Redbridge, which include many underground and railway stations, is that they will gain nothing from implementation of the scheme. The wrong scheme is being introduced at the wrong time in the wrong way.

There has recently been controversy about a residents' parking scheme in Seven Kings. My constituents will be charged £5 to enter central London, but under the Mayor's strategy they will be entitled to a 15 per cent. reduction on journeys in, which will have to be taken by other forms of transport. There is no way in which the 86 bus can go all the way from Romford to central London in anything like the time that it takes on the tube or suburban rail lines. My constituents will use the Central or District lines or the suburban lines from Liverpool street to Southend or from Fenchurch street to the east. Those lines are already jam-packed at rush hour, and it is unbelievably unpleasant to get on a Central line train at any time between 8 am and 9.30 am. It is the same in the afternoon.

My constituents will either pay the £5 charge to drive into central London every day, or they will have an even more unpleasant journey on public transport. When they get home from work, they will see outside their houses and all around cars owned by county commuters from Hertfordshire and Essex who have come in and found a tube or suburban line station near which to park to enable them to get to work. The whole of outer London will become a car park for county commuters. There will be no benefit to my constituents whatever.

I raised these concerns during the original consultation but, needless to say, my views were completely disregarded. I expected nothing else, because the Mayor is obsessed with getting the scheme through before his next election. His timetable is unrealistic; he wants the scheme to be introduced in February next year and he is using technology that is untested and unproven.

An interesting article in *The Guardian* on 14 July 2001 referred to the general problem of new technology for Governments and said:

> "'The lesson that government departments have been forced to learn is that the big bang approach is a recipe for disaster' said Tony Collins, executive editor of Computer Weekly magazine. 'There have been so many projects which have sounded so simple on paper. But it is only by running a test in a certain area for at least six months that you can find out whether it will work.'"

Perhaps there will be a test and we shall be the guinea pigs. The first six months will be interesting.

With a mayoral election in spring 2004, I am tempted to let the Mayor get on with it and suffer the political consequences of introducing such a disastrous scheme. However, that will not be good for my constituents or anyone else in London, whether within the central zone or outside it. It is in the public interest that those of us who are worried about the matter speak out now. If the scheme goes ahead regardless, we will at least be able to

[Mike Gapes]

say that Labour politicians were not responsible because the Mayor is anti-Labour, was elected as an independent and introduced this policy in a pig-headed way without listening to the voices that said it would not work in the interests of our constituents. Many other people should be speaking out. For my constituents, and many others in outer London, there is no tangible benefit whatever from the scheme as it is proposed today.

11.49 am

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I undertake to speak for a couple of minutes only. I have a direct constituency interest in the proposal because the boundary of the zone goes from Tower bridge on the northern edge of my constituency and cuts through the north-eastern part of Southwark until it joins the Lambeth border at the end of Newington Butts. North-east Southwark is in the zone, the rest of the borough is out of it and the boundary goes through my constituency, in a similar way to that described by the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) in relation to her constituency.

The Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties have been consistent in the principle of their positions. We have supported in principle a congestion charge and the fact that London government should decide on it. My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) will speak on behalf of our party on that general principle. I have made my views clear at both rounds of the submissions that have been called for by the Mayor and Transport for London and have put in submissions on both occasions, including earlier this month.

I want to raise some matters that I believe are important with the Minister. It is appropriate to bring to Ministers' attention matters that might influence their decisions about whether to intervene in the way in which the 1999 Act allows them. I have put the case for the boundary to be in a different place. It is nonsense for it to go through the middle of communities, boroughs and postal districts. Illogically, that will break up natural patterns of movement and put people on either side of a boundary that they will have to cross regularly. I have asked for the boundary to be moved outwards, so that it naturally takes in the whole of communities in my borough and elsewhere.

I have put the case for a buffer zone, so that people who live just outside the zone but whose natural movements, for which they have to use private transport, come within it—taking the children to school, going to see an elderly relative, shopping, going to the doctor—can be covered without having to pay the £5 daily charge. I am surprised that that idea has not yet been accepted. I hope that Transport for London and the Mayor will accept it, but if they do not, it will be helpful to bring other pressure to bear in examining the issue. There is a strong view in my constituency that it would be right.

Like the hon. Member for Vauxhall and others, I think that although the exemption extensions made by the Mayor between rounds one and two are welcome, other categories have not been thought through. The hon. Lady and I share the Guy's and St. Thomas's hospital trust: Guy's is in my patch, St. Thomas's in her's. I think that there are only two other hospitals in the zone: Bart's and the Middlesex hospital. There is a real issue here for the major hospitals, about which we are all concerned. I hope that other exemptions, including those that would affect the life of hospitals, will be examined.

As my constituents have become aware of the issues, they are increasingly persuaded that the Mayor should use his power to hold a public inquiry. My judgment is that the scheme is a good idea in principle, but that it must be shown to work, stack up and be fair. That will provide public confidence in it. I hope that the Mayor and Transport for London will agree with my view.

11.53 am

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway) on obtaining the debate and, in an era when Conservative policy seems to change from day to day, on staying true to what was Conservative policy during the passage of the Greater London Authority Bill. He was opposed to the measure then and is now; I supported it then and do now.

I shall set part of the argument in context, thanks to a helpful briefing from Transport for London about whether the proposals will actually go ahead. As we know, the Mayor has held a consultation period during the past 18 months, which, I believe, closed in January 2002. Transport for London is reviewing all the representations and I understand that the Mayor will issue a report, then make a decision later this year, on

> "whether to accept the scheme unamended, to press ahead with an amended scheme, to order a public inquiry or to drop the scheme".

I point out to my hon. Friends that the idea of congestion charging was certainly Labour party policy. A Labour Government introduced the GLA Bill and a Labour Government afforded a major breakthrough in how to raise adequate funding for transport in London, namely by hypothecation. That issue was touched on only briefly this morning. The hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) suggested that £130 million a year might be raised from congestion charging. The figures presented to me by Transport for London show that it is actually £130 million a week. It has been estimated that traffic congestion costs London £2.5 million a week.

The arguments advanced by hon. Members who oppose the introduction of congestion charging in London are exactly the same as those that would have been advanced when residents' parking was first proposed. My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes) spoke about county travellers coming in and using his constituency as free parking. That happened in my constituency. The problem was solved when my local authority introduced a residents' parking scheme. I have never heard anyone ask for such a scheme to be abolished. On the contrary, I get letters from constituents saying, "Please, when may we have a residents' parking scheme?"

The bottom line is that traffic must be managed. We must control it; it cannot control us. It destroys people's lives. Several hon. Members, quite properly, put forward the concerns of their constituents. I put forward the concerns of my constituents, many of whose lives are being destroyed by traffic from outside their borough. The owners of those cars do not inflate the local economy; they use the constituency simply as part of a process for getting from one side of London to the other. People are plagued not only by air pollution, but by noise pollution. Their children cannot play on the streets and they are worried about the rate of traffic accidents.

Those are the issues that must be tackled. It is absurd to argue that this is a sneak tax that is being imposed on the people of London. Where does the money for improvements in transport and the environment come from? It comes directly from income tax or it is raised from people who use the benefits of their cars and have to pay for the privilege. We accept that we have to pay for the privilege of parking. Our ability to park where we would ideally like is continually reducing. In inner and central London, methods of controlling traffic by making it more difficult or more expensive to park have reached their apotheosis. It is not possible to reduce traffic any further in that way. We have to use other ways of managing traffic and of ensuring that people who stay in their cars have to pay for the privilege.

The big plus about congestion charging is that all moneys raised can and must only be spent on improving transport in London.

Mike Gapes: Does my hon. Friend not think that it would be more sensible to improve public transport before introducing such a scheme so that the capacity is there to take the people who are giving up driving?

Glenda Jackson: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. We are seeing improvements in public transport in London. [HON. MEMBERS: "For goodness' sake!"] Hon. Members may scoff, but improvements are under way near this place. There are changes in road routes, a greater preponderance of bus lanes with more cameras so that people who still insist on driving their cars down them will be fined, and more and better buses that are more accessible, clean and green. It is absurd to think that public transport in London can be transformed without the added money that will come via congestion charging and the other plans to introduce money into the public transport system.

I found it astonishing that the hon. Member for Croydon, South was suddenly a passionate advocate of the needs of the poorest people in London—this from a member of the party that fought tooth and nail against the introduction of a minimum wage. He also referred to housing. His Government absolutely decimated the building of public housing in London.

Ms Buck: On the conversion of the Conservative party to the cause of the poorest, Westminster City council generates £88 million a year from its parking charges. The charge does not discriminate between rich and poor, neither are there exemptions for nurses, teachers or other public sector workers. It is extraordinary hypocrisy for Conservative Members to justify such income for that council but deny it as a means of raising money for investment in public transport.

Glenda Jackson: Hear, hear! I entirely endorse my hon. Friend's powerful argument. The poorest people in London do not have cars; they do not even have old bangers.

Ms Buck: It is the first thing that they buy.

Glenda Jackson: It may be the first thing that they buy, but it is extremely difficult for them to maintain it. Old bangers make a sizeable contribution to pollution in London and, in many cases, are dangerous. However, some people are too poor to afford even an old banger. They are entirely dependent on public transport, particularly buses. Buses are the first target in the Mayor's plans to improve public transport in London. It is beginning to work: the number of people who use buses during the day in London has increased by 6 per cent. and the figure is even higher for night buses.

There will always be difficulties when we attempt to change the entirely erroneous belief of virtually everyone in this country—not just in London—that someone who owns a car has an absolute right to drive it where and when they like and park it where they like. We must not only improve the environment of London but ensure that its economy is sustainable. Traffic in London costs far too much. It must be properly managed and it must make a decent return to improve public transport.

Kate Hoey: My hon. Friend has talked a lot about the environment. Does she agree that it is ridiculous that there has not been an environmental audit of congestion charging? How will it affect communities and what will happen on each side of the boundary?

Glenda Jackson: An environmental audit has been done in part, if not in totality. The mayoral advisory cabinet with responsibility for the environment in London will examine the matter in some detail. However, the basic principle stands. The Labour Government took a major step forward in breaking down the barrier against hypothecation that had precluded many advances for the common good. Congestion charging is hypothecation. The money raised must be spent only on improving public transport.

Improving transport in London improves transport for everyone. I supported the measure when I helped take the GLA Bill through the House and I support it now. The Mayor will consider the responses to the consultation and the boundaries may be amended. However, the basic principle is right and proper. The Mayor was elected and congestion charging was part of his manifesto. The most recent MORI polls show that 51 per cent. of the people of London support congestion charging, and I am one of them.

Mr. Roger Gale (in the Chair): Order. I call Mr. Randall, who will be the last hon. Member to speak before the Minister.

12.4 pm

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): A marker has been put down. We will have to return to the subject, because many people wish to speak on it. The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) expressed a view that is contrary to the majority view. There is no point in rehearsing the arguments against the measure. I would not drive into London if public transport were improved, but would much prefer to come in on the

[Mr. John Randall]

Metropolitan line. However, I understand that it will not be modernised for at least 10 to 15 years. Until public transport is improved, many people will not find congestion charging a disincentive to coming in by car.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): Does my hon. Friend share my concern and surprise that fire fighters are not designated as key workers? Many fire fighters who are stationed in the charging area live outside it and they cannot get an exemption for their home-to-work travel, as the Secretary of State refused it on request.

Mr. Randall: That shows, Mr. Winterton, why we need to discuss—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): Order. The hon. Gentleman holds an important position in the House and should know that I am now a Deputy Speaker in Westminster Hall.

Mr. Randall: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is a delight to address you in the proper manner.

The impact on areas just outside the zone and in the suburbs will be huge. The scheme is impractical and will be expensive to implement and I urge the Government to use their power to give all Londoners a break. The scheme may be regarded as well intentioned—I give the Mayor that—but it is fatally flawed and we should not go ahead with it until we have thought it through properly and public transport is improved.

12.6 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I wondered why we were to have this debate on the Government's policy on congestion charging in London, as that is a devolved matter. Of course, the Government need to consider the impact of congestion charging in areas where the Greater London Authority has boundaries, or if there are motorways, but hon. Members know that the Greater London Authority Act 1999 unequivocally gave the GLA those powers.

Glenda Jackson: Any scheme requires the Secretary of State's approval.

Tom Brake: I am aware of that, and I will ask the Minister only one question on that point. As the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) said, there is evidence of support for congestion charging, which hon. Members must remember. There will be concerns as the details of the scheme emerge, and the role of the Mayor and Transport for London is to address them.

I want to concentrate on the Conservative position on the issue in case any hon. Member is under the impression that the Conservatives are, and have always been, implacably opposed to congestion charges. In 1996, Lady Olga Maitland, who is no longer in the House, asked whether the Government had any plans to introduce road tolls in London. Steven Norris gave a long answer, in which he clearly did not say no. He could simply have said no, but he did not. At the end of his response, he said:

"The Government are rightly more sanguine and cautious."—[*Official Report*, 10 June 1996; Vol. 279, c. 7.]

There was no categorical denial of support for congestion charges in London. The section on road congestion in the Tory manifesto talks about introducing new regional traffic control centres, extending the use of variable speed limits, and

"ensuring that local authorities have the necessary powers to act."

Presumably, "necessary powers to act" could include congestion charges and workplace parking charges. The hon. Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway) seemed to advocate support for that system and for Singapore-style charging on entry. I can only anticipate his complaints if a scheme were introduced under which people had to pay a charge each time they went through a zone. The hon. Gentleman seems to be confused about whether he or his party supported that. He argues against the scheme that the Mayor proposes, but argues for the scheme in Singapore.

Richard Ottaway: To save the hon. Gentleman wasting his time, I mentioned the Singapore proposal to show how the scheme could be run more efficiently if it were introduced. As I said at the outset, I am against the proposal, as is the Conservative party, and I voted against it in when we dealt with the GLA Bill in 1999.

Tom Brake: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his clarification, but unfortunately it did not clarify the points that were made, for example, when Steven Norris replied to that question.

The Labour position is one of lukewarm endorsement. If one examines what the Labour spokesman has said in the Greater London Authority, one can see that he is urging the Mayor not to rush the introduction of road charging. The Labour party is in favour in principle, but does not want it done too quickly. The view being expressed in the GLA is not the same as the one being expressed by some Labour Members today.

The Liberal Democrat position has been consistent and clear. In principle, we believe that congestion charges would be helpful and would raise revenue, which is a point that hon. Members have not tackled. Many argued that London Underground is underfunded, including the hon. Member for Croydon, South, who then went on to say that the £100 million that would be raised would be insufficient. He did not take the next logical step, which would have been to explain from where the necessary additional funding would come to make up the shortfall. The charges could play a role, but equally we have made it clear that congestion charges will work only if the public transport improvements have been made and can be seen to have been made. In our submission, we made it clear that it has not been sufficiently improved.

Ms Buck: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tom Brake: I am sorry, but I will not because I must finish in the next 60 seconds, if possible.

The debate has shed some light on what some hon. Members do not want but, unfortunately, not on what they would want to be introduced instead. I will finish by asking the Minister one question. Will he confirm today that the Government will not interfere in congestion charging schemes other than in areas where there is an overlap with Government interest—the motorway network, for example—and in authorising the scheme and how revenues will be allocated, which is rightfully the Secretary of State's role?

12.12 pm

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway). In view of the shortness of time, I hope that he will forgive me for giving only simple congratulations, rather than saying the many magnificent things about his career that I would want. He laid down three clear tests, which were of fairness, purpose and efficiency, and demolished the proposals on every one. That clearly demonstrated that we are about to see a real mess in London.

It was notable that, with the exception of the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson), every hon. Member present completely opposed congestion charges.

Richard Ottaway: What about the Liberals?

Mr. Pickles: I will deal with them in a moment, because I thought that they were all over the place, as always. They were in favour, but against the detail. They think it is a wonderful idea, but do not like how it will work in practice.

The hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) painted an unforgettable image of Harrods as an out-of-town shopping centre, but described Kennington as a community cut in two, saying how expensive it will be to take a sick child by car to visit the doctor. It may be just a few streets away, but it will cost £5 and her contribution was telling. My hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) spoke about key workers and said that if the Government wanted to bury the toll tax, the Conservatives would cooperate. That would be the case. The hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes) rightly said that this was the wrong scheme in the wrong place at the wrong time. His comments on the No. 86 bus from Romford could work for almost every bus route in London.

I assumed that the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate would be present to apologise for the mess created by the Greater London Authority Act 1999 and for allowing the possibility of congestion charges. Her remarks on the issue have been refreshing. It is clear that the measure is about paying for the privilege of owning and using a car. We should forget the poor, because according to the hon. Lady they are not entitled to a car—they have to go by bus. I have seen correspondence that she sent to the Conservative group at the Greater London Assembly in which she said that the minimum wage was there to pay for things such as congestion charges and the toll tax. There are many reasons why the minimum wage was introduced, but I did not think that it was—

Ms Buck: Will the hon. Gentleman therefore advise central London boroughs, such as Westminster and the royal borough of Kensington and Chelsea, that they should not be levying a combined total of some £130 million in parking charges on the very people whom he now claims to defend?

Mr. Pickles: The hon. Lady should talk to her friends, because the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate says that these folk are not entitled to a car. How they managed to slip from Hampstead and Highgate into the centre of town despite being so poor, I have no idea.

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) says that the Liberals are in favour of the measure. I think that there is consistency among the Liberals. Within London, by and large, they favour a congestion charge; it does not matter that, in the rest of the country, they are opposed to it. However, I shall make one prediction: the closer we get to congestion charges, the more we shall see Liberal "Focus" leaflets saying that the measure is not quite right, that they do not like it in a particular place and then that they are absolutely opposed. Indeed, we have had a taste of that today.

We can talk about whether the Mayor has already committed £20 million, whether or not we have congestion charging, whether he has signed up to two secret deals, and the fact that the date for introducing the measure jumps between the end of February and the end of March. We want to know who will pay for it. Will it be taxpayers or the poor people of London?

We airily say that we should introduce the measure when the infrastructure can support it and when there have been significant improvements in public transport in London. I know that the Minister never gives way when he is speaking, so I shall make my point now—*[Interruption.]* I have it on record. I recall asking the Minister's boss how often he had travelled by tube during peak times and he said, "Not for a long time." He had to think back to his school days for the last time that he had travelled at peak time. The Minister says that there have been improvements, but there have been no significant improvements. Most of the underground lines are operating at peak capacity and some of them are operating at 120 per cent. capacity.

The hon. Member for Ilford, South talked about the Central line, but it already moves about 8,000 people every 15 minutes, so where will the capacity come from? London Transport says that it will put 200 new buses on the line. When we ask whether they are new or replacement buses, it says that some are replacement buses but some are virtual buses. I bet that you do not know what a virtual bus is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and you are probably the most intelligent person in the Chamber—we will not put that to a vote. A virtual bus is a bus that apparently travels faster. What will that achieve? The answer is an extra 7,000 passengers at peak times, but the Central line carries 8,000 every 15 minutes, so that will make no difference.

Even if the congestion charge is successful and manages to reduce by a small percentage—let us say 5 or 6 per cent.—the number of people coming into the city centre by car, those people will still have to come into the centre and there will be no room on public transport for them. Unless the Minister is about to say that white-gloved guards will be employed on the underground to push people on to the tube at peak

[Mr. Pickles]

times, we shall simply see more tube stations closed at those times. The measure will do nothing to reduce congestion and will not help the city. It will just be a way of trying to raise a relatively small sum, once one takes the amount needed to set up the infrastructure into account.

The hon. Member for Ilford, South said that there was a case for giving the Mayor plenty of rope with which to hang himself. That would be one of the most expensive lynchings ever. As an implacable opponent of capital punishment, I must say that this is a unique form of capital punishment, one that punishes our capital. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh dear!"] Well, it was a pun. I thought it was worth doing.

Finally, I should like to set the record straight. The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) has been looking through *Hansard.* I cannot remember whether he found something from 1996, 1896 or 1920. Occasionally in the distant past, the Conservative party briefly thought about congestion charges. We now realise that it is a stupid idea. It will not work. We are introducing new policies, so we cannot make any policy commitments, but this matter has been through our policy board and I can state categorically that the Conservative party is opposed in principle to congestion charging.

12.21 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Richard Ottaway) on securing and introducing this important debate. In the interests of clarity, I should declare an interest. I have a residential property inside the proposed zone. I also have an excellent Member of Parliament to represent me, my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), who is well thought of not just by me, but by many others in the area.

The debate became quite interesting. I thought at one stage that it would be a battle between Hampstead and Highgate and Vauxhall. A variety of views have been expressed. I should first like to put one important point on the record. The Government have no power to veto the proposed congestion charges. The decision on whether congestion charging should be introduced in central London is a matter for the Mayor. He has an obligation to listen to the views of hon. Members. I am sure that he will pick through *Hansard* tomorrow, going through most carefully the varying views that have been expressed.

If the hon. Member for Croydon, South will allow me, I shall answer briefly the question posed by the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake). Unusually, he asked just one question: normally he asks 51. He asked whether the Government would interfere with any plans for congestion or workplace charging outside London. The Government would never interfere in those plans. Outside London, the Government must approve the plans and will do so on their merits. We have no power to interfere with or veto the congestion charging that has been proposed in central London, but we have the power to look at the spending plans, which we believe will be available in the next few weeks. We will act appropriately on the basis of the power vested in us by the 1999 Act.

The hon. Member for Croydon, South performed some wonderful and intriguing intellectual gymnastics. He started off in his usual way by saying that this scheme was all based on socialist envy, as if the Mayor or the Government were going to be hard on better-off car owners. Curiously, he moved on to say that it would hit the poor and that it was a regressive tax. That is quite a departure. Perhaps that has been through the policy board too. Conservative Members are now advocates for the poor: I do not think so. Their record has never suggested that—*[Interruption.]* However much the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) chunters on, he will not convince me that it is the Conservative party that is fighting for the interests of the poor. It is interesting, too, that we heard no alternative from the hon. Member for Croydon, South, nor from the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar, from whom we heard only that the policy body said that it did not favour congestion charging—end of story.

The hon. Member for Croydon, South made an important point about other parts of the 1999 Act and asked whether the Government had a power of intervention, the answer to which is, alas, no. The hon. Gentleman asked whether we thought there was a need for direct revisions to the transport strategy; they are justified only when the strategy is manifestly counter to Government policy and would be detrimental to areas outside London. I hope that that is helpful. He also mentioned traffic-calming measures in parts of London, which he thought were somehow the Government's fault. I thought that they were introduced by local government.

Richard Ottaway: You gave them the money.

Mr. Jamieson: We gave local authorities generous amounts of money for local transport plans, particularly in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. The democratically elected councillors in the areas, some of whom are Conservative party members, decided to introduce the measures; it is for local authorities to take such decisions on behalf of people in the area.

The hon. Gentleman thought that he was giving some clever quotes from the documents before him, but the Labour party view in the mayoral elections was clear: we were opposed to the introduction of congestion charging in the Mayor's first term. The document made it crystal clear—the hon. Gentleman quoted selectively—that we were not opposed to the principle. If we had been, we would not have introduced the GLA Act, which was steered through Parliament so capably by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson).

The Mayor won a mandate in his election and in 2004 he will have to go back to the good people of London, who will judge whether he has fulfilled his mandate.

Richard Ottaway: The front cover of the manifesto says,

> "New Labour, new London, no congestion charges."

Is the Minister saying that that is not what it means?

Mr. Jamieson: It meant no congestion charges in the Mayor's first term. If the hon. Gentleman reads the small print, he will see that that is what it says. I see that he has only got to the front page; he may be colouring the thing in, and not actually reading the words inside it. The mischievous expression on his face shows that the hon. Gentleman knows what it says inside and knew it before he spoke in the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall made a powerful speech in which she said that there should be a public inquiry. The Mayor will have listened to her view and that of other hon. Members. Under the 1999 Act, the Government have no power to do what my hon. Friend suggests, but the Mayor can call a public inquiry if he thinks it appropriate. Until my hon. Friend's speech, I had not realised that Harrods is outside the zone and that the Flipper fish bar in Kennington road, which does excellent fish and chips, is inside it. My hon. Friend said that women would be forced out of their cars. I see plenty of men and women on my regular journeys on the underground and the 159 bus.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes), in a powerful speech on behalf of his constituents, said that the proposal had no tangible benefits. I hope that the Mayor will take careful note of what he said, because he always speaks well on these matters.

Richard Ottaway: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jamieson: No. I want to refer to what the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) said. He asked whether we could step in, but the GLA Act does not give us any power or authority to do so on these matters.

In a powerful and impassioned speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate made the important point that many people do not have access to cars. About 40 per cent. of my constituents probably do not.

It has been an important debate and, as usual, I am allowed little time to deal with all the matters raised. If any hon. Member feels that I have not dealt with an issue in sufficient detail and would like to drop me a line, I will ensure that they receive a written response.

Richard Ottaway *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am going to use my discretion and say that time is up—

Richard Ottaway: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up. I am not taking a point of order. We move to our next debate, introduced by the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Havard), on the appropriate use of blood in the national health service.

Blood Use (NHS)

12.30 pm

Mr. Dai Havard (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): The appropriate use of blood in the national health service is the subject of debate and I would first like to explain how I became interested in it. A newspaper article in October about the possible halving of blood supplies as a result of donors' fears about Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease testing alerted me to it. The article was about the position in Ireland, and it was clear from it and from subsequent research that there is a current problem with sustaining the supply of blood and that it could be jeopardised further.

The experience in Ireland was of crisis proportions. From a base of bad experience with other blood-related problems such as human immunodeficiency virus and hepatitis C, the confidence of donors in Ireland was already reduced, and effectively it crashed with the human variant CJD screening proposals. The net effect was the cancellation of surgery and the introduction of haemovigilance officers—the so-called "blood police"—into every hospital in Ireland in order to deal with the crisis caused by low supplies of an increasingly scarce and valuable commodity.

We know that in the coming year the United Kingdom will face an acute shortage of blood, which could be compounded if the problem is not properly tackled and the public given sufficient confidence to continue to donate blood. I am a blood donor and I will continue to donate my blood—and I encourage others to do so.

My concerns were heightened over Christmas when I sat at home in Wales listening to emergency radio appeals for donors because stocks were running out. I fear that when this shortage comes, non-emergency patients in the NHS—people with cancer, for example—will suffer most while the dwindling blood stocks are rightly used for life-saving procedures.

The National Blood Service is on record as saying that testing for vCJD will cause a donations crisis—perhaps as much as a 50 per cent. drop in supplies. I believe and I am glad that you, Minister, are planning for that eventuality. The appropriate use of the blood working group has been set up to

> "ensure the most effective use of blood as an increasingly scarce resource"—

a recognition that blood will be a scarce resource.

In October last year the chief medical officer held a conference, at which our colleague, the Health Minister, Mr. Hutton, said:

> "One of the important issues discussed was how to avoid the unnecessary use of blood in clinical practice in the face of decreasing supplies and numbers of blood donors".

The Government clearly recognise the problem, and it is being addressed. I have been attempting to ascertain exactly how those deliberations concluded. To date my replies from the Department have been disappointing—hence my initiation of the debate.

Before Christmas, stories flourished in the media of people who had been transfused with blood donated by donors who had since gone on to develop vCJD. Neither the Department nor the NBS has challenged the authenticity of these stories. One alarming story—it was

[Mr. Dai Havard]

not denied by the NBS or Professor Banner—was that in an attempt to control the spread of vCJD, the Department was considering banning everyone who has ever received a blood transfusion from donating blood or their organs. My research has shown that if such a decision were ever made, it would instantly reduce the blood donor base by 15 per cent. Will you give me an assurance today that neither your Department nor the NBS is considering preventing recipients of blood transfusions from donating blood again?

We know that blood donations in the UK are already in decline. According to the Minister's predecessor, John Denham, between 1994 and 1999 blood donations fell by 17 per cent. Last year the NBS tried to reverse the downturn with a high-profile celebrity campaign for donations. If the figures given by your colleague Yvette Cooper to the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) on 14 January are correct—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): Order. The hon. Gentleman should address Ministers by their constituency, not by their name.

Mr. Havard: I apologise. Mr. Deputy Speaker.

If the answer given on 14 January is correct, the campaign to which I refer is at best reducing the speed of decline. Last year saw another substantial reduction of 3.4 per cent. These figures led me to look at how blood is used. I am concerned both in terms of public responsibility and on a party political basis. As a party, we are trying to bring massive reform to the NHS. This is an area in which we are needlessly under attack.

According to the Department's figures, about 30 per cent of blood is used for cancer patients. I declare an interest; my constituency has one of the highest numbers of cancer patients in the UK. That is a significant problem that needs to be addressed by a step change. My information suggests that in practice 40 per cent. of blood is used for cancer patients, to overcome the debilitating effects of anaemia and related fatigue. Fatigue is consistently listed by cancer patients and patient groups as the worst side effect of treatment. Last year, more than 2,000 cancer patients responded to Cancer BACUP's advertisement on the subject of cancer-related fatigue. The International Myeloma Foundation said that it would like Government assurances that cancer patients would not suffer in the light of any future shortage of blood supplies.

I reinforce the IMF's sentiments and ask the Minister for an assurance that cancer patients will not suffer unnecessarily in the event of the NBS having to restrict blood supplies. To do otherwise would make a farce of the Government's cancer care plan. The Minister will recognise that the extensive additional resources given to the NHS to fight cancer are much needed and welcome. They will do a good deal to redress previous neglect. How we make a step forward change rather than mere incremental change to the health service is a political question that must be addressed. The plan was meant to help achieve that, but in terms of blood it could be undermined if we are not careful.

What options are there to the use of blood for cancer patients, I asked myself when examining the figures, to help to avoid the impending crisis? I was pleased to accept an offer from the then Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), to attend a meeting with officials, along with the NBS and other parts of the Department, to discuss what could be done. I thank them for brokering that meeting. I took along a leading haematologist, a Macmillan nurse who is a practitioner in the field, and a representative of the drug industry, to discuss options to using such a large proportion of the blood supply.

It became clear during the discussion that using the drug Erythropoietin to treat chronic fatigue in cancer patients could provide not only a better standard of care but also free up most of the 30 or 40 per cent. of the blood supply used in cancer treatment. Many leading specialists believe that transfusing blood to cancer patients is unnecessary. A leading haematologist, Dr. Ivor Cavill, says that

> "the majority of cancer patients treated for anaemia are needlessly exposed to transfusions when there are better alternatives available".

At the meeting we heard the experience of the Macmillan nurses at Whipps Cross hospital in London, where they have adopted the practice of using Erythropoietin in place of transfusions, which is appropriate for 70 per cent. of their cancer patients.

There is a debate that drugs may have a curative as well as a palliative effect. I believe that they provide a better base for the other treatments to take effect. I am carrying out more research in that area and I will be pleased to supply information to the Department. I examined also comparisons with European countries. There has been much talk recently about developing our health service to European standards.

Currently, in France, a cancer patient is six times more likely to be treated in this modern way, rather than by receiving a blood transfusion. In Spain, that would be seven times more likely, and it would be eight times more likely in Italy. American patients are 100 times more likely to receive such treatment, rather than the one that we have used over the years.

European standards are important, and we could match them quickly. That is the sort of step change to which I referred, rather than an incremental change. In Europe, modern options are used as a matter of course. Other countries preserve their blood supplies for emergencies and surgery. A report in yesterday's *Evening Standard* mentioned the possibility of sending our cancer patients to Greece. If they went to Greece, their chances of being treated with the use of drugs would be greater than those in Great Britain, although I do not know the exact figures because I have not had a chance to undertake the research.

Economic factors are involved. Obviously, drugs cost money and the way in which blood is costed must be examined. My research, which is based on the Government's figures, shows that if modern blood options were used for cancer patients, 250,000 bed days a year would be freed up. I gave that information during the meeting on 5 December. The argument that the drugs would cost must be set against potentially massive savings in other areas. The use of drugs would also deal with the chronic problems of bed blocking and insufficient resources in the health service.

In a week during which we have been pilloried as a result of stories about people waiting on trolleys in emergency departments and unable to get beds, it is disappointing that I am still waiting for an answer about the information that I gave in December. I understood that the meeting's outcome was that the costs would be examined. The Department could not cost them properly and needed to find a way in which to do that. I have not received notification of any progress on the matter.

The Department was also to examine broadening people's involvement in the debate on blood policy. The issue of blood is about much more than transfusions; it must be examined in the round. Those who are involved with only transfusions may have a narrow perspective of the matter, and a broader perspective must be given.

I have received no recognition that things have moved forward. Obvious benefits would stem from the cancer plan and cancer patients' quality of life would be improved. Standards of care could be improved, and we could meet quickly European and international standards. We could move forward the reform agenda that is necessary for the NHS.

As a spending Ministry, the Department of Health must look to the Treasury. How can the Department demonstrate and account for the effective use of reformed resources, processes and procedures if it cannot answer questions such as mine about the effect and economic implications of changing procedures? The Department must address these matters quickly.

There would be benefits in moving to modern drug treatments for anaemia and fatigue-related treatment. The exposure of many people to transmission-related diseases would be reduced. The move would free up about 30 per cent. of the blood supply, and help to protect it. It would avoid a crisis in supplies and avoid also cancer patients being put in a position in which palliative care for them is penalised in order to allow emergencies to be dealt with. Better treatment standards would be available for cancer patients, and modern European standards could be adopted. It would free up quickly 250,000 bed days a year, and help with that crisis.

Such a change is not only possible, but would be effective and efficient for patient care and best practice. There is justification for it on grounds of both patients and economics.

The change would be politically advantageous. It is no secret that I must defend where I am and what I argue about the health service. We must make step changes. I will discuss how we can progress on the issues with my colleagues in Wales, because some involve devolved matters.

I remind the Minister of the assurances that I would like. I want confirmation that those who have given blood will be accepted as future donors, and an assurance that cancer patients will not suffer in the face of dwindling blood stocks. The economic case for using drugs and saving bed days, and ways of accounting for that, must be a priority for the Department of Health. Will the Minister consider broadening the involvement of the new transfusion committee, or using other methods to develop a consistent blood policy throughout the UK? That must be a matter of urgency.

I apologise for my indiscretion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The House thanks the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Havard) for his speech. The Minister to whom he referred two or three times is the right hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton). I call the Minister to reply.

12.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Havard) on his success in having secured the debate. He has taken a special interest in the subject for some time, and from listening to his speech today, we can all appreciate the depth of his knowledge and expertise in a technical area about which I have had to learn a great deal recently. He raised some important issues in a clear analysis of how he believes that we can make progress in the national health service and in providing services to patients in need.

We should place on record that everyone in this country owes an enormous debt of gratitude to blood donors. I am delighted that my hon. Friend is himself a donor. Every year, about 2 million people take significant time out from busy lives to give blood. Having enough blood in the NHS is vital. As my hon. Friend said, the supply is not endless, and we must be careful to use blood efficiently and effectively.

I am pleased that the National Blood Service currently meets all NHS demands for blood. There are occasional media claims to the contrary, and we hear scare stories about blood just as we do about other matters. There have been no emergency appeals for blood in England for the past three years, so we have managed to keep a position of balance, which is important.

The blood service is itself constantly looking for ways in which to improve the way in which it operates to ensure that it has the maximum amount of blood possible. It is not complacent, and it does not feel that because it has been successful so far, it can relax. It is making huge efforts to anticipate and deal with possible health challenges, including the unknown risk from variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, which my hon. Friend mentioned.

There is a constant drive to maintain our blood stocks and to introduce new scientific developments to make blood safer and to provide options to the use of human blood. As science and technology develop, we are beginning to see some exciting alternatives. My officials told me about the possibility of bloodless surgery, an exciting prospect for the future that may become a reality.

The blood service is doing much to modernise the way in which it operates and to draw in as much blood as possible. In encouraging the public, it is trying to ensure that giving blood is not so time consuming, so that people do not have to wait for literally hours. When people go to give blood these days, they need to complete a fairly detailed questionnaire about their background. The blood service is trying to introduce a system of sending out the questionnaire to donors in advance so that they can complete it in advance. They can then give blood on arrival, perhaps in their lunch hour, and get back to work. That is an important improvement.

[Ms Hazel Blears]

We must ensure that we seek blood donors in the places where they are and at the hours and places that suit them, after work if necessary, in shopping centres, or wherever possible, to try to maximise the supply of blood in the service. That is crucial.

We are trying to make the best use of available blood by encouraging clinicians to use it only when strictly necessary. That involves changing clinical attitudes and behaviour and putting the issue higher up the agenda. We are considering the increased use of safe, clinically appropriate and effective alternatives, which my hon. Friend highlighted. These are the criteria by which we judge almost everything in the health service—whether things are safe, clinically effective and appropriate, and cost-effective. Examples include Erythropoietin and the use of iron supplements for treating anaemia, and the use of synthetics such as recombinant clotting factors for treating haemophiliacs. Whenever we can develop new ways of working as part of our modernisation and reform agenda, as my hon. Friend emphasised, it is crucial that we do so. Making a step change in progress such as he outlined is important.

We are trying to develop plans to tackle a possible reduction in donors following the introduction of CJD screening tests. We believe that the tests may be introduced in three to five years' time, so we have a little time in which to plan for that contingency. However, we are aware that there could be a dramatic reduction in donors, and robust plans need to be in place to meet that contingency.

The safety of the United Kingdom blood supply is maintained through independent regulatory systems and through audit. However, there is an element of risk in every medical treatment or intervention that involves blood. The serious hazards of transfusion team has conducted four major studies, which have demonstrated that blood transfusion in the UK is safe. It is becoming safer, due to improving technology and clinical audit, but further improvements can be made. It is important to ensure that patients receive top-quality services, and that maximum safety is achieved. All hon. Members will be aware of the tragedies that have befallen people because of infected blood products, and of their families' feelings of devastation. Therefore, we must ensure that blood is as safe as possible.

We have taken precautionary measures against the theoretical risk that vCJD can be transmitted through blood. I stress that that is a theoretical risk at present. The white cells are removed from all transfused blood by a process called leucodepletion, because the experts consider that CJD is most likely to be transmitted through the white cells. We no longer use plasma from the UK in the manufacture of blood products, to ensure maximum safety. These precautions have been reviewed by the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee on several occasions, and it has concluded that no further precautionary measures are currently necessary to protect public health. However, we are continuing to look at other possible risk reduction measures with regard to CJD, in the light of new scientific developments and advice.

My hon. Friend asked whether everyone who has received donated blood will be disallowed from donating. A risk assessment is being conducted into that. No decisions have yet been made, but the Department has engaged an expert adviser to consider the risk assessment, and whether to exclude transfusion recipients from giving blood. If we were to decide to do that, it would be another precautionary measure, because we are dealing with a scientific area where we do not know what would be the case. However, we are guided by previous experience, and the last thing in the world that we want is for people to be affected by infected blood. I undertake to keep my hon. Friend informed about the outcome of that process.

We must make the best use of the blood that we have. A major conference, the better blood transfusion conference, was held in October 2001. Its goal was to set the priorities for making the best use of the resource.

Within the coming few months, we intend to issue an action plan for the NHS. It will adopt a patient-focused approach: we have tried to involve patients in the process, because it is important to consult those who receive blood, as well as clinicians and other professionals.

The action plan will probably include guidance for clinicians on assessing patients' treatment needs—including the use of their own blood—and information for patients about transfusion and its alternatives, so that they possess the knowledge to be able to make informed decisions. That is an important thread that runs through all of our reforms of the NHS. It is one of our priorities to try to empower patients by giving them sufficient information and skills to be able to have a mature partnership with clinicians in making decisions about what is best for them, with regard to their health care.

A new national blood transfusion committee has been established to study practice. My hon. Friend stated that he wanted the broadest possible cross-section of people to be involved in that committee, and I assure him that it has representation not only from the royal colleges, the scientific and professional bodies, clinicians and the National Blood Service, but from patients, but is directly linked to a network of regional committees and committees in hospital trusts, so it is informed by what is being practised in the NHS.

My hon. Friend has referred to his meeting with my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Health. Following that meeting and my hon. Friend's intervention, we have taken a fresh look at the remit of the committee, and we have made it explicit that it covers exploring and facilitating the implementation of methods to reduce the need for blood transfusions. We have made it clear that we are considering alternatives.

Three working parties are considering how we can ensure the most effective and efficient use of the blood that we have. They are considering the alternatives, too, including autologous transfusion, all forms of blood substitute therapies, and the feasibility of bloodless surgery units, as I mentioned. They are also working on contingency plans for prolonged periods of blood shortages. The groups are representative of a range of people, including surgeons, anaesthetists, nurses, paediatric experts, haematologists and patients. The recommendations of the groups will be considered by the committee later this year and will be promulgated across the service.

On Erythropoietin or EPO, as I understand it is referred to colloquially, I am aware that evidence is growing that by maintaining the patient's haemoglobin at near-normal levels, EPO may improve some patients' response to treatment, especially radiotherapy. It can improve quality of life by making patients feel better and less tired. Tiredness is a problem for many patients with cancer. The drug is licensed for that purpose.

Clinicians are free to prescribe the drug when they think that it is beneficial to the patient. It is a core part of the NHS that clinicians should make appropriate decisions in the interests of their patients. There are on-going trials at the Christie and Royal Marsden hospitals on the use of EPO for cancer patients. I am sure that my hon. Friend will be interested in the results when they are available.

We in the Department of Health have considered the issue of using EPO more widely on cancer patients. We have tried to make some costings, as my hon. Friend has said. The costings put forward by those who would like EPO to be used more widely in the service include the number of bed days that could be saved as a result of patients being not transfused, but instead being injected with EPO. I urge caution on the subject because many patients who are occupying a bed for a transfusion are also receiving other services and treatments, and a direct substitution of EPO for a transfusion would then not necessarily result in saved bed days. Although my hon. Friend has raised an important issue, there would be no direct equation.

Cost is also an issue. Our estimate is that if all cancer patients—and EPO is not suitable for them all—received EPO, the cost would increase by four to eight times. That is an important issue for us to consider. I must say that the estimate makes some assumptions. There is limitation on existing data and there is no typical treatment regime for cancer patients, so there are some variables in the estimates.

Mr. Havard: Would the Minister make available that information, including what criteria were used and how that cost was calculated?

Ms Blears: It is early days for costing such developments. I am happy to involve my hon. Friend in the discussions, but this is a new subject for us, and we should be conscious of the range of variables.

It is possible for patients to self-administer Erythropoietin. That might result in some saving, but the patients would probably need a couple of out-patient visits in order to be trained and assessed. That is a complex issue, but it is interesting to explore it, and we will continue to do so.

I hope that the initiatives that I have outlined for maximising the blood supply—making the best clinically effective use of the blood that we have—and considering scientific alternatives add up to a coherent approach. We are trying to ensure that we not only get the best deal for the NHS but, more importantly, provide the right services for patients who can take advantage of emerging technologies.

We still have an immense amount of work to do to make sure that we are providing the best quality services, but that work is in hand. I am delighted that my hon. Friend has raised such important issues, and we shall return to them. I am grateful to him for his vigorous analysis. The passion with which he has presented his argument shows how enthusiastic he is that the NHS should survive and prosper.

Radon Gas (South Devon)

1 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): I thank the Minister for the Environment for attending the debate. His attendance shows the Government's concern about such issues. The right hon. Gentleman's response will be interesting, not only to hon. Members who represent constituencies in Devon, but to those with Cornish constituencies. Since 1992, on average more than 50 people have died each year of variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. Over the past three years, the number has crept up to about 80 people a year. In contrast, lung cancer causes about 37,000 deaths a year, of which 33,000 are attributable to smoking and 2,000 to 3,000 attributable to radon gas. That puts the matter into perspective.

Radon is a naturally occurring odourless and colourless gas that is formed by the radioactive decay of naturally occurring uranium. It travels through fissures in the subsoil where it usually disperses, but it can accumulate in buildings. Proper ventilation is the solution and, paradoxically, energy conservation measures often make matters worse by trapping the radon gas in buildings.

We receive never-ending advice about personal health and safety. We should eat less fat, more fruit and vegetables and strive towards a healthier lifestyle, yet the importance of reducing high radiation exposure for an estimated quarter of a million people living in homes with excessive radon levels may not have been given the attention that it deserves. There is a significant increase in the lifetime risk of lung cancer for such people.

Devon and Cornwall are particularly badly affected by radon and levels beyond 200 bq/cu m, which is the measurement for radon, are not unusual. At that concentration, the Government's advice is that remedial measures should be taken. Other European countries affected by radon have taken similar action at 200 bq/cu m. Fortunately, Westminster Members of Parliament are spared high radiation exposure, because our main debating Chamber and the extensive cellars, which have been tested, have extremely low exposure to radon. That is mirrored by areas around flood plains and rivers throughout Britain. The Chamber. I am glad to say, has an especially low level.

The risk of lung cancer from radon dramatically increases for smokers as against non-smokers. Analysis carried out by the World Health Organisation in 1996 revealed that, out of 1,000 cases of lung cancer victims who were exposed to radon, 20 were non-smokers, but 980 were smokers. There is a huge multiplier risk for those exposed to radon who smoke as against those who are exposed to radon who do not smoke. That should be distinguished from the additional or accumulative risk that we would expect. Smoking and radon gas multiply the risk to a dramatic degree.

People who spend a lifetime in their homes where radon concentration is more than 200 bq/cu m show lung cancer rates about 20 per cent. higher than those whose radon levels are 20 bq/cu m. Where the concentrations reach 400 bq/cu m, the estimated increase is 40 per cent. About 250,000 people are living in homes with radon levels above the level of 400 bq/cu m. Of course, the workplace is subject to special legislation and employers are liable to ensure safe levels of radon in factories and warehouses, but since those places are usually draughty and airy, there is little risk of a radon problem. In fact, I do not think that there has been a factory or a warehouse in which radon levels have been considered to be sufficiently high to take action.

There is no getting away from the fact that radiation exposure to the public from radon gas is more than 1,000 times greater than that from the entire nuclear industry. John Miles of the Nuclear Radiological Protection Board said:

> "if there was a threshold dose beyond which all types of radiation was harmless and if such a threshold was as high as the doses that the public received from Radon then most of the expensive protection that the nuclear industry has to apply would be totally redundant."

The final piece of evidence that demonstrates the danger of radon is that there have been 1,850 more lung cancer deaths than expected among miners who were exposed to radon, compared with 480 excess deaths from all types of cancers from Japanese nuclear bomb survivors. Those statistics show the scale of the problem.

Areas affected by radon are those where more than 1 per cent. of the houses are likely to have concentrations of radon above the action level, which is 200 bq/cu m. In 1990, the NRPB recommended that the level should be 200 bq/cu m, averaged over a year. One bequerel is equal to one radioactive disintegration per second. That is 10 times the measured United Kingdom average radon exposure, which is 20 bq/cu m. Two hundred bq/cu m is the limit which is considered to be safe. Action is required over that level.

Based on the assumption that all doses of radiation present some risk of cancer, the action level represents a risk of one in 30 of lung cancer from radon gas over a lifetime. That is 10 times higher than the average UK risk of one in 300 from all natural sources of radiation and one in 20 from smoking. Where concentrations are above the action level, the NRPB recommends reduction of concentrations in existing buildings. Additionally, in certain localities in affected areas, the board recommends that preventive measures should be taken against radon entering new buildings.

Areas affected by radon are defined using maps based on radon concentrations measured in the 400,00 houses surveyed to date. Approximately 40,000 of those homes were found to have radon concentrations above the 200 bq/cu m limit. From the survey data, the NRPB has estimated that approximately 100,000 dwellings throughout Britain had radon concentrations above the action level. Most were in England, with Cornwall and Devon being the most significantly affected areas. For example, in the Truro postcode district, the NRPB found that 29 per cent. of dwellings had radon concentrations above the action level. I have mentioned that to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor), who unfortunately could not be here today. In Plymouth, the figure was only 14 per cent.

The worrying factor is that only about 10 per cent. of people who have been told that the levels of radon in their homes is above the action level have taken any remedial action. It is as if people believe that their homes are impregnable to radon gas because they cannot see or hear it. Evidence suggests that there is little or no perception of risk and no recognition of the danger. Once the front door is bolted, people feel that nothing can touch them, even though radon gas could be seeping up through the floorboards.

Since 1998, 80,000 Devon homes have been tested. Of those, 85 per cent. are privately owned. Can the Minister tell me whether anything has been done to ensure the safety of people living in the 10 per cent. of homes that are run by local authorities and housing associations? Many tenants are not aware of the risk and many local authorities have not taken action. Statistically, people living in local authority housing and housing association property are more likely to be smokers.

How should the problem associated with radon gas best be tackled? Radon enters the building primarily from airflow from the underlying ground. Several measures can be taken to achieve protection for occupants and to reduce radon levels. The techniques for reducing radon exposure in new and existing dwellings include under-floor extraction, improved ventilation under suspended timber floors, positive ventilation and sealing cracks and gaps in solid concrete floors. The problem is that few builders will undertake that work because they do not have the skills or the training. If one can find a builder, the cost is more than £1,000, which is out of the reach of pensioners and low-income groups. I make that point because my constituency has the eighth highest proportion of elderly people in the country.

I am advised that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has not capped individual local authority budgets for radon testing, which is up to the discretion of each local authority. I should like to pay tribute to the excellent chief environmental health officer in South Hams district council, Peter Smith. I shall also mention the British Geographical Survey, which has been enormously helpful, and the splendid help that I have had from the House of Commons Library, and especially from Donna Gore of the science and environment section who wrote an excellent paper on radon in 1997 that has not been as widely read as it should have been. I mentioned South Hams district council because the environmental health officer told me that only six radon protection grants have been awarded in the district since 1989, and that only 40 per cent. of the district was surveyed for radon in the late 1980s.

The Government have halted free radon surveys, but the National Radiological Protection Board has unspent money for testing. In South Hams, 20 to 50 per cent. of the housing stock surveyed was above the 200 bq/cu m action level. As for my constituency, the areas affected are not, as I thought they would be, the granite outcrop around Dartmoor, but include Kingsbridge, Dartmouth, Salcombe, Thurlestone, Slapton, Stokenham, Stoke Fleming, Loddiswell and South Brent, where some of the highest figures have been recorded. Properties have been identified in those areas that are 10 to 30 per cent. above the 200 bq/cu m action level. South Hams is one of the worst affected areas in Devon, but only six radon grants have been made.

Radon levels and testing are especially relevant in buildings that are more than 10 years old. Since 1991, guidance on protective measures against radon has been included in building regulations, and in 1999 the Building Research Establishment and the former Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions have produced updated guidance on protective measures to reduce the risk to occupants of exposure to radon. That new guidance reflects the greater knowledge of radon-prone areas and the advances made in developing practical, cost-effective measures. That does not, however, apply to the majority of homes that are more than 10 years old. The Government have stated that 3.8 million new houses need to be built by 2011, although that will probably not happen. Of those houses, 700,000 will be in the south-west. Will the Minister confirm that all new houses built in the south-west will be obliged to have radon insulation? We are not discussing money, but raising public awareness. The task is getting home owners to respond to a threat that they can neither see nor smell. It has not been properly recognised as a health risk, but it has been exacerbated by legislation on energy efficiency.

The Government are aware of the problem, but their promotions and publicity have not had the intended effect. Perhaps the media hype about Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease is caused by the fear that it is infectious, but 3,000 per cent. more people die from radon exposure than from CJD each year. Public understanding remains poor, although there have been successive local authority programmes since 1987, and a more detailed discussion on a three-year rolling programme announced by the Minister last July that involves more than 30 local authorities. That ends next year, and the question remains about the Government's plans to build on the programme in light of these dangers.

Before 1996, the Government offered free radon tests to all, but since then offers of free radon measurement have been by invitation only—I do not know anybody in my constituency who has had an invitation. The radon test is safe and extremely simple. A small plastic container about the size of a door knob is used, and it contains a piece of plastic that is sensitive to alpha particles, which are emitted by radon. The public can obtain the test through the post for about £35 from the NRPB at an address that I have, but I shall not give in this debate. The public take-up of the test has been disappointing. I have made a meal of the dangers of radon gas, and I do not want it to be construed as a scare story that many of us are breathing in carcinogenic particles as we sleep, but people in the west country, especially in Devon and Cornwall, need to be aware of the risks and the tests available.

For almost no cost, the Government could do much more to raise public awareness through publicity campaigns and encouraging local authority initiatives. We all know the risks of smoking, and we all erroneously believe that there are risks from nuclear energy, but few have comprehended the health risks from radon exposure and that the annual radiation dose can be dramatically increased by living in the wrong part of the country in well-insulated homes. I hope that now that I have raised the public health and safety issue, the media will take up the cudgels and that the Government will consider new initiatives and further action so that some 2,000 to 3,000 lives can be saved in this country each year.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): The hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) has sought the permission of the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen), the Minister and myself to make a brief contribution, and I am happy to call him.

1.15 pm

Andrew George (St. Ives): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I will be brief. I am also grateful to the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen). Perhaps I should call him my hon. Friend as we share so many interests, and often, as on this occasion, share the analysis.

The hon. Gentleman raised extremely important issues. I am keen to have clearer guidance on how local authorities in south Devon and elsewhere can help householders to reduce the risk posed by radon. In Cornwall, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned, of the six local authorities and one on the Isles of Scilly only one, Kerrier, is part of the Government's scheme on this. In Penwith in the west of Cornwall, 10,500 of 19,00 properties have a radon risk level of more than 30 per cent., which certainly requires action. The matter is of deep concern.

In a parliamentary answer given on 29 November, the hon. Gentleman was told that £705 million in housing capital grants is available for this year. However, it is not known exactly how much of that is to be directed towards addressing the problem of radon, which the hon. Gentleman has articulately put before us today. The Minister and the Department must ensure that the grants available are more targeted to address the serious and important issue.

1.18 pm

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): I sincerely congratulate the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) on making a well-documented and serious case for greater focus on the problem of radon. He drew attention to the fact that far more people—I think that he said 3,000—die each year from radon poisoning than from Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. Although we know that the main cause of death from lung cancer is, overwhelmingly, smoking, a significant proportion of lung cancer deaths is nevertheless attributable to radon.

The hon. Gentleman made a powerful comparison between the risks associated with mining, or those affecting survivors of the Japanese A bomb, and the mortality risk from radon. That the issue is serious is not in dispute. I will try to answer his questions as precisely as I can in the time available.

In 1990, following advice from the National Radiological Protection Board, the Government set a radon action level of 200 bq/cu m, as the hon. Gentleman said. That is half the 1987 level. It was deliberately tightened on advice. It is about 10 times the average UK level of exposure and is the standard used. Where radon levels greater than that are found, householders are strongly advised to take action to reduce them. It is estimated that, at that level, there is a lifetime risk of 3 to 5 per cent. for the general population of contracting lung cancer. For non-smokers, the risk will be about 1 to 3 per cent., but, as the hon. Gentleman rightly said, the risk is much greater for those who smoke: approximately 10 to 15 per cent.

Following research by the NRPB in the mid-1980s, which identified that radon was a problem in the UK, successive Governments have introduced measures to try to combat its effects. Initially, those centred on offering free measurement to the areas most affected. In England, that meant Devon, Cornwall, Somerset, Northamptonshire and Derbyshire. Later, following extensive mapping, the measurement programme was extended to include many other parts of the country in which high radon levels were found.

In 1998, we completed a programme to ensure that every household in England with a more than 5 per cent. probability of exceeding the radon action level had received the offer of a free measurement. Some 400,000 measurements have been made, at no cost to the householder, since the programme began in 1987, and about 40,000 homes—one in 10—were found to be above the action level. In relation to the number of measurements carried out in Devon, I know that the hon. Gentleman was given a figure of 80,000, but having updated the database we now think that it is just over 94,000. The large majority were paid for by the Government at an approximate cost of £2.5 million. In Devon, 7,100 homes were found to be above the action level. It is striking that the highest level found was 5,300 bq/cu m. High levels have been found in several areas of the county.

Where a home is found to be above the action level, the householder is faced with the problem of what to do next. The various courses of action are set out in booklets prepared by the Department, which provide general advice to householders about radon, specific guidance about the types of remedial measures that can be employed, and information for those who are buying or selling houses in radon-affected areas. Householders can obtain additional advice on remediation methods over the telephone from the Building Research Establishment, which runs a hotline under contract from the Department.

The costs of remedial action can vary markedly. Establishing better airflow under suspended floors may be all that is necessary for a home that is just a little above the action level. If the problem has been caused because airbricks have been overgrown by plants or blocked in other ways, it can be solved fairly easily at no monetary cost.

The most effective method of reducing radon levels, which is necessary for the highest levels, is the sump system. The sump is a small void about the size of a bucket that is dug under a solid ground floor and to which a pipe and a fan are attached. The fan gently draws the radon-laden air from underneath the floor and prevents it from entering the home. The cost of such a system varies depending on its exact method of installation, but it is typically between £600 and £1,000. Its installation is not beyond the ability of an experienced DIY enthusiast—in which case the cost would drop significantly—although one should be careful about that.

Mr. Steen: Some homeowners may wish to bury their information about radon gas because they think that if their levels are as high as 5,000, or anything above 400, that might affect the price of their freehold. Is there anything that the Minister can say or do about that?

Mr. Meacher: The right way to deal with that is to have in place a system that draws off the radon and can be demonstrated to make the house effectively free of radon in the sense that any radon that is present is below the action level. No Government can offer subsidies for householders to maintain value, but we can and will ensure that the cause of any likelihood of reduced value is properly addressed at public cost.

Although radon remedial work can be expensive, it need not necessarily be so, and even the most expensive options are similar in price to other building works that householders may have to face to keep their properties in good condition.

There are provisions to help those least able to pay for radon remedial works. Local authorities have discretionary powers to award house renovation grants and home repair assistance to help with the cost of radon remedial work. Renovation grants have no upper limit and are not means-tested. Home repair assistance is limited to a maximum of £5,000 per application, which is reasonably generous. It is not means-tested, but the applicant must be 60 or more years old, or on a state benefit.

A regulatory reform order before the House will give local authorities the power to offer subsidised loans or an equity release scheme for home renovation, rather than grants, as is currently the case. Local authorities will be able to continue assisting radon remedial works under that general power, but will have the freedom to decide whether to fund the works through a grant or a loan and will not be obliged to apply a means test.

The hon. Gentleman asked about new build, and quoted a figure of 700,000 homes expected in the south-west, which I presume is accurate. Under the building regulations, guidance designed to prevent radon from becoming a problem in newly built homes was first issued in 1990, and covered Devon and Cornwall. Later, that guidance was extended to cover parts of Somerset, Northamptonshire and Derbyshire. The protective measures were updated, and the area covered was greatly increased in 1999, to take into account the latest research on building methods and the survey work carried out by the NRPB and the British Geological Survey. Basic protection, required under the regulation, comprises the modification of the damp-proof membrane so that it forms a radon-proof barrier that extends across the whole of the ground floor of the dwelling, including through the walls. In areas of higher radon potential, full radon protection may be required. That comprises the radon-proof barrier, supplemented by a sump in case it should be necessary to draw the radon-laden air from beneath the building.

When the radon programme first began 15 years ago, it was widely believed that householders whose homes were above the action level would take prompt action. Research in recent years has shown that that was correct only to a limited extent. Approximately 10 to 20 per cent. of such householders are thought to have taken action to reduce their radon levels, a figure that I find disappointing. However, the research discovered that many householders would be prepared to carry out remedial work if they were given greater support in the process from a source that they knew and trusted.

In 1998, we carried out pilot studies in partnership with Derbyshire Dales, Cherwell and Mendip district councils. The local authorities provided the public face of the initiative and ensured that it was responsive to local needs and knowledge. The Department provided resources to support the local authority. The pilot study showed that that approach worked well and could double the background remediation rate. That is helpful, but we still have a long way to go.

The support provided by the Department, largely using contractors, includes free radon measurements to identify homes above the action level, and to confirm that remedial action has worked. Expert NRPB advice was provided to local authorities, the local medical community and householders about the health effects of radon. Expert advice from the Building Research Establishment was supplied to the local authorities, local builders and housing professionals and householders about remediation methods. Locally branded publicity materials were provided to meet the local authority's needs, and consultants helped the local authorities draw up their action plans and handle logistics.

In 2000, following discussions with the local authorities, we rolled out a programme based on the lessons learned in the pilot studies. A good practice guide was prepared to disseminate the information. The areas of 78 local authorities were transected by areas with 5 per cent. or more probability that homes would be above the action level, and they were invited to participate. I am pleased to say that 33 authorities have volunteered to work with us. Three authorities in Devon are participating in a programme—South Hams district council, Torbay district council and West Devon borough council. Their plans have, unfortunately, been delayed because of foot and mouth disease, but we look forward now to working with those three authorities to re-activate their plans in the near future. We shall carry out a review of the roll-out programme when sufficient progress has been made to allow us to determine how successful it has been and I hope that that will be before the end of this year. We shall then make our judgment on the future direction of the Government's radon programme.

Dundee Airport

1.30 pm

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): I am delighted to have secured this debate and to bring to the Government's attention the need to explore all avenues to promote the development of Dundee airport.

I have tried for some time following my contribution to the debate in this Chamber on regional aviation, which was introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Stewart), to focus on what can be done to increase the use of the important economic and transportation feature that serves Dundee and the surrounding areas of north Tayside, Angus and north-east Fife. I am happy to acknowledge the efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) to ensure that the services at Dundee airport, which is in his constituency, are enhanced and improved.

I made it clear during the earlier debate on this matter that the economic viability of peripheral areas of the United Kingdom, such as Dundee, must be sustained by the Government in the face of a limited supply of regional airlines, a serious dearth of runway capacity in London for regional airports, and the overwhelming commercial pressure exerted by the buying power of large carriers to force smaller, domestic and regional operators out of London. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will respond to these issues, which are vital if we are to ensure that regional aviation and airports such as Dundee have a viable future.

I am pleased to pay tribute to the staff of Dundee airport, the economic development department of the city council, which manages the council facility, and the major carrier at Dundee airport, ScotAirways, for their vital contribution to the successful establishment and smooth operation of Dundee's vital air link to London. I was heartened by recent press statements confirming ScotAirways' commitment to the vital Dundee transport connection, and hope that one of the outcomes of this debate will be the strengthening of this travel option.

I am not here to promote any commercial or business interest. My only motive in seeking the debate was to ensure the best interests of my constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West. Mr. Winterton—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): Order. The hon. Gentleman may address me as Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I should be honoured if he would do so.

Mr. Luke: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The topic of this debate is critical to the area that I represent. Dundee airport is a focal point for commuters who travel on business and for leisure from an area about 486 miles from the metropolis, which in European terms is on the periphery of Europe. It is part of an economic jigsaw that has been painstakingly put together to ensure the economic well-being and future prosperity of an area that suffered more than most from the recessions that ravaged the United Kingdom during the 1980s and 1990s.

The important economic role of all airports was emphasised by my right hon., Friend the Deputy Prime Minister during a speech in March 2000, when he identified airports as being vital to the economy and the key to the Government's integrated transport policy. He said that

> "airports are more than just a means of getting from A to B. They are the key to the economic success of our regions and vital to our national economy."

As a Dundee Member, it is important to make the case—as I do at every opportunity—for more government assistance to recreate Dundee's industrial, commercial and service sector base. It is important also to ensure that these different areas of enterprise and employment are supported by a far better transport infrastructure than that in place to allow these activities to achieve the full potential that is open to them.

The airport that serves my area had, like so many others, humble grass-strip beginnings. It was fostered by the local authority for some time for the benefit of the community and now has an anchor of four daily flights from Dundee to London City. The growth of the airport has been fostered by funding from the European regional development fund, and grants previously provided by the then Scottish Office and the Government. We must review the money that has been spent on Dundee airport over the years—about £14 million at 2002 prices—to ensure that the investment begins to pay off.

Considerable progress has been made and, although the estimated 45,000 passengers using the airport this year—last year, it was 47,000—may be few compared with figures for other Scottish airports, it is impressive for the airport's size. Further, when set against the potential passengers travelling between the greater London area and the Dundee airport catchment area, the figure could be in excess of 250,000. There is therefore much to do. Estimated direct peak-time access to London could double the figure of 45,000 over a short period.

To achieve the best returns for the money provided by the Government and the European Union, we need to capitalise on our connections. We must achieve a breakthrough to gain more internal flights in the UK, and greater access to short and medium-haul direct flights to European destinations. Only thus will we ensure the airport's long-term viability. To attain that goal we need the help of the Government, and for them to become more involved,.

As figures show, the service has been performing well and has the potential to be developed, but since 11 September the number of people using the service has dropped. That was confirmed by the chairman of ScotAirways when my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West and I met him in Parliament last month to put the case for the expansion of services from Dundee. He said that now was a period for retrenchment, rather than expansion, and since then ScotAirways has cut proposed flights from Inverness and Aberdeen, and all flights from Glasgow to London City airport. We are consequently lucky to have managed to maintain our London services intact.

I hope to ensure from this debate that once we are over the worst effects of the downturn in air travel since 11 September we will be in a position to begin to build for the future. For Dundee airport, that means certain things, and one is to capture a prime-time slot at peak periods during morning and evening arrivals at London

City airport. The Government must do all that they can to aid ScotAirways and Dundee airport to achieve that. Much play was made in the regional aviation debate, held on 31 October, of the use of PSOs—public service obligation orders—to gain prime access to London airports. Under EU regulations, only two criteria can be used by the Government to intervene and justify imposing such an order. The first is to secure a route to an airport serving a peripheral or development region if the route is considered vital for the economic development of that region. Although Dundee fits that criteria, because of the different elements that must be matched to gain access to the PSO, I do not believe that it would achieve such status through that route. A second route is one in which the Government can, where they feel it necessary, serve a PSO to maintain a service that would not otherwise exist.

No case has been made for the second criteria for any routes between a regional airport and London. Dundee's circumstances are heavily centred on a PSO being imposed by government to ensure a service at prime time, which would not otherwise exist. If it cannot fit that service, it will fit the next consideration that I shall address. I publicly call for a PSO to be served to secure a prime slot for Dundee airport, given its disadvantaged status.

Once we can increase the number of flights coming to London City airport, we must widen the UK flight options open to travellers from Dundee airport. Gaining access to a regional or London hub airport must be high on a joint development agenda to be created between government, local authorities and Members of Parliament.

Of the estimated 250,000 possible journeys that I mentioned, many will be made to west London via Heathrow. It is assumed that many passengers will want to progress to international destinations not available from other Scottish regional airports. The Minister might remember, or be aware of, the Manchester-Dundee flight, which operated until 1998 and carried about 10,000 passengers annually. It was a very useful connection that could have been developed. Unfortunately, it collapsed, and we wish that we could work with government to recreate that sort of link and to help to promote it.

A third and vital element in the game plan is for Dundee to gain access to short and medium-haul European destinations. Holiday charter flights to Spain and Jersey have operated in the past. Sadly, those no longer run, although they proved popular. Operation costs played against them. Currently, we are trying to gain access to Schipol airport in Amsterdam. For a small airport, that is a difficult agenda to achieve and maintain. That is the final goal that we need to work for, given that very soon Dundee will witness the completion of an international departure lounge, financed by the Government and the European Union. I hope that, working together, we can ensure that this new facility, the vital next stage in the development of Dundee airport, becomes a vibrant and much-used starting point for both business and leisure air travellers going abroad. Anything that the Minister, his Department and its officials can do to help will be extremely useful.

If the Minister is to repeat the well-publicised whistle-stop tour of regional airports that he conducted last October, will he take time out to travel to Dundee? He will be made very welcome. He will add to our passenger figures, which will also be very welcome, and will see at first hand the progress that we are making in the development of Dundee airport. I think that he will be surprised at the quality of service there, which could be replicated in the City.

I reiterate some of the points made by Dundee city council in its submission last year in response to the "Future of Aviation" consultation paper, which are pertinent to this debate. The council and the departments involved made the case for more direct access at appropriate times to London City airport in order to maximise the current service uptake and to ensure the health of Dundee's business, community and economy. I must stress the influence of the weather—during the storm on Monday, my arduous journey from Dundee to London took well in excess of 14 hours and involved trains, planes and buses. There is no viable surface alternative for business people trying to make vital connections.

Slot availability and slot pricing are hampering the development of our services. With the continued growth in slot demand and free market allocation of London slots, there is a long-term threat to our continued access to London if no Government action is taken. Protection of slots for London locally require a combination of regulations, as I have already said, and a carefully conceived and managed increase in the provision in the capital of runway capacity for regional access. Finally, the representations made by the council underlined the point made by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister in March 2000. The integrity of the UK economy requires the interests of the regional and national economies to be given priority over the maximisation of profits by airports and large airlines.

When the Minister replies to the debate and when he frames the aviation Bill, which will be introduced later this year, I hope that he will take on board the points raised by me, the city council and my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West. I also hope that you will find time in your busy schedule to meet us, officers from Dundee city council and, if possible, the management of Dundee airport, to take the agenda forward, whether in Dundee—you are always welcome to visit us there—or in London.

I am glad that I have had the opportunity of this debate to put the case for the fuller development of Dundee airport.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I know that I would be very welcome in Dundee, but I think that the hon. Gentleman was speaking to the Minister. The hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) has properly and courteously sought the permission of the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke), the Minister and the occupant of the Chair to participate briefly in the debate, and I am happy to call him.

1.45 pm

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to speak for a couple of minutes. I congratulate my hon. Friend the

[Mr. Ernie Ross]

Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke). When he arrived in the House, he replaced a very active Member of Parliament, who is now a Member of the Scottish Parliament. Since that time, he has displayed not only a determination to stamp his ideas on the House, but an admirable understanding of the problems that face Dundee. That awareness comes from his many years in local authority service and his responsibility for economic development during that period. I have been happy to support him.

I join my hon. Friend in hoping that my hon. Friend the Minister will go on an early jaunt—we shall try to make it a jaunt, although perhaps I should call it a visit—to Dundee. In any event, the Minister will certainly be welcome, and we shall take the opportunity to highlight the necessity and the benefits for Dundee of developing the airport.

Over the past 20 years, I have used every method of transport to get to this building, but the ScotAirways service to London City airport is by far and away the best. I leave my office in Portcullis house—with the Whip's permission, it must be said—at 10 to 3 on Thursday afternoon, and I am sitting having my tea in my front room, 426 miles away, at half-past 5. ScotAirways is to be congratulated on its remarkable service, which has changed my life and those of many people in Dundee.

The airport is also important because we are trying to develop Dundee as a biotechnology centre for Tayside. One can meet professors, academics and business people on the plane, and on one flight up from London City airport there was a woman who was anxious to get to Dundee because her daughter was having a baby in Ninewells hospital. Just as we flew over the hospital and approached Dundee, the pilot was happy to announce that the woman had become a granny. I am sure that she would much rather have been at the hospital, but that is just one example of the type of person that one meets on the flight.

It is important to compliment David Johnson, the airport manager, and his staff on their running of the airport. We are fortunate that ScotAirways has made it the engineering base and the ticket and reservation centre for the whole company, and we appreciate that. Doris and her team also do a marvellous job.

The flight is a pleasant experience, bearing in mind that it is such a small airline. One cabin supervisor, Kathy Milne, who was an experienced flight attendant, drummed the need to pay attention to detail into her successor, Vivian Harper, who drummed it into all the cabin staff. The flight is a really pleasant experience, which I hope that the Minister will soon enjoy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am delighted to ask the Minister to reply to a debate for the second time this morning.

1.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): I am delighted to be able to accept your invitation to respond to the debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. Luke) on securing this important debate. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross), who has been a strong advocate for his local airport and constituents. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East is certainly making his mark as an advocate for the people in his area, and I congratulate him on the calm and sensible way in which he conducted the debate.

My hon. Friend made a strong case for air links to London, and no one could deny that they would help improve the economic fortune of the area. He also made a good case for prime slots into London. He almost suggested that the Government might be able to allocate slots into London, but we have no role in that allocation. Much as we might wish to allocate some favourable slots for the airline from Dundee into one of the major London airports, we cannot do so. In recent months, however, British Airways has relinquished a large number of slots at Gatwick, and other airlines are bidding for them and taking them on. My hon. Friend should encourage his airline to take that option. He will appreciate that it is not within the gift of the Government; the initiative must come from the airline.

My hon. Friend asked about the public service order being placed on the airline. Indeed, he almost declared that it was his wish for the process to be carried out. We often wish things on behalf of our constituents, but the request must be made by the local authority, Dundee city council, or the Scottish Executive. Should such a request be made, it would be considered in the same way as the one made by the Scottish Executive for Inverness airport, which we are considering carefully. The Government are not minded generally to ring-fence slots or protect them because we believe that the marketplace works well. Nevertheless, in some circumstances, we may reconsider that policy.

I am glad that my hon. Friend mentioned my well-publicised visit to regional airports. I was in Edinburgh yesterday and visited the fine airport there. I did not go to Dundee, but I would be happy to take what my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West called a jaunt. If we rearranged the word slightly, we could call it a junket.

I am intrigued to discover that my hon. Friend leaves this place on Thursday at 10 to 3. I see that the Government Whip has entered the Chamber. Perhaps I can put in an application to get away early on Thursday. I assure my hon. Friend that after 7 pm on a Thursday, there is not much in the way of public transport to Plymouth, let alone an air link. I usually arrive home at between midnight and 1 am.

Mr. Ross: So that I do not get lynched when I leave the Chamber, I should say that it happened only once.

Mr. Jamieson: I am glad that my hon. Friend has put that on the record. From now on, I shall keep a careful note of his voting record on Thursday afternoons.

I recognise the importance of good regional air links between Dundee and London. They provide spin-offs not only for the local economy but for the social life of the city. I appreciate that certain regions of the United Kingdom are worried that their slots are being threatened by commercial pressures and because of pressure on airport capacity, although in recent months that pressure has been somewhat reduced, particularly at Gatwick. Airport slots at London airports are allocated by the slot allocator, Airport Coordination Ltd. ACL allocates slots on a neutral, transparent and non-discriminatory basis, and its decisions are binding. The Government have no role in that process.

The allocation of airport slots derives from a combination of European and international air transport guidelines. As my hon. Friend said, Dundee services use London City airport, which is a co-ordinated airport, and uses the International Air Transport Association guidelines for slot allocation. It is also a prior permission airport and is constrained by the number of airport stands that it has. However, I am sure that my hon. Friends will be encouraged, as I am, by the fact that there are currently four daily services between Dundee and London City, with some flights, at least, at peak times of the day. I was also delighted to be informed that a fifth service will start in February. At London City airport, airlines are offered permission to land if they flew the relevant service in the previous season. Dundee should, if the market exists and the airline wants to continue flying that route, retain the access.

Mr. Luke: I am glad to hear that announcement. Does my hon. Friend agree that it gives an added advantage? If he has the opportunity to come to Dundee, there is an extra flight available.

Mr. Jamieson: My hon. Friend has been extremely persuasive, and on my next tour of regional airports I shall be giving the strongest consideration to the idea of going to Dundee, where I shall, I am sure, be given a fine reception by my hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Dundee, West—if they can get off the Whip.

I want to say more about the protection of slots, which my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East rightly stressed. My Department is currently undertaking a policy review on options available for the protection of London airport slots for regional air services. We are examining the current mechanisms by which the Government could intervene to protect access for regional air services. Those, as my hon. Friend knows, will include ring fencing slots under European Regulation 95/93 and imposing a public service obligation under European regulation 2408/92. Those and a range of other options are being considered, and the review is now well under way. The work will subsequently feed into the preparation for the aviation White Paper that we expect towards the end of the year.

My hon. Friend pointed out that Dundee airport is linked to the prospects of airports in the south-east. The Government recognise that some major airports are close to the limits of their capacity. United Kingdom airports now handle more than double the number of passengers that they accommodated in 1985 when the previous national airports policy statement was published. The continually growing demand for both business and leisure air travel is increasing pressure on capacity at airports.

Nowhere is that pressure more evident than in the south-east of England. Three of the United Kingdom's four busiest airports are located in the region. All the major south-east airports are struggling to cope with the demands on their capacity. The Government are tackling the issue and we plan later in the year to publish an air transport White Paper to lay down the framework for the sustainable development of United Kingdom airports over the next 30 years.

There are three main building blocks to the preparation of the White Paper. This is probably important for my hon. Friend's constituency interests. First, we published in December 1999 a consultation document on the future of aviation. The other two building blocks are the two further consultation documents, one on the options for development at regional airports and the other about an option for airports in south-east England. We plan to issue those consultation documents in the spring.

As to airports in the south-east in particular, the south-east and east of England regional air services study has examined a wide range of options at existing airports and new sites. I am pleased to say that that study has now been completed. I am sure that when it is published it will be of considerable interest to the constituents of my hon. Friend and others with an interest in the matter.

As my hon. Friend will know, the 1998 White Paper "A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone" announced that the Government would prepare a statement of policy on airports, looking 30 years ahead. That paper made it clear that we need to make the best use of our regional airports, indicating our objective that they should meet local demand for air travel where that is consistent with sustainable development principles. We want to maximise their contribution to local and regional economies, relieve pressure on the congested London airports and reduce the need for long surface journeys to airports in the south-east. We are taking those policies forward through the regional airports and air services programme. If my hon. Friend carefully examines those studies, he will see that value can certainly be derived from them for his constituents.

This has been a valuable debate and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East on raising it and giving me, on behalf of the Government, an opportunity to answer some of his points. If there are any I have not answered, I should be delighted to write to him.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 31 January 2002

[SIR MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

Gibraltar

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

2.30 pm

The Minister for Europe (Peter Hain): The Government have called this debate because we want to report to the House on the negotiations on Gibraltar. I understand the suspicion and fear on the Rock about the Government's motives. So I want to explain our policy, and to nail the many myths about it. Our aim is to safeguard Gibraltar's way of life, to secure a better future and to end our dispute with Spain. That is not because we want to appease Spain or to rid ourselves of Gibraltar—quite the reverse.

Why have the Foreign Secretary and I devoted such time and energy to Gibraltar these past six months when we have also had to deal with international crises from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe and vital issues elsewhere in Europe? We did so because we feel it is our duty. We did so because the current situation is damaging Gibraltar, constraining our relationship with Spain, blocking British objectives in the European Union and undermining Britain's wider interests. We did so because there is a moment in history either to seize or to lose, perhaps for a very long time.

Gibraltarians have had to live under the shadow of Spanish antagonism for far too long. They have endured disruption to their everyday lives that no one should have to put up with in modern Europe—lengthy border queues and delays, telephone problems such as insufficient landlines and inoperative mobiles, restrictions on proper air services, and continual frustration.

It is not just Gibraltar's present that is difficult. Gibraltar cannot stand still in a globalised world. Its economy will not thrive in the new global marketplace unless it can modernise. It will not thrive unless it can attract new investment. It will not thrive unless it opts for full and unfettered access to the EU's single market. It will not thrive until the barriers that separate it from the wider region come down. Those things will be harder or impossible to achieve while the current dispute festers.

Already Gibraltar's special tax breaks will have to change as a result of modernising initiatives from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and the European Union. That will happen whether or not any agreement that we reach is supported by the people of Gibraltar, but if we reach an agreement that is acceptable to Gibraltar we will receive the support of the European Union and the Government of Spain in upholding Gibraltar's interests and ensuring that changes are implemented in a way that protects the Rock's prosperity. If we do not reach an agreement, it will be much harder to secure the necessary transitional arrangements to provide the protection that Gibraltar wants.

Be clear that change is coming anyway, as the Chief Minister, Peter Caruana, has recognised. Moreover, the strong relationship that Britain now enjoys with Spain cannot reach its full potential until we resolve the Gibraltar issue. Gibraltar matters to us. It has mattered for many hundreds of years. It will continue to matter to us, but so does our relationship with Spain. Spain is a big country. It is increasingly prosperous; soon it will be a net contributor to the EU. It is increasingly powerful inside and beyond Europe.

We already have a strong alliance with Spain on a range of key issues, including reform of the European economy to deliver greater prosperity and more jobs in all our constituencies, which we will take further forward at the Barcelona European Council in March; creating an EU that is more effective and accountable and in which the key decisions remain with the nation states; and fighting the domestic and international terrorism that has afflicted both our countries more than many others in the EU. Our two Governments co-operate closely at all levels.

The relationship matters to real people too. Some 500,000 British citizens live in Spain. Our exports to Spain are worth more than £8 billion per year and support thousands of British jobs. But this relationship, good though it is, remains constrained by the Gibraltar issue. We will not realise its full potential and the benefits for Britain that will flow from it unless and until we resolve that issue. The Spanish Government feel exactly the same way.

Nor will we secure from the European Union all the benefits that we want for the British people until the issue is resolved. In the EU, the dispute damages our interests. It has complicated and delayed for years the opening up of a European single sky and measures to make air travel safer, flights cheaper and delays shorter.

So this is not an abstract diplomatic dispute. It has real effects on the lives of 30,000 Gibraltarians and of 59 million Britons, who are unable to enjoy all the potential benefits of our relationship with Spain and the European Union because of it. It needs solving, but not at the expense of Gibraltar. Any solution must be in the interests of Gibraltar. That is our objective and our pledge. We will not solve the problem by posturing or shouting or carrying on, as successive British, Spanish and Gibraltarian Governments have done for decades. Where has all that got us? The old ways have been abject failures.

When the British Governments of John Major and of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister started out on the road that brought a new settlement to Northern Ireland, no one thought that they could succeed. But my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has succeeded. He has done so only by breaking with the failed approaches of the past. Britain, Spain and Gibraltar must have the vision and self-confidence to negotiate a new deal for a new century. We must also have the political courage. Leadership is not about telling people what they want to hear, or hiding behind failed old shibboleths. That demonstrates not courage but weakness.

Why should anyone be afraid of negotiation? It is the right way to advance Britain's and Gibraltar's interests. Negotiation is not selling out. The only sell-out is by those who try to fool the public that there are serious alternatives to talking—there are not. The

[Peter Hain]

Government's first aim is to preserve Gibraltar's way of life, its culture and its proud British traditions. Our second aim is to establish greater self-government in Gibraltar so that its people can have what they want—more power over their own lives. Our third aim is to deliver real and lasting practical benefits to Gibraltar—a stronger economy, more and better jobs, and an end to border delays, problems with telephones and restrictions on air services, through a new relationship with the region and with the European Union. Our fourth aim is a lasting agreement on sovereignty, so that the 300-year-old dispute and all its damaging effects are finally put behind us, enabling Gibraltarians to enjoy security for their way of life and an end to feuding with Spain.

That is why we and Spain relaunched the Brussels process last year. We are making good progress, with a view to agreeing proposals to be put to the people of Gibraltar. However, it will be tough going. The negotiations are difficult. The positions are entrenched and have been for centuries. We continue to hope that the Chief Minister of Gibraltar will join us in those talks to represent at first hand the interests of the people of Gibraltar. Our offer to him to participate remains on the table. Both my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I had long, friendly and constructive discussions with him last Friday.

I have since written to Mr. Caruana to reaffirm our offer to him to participate in the talks and to reassure him about our aims. Our aims remain to agree proposals covering all outstanding issues, including those of co-operation and sovereignty. The guiding principle of those proposals is to build a secure, stable and prosperous future for Gibraltar and a modern sustainable status consistent with British and Spanish membership of the European Union and NATO. The proposals will rest on four important pillars: safeguarding Gibraltar's way of life; measures of practical co-operation underpinned by economic assistance to secure normalisation of relations with Spain and the EU; extended self-government; and sovereignty.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): The Minister has referred several times to the European Union and the relationship with it. Will he confirm that changes to the status of Gibraltar may require subsequent change to European Union treaties, to which we are party?

Peter Hain: Any changes of that magnitude would have to be endorsed in a referendum by the people of Gibraltar. However, there could be changes to the treaties required, which would require the approval of the European Council at the intergovernmental conference in 2004.

If and when we have agreed proposals, which will not be easy given the difficulty of the issues involved, we intend to report them fully to Parliament. We hope that the Government and people of Gibraltar will study the proposals carefully. If they wish, they will have the opportunity to negotiate a final agreement before putting it to a referendum.

I want to make two things crystal clear in case they were not clear before. In the absence of the Chief Minister, the proposals will be in the form of a joint declaration from Her Majesty's Government and the Government of Spain. As such, they will be historic. Crucially, however, they will not be a fait accompli. Neither Government will say to the people of Gibraltar, "Take it or leave it." Instead, there will be proposals for consultation with the people of Gibraltar and negotiation with their Government. Once the Brussels process meetings have concluded, both Governments will be ready to invite the Chief Minister to fresh negotiations, especially on those matters of detail and substance without which any new settlement could not be satisfactorily implemented to the benefit of all concerned, especially Gibraltar. If at the end of that process we have a viable agreement, we plan to put the whole package to the people of Gibraltar in a referendum and let them decide. If they say yes to the package, we will implement it. If they say no, we will not.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): The Minister has said that if we have a viable agreement, we will put it to the people of Gibraltar. I refer him to the evidence that he gave to the Foreign Affairs Committee recently, when I probed him about this point, as I do not want there to be any misunderstanding or ambiguity. If no agreement is reached with Spain, or if an agreement is reached with Spain that falls short of transference or shared sovereignty, what is agreed will nevertheless be put to the people of Gibraltar. I understand that a memorandum of understanding is likely to emerge. Will the Minister clarify whether its contents will be put to the people of Gibraltar?

Peter Hain: My hon. Friend—he is a good friend—may not have been listening to what I have been saying. I will continue with my remarks, and allow him to intervene if he is not satisfied.

If the people of Gibraltar say yes to an agreement negotiated after the Brussels process meetings with the Government of Gibraltar have finished, the final word will lie with this House. Any changes to sovereignty would require primary legislation. We said at the start what we were going to do, and we are doing it. At each stage, we have reported to Parliament and will continue to do so. If and when the process reaches a conclusion, we will come back to Parliament. I continue this rich tradition of transparency today by announcing that the next in the series of ministerial meetings in the Brussels process will be held in London on 4 February.

At every stage, we have worked hard to bring the Chief Minister into the talks and meanwhile we have maintained close contact with him. I also offered to brief the Opposition on the usual terms where matters of state, not party, are at stake. They declined, despite the fact that in opposition Labour accepted precisely the same offer from the Conservative Government when they were involved in the same process to support a bipartisan process. We could not have been more transparent and accountable to the House short of inviting television cameras into the negotiations, and anyone who knows anything about diplomacy realises that that would have been ridiculous.

Geraldine Smith (Morecambe and Lunesdale): Is my right hon. Friend saying that this House could decide to give joint sovereignty over Gibraltar between Britain and Spain, even though it is not what the people of

Gibraltar want and they voted against it in a referendum? That would be wrong. We should take the views of the people of Gibraltar into account, and the overwhelming majority want to stay British.

Peter Hain: My hon. Friend is another good friend, but I invite her to consider what I said rather than what she thought I was going to say. I said that the issue would arise and primary legislation would follow only if the people of Gibraltar had accepted an agreement in a referendum. If the people of Gibraltar endorsed an agreement, it would be for the House to implement their wishes. I hope that that provides a categorical reassurance on that point.

Mr. Bob Laxton (Derby, North): Despite all the discussion, openness and transparency, and the fact that many Gibraltarians would welcome an easing of the relationship with Spain, are we not facing the danger that the result of a referendum might be no? That would render the whole process described by the Minister abortive.

2.46 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

3.1 pm

On resuming—

Mr. Laxton: I am sure that Gibraltarians will welcome much of what the Minister said about the possibility of improving the relationship with Spain. However, despite the transparency of the negotiations, does the Minister agree that it is possible that the process may be abortive if the Gibraltarians vote in large numbers against any change in the relationship? Would it not have been better to place some pressure on the Spanish to go through a perhaps lengthy process of easing restrictions and adjusting their demeanour in relation to Gibraltar in a way that would have found more favour with Gibraltarians and encouraged greater affirmative response in any referendum?

Peter Hain: I thank my hon. Friend and agree with him. If we or our Conservative predecessors had managed to persuade Spain to treat Gibraltarians as they have a right to be treated, we would not have had to embark on this course. We have not managed that, like all previous Governments, which is why we have chosen a fresh approach. I am confident that it can produce an outcome for which the people of Gibraltar will feel able to vote in a referendum and one that will guarantee them a stable and secure future. That is our objective. If the people of Gibraltar say no at the end of the process, that is their democratic right, but at least we will have tried as hard as we can.

I will clarify something for my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay), who asked about a referendum. I have tried to explain something this afternoon that is perhaps new. Given that we have been unable so far to attract the Chief Minister of Gibraltar to the Brussels process meetings, we have secured Spanish agreement to putting proposals to the people and Government of Gibraltar, which they could then use to engage in fresh negotiations outside the Brussels process that may be easier for them to take part in. There is fresh thinking in Madrid and London and there should be fresh thinking everywhere to resolve this impasse.

Andrew Mackinlay: I am genuinely bewildered. I understood the Minister to say that he hoped that heads of agreement—or words to that effect—would emerge from the process, which would be put to the people of Gibraltar and, if they were accepted, that there would be subsequent negotiations. Will there be a second referendum? Is that what the Minister is saying?

Peter Hain: I am grateful that my hon. Friend has sought clarification, as it enables me to clarify the matter in triplicate, so to speak. If, between us, we are successful in achieving a way forward with the Spanish Government—I do not know whether we will be, as difficult issues are involved—there will be a joint declaration of proposals, not a final agreement. There is no fait accompli or take-it-or-leave-it decision. We do not envisage a referendum on the proposals; we envisage the proposals being put to the people of Gibraltar to study, think about, consult on and form their own views about. We can then invite the Chief Minister in the Government of Gibraltar to negotiate with us jointly—Spain and Britain—bilaterally with Spain and bilaterally with Britain, as is appropriate, to form a final agreement which will then go to a referendum.

At this moment I do not envisage one referendum after the other. I do not know; we would have to see what the Government of Gibraltar felt, but if there were no subsequent agreement following the conclusion of the Brussels process with the Government of Gibraltar, I am not sure that there would be any point in calling a referendum. However, that is a matter for the Government of Gibraltar, who may want to call a referendum, in which case we would happily discuss with them how to proceed in order to achieve a definitive conclusion to the process. That is something for the future.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock shows a genuine and principled interest in the matter and I ask him to think of a fresh way through, because that is what we are trying to find.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): If there is a joint declaration between the United Kingdom and Spain, and if proposals are made, how will the people of Gibraltar express their position on them? If there is no opportunity to reject those proposals how can the Minister take the process forward?

Peter Hain: As I have explained, if the Government of Gibraltar feel that it is in their interests to do so, they may want to go straight to a referendum on the proposals without negotiation. Hon. Members should bear it in mind that without Gibraltar's presence in the Brussels process negotiation it is not possible, let alone desirable, to reach anything like a final agreement, because that would have to include matters of detail and substance that are properly the preserve of the Government of Gibraltar.

Let us suppose that the final declaration to emerge from this round of the Brussels process meeting included something on the airport, in principle—for example,

[Peter Hain]

removal of the restrictions on flights that exist at present due to the ban by Spain. It would not be possible to take that forward and implement it in a practical way unless the Government of Gibraltar agreed the modus operandi and all the detail, because they not only have a stake in it but have powers over the matter.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): If there were a substantial no vote by the people of Gibraltar—we appreciate that that is one possibility—would the joint declaration then be dead so that we would start again, or would the joint declaration between Britain and Spain have a continuing status? That is something that mystifies many of us, even though we have different views. Can it be clarified?

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it appropriate for hon. Members who want to speak in the debate to say whether they have made any visit to Gibraltar that was funded by the Gibraltar Government?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Edward O'Hara): It is entirely for hon. Members to decide whether they wish to declare an interest.

Peter Hain: I shall respond to the hon. Gentleman in some detail, as this is an important point. I refer him to the background. The European Council asked us to take forward the Brussels process discussions in the interests of all concerned. The Government of Gibraltar left Britain and Spain with no alternative but to see whether we could agree proposals, as we were the only parties that could do so when the Chief Minister left an empty chair. Now that the Government of Gibraltar realise that their attempted veto has failed and that the talks must proceed because the European Council requested us to reach a conclusion if possible, people seem to be saying that we should create a second veto instead of filling that empty chair.

As I understand the point made by the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), any proposal that emerged from the Brussels process is supposed to vanish as if it had never appeared, in the way that communist governments air-brushed events from their history books. Any proposals that emerge will be just that—proposals. If they are put to a referendum and rejected, no one can air-brush them away, but they cannot be implemented. I remind the Committee that in 1994, under a similar line of attack, the Conservative Secretary of State for Northern Ireland was asked about the status of the Downing Street declaration that was agreed between the Governments of Britain and Ireland. He told the House that

> "The declaration remains, and will remain, a free-standing declaration of principles."—[*Official Report*, 28 April 1994; Vol. 242, c. 375.]

That was greeted with outrage from some quarters, but led eventually to the Good Friday agreement of 1998, which has brought peace and stability to Northern Ireland when none looked possible. The short answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is that one cannot air-brush the joint declaration away, but it cannot be implemented without the people of Gibraltar voting yes in a referendum.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): In response to the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick), I have never visited Gibraltar as a guest of the Government of Gibraltar.

I want to take the Minister back to his remarks about the airport. Does that mean that there would be a vote under duress? In other words, would the legitimate rights of the people of Gibraltar over their airport be met only if they voted the right way in a referendum? If so, that would confirm all our fears.

Andrew Mackinlay: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I told the Deputy Speaker who preceded you in the Chair that if I was called, I would refer to a visit that I made to Gibraltar, which I do not have to do, as declarations are time-limited. I also said that I would give notice that there is a material point about access to a place where we have responsibilities, but where, as Members of Parliament, we cannot go.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order. It may be an observation of indeterminate pertinence. If hon. Members have visited Gibraltar at the expense of the Government of Gibraltar, they are advised to declare the interest.

Peter Hain: I will respond to the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay). It is a problem in this debate that there is always an interruption, whether it is a vote or some other thing, before I can answer the question.

My remarks about the airport do not mean what the right hon. Member for Bracknell says that they mean. They mean what I said. I offered as an example the airport, or any other matter that is currently under the jurisdiction of the Government of Gibraltar in which they have a direct, practical interest and for which they have a legal responsibility. We could not simply proceed to implement something without agreement or negotiated participation. That would be impossible. That is why the policy of the empty chair pressed on the Chief Minister by many on the Rock is mistaken. If he is unable to participate in the Brussels process negotiations for understandable reasons, given the history of the past few months, the Chief Minister and the Government can negotiate a phase II, after we have agreed a joint declaration of proposals, if we are able to do so. That will still be subject to a referendum.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Will the Minister give way?

Peter Hain: I will, but I should make progress in the interests of everyone.

Rev. Martin Smyth: For the avoidance of any doubt, I should say that a long time ago I went to Gibraltar as a guest. Since then I have been there at my own expense with my wife. My last visit there was with the British islands and Mediterranean region conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

The Minister referred to the Downing Street declaration. He will be aware that there are those of us who accepted the principle of consent. This is what concerns the people of Gibraltar; that consent is taken for granted and people move forward because joint sovereignty has been given away and the people of Gibraltar, like the people of Northern Ireland, are not keen on joint sovereignty.

Peter Hain: I do not want to enter into the history of Northern Ireland—[HON. MEMBERS: "You raised it."] I raised the declaration and I was pleased to do so. There was a declaration of principles, which many criticised, but for all its imperfections, it has led to more peace, stability and security than Northern Ireland had enjoyed for generation upon generation. We should not approach the issue with closed minds, but, as has been the case in Northern Ireland—if one wants to extend the comparison—so it will be in Gibraltar. Irrespective of whether any proposals lead to a final agreement with the Government of Gibraltar, which would be ideal, in the end the people of Gibraltar will have their say in a referendum. That is our pledge.

Mr. Greg Pope (Hyndburn): With a name like mine, I am not going to raise Northern Ireland. Will my right hon. Friend the Minister assure us that, if the Government of Gibraltar continue to boycott talks, not only in the Brussels process but after its conclusion, that will not prevent the people of Gibraltar from having a say in their future and they will not be able to veto a referendum?

Peter Hain: I understand my hon. Friend's point. From the moment we began the latest phase of the Brussels process negotiations, the introduction of vetoes has been a negative aspect of the discussions. It would have been far better if the Chief Minister had joined us, as he could have done, and as he still can with his conditions of safety and dignity satisfied. Even if he is unable to do so until after the joint declaration is published—if we reach that stage with the Government of Spain; there are still major issues to be resolved—I hope that there will not be a second veto.

I hope that the Government of Gibraltar will say, "We may not like all of this, but we may like some of it. Let's negotiate over it and see if we can reach a better deal. Let's see if we can represent our interests on behalf of the people of Gibraltar. If we can't, and the negotiations don't succeed, we will ask people to vote no in a referendum or we won't consider it worth putting to a referendum". That will be a matter for us to discuss with the Government of Gibraltar. I would not want to go to a referendum against the wishes of the Government of Gibraltar. That would not be sensible, regardless of what we felt, Gibraltarians felt, or indeed the Chief Minister felt about the contents of any proposals.

Let me again set out our pledges. Our opponents clearly do not read *Hansard*, so instead I invite them to read my lips. First, the British and Spanish Governments want the Government of Gibraltar to be represented in negotiations. The door remains open for Mr. Caruana. Secondly, we will not impose any deal on the people of Gibraltar. They will have the final say in a referendum. Whatever the Conservatives may say, the Chief Minister of Gibraltar acknowledges that. In his new year message to the people of Gibraltar, Mr. Caruana said:

> "Both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have recently made clear in parliamentary statements that there would be no change in the sovereignty of Gibraltar against our wishes. I believe that this assurance is totally reliable . . . There is no harm in proposals being put to Gibraltar to accept or reject, provided this is a genuinely democratic exercise".

That is exactly the process in which we are engaged. As we made clear, we hope that the Government and people of Gibraltar will help to shape the proposals that we and Spain are working out before any vote in a referendum.

Our position is clear. The real problem is not the Government's approach but the Opposition's approach. How many Opposition Members here today agree with the following statement:

> "the present position is doing harm to every party concerned. It is doing harm to Spain itself. It has a historic grievance, and one can understand that. For Spain to have a small corner of territory outside its own country but very close as an area of persistent economic, social and political concern must in itself be undesirable.
>
> Gibraltar has a similar set of problems to confront . . . There is a limit to its prospect of political progress; there are recurrent economic and social shocks; the frontier closes and opens; and there is no present arrangement for its representation in the European Union.
>
> Far and away the greatest British interest in the situation is in a resolution of this dispute on terms acceptable to the other parties"?

It is striking that so few Opposition Members are prepared to endorse the common-sense views of their former Foreign Secretary. Perhaps we should not be surprised. As Lord Howe also reminded us in that speech:

> "Some people question the legitimacy of even seeking a solution to this issue. Some people write and speak as though the search for improvement in this position is in some way . . . disloyal".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 12 December 2001; Vol. 629, c. 1392.]

Many of those people are sitting here today. Like Lord Howe, this Government reject that view absolutely. The Opposition seem keen to forget the views of their former Foreign Secretary. They are keen to forget other things too. The people who launched the Brussels process that they now deride were members not of this Government but of the Conservative Government in 1984. The person who first agreed to discuss Gibraltar's sovereignty with Spain was not our Prime Minister but Margaret Thatcher.

I will accept responsibility on behalf of Labour in two matters connected with Gibraltar. First, the Government who gave the pledge that I have reaffirmed again today—no change in sovereignty without the consent of the people of Gibraltar—was a Labour Government: Harold Wilson's in 1969. I am glad that the Tories are rallying to this. Secondly, although the Tories started this process, the people who aim to finish it—we are determined to finish it successfully—are this Labour Government.

So why have the Tories lurched from supporting a process that Margaret Thatcher launched in the 1980s to condemning it as virtually treasonable in 2002?

Mrs. Eleanor [illegible]aing (Epping Forest): Will the Minister give way?

Peter Hain: No.

[Peter Hain]

The answer is simple. The Tory party has changed. Today's Tory party does not believe in negotiation. Today's Tory party does not believe in Europe. Today's Tory party has made sovereignty a virility symbol—even when pooling it in the EU actually benefits the people of Britain. Today's Tory party prefers to posture from the Back Benches rather than face reality; to make trouble in opposition rather than make a difference in government. That is of course the luxury of opposition. As long as Conservatives stick to their current polices they will enjoy that luxury for a very long time to come.

This Government are serious about delivering. We live in the real world. We are serious about safeguarding Gibraltar's way of life, about securing a better future for Gibraltar and about advancing our interests in Europe for the benefit of the people of Britain. That is why we are in this process. That is why we will continue to take it forward with clarity and commitment. And that is why I hope that this House, and all who want a better future for Gibraltar, will support us.

3.23 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): Many hon. Members are concerned about recent reports about developments in the latest round of the Brussels process. I am grateful to the Minister of State for initiating the debate this afternoon so that those matters can be aired. He is absolutely right. This is about real people and real problems. We are all interested in resolving this matter.

There have been widespread concerns that Gibraltar is being pushed into a done deal whereby sovereignty will be shared with Spain. The Government have done precious little to allay those fears. The Government must understand their responsibility for the mess and heightened passions that they have created. The Minister should just look around him. All parties in the House of Commons share a concern about the future of Gibraltar. To suggest that this is a partisan issue is unworthy of the Minister.

We must have calm negotiations, which would allow for resolution of the difficulties in the relationship. Surely the Minister agrees that a reassuring approach is the only way to resolve the difficulties satisfactorily, particularly for the people in Gibraltar who are affected by them. The Minister made several important points this afternoon, but they beg many questions.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): Does the hon. Gentleman endorse the Chief Minister's refusal to take part in the talks unless he is given an absolute veto on their outcome? Can the hon. Gentleman cite any precedent for that approach, apart from that of the Democratic Unionist party?

Mr. Spring: I am disappointed by the hon. Gentleman's intervention, because that is a parody of the Chief Minister's position, which I shall discuss in detail later.

Ministers have done nothing to reassure the people of Gibraltar. Of course, the Government are involved in the Brussels process, which the Conservative party began. I accept that, from the beginning, "the issues of sovereignty" were to be discussed. However, when the Spanish put forward proposals on changing Gibraltar's sovereignty, the Conservative Government always rejected them. By contrast, by allowing the Matutes proposals to lie on the table unanswered, this Government have helped to create the atmosphere of uncertainty in which the Government of Gibraltar refuse to participate in the talks. I shall elaborate on that later.

The words of the Government and the Minister have not helped. The Minister will no doubt remember his insensitive observation on 7 November:

> "Our European partners do not understand why a dispute between two member states over a territory with a population one fifteenth that of Luxembourg should be a deciding factor in such decisions."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 7 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 90WH.]

Equally, on 17 September he bizarrely told the *Gibraltar Chronicle*:

> "If people want to get stuck in the past, the future will leave them behind",

whatever that is supposed to mean.

Does the Minister think that those comments convinced the people of Gibraltar that he and his Government have their best interests at heart?

It does not stop there, however. The Minister has form. In the 7 November debate, he said that, if Gibraltarians did not make the choices he wanted,

> "Gibraltar will be left behind."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 7 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 89WH.]

He may also remember once saying that he was puzzled that the Government of Gibraltar had taken a boycott stance. No one else is puzzled, given the background of remarks.

There is still more. In evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee, he said:

> "in modern Europe, to have a territory off the Spanish mainland, indeed linked to the Spanish mainland, some 1,800 miles from Britain somehow integrated into mainland Britain is not what the modern Europe is about."

Whatever the merits of that bizarre observation, the tone is extremely unhelpful. It implies that he believes that the very existence of a Gibraltarian entity separate from Spain is an anachronism that should be abolished, whether the people of Gibraltar like it or not. Does he agree that Gibraltar should be able to have a "modernised" relationship with Spain which leaves the present situation on sovereignty intact? Or does he see that as part of the status quo which must be changed? I would be interested to hear his response.

I wish to refer again to the extremely damaging and unhelpful remark made by the Minister's Parliamentary Private Secretary on Sky Television. She said that

> "there is smuggling on a massive scale."

To my knowledge, not even Spanish commentators have ever claimed that. It is that sort of background mood music coming from Foreign Office Ministers that is destroying a constructive relationship. I hope that the Minister will take the opportunity today—he declined to do so earlier—of dissociating himself from remarks made by his Parliamentary Private Secretary.

Hon. Members will know of the reports issued at the weekend on the current state of the negotiations. We read that our Government at first appeared to give the Government of Gibraltar the reassurances that would allow them to feel comfortable participating in the negotiations. It seemed to Gibraltarians that at long last the Government were seeing sense and agreeing to the formula. We talked earlier about Northern Ireland, so we can talk in the context of the two flags, three voices policy that was first advocated by my noble Friend Lord Hurd. We read that subsequently Foreign Office officials told representatives of the Government of Gibraltar that the result of a Gibraltarian referendum on any proposals agreed by the British and Spanish Governments would not be truly decisive, a point on which I shall elaborate. In other words, the principles agreed to bilaterally—I think that the Minister used the term "a joint declaration"—would remain on the table even if the Gibraltarians rejected the proposals that emerged from the agreed principles.

We need to know whether the joint declaration speaks of joint sovereignty or whether the Minister is prepared to rule that out categorically. I have obviously not seen the letter to the Chief Minister of Gibraltar to which the Minister referred, but my understanding is that it did not rule that out. If that is the case, it would be damaging to the successful outcome of any negotiations and hon. Members need immediate reassurances that that will not happen. What have Foreign Office Ministers been playing at? Have they agreed with the Chief Minister of Gibraltar that Gibraltar should have a distinct voice in the talks of a single composite British delegation? If not, why not? If that were the formula, progress could be made. Will the Government produce a done deal with Spain and an agreement of principles which will stand as a milestone, as one Spanish official put it, regardless of whether the people of Gibraltar agree to it in a referendum? That is a crucial point.

We have reason to fear that the agreement of principles, or joint declaration, will propose the sharing of sovereignty, yet the Foreign Secretary told the House on 14 January that no agreement to share sovereignty had been reached. Will the Minister tell us, without any weasel words, whether such an agreement is now being reached? Is it true that there will be a joint declaration and agreement of principles, or whatever it is called, regardless of the result of the referendum? If so, the measure is counter-productive and shows contempt for the democratic process.

Does the Minister realise that such an agreement would also, in international eyes, legitimise Spain's claim on Gibraltar? It is interesting that the whole process is apparently being spurred on by the European Union; begun by the Brussels process, the proposal suddenly gets put in as a mechanism to push it on. The internationalisation of the issue is of great concern. It contradicts the position that every past British Government have adopted—indeed, in a written answer to a question from the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Crausby) on 6 November, he admitted that it has been the position of the British Government since the mid-1960s that Gibraltar's right of self-determination is limited only by article X of the treaty of Utrecht. Does the Minister agree that that would no longer be true once Spain's claim is legitimised by an agreement between the two Governments, thus negating for the first time the United Kingdom's historic position? Such an agreement would run the risk of creating irreversible parameters for future negotiations, even if a referendum produced the result that I think is inevitable.

Does the Minister not understand that an agreement of principles such as a joint declaration that would still stand after a rejecting referendum would betray the guarantee that the Foreign Secretary gave the House on 14 January that the final outcome will be subject to the wishes not of the Spanish or British Governments, but of the people of Gibraltar? I ask the Minister for a clear reassurance on that point.

I find the proposal extraordinary, given that the Minister has been warned repeatedly by the Opposition, the Government of Gibraltar and many of his parliamentary colleagues that the least desirable result would be a done deal between Britain and Spain that would act as a marker for any future negotiations despite its rejection by Gibraltar. Does he not realise that the proposal flies in the face of the people of Gibraltar's rights? He has made much play of wanting a better future for Gibraltar. Of course, we all want that, but how can Gibraltar have a better future when the proposal appears to leave the sword of Damocles hanging over its head, as the Chief Minister put it?

We all want Gibraltar to have better relations with Spain, as do the Government and people of Gibraltar. Spain is one of our closest friends and allies. We all greatly admire its magnificent political and economic achievements over the past generation. Spain is a valued partner in NATO and the European Union, and we have similar attitudes on many common interests and concerns.

I was interested to read the article by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) in *The House Magazine*, in which he called for "confidence-building measures". I could not agree more. The Minister and his colleagues have proved themselves incapable of such measures. We expect a measure of diplomacy from Foreign Office Ministers, but that has been remarkably absent over the past few months. Instead, as I said, we have had a catalogue of observations and remarks that can only demolish confidence in Gibraltar.

Time and again, I call on the Government to show some sense. Before an irreversible agreement with Spain that the people of Gibraltar do not want is reached, will the Minister agree to the principle of two flags and three voices and continue the negotiations within arrangements with which the Government of Gibraltar will feel comfortable?

Several references have been made to Northern Ireland, but unlike the situation there, we are talking about only three parties between two states, so this matter should be much simpler. Only when detailed arrangements had been agreed by all parties did an agreement between Britain and the Republic of Ireland become bilateral, as we saw in the Good Friday agreement.

As my right hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State has suggested to the Foreign Secretary, will the Minister use another successful formula from the Northern Ireland negotiations—nothing is agreed until it is agreed? Does he agree that no satisfactory solution will come from treating the negotiations as purely bilateral? Just as Gibraltar cannot insist on agreements that Spain cannot live with, so Spain should not be able to insist on agreements that Gibraltar cannot live with. With that principle, all parties could move forward

[Mr. Spring]

constructively without feeling that they were committing themselves to doing something irrevocable. In the joint statement with the Spanish Foreign Minister on 20 November, the Foreign Secretary said that he sought a comprehensive agreement, but he will not achieve a just and enduring agreement unless he comes up with something to which the people of Gibraltar can agree. They are the people who will be affected.

The negotiations need not be the unpopular mess that they have turned out to be. I ask the Minister to listen to the criticism by hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber that he has heard and will hear this afternoon, and to that by the Government and Opposition in Gibraltar. I ask him to change course before the negotiations do irreversible damage. Public opinion in this country will stand for nothing less.

3.38 pm

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East): Normally, I have some affection and respect for the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring), who spoke from the Opposition Front Bench. Normally, he is a responsible spokesman for his party on these matters, and I agree with much of what he said, but the position in which he has put his party with some of the remarks that he has made this afternoon is irresponsible. That is uncharacteristic and regrettable.

There are four broad headings of significance in this debate. The first—this is where we came in with Gibraltar—is its strategic importance. The second covers several issues broadly falling into the constitutional category, including any perceived on-going moral obligations and cultural identity—another issue raised in this afternoon's debate. The third is the practical difficulties—my right hon. Friend the Minister mentioned them in his opening speech—arising from living cheek by jowl with Spain, which is antagonistic towards Gibraltar's current status. Telephone facilities were one example. The final issue is the engagement or non-engagement of the Government of Gibraltar and the people of Gibraltar. I shall attempt to cover those four headings as briefly as possible and discuss any parallels between Gibraltar and Northern Ireland.

The Minister will be aware that I recently asked a question about the strategic importance of Gibraltar. The answer I received will not surprise any hon. Member present. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence replied:

> "Gibraltar has been and continues to be an important overseas base for the British Armed Forces, and contains valuable support, logistic, communications and training facilities."—[*Official Report*, 14 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 741W.]

Andrew Mackinlay: Some secret stuff.

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend is helpful. It may surprise him to know that I had almost guessed that myself.

I accept that the position set out by the Minister of State in that reply is an accurate description and responsible attitude for the Government to adopt. However, a century or so ago, in the time of Lord Salisbury, the strategic importance of Gibraltar was entirely different. It was still a base for British armed forces—presumably different communications, logistic and training purposes were met—but in a wholly different international context with a different relationship obtaining between the United Kingdom and the rest of the world. We were still an imperial power: the Suez canal was still important and we had significant imperial interests in places such as the Indian sub-continent. The nexus of military organisations and agreements was also different. It was before the time of NATO, the European Union and even before the United Nations.

I accept that a strategic interest remains, but it exists because we are already in Gibraltar, not because of where Gibraltar sits in relation to the rest of the world. My main argument is that much of the strategic interest is transferable: it could be done from elsewhere and it is not beyond the wit of the Ministry of Defence to find alternative arrangements within a certain time scale if the people of Gibraltar felt that they could order their affairs differently.

Moral, cultural and other obligations broadly fall under the title of constitutional arrangements. At this point, I want to draw parallels with Northern Ireland. I served as a Northern Ireland junior Minister for two years, and I do not claim to be the sole repository of wisdom on the subject. However, one lesson can be learned from Northern Ireland. Whichever example we consider—the start of the peace process in Northern Ireland during the time of John Major or the start of the Brussels process—we find that, if a party is over-prescriptive, possibilities are eliminated.

Although I suspect that the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) would disagree, I believe that the strength of the package put to the people of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in the referendum on the Good Friday agreement was that it was constructively ambiguous. It enabled someone who held nationalist views to contemplate an immediate future in the United Kingdom without having to give up their republican views. It enabled the bare majority of Unionists who voted for the agreement to retain their Unionist identity, and recognise that a different set of relationships with the Republic of Ireland would be introduced alongside different constitutional arrangements, such as devolution.

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howarth: I shall finish in a moment. That process enabled people to retain their cultural and national identities and enter into an arrangement that allowed the possibility of peace. It is an imperfect peace, but it exists, and people have put aside some ancient enmities.

Mr. Rosindell: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the crucial difference between Northern Ireland and Gibraltar is that Northern Ireland is a divided community? A certain section of the community in Northern Ireland would like to become part of the Republic of Ireland. Barely a single person in Gibraltar wishes it to be a part of Spain, or would want the Madrid Government to have any power over Gibraltar.

Mr. Howarth: I accept the distinction that the hon. Gentleman makes. However, it is not possible to make exact comparisons between a situation in one place and one in an entirely different place. That was not my point. Although I accept the differences that he described, we must allow people flexibility to look for a solution. There may be a solution that no one has yet suggested. That is why I used the term "constructively ambiguous", to the bafflement of those sitting here. It requires imagination, and space in which people can exercise it, to foresee how a relationship might develop in future. That is my point on the Northern Ireland process. I accept that the parallel is not exact.

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East): I listened carefully to my hon. Friend's comments on cultural identity and the relationship that he explored. Is he aware that an Indian community has been around in Gibraltar for 130 years? That community, of which the Hindu and Muslim communities are part, has made a large contribution. How will he protect their rights under his suggested arrangements? Gibraltar has an identity, which the Indian community has enjoyed and which has been protected for so long. How, under the arrangements that he is floating, will that be protected?

Mr. Howarth: I do not know whether my hon. Friend has misunderstood me. I am arguing for space in which a new settlement can be developed, not prescribing a blueprint. I entirely accept that Gibraltar is a multicultural society with a long tradition of people from different cultural and religious backgrounds contributing to the richness of Gibraltar's life. That is also true of Spain.

My comparison with Northern Ireland showed that arrangements on equality and human rights are in place so that the identity and rights of people of all backgrounds—not just those of nationalists, Catholics, Unionists or Protestants—are protected, overseen and looked after. Any negotiated settlement could and would address such issues in a way that suits everyone. I make that point not to offer a particular solution but to suggest a process similar, but not the same, to that in Northern Ireland—I accept the distinction made by the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) in his intervention—

Geraldine Smith: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Howarth: If my hon. Friend lets me finish my sentence, I will gladly give way. Such a process offers the possibility of bearing fruit.

Geraldine Smith: Does my hon. Friend accept that the Good Friday agreement was agreed to by the people of Northern Ireland? If a joint declaration is agreed to by the people of Gibraltar, we will not have a problem, but we are talking about what happens if it is rejected, and whether it should be imposed on the people.

Mr. Howarth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. I have been careful about making a point for no particular end solution, and have not described what arrangements might look like; frankly, I am not in a position to be able to. I have tried to describe a process, and my hon. Friend's intervention is wide of the mark because she assumes that I am defending a particular set of arrangements. I strongly agree with my right hon. Friend the Minister, and am in favour of the idea that the status quo is probably not a sensible arrangement as regards modern relations between the United Kingdom and the rest of Europe. Moreover, it is probably not the most sensible arrangement for the people of Gibraltar.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is another similarity between Gibraltar and Northern Ireland on which he has not touched? For years, the policy of the Foreign Office was to try to get rid of any problems and yield to the greatest pressure point.

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman and I are old and good friends, so he will forgive when I say that I do not speak for the Foreign Office. It is a relief not to be speaking for it, or for any Government Department, but to be giving my own views.

It is important to say—I agree to some extent with the critics, but the matter is not necessarily a bone of contention with the Foreign Office—that the people of Gibraltar must have a say in the matter and their views must be factored into any agreement.

Mr. Tynan: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Howarth: I seem to be popular for interventions. I am looking to you for guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am usually generous about giving way, but the more I give way, the less time will be available for other hon. Members to be called. Seeing the expression on your face, I shall give way to my hon. Friend, but that will be the last intervention before I conclude my comments.

Mr. Tynan: Let me test my hon. Friend's position. Does he accept that the negotiations between Britain and Spain should involve the Government of Gibraltar before a joint declaration is made to test the proposition in the statements?

Mr. Howarth: I am grateful for that intervention, because it leads me to my final point on engagement. My right hon. Friend the Minister referred to an empty chair, which is a good and accurate description of the situation. If the Gibraltar Government were properly engaged in the process, the shape and context of any declaration would probably be entirely different. If three parties were involved in the negotiations instead of two, I am convinced that, although my right hon. Friend and the Foreign Secretary will do everything possible to protect the interests of Gibraltarians, there could be no better guarantee of those interests being advanced than involving the Gibraltar Government in the process and filling the chair. My right hon. Friend is putting the cart before the horse. I am sure that there is a better analogy, but I cannot think of it.

In the interim, it is important for the Gibraltar Government to be involved in the process because, first, the strategic interests, although they still exist, are different from 100 years ago; secondly, any process involves engagement and that must be constructive, with space for a different arrangement to be agreed that suits everyone better than the current arrangements; and thirdly, because of the practical difficulties being experienced by the people of Gibraltar, it is in

[Mr. Howarth]

everyone's interests that a new future is carved for Gibraltar that recognises not only its place in the world, but the place of Spain, the United Kingdom and Europe. I appeal to the people and Government of Gibraltar to be constructive and not to sulk in a corner.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The next speaker will be a Front-Bench spokesman and when he has concluded the Front-Bench contributions will have taken up a large part of the debate. It was scheduled to end at 5.30 pm, to which can be added 15 minutes for the Division, so it will end at 5.45 pm. It is my intention to confine the winding-up speeches to a ministerial response and I understand that 10 minutes will be adequate. It may help hon. Members to know that so that they may balance their contributions and enable as many hon. Members as possible to contribute.

3.59 pm

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I heard what you said, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

On behalf of the Liberal Democrats, I welcome this debate. When the subject has been discussed recently, it has been during Back Benchers' time or as the result of private notice questions, and it is welcome that the Government have provided time for this debate. Perhaps the issue will be promoted to the Chamber for discussion.

We are rapidly approaching the 300th anniversary of Britain's involvement with Gibraltar. In three centuries the issues have proved largely intractable, and in three hours this afternoon we are unlikely to find a solution. Nevertheless, seeking a solution must be the objective of everyone who has an interest in Gibraltar and, as we have heard today, there are plenty of options.

The history of the different disputes is well known and well rehearsed, but it is worth focusing on several key issues. What Gibraltar wants out of the process is clear: it wants easier living, whether that is clearer and fairer border controls, the ability to use a phone or better access by air or other modes of transport; it wants greater autonomy, which we can all support; and, most crucially, it wants to maintain its right to self-determination. To achieve any and all of those it will need the United Kingdom and Spain to work alongside it.

It is also evident what the United Kingdom wants out of the process. An easier life might be a cynic's view, and the occasional impression has been created that Gibraltar is an administrative embarrassment to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and perhaps something of which it would gladly be rid. More seriously, there is the prize of making progress on several issues, which the Minister was at pains to set out, in the European Union. Crucially, the United Kingdom must want to see things right for Gibraltar and to ensure that it is treated fairly. In all those areas the Government need both Gibraltar and Spain to co-operate with them.

It is clear what the Spanish Government want. Strategic gains would accrue from repossessing the rock over which Spain has a historic desire to reassert its sovereignty. However, it, too wants broader progress on the larger European Union issues that are at stake. None of that will be possible without Gibraltar and the United Kingdom. Over too long a period the situation has developed, such that we now have an elaborate diplomatic version of the game of rock, paper, scissors in which each participant is interdependent and has the ability to blunt, smother or skewer the other's progress.

Whichever view is taken of Gibraltar's history, there is plenty of scope from the Utrecht treaty, the 1969 constitution of Gibraltar, the Brussels process and the Barcelona communiqué to justify the arguments for or against. Here in Britain it should not be too difficult for us to agree that the current situation is untenable, that Gibraltar must retain the right to determine its future and that there are greater European Union prizes to be gained if the problem can be resolved.

Mr. Rosindell: The hon. Gentleman hits the nail on the head. He discussed greater prizes in the context of the European Union, but the reason why the Government are determined to push this ahead is because Gibraltar is being used as a bargaining chip to allow deals to be done with Madrid, and the Government want greater concessions at the next intergovernmental conference. That is the real reason why the Government are entering into this betrayal of Gibraltar.

Mr. Moore: The hon. Gentleman has made his point, and I shall allow the Government to answer it rather than being drawn in. I hope that my position is clear and will continue to be clear throughout the debate.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): The hon. Gentleman mentioned self-determination. Precisely what does he mean by that: a referendum or something else?

Mr. Moore: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I will develop my thinking and I hope that that will become clear to him.

The current situation is untenable. Gibraltar has to retain the right to self-determination, and there are bigger prizes that Liberal Democrat Members want to be achieved as well. However, nothing can be achieved without dialogue. Although there is some dialogue, the situation remains a mess. We must ask why matters are not progressing. Some think it is because of the dialogue between the UK and Spain that we are getting further away from, not closer to, a solution.

Liberal Democrat Members have long supported the Brussels negotiation process, and we acknowledge that that partly involves talks about sovereignty. Those talks must lead to a proper, fair and free referendum. We cannot allow a rigged referendum or one that takes place under political duress. That is what the people of Gibraltar fear. For as long as Gibraltarians continue to be denied basic rights such as freedom of movement, proper access to telecommunications and participation in European Parliament elections, they will be very wary of, if not absolutely hostile to, any deal cooked up by the two Governments. Equally, for as long as they are unclear what future constitutional status will be offered to them, they are right to be cynical.

The Foreign Secretary has conceded the need to improve life for Gibraltarians. However, what is not at all clear is the British intention regarding the Rock's constitutional status. The Minister was not specific in his article in *The House Magazine* of 28 January, nor has he been today. Nor was Baroness Symons in a debate in another place on 12 December. The Government have been offered several opportunities to spell out Gibraltar's possible future constitutional status, but have taken none of them. It is not clear what offer may come to the people of Gibraltar in due course.

Much reference has been made to Northern Ireland. I was born there, but, alas, did not spend much of my life there. I would prefer not to draw that parallel, but rather one that has a great deal of resonance; the constitutional changes on the mainland of the United Kingdom over the past five years. In Scotland, the arguments over the different options for devolution that were available to us were debated and agonised over for a long time before we got anywhere near a referendum in 1997. People still had differences of opinion, but they were absolutely clear about what they were voting on. That possibility does not appear to exist for the people of Gibraltar.

The Government may respond that the Chief Minister has an open invitation to join the talks, and Liberal Democrat Members would certainly urge him to do so. However, if it is to be a meaningful process, the Gibraltar representatives have to have confidence in it. The Government are right to tackle the issue, but wrong to fail to recognise the limitations of the current process. They must persuade the Spanish to develop some confidence-building gestures. They must also make it clear what constitutional options they may consider, and then Gibraltarians can play their part and join the dialogue.

The Minister has shown that we are making some progress with his announcement today that if the Chief Minister does not join the talks, there will be a chance for negotiations before the outcome of those talks is put to a referendum. That will need to be developed further and the people of Gibraltar will have to have their say on it. He was less clear—I fear that this will undermine the whole process—on what status that negotiated agreement will have should the people of Gibraltar reject it.

In the whole process, there is a catalyst necessary to turn the current vicious cycle into a virtuous one; it is trust. There is too little of it at the moment but without it, all the best intentions in the world will come to nought.

4.10 pm

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): I declare an interest; I have visited Gibraltar at the expense of the Gibraltar Government.

The Minister clearly states that he believes in transparency and openness. However, I have a concern, which I hope that he will address when summing up. Transcripts of a private meeting between my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and Mr. Piqué have been made available to certain individuals, but not to anyone with Gibraltar group membership. It seems that some hon. Members have been excluded and omitted. I believe that a Parliamentary Private Secretary has had the notes from the Foreign Office and has been given a list, restricted to a few. The notes have been circulated to some but have not been given to the rest of us here. I do not think that that leads to openness or transparency. It returns us to all the suspicion that started over Gibraltar in the first place.

I wish to move on to some of the points that have been raised about Gibraltar, but I shall give way first, if the Minister wishes to respond.

Peter Hain *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Hoyle: It is unusual for the Minister to speak from a sedentary position. I am more than willing to give way on this important point. It is not about politics, but about ensuring that Members of Parliament are all treated equally. That is all I am speaking about; nothing else.

Gibraltar plays a major military role to this day and has been involved in every war since the second world war, sharing part of the supply chain. That is because it is 1,000 miles from the UK. Recently, the submarine Tireless, which no one really wanted to discuss, had to be repaired in Gibraltar. Nowhere else was available and it was not safe to bring it back to the UK. That is just one example of the strategic importance of Gibraltar.

Anyone who goes between the straits is monitored. Every ship or submarine that progresses through those straits is known. It is as important militarily now as it was 100 years ago in terms of surveillance tactics, especially for movements up into the Gulf. I make that point seriously, because people should be aware of it.

At the weekend, *The Times* said that talks were going well and that the Minister might be able to attend them. On Sunday, we read headlines such as, "Gibraltar deal is a betrayal". That is the worry. Unfortunately, we do not have much time to enter that debate. I know that many other hon. Members wish to comment, but some points must be made.

The people of Gibraltar must have their rights. People might want to comment one way or the other, but the bottom line is that if there is to be a referendum, why should it not be extended? Why should we not ask the people of Gibraltar to vote for integration, if that is what they wish? It is a possibility that, as Spain accepts Ceuta and Melilla as integrated parts, we could do the same with Gibraltar. That would resolve the issues for everyone. I would go even further. People say that we cannot touch the treaty of Utrecht, but I say that we cannot have it both ways. The Minister wants joint sovereignty, which would mean altering the treaty of Utrecht. Surely Spain, which I welcome as a newcomer to the democratic process, would also allow and support the rights of the people of Gibraltar to have independence, if that is what they wish.

[Mr. Hoyle]

We ought not to shy away from such points; they must be made. We ought to let the people of Gibraltar choose, and I do not think that anyone in this House who believes in democracy should shy away from negotiating on behalf of the people of Gibraltar. That is important.

4.14 pm

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle), who made an important but all too brief contribution. It was deeply significant to hear him criticise what appears to be an unpleasant dirty trick, with selected Members being given special briefings by a Parliamentary Private Secretary, presumably on behalf of the Minister. If that is untrue, the Minister will say so in winding up. Despite always being keen to speak and to give his views at any point at any time in any magazine, the Minister has been remarkably silent. He mumbled away and failed to intervene when the hon. Member for Chorley offered him the chance.

That follows a pattern, and I was a little perturbed by the point of order of the hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick), who I am glad to see has returned to the debate. Bearing in mind the remarks of the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay), I was not alone in inferring that as rather threatening. There was an implication that there is something wrong about Members of this House visiting Gibraltar as guests of its Government to learn more about a territory for which we still have responsibility. I speak as someone who has not visited Gibraltar as a guest of its Government, although I have been there on several occasions at my own expense. I did not like the comment, because it was a Whip's or PPS's nark's intervention and an attempt to threaten Members.

Those who have been here for some time, as you have, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will recall how much debate in the House has benefited from Members visiting Hong Kong. When I was Tom King's PPS, I used to arrange for Members of the House to visit Northern Ireland and, thereafter, as the hon. Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth) will confirm, there was much more informed debate. They were paid for by the Government of the day and were all-party visits, so I hope that we can knock that point on the head once and for all. It was a nasty and unpleasant point of order.

I will now go back nearly 25 years—more years, I fear, than any other Member in this Chamber can—when, as the youngest Member of Parliament at the time, I spoke from the Opposition Benches in a debate about the accession of Spain and Portugal to what was then the European Community. I spoke vigorously in favour of their accession, and it is easy to forget today that Spain and Portugal were then fledgling democracies. There was a real possibility that they would fall back into military dictatorship, and indeed it was only the courageous intervention of King Juan Carlos that stopped a rather buffoonish military coup, which included a strange colonel with a funny hat waving a gun in front of the Speaker of the Spanish Parliament.

It is easy to forget that we were also under a huge Soviet threat at the time. Communism was sweeping across Europe and there was a large Communist party in Portugal and a significant one in Spain. I believed then, as I do now, that it was important for both countries to become our partners in the European Community. I remember being intervened on by the then right hon. Member for Down, South, the Ulster Unionist J. Enoch Powell, who took the opposite view and believed that it would do further harm to the European Community. We hear those views expressed again now in terms of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and other countries, and it is important that we bring them into our democratic fold.

I say all that because I am delighted at the success of democratic Spain. I have watched in admiration as Spain punches its weight in Europe and the world, as well as in NATO. I speak as a friend and admirer of modern Spain, someone who holidays there regularly and enjoys meeting the Spanish people. However, I do not say that at the expense of the people of Gibraltar, or with the aim of tearing up the treaty of Utrecht.

A statement on Gibraltar was made a few weeks ago on the Floor of the House. The most significant contribution was, as is quite often the case, from the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes). Sadly, he is not with us today. He asked the Foreign Secretary what was the point of conducting negotiations with the Spanish if there was nothing to negotiate. I agree entirely; the negotiations are pointless and, in giving false hope, they are unfair on the Spanish Government and people. This House will not sell out Gibraltar.

Only if agreed principles and an agreed framework are reached in the Brussels talks will the negotiations be of any advantage to Spain, but those principles would be put to the people of Gibraltar and rejected. The Gibraltarians' worry is not that the referendum will not be won—everyone knows that it will be won overwhelmingly—but that Spain will subsequently have a legitimised claim because it will have on the table agreed principles and an agreed framework to negotiate with the British Government. That is the harm and the damage. As my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) rightly said, that is what it is all about.

I listened carefully to the Minister when he said that it would be damaging to Gibraltar if an agreement were not reached. I listened equally carefully to his response to the significant intervention of the hon. Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan). Threats, coercion and duress were mentioned and it was suggested that the people of Gibraltar should have, as an absolute right, freedom of movement, open telecommunications, open air links and an open airport. Those are the democratic and simple rights of people in any country in the world, but the people of Gibraltar cannot have them unless they do a deal on their sovereignty. The suggestion is that those rights will be available and that life will be more comfortable for the people of Gibraltar, provided the they vote the right way. That is election under duress and it is absolutely wrong.

I listened carefully to the Minister when he said that the lack of an agreement in Gibraltar undermines our own interests. I am not sure why. He then strangely went on to refer to the 500,000 British nationals living in Spain. Is he suggesting that our friend and ally, our partner in the European Union—democratic Spain—will threaten all the Brits living in Marbella, Torremolinos and Fuengirola? Should we be bringing them home, as in the case of Zimbabwe? What an absurd and irrelevant suggestion from the Minister. What single other reason can there be for mentioning the 500,000 British subjects who live in Spain? Will the Minister tell us why?

Peter Hain: Because it is a fact, to which I drew the attention of Members.

Mr. MacKay: That rather confirms my point. It is irrelevant. Endless facts can always be provided, but they are not necessarily relevant. It was suggested that British interests could be undermined if we did not negotiate and, in the next breath, the Minister reminded us of the fact—we all know it is true—that approximately half a million British citizens live in Spain. It was suggested that they might be under duress. That is clearly crazy. What was the point of mentioning it in the same context? It was another red herring.

A further red herring that has been dealt with in part by powerful interventions from the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Geraldine Smith) and my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) is that strange comparison with Northern Ireland. It was made by the Foreign Secretary during his statement and was shot down by the hon. Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick) and it was made again by the Minister today. Let me take the Minister slowly through the facts. He is keen to have facts.

First, a significant minority of people in Northern Ireland aspire to be part of a united Ireland. That creates genuine tensions and problems. Secondly, for over 30 years, there have been what are described as the troubles in Northern Ireland. A large number of people have been murdered or maimed and a significant number of people have been forced to leave the Province. The situation in Gibraltar bears no similarity at all. Comparisons between Gibraltar and Northern Ireland are wrong. They are a typical muddying of the water by the Foreign Office. Those of us who know a significant amount about Northern Ireland know that there is no point in making any comparisons.

I am anxious that other colleagues can speak too and so I will conclude by giving a word of warning to both the Minister and, perhaps more importantly, the Government Whip, the hon. Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin). They should be careful. There is no chance of getting this sort of measure through the House, as they do not have the support of the majority of hon. Members.

/ 4.26 pm

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): As I mentioned on a point of order, I want to pick up on Members of Parliament's access to this important part of the EU. My hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) touched an important button by raising this. First, Members do go at the invitation and expense of the Gibraltar Government and we have to declare it. There is a special arrangement for overseas territories. I was partly instrumental in that, persuading Tony Newton, who recognised that there was a moral obligation on hon. Members to visit overseas territories and the British Government did not want to pick up the cost.

I have pursued this matter time and time again, including with my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin) when he was Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Leader of the House in the last Parliament. My hon. Friend the Member for Preston and I can go to any part of the EU, at the expense of Parliament, but the one place we cannot visit is Gibraltar, notwithstanding it is an EU issue in itself. My hon. Friend the Member for Hove will remember that we were promised that this issue would be reviewed. I hope that the Minister will at least take that board. It is perverse that I can go to Edinburgh at the expense of this place, and indeed I do, but I cannot go to Gibraltar. I often go to Northern Ireland but we cannot go to this important place where there are British subjects who are disfranchised and who have no access to this House of Commons.

The question is not "integration" but the fact that these people, uniquely, are not represented in their national legislature. Their Prime Minister is our Prime Minister; their Foreign Secretary is our Foreign Secretary; their Defence Secretary is our Defence Secretary. If we go to war they cannot say, "If you don't mind we'll sit this one out." They are committed. It is nonsense that they have no access to the legislature on matters germane to them. In the meantime they are dependent on the surrogacy of hon. Members to protect and promote their interests, which I think is unhealthy. That democratic deficit should be an acute embarrassment to the United Kingdom.

The Minister suggested why there is growing ministerial interest in Gibraltar. The reason predates him. There was little interest in Gibraltar in all the years prior to 1997. The last time that the Foreign Affairs Committee addressed this before Labour came into power then was at the time of Anthony Kershaw. He even predates the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay). It was a long time ago, and there has been no interest—until, that is, at the first European summit after the 1997 election. The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary overlooked an important codicil in the negotiations impacting on Gibraltar. There was one hell of a row in the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, which triggered several reports and other hon. Members' growing interest in the matter.

I asked the Foreign Secretary when he was Home Secretary if it would be possible to extend the franchise to the people of Gibraltar in relation to the European Union. His advisers said no. My right hon. Friend said in the House of Commons that it could not, and should not, be done. That illustrates that often people who advise and counsel Ministers are bonkers; they have no idea of the basic tenets of European law. They were subsequently proved wrong. I make a little prediction—I shall refer to it again; it will be in *Hansard*—that there will be a challenge to the fact that these people are not represented in their national legislature because it conflicts with the standard western European democratic norms and our human rights legislation.

When Baroness Symons was Minister with responsibility for the overseas territories, she introduced a White Paper and in evidence to the Select Committee canvassed the idea that there should be some access for people from overseas territories to petition at the Bar of the House of Commons. But we heard no more about it. The Government have no great interest in these people and there is a continuing, unacceptable denial of their democratic rights.

[Andrew Mackinlay]

I visited Spain recently—I did not have to declare it—and met Government Ministers and colleagues in the Spanish Parliament. Their expectations are high; like the Minister, I too am concerned about our bilateral relations with Spain. I believe that this Brussels process will all end in tears. Far from advancing our mutual interests and collaboration with our Spanish friends, there will be a massive let down, which will set back so much that is mutually important to us.

Her Majesty's Government and the Spanish Government have overlooked some of the practicalities. The Minister spoke about giving Gibraltar access to the European market. After the royal naval base was withdrawn it suited the United Kingdom of the day not to make a Treasury subvention but to encourage Gibraltar to be self-sufficient. It was argued and promoted in the House that Gibraltar should develop its financial sector and other advantages that would attract business and commerce and make it self-sufficient. I am open to correction, but I cannot see how that can be reconciled with an open market and with Schengen. What will come in its place? Will there be a massive subvention of social security payments to the people of Gibraltar? I know all the arguments about the La Linea region becoming a powerhouse, but that requires much more explanation. There will be a depressing effect on the region; the economy and income of the people of Gibraltar would collapse if there were to be total integration into the European framework.

History should have been different but it was this place that decided what happened. This place created some of the problems of Ireland, but our generation must deal with them and it ain't that simple. There is no magic wand that can be waved to unscramble the fact that we have a special economy—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that he is addressing the Chair.

Andrew Mackinlay: I am very sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There was a reference to Ireland; I do not want to labour that point as it is the difference between an apple and an orange, save for one thing: I predict that the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) is more likely to be elected Pope than the people of Gibraltar are to accept joint sovereignty or sovereignty.

The Minister has been very good, and I hope he will take this opportunity to stop the traducing of Gibraltar in the press by some politicians, often through ignorance. The Foreign Secretary is the law-and-order Minister in Gibraltar and the Treasury oversees the financial sector; any criticism in those areas would be criticisms of them. We must stop journalists, politicians and other people, especially Spanish spokespersons, pretending that there is something rotten in Gibraltar. That is simply not so. There may be things that they do not like, but their criticisms are false. If they had validity, they would be aimed at the Foreign Secretary and others in Whitehall.

I thought about the matter on my way to the House today; indeed, I lay awake last night thinking about it. I remembered a prayer that I was taught: "Lord, give me the courage to change the things that I can, the serenity to accept the things that I cannot change, and the wisdom to know the difference." That is what the Minister should say before he goes to bed tonight, because he will not be able to dragoon the people of Gibraltar, who are British citizens and who have the same inalienable rights as his constituents in Neath and mine in Thurrock, into a relationship with Spain that involves joint sovereignty or Spanish sovereignty.

Mr. Brian Jenkins (Tamworth): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Andrew Mackinlay: I will sit down soon. Mr. Deputy Speaker referred to the winding-up speeches, but this is an unwinding speech.

Mr. Jenkins: I have listened to several Members who seem to believe that the end game is to absorb Gibraltar into Spain; I am not sure whether my hon. Friend believes that. The end game in this round—[HON. MEMBERS: "This round."]—at the behest of a European Committee is to get two members to agree a common accord. That would become the policy of the European Union and is the framework that we must deal with.

Andrew Mackinlay: Our hopes and expectations are not that we will have discord. We would like to have good relationships between Spain, the United Kingdom and this strange jurisdiction, which is unique in the European Union. I am trying to say that it ain't that simple. The Government are extremely naïve to think that it is. By embarking on the process, they will fail. They will knock back our bilateral relations with Spain, irritations will continue and Spain will, perhaps, read the signals incorrectly.

My notes refer to the fact that the Minister introduced sterile knocking of the Conservatives. I hope that he will accept that I do not mean that disrespectfully. In a way, both parties are to blame, because they have both sent the wrong signals. The Conservatives sent signals to the Argentine Junta, and we saw what happened: they misread them. The signals that we are sending to Spain about their expectations could be a big mistake.

It is a great tragedy that we did not deal with the issue when Spain wished to join the European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. I believe that it was a Conservative Administration at the time. As a condition of entry, we should have tightened up the status of our friends and fellow citizens in Gibraltar.

The Minister said that there are four pillars to what he is trying to achieve for Gibraltar. First, safeguarding the Gibraltarian way of life: I would hope that that would be automatic and "understood." I imagine that he is referring to the Gibraltarians' relationship with the Crown and the symbols of Britishness. Secondly, normalisation of relations with Spain: I have acknowledged that that is a laudable aspiration, but I do not think that it can be achieved.

Thirdly, self-government: it is not as if the good people of Gibraltar lie awake at night thinking that if only they could get rid of the Attorney-General, who is an official member sitting in the Legislature, there would be heaven on earth in Gibraltar, or what joy there would be to have a revamped constitution. Of course, constitutions are important, but that is not a carrot to the people of Gibraltar. I would hope that it was open for them to invite the House of Commons to modernise their constitution at any time. They have full internal self-government at present, and their stewardship of it is extraordinarily good. There should be no imputation that they are negligent in the way that they conduct their affairs. Constitutions should be revisited by this place, but it is not a great carrot to hang in front of people to give them something that they have already.

Finally, sovereignty: the Minister has been at pains to insist that we are not going to surrender sovereignty. The House welcomes that and does not think that, in any event, it would be possible for him to cede sovereignty. However, we need to be clear when the talks are concluded that we are not left with something that falls short of sovereignty, or that does not require primary legislation but has shifted the dice in favour of Spain. That could give the Spanish false hopes that they could attain sovereignty in the not too distant future, and would make us feel that these Britons, who are so important to us strategically, had been betrayed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth), who is not in his place, referred to the strategic nature of Gibraltar. My hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) reminded us how useful the relationship with Gibraltar was in the Falkland Islands conflict. It is also right to remind us how Spain will not let HMS Invincible go into Gibraltar on a NATO exercise because it might offend Spain: a situation that I find repugnant. Last year, it was too perilous to take the disabled submarine through the bay of Biscay and it was essential to repair it in Gibraltar. Gibraltar will always be important to the United Kingdom's interests, and that must be recognised and reflected in how we respond to the interests of the people of Gibraltar. There must be no cession of sovereignty to Spain, because that would not be a friendly act to Spain in the long term, and it would be a great betrayal of the Gibraltarians, to whom we owe so much.

4.40 pm

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) who has made some excellent points, not least in his opening remarks about the importance of Members of the House of Commons being able to visit Gibraltar to know what is going on there.

Mr. Hendrick: When the hon. Gentleman referred to my point of order, he gave the impression that there was no way to pay other than through the Government of Gibraltar. Many Members make trips to other countries under their own steam using their own funds. I do not see why that should pose such a great difficulty to the hon. Gentleman, or to anyone else for that matter.

Mrs. Laing: The hon. Gentleman has entirely missed the point. I wonder who told him to say that in the first place. He has, however, strangely echoed the point that I am about to make. I do not need to declare this, but some years ago I went to Gibraltar as a guest of the Government of Gibraltar. I have visited Gibraltar on many other occasions, as my cousin lives there. I spend a lot of time there and my impression of what the people of Gibraltar think about their current predicament comes directly from my cousin, her friends and associates, not from reading articles or being told by representatives of the Government of Gibraltar. That does not alter the fact that it is vital that Members of this House know what is going on there, as Gibraltar has no other voice. The people of Gibraltar are British and they deserve to be listened to as much as any British person living in the British isles or any other part of the world.

Peter Hain *indicated assent.*

Mrs. Laing: I am glad to see the Minister nodding his assent. The debate is not about 30,000 people living several hundred miles away, but about basic principles of democracy and how the British Government deal with British people wherever they are. It is the thin end of the wedge if the British Government are allowed to deal with British people who happen to live in Gibraltar less respectfully and democratically than British people here or in other parts of the world. If we give in on this point and allow the Government to treat the people of Gibraltar as if they do not matter because there are only 30,000 of them, where does it stop? Where do we draw the line? That is why the debate is so important.

I have heard the Minister speak about Gibraltar on several occasions, and I find myself asking again and again what he means. He likes to use words that might have one meaning in one context, but another meaning in another context. I wonder whether the Government of Spain and their representatives consider that the Minister is using words to mean exactly what he wants us to think he means. Indeed, he says that these words mean what he says they mean, but that is not good enough. They must mean what we all understand them to mean. In other words, everyone—the people of Gibraltar and the Spanish and British Governments—has to use the same language. *[Laughter.]* Some Labour Members seem to find that amusing, but it is not; it is deadly serious.

The way in which the Government spin and use certain words and phrases is a disgrace. It is time that we pinned the Minister down by making him explain exactly what he means. I shall begin with the word "sovereignty". He has assured us on several occasions, as has the Foreign Secretary, that sovereignty is not at issue and not up for negotiation in the talks. However, the last edition of *The Sunday Telegraph* said something different, and before anyone says, "You shouldn't believe everything you read in the papers", let me assure the Committee that of course I do not.

Mr. Ivor Caplin (Hove): Certainly not in *The Sunday Telegraph.*

Mrs. Laing: Nor do I believe everything in *The Sunday Telegraph*, but which statement is true? Is it true, as the Minister and Foreign Secretary have said in the past, that sovereignty is not up for grabs? Or is it true, as *The Sunday Telegraph* says, that the Foreign Secretary said that all aspects of Gibraltar's future, including sovereignty, were up for discussion?

Peter Hain: From the beginning, we have always said, as did Baroness Thatcher when she initiated the process, that the issue of sovereignty is on the table. Equally, however, we have made it clear that we are not about to hand Gibraltar over to Spain. That is completely outside

[Peter Hain]

the agenda that we are prepared to discuss with the Spanish Government. Our position is nothing new: we have consistently made it clear on the Floor of the House, so it is on the record.

Mrs. Laing: I am pleased to have the Minister's words. Is he saying categorically that *The Sunday Telegraph* report is wrong?

Peter Hain: I did not read *The Sunday Telegraph* and I do not have it in front of me. If the hon. Lady passes it to me, I will have a look at it and reply.

Mrs. Laing: I am not saying that what *The Sunday Telegraph* says should matter; I am simply saying that it states:

> "The Foreign Secretary said that all aspects of Gibraltar's future, including sovereignty, were up for discussion."

That is exactly what the report says.

Peter Hain: There is nothing new about that. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I have repeatedly said—I said it this afternoon—that sovereignty is one of the four pillars that we are discussing. The Conservative Government discussed it as well. The point is that that does not determine the outcome.

Mrs. Laing: I am grateful for the Minister's clear explanation. My understanding was that on previous occasions, in meetings both private and public, he and his right hon. Friend said that there was much to be discussed by the Governments of Spain and Britain, but that the sovereignty of Gibraltar would not be altered. I appreciate that the Minister is saying that my understanding was wrong. It is clear that the issue of sovereignty is up for discussion.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): Is the Minister not showing exactly the tendency to which my hon. Friend referred, which is to be disingenuous with the use of words? My understanding is that we never allowed the Spanish to discuss sovereignty with us when we were in government.

Mrs. Laing: It is certainly the case, as I have feared, that the Minister's words have not been clear, but I am grateful that in the last couple of minutes, in answer to my questions, he has made it clear that the issue of sovereignty is up for discussion.

Peter Hain: I am sorry, but I do not know whether the hon. Lady understands words when I say them. Sovereignty has always been on the table, defined as part of the Brussels process. That does not imply any particular outcome. I repeat that we will not agree to Gibraltar's being integrated into Spain or to hand Gibraltar over to Spain, and the hon. Lady must not imply that in her request for clarification of what I mean by sovereignty being on the table. Sovereignty was on the table under Baroness Thatcher and has been on the table in every discussion on the issue, but that does not mean that we accept Spain's version of sovereignty—which, as the hon. Lady sees it, is to reincorporate Gibraltar.

Mrs. Laing: I am grateful to the Minister for that explanation. Contrary to what he says, I must question him as I am doing—that is my duty. What the Minister has been saying has been unclear, but he has now clarified it, for which I am grateful.

I find it strange that the Labour Government are praying in aid Baroness Thatcher. It is true that the Brussels process and the negotiations began under her Government, as did many other excellent policies that the Government wish to overturn. It is ridiculously inconsistent for them to argue that because Baroness Thatcher began the process, it must be right. Although I totally agree with that argument, I am extremely surprised that the Minister does. The Minister overlooks a fundamentally important point: Baroness Thatcher and her Government may have begun the process, but they never envisaged that it would come to this and they never suggested that a Conservative Government would give away the sovereignty of the British people in Gibraltar.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Does my hon. Friend accept that the leader of the Gibraltarians, Chief Minister Peter Caruana, who is one of the most intelligent and articulate men whom I have met and a distinguished barrister, is of the decided opinion that the sovereignty of Gibraltar is in jeopardy as a result of the agreement between the Government and Spain? Should not his views be respected? I respect them.

Mrs. Laing: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I share his respect for the views of the Chief Minister of Gibraltar. I also respect Mr. Caruana's forensic skills in working out what "sovereignty" means in relation to Gibraltar.

Mr. Bryant: Perhaps the hon. Lady would then explain why it has taken her such a long time to understand the simple statement made in a public communiqué—a copy of which I am holding—by the Spanish Foreign Secretary Mr. Piqué that,

> "This overall agreement will cover all outstanding issues, including those of cooperation and sovereignty".

Mrs. Laing: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for enlightening me on the contents of that communiqué.

Mr. Bryant: It is a public communiqué.

Mrs. Laing: I have never seen it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Seated interventions are undesirable.

Mrs. Laing: I confess that I do not read every communiqué issued by the Foreign Secretary of Spain, but I realise that that is an important one. If the hon. Gentleman were kind enough to give me a copy, I should be delighted to have one.

It is not that I lack understanding of the word "sovereignty"—I know what I believe it to mean, as doubtless does the hon. Gentleman. I am endeavouring to tie down what the Minister holds it to mean. He has been helpful in answering our questions on that and we have made progress—we make progress on the semantics, the vocabulary and the legal position, but we have not made progress on safeguarding the position of the people of Gibraltar. They should be more concerned after the debate than they were before it about their chances of holding on to sovereignty of their territory.

The second word about which I am concerned because of the vagueness of its meaning is "referendum". We all know that the answer given in a referendum depends on the question. The hon. Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) made this point well earlier. It seems that the Government intend to put before the people of Gibraltar a question not on the principles that matter to them, but merely on the secondary issues that would flow from a bilateral agreement between the British and Spanish Governments, either with or without consultation with Gibraltar. The Minister is muttering again, and I will always give way to him as a matter of courtesy if he wants me to.

Once again, we have a concept of referendum. The Government want the people of Gibraltar—and the people of the United Kingdom—to believe that they will, by way of referendum, be given a say in their future. That is not the case. It is now clear that the matters on which the people of Gibraltar will be consulted are only the secondary matters, not the principles. That would be a bogus and meaningless referendum, which would pull the wool over the eyes of the people of Gibraltar and the United Kingdom.

Mr. Hendrick: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Laing: No, I have already given way and I must hurry because many other Members want to speak this afternoon.

It was sad to hear the Minister and other Government Members speaking about the problems of border queues, telephone lines and air services in Gibraltar as if they were some kind of natural disaster, like problems with flooding in third world countries. They are not natural disasters or phenomena that happen only in Gibraltar, but issues that have arisen only because of the actions of the Government of Spain. There would not be border queues if the Spanish Government did not create them. There would not be problems with telephone lines or mobile phones if the Spanish Government were not standing in the way of the people of Gibraltar having decent rights in the same way as everyone else in Europe and, indeed, the world. There would not be problems with air services if they were not created by rules laid down by the Spanish Government.

With three rules of a red pen, the Spanish Government could solve the problems tomorrow if they so wanted, but they do not want to. To them, they are important bargaining counters. By giving in and treating those problems as negotiating points, the Government are simply succumbing to bullying. The large country of Spain has bullied the small territory of Gibraltar for decade after decade. If we give into the bullying of the people in Gibraltar, where does it stop? Where do we not give in to bullying of British people? We never have given in to such pressure, and it is a total disgrace that the Minister should be considering giving in to it now.

Mr. Pope: Some of the hon. Lady's comments are a little irresponsible and will inflame matters greatly on the Rock. When the Minister was before the Foreign Affairs Committee only recently, he reiterated the words of the 1969 agreement that there is no possibility of handing over the sovereignty of Gibraltar to another state against the free and democratic wishes of its people. That position has not changed since 1969. It is here in *Hansard*, and I will show it to the hon. Lady later. Does she accept that point?

Mrs. Laing: I accept that what the hon. Gentleman has said is absolutely true, and his integrity is beyond reproach. However, the people of Gibraltar rightly fear—as we do too on their behalf—that although some kind of sovereignty might be protected on paper, their way of life would be considerably affected by the present proposals that the Government have put forward jointly with the Spanish Government. Although what the hon. Gentleman says is correct to the letter, the actual effect would not be what he and his colleagues on the Foreign Affairs Select Committee might hope.

I am surprised that the Minister is still relying on his argument that an offer has been made to the Chief Minister of Gibraltar to participate in talks. It sounds good, but it is not a genuine offer because, as the Minister knows, the conditions imposed on the Chief Minister make it impossible for him to accept.

I agree with the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) that the real parallel in constitutional change is that of devolution in Scotland and Wales. During 1997 and 1998, I campaigned furiously against a Scottish Parliament. A full campaign was held in Scotland and Wales on devolution. The late right hon. Donald Dewar said repeatedly that he wanted to implement the settled will of the Scottish people. I did not agree with that will, I still do not, and I do not suppose I ever will. However, the then Secretary of State for Scotland and the Government were right. They consulted the Scottish people and carried out a referendum that was respected and accepted by all of us.

A fair and honest referendum should be carried out in Gibraltar. The Government of Gibraltar should be more involved in carrying that forward. If British people in Scotland and Wales are treated fairly by this Parliament, so should the British people in Gibraltar.

5.2 pm

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): It is with some amusement that I advise the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) that the prayer to which he referred was originally in Spanish, and comes from St. Teresa of Avila.

One of the most important questions for us to consider is why we should change the current arrangements in Gibraltar. I have long believed that the current situation is a patent anachronism. It owes more to Queen Anne than it does to Queen Elizabeth II, and it owes more to the Franco era than it does to the era of Aznar and Juan Carlos. For that reason alone, it is time

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for change. The situation must change because the current arrangements lead to a wholly unacceptable series of restrictions for the people of Gibraltar.

Mr. Hoyle: My hon. Friend mentions the anachronism of Gibraltar's colonial status. However, there is a danger that it might have joint colonial status with two masters.

Mr. Bryant: I shall consider whether there should be one, two or however many masters, or mistresses, later. We should not be permanently obsessed about what happened in 1704 or 1713. We should be thinking and talking about the future. Unacceptable restrictions apply to the people of Gibraltar, and we want to ensure that they become a thing of the past. The present situation is injurious to British foreign policy, and it would be a mistake for the Government not to move forward to resolve the situation in the interests of all British people.

The present situation is understandably troubling for the people of Spain, if for no other reason than that they have an onshore-offshore tax haven where thousands of Spanish businesses make their homes. That must be a troubling issue for them, just as we would be troubled if the Isle of Anglesey were to have a completely separate tax status.

Mr. Swire: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman, with his privileged information on what is really going on in these negotiations, would enlighten us on whether the Chancellor is putting pressure on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for some sort of settlement because of Gibraltar's peculiar tax position, in the wake of a case being launched in the European Court of Justice.

Mr. Bryant: The hon. Gentleman must have mistaken me for a Treasury Minister, which I am not. I have no idea about my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's views on the matter. All I am saying is that it is understandable that the Spanish people are worried by an onshore-offshore tax haven. In years to come the situation on value added tax and other taxes in Gibraltar will change, which is why it is important for the people of Gibraltar that we achieve a resolution in the next few years. Without one, I worry that Gibraltar's economy will falter in three to five years.

I want to demolish a few myths that sadly Government Members, but also Opposition Members, are keen to perpetuate from what I presume to be honest intentions. It has been mentioned several times today that there will be a stitch-up between the two Governments concerned, and that there will be no referendum. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) said earlier that she was worried that the Government were going to propose something that was not a proper referendum and that there would be a stitch-up, but they have stated:

> "We stick absolutely by the 1969 resolution that makes it clear that there should not be a change in the constitutional status of Gibraltar without the consent of the people there."—*[Official Report*, 28 November 2001; Vol. 375, c. 967.]

Those were my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's words which I am sure that all hon. Members in the Chamber, heard on 28 November 2001.

Like everyone else, if the Government were considering a fait accompli, I would urge them not to because on the whole people do not vote for faits accomplis. Both Government and Opposition Members are keen to see a resolution voted for by the people of Gibraltar, without whom it will be impossible to move forward.

The second myth that I want to demolish is that a referendum will be held under duress. What is a referendum that is or is not held under duress? Hon. Members might bounce up and down saying, "You are going to try to blackmail them. If they do not do what we want, there will be more restrictions." It is clear that there will be a free and open democratic process on the referendum. The Minister has provided us with strong reassurances that if Mr. Caruana refuses to take part in the current talks, there will be a further stage of consultation. The Government are moving in the right direction.

Mr. Tynan: If negotiations take place, as at present, between Britain and Spain, and an agreement is reached that the people of Gibraltar find unacceptable and reject, it would stay on the table, which would be to the detriment of the people of Gibraltar and would mean that they were under duress to accept its conditions.

Mr. Bryant: If such an agreement were to fall, the proposal would be dead. The Governments of Spain and Britain and the people of Gibraltar would want to know what the future held, but we can cross that bridge when we come to it. I hope that the Government will be successful in putting to the people of Gibraltar proposals that they wholeheartedly want to endorse and vote for.

Mr. Francois: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bryant: No. I want to make progress. Many other hon. Members want to speak and I have already taken several interventions.

Mr. Francois: The hon. Gentleman said that last time.

Mr. Bryant: It is not a personal matter, although I could make it one.

The next myth that I want to abolish is about the separate seat for the Government of Gibraltar. Whether we refer to two flags or three voices or something else, it seems clear that there should be three people sitting at the table. There should not be a stitch-up before the meeting, but open, genuine discussions. I do not think that they should take place in the glare of publicity because, as anyone who has watched the process in Northern Ireland or any diplomatic process knows, the only way that anything significant can be achieved is if talks are in closed camera.

Mr. Rosindell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bryant: I will give way one final time. I am being very generous.

Mr. Rosindell: In view of the very reassuring comments that the hon. Gentleman makes, will he retract what he said to me on Thursday 10 January—that, for all he cared, Gibraltar could be given back to Spain and the Falkland Islands to Argentina?

Mr. Bryant: The hon. Gentleman is trying to make me recall events that happened on the day before my 40th birthday. To make me remember anything that I said during that week would be pushing it.

Mr. Rosindell: Do you deny making those remarks?

Mr. Bryant: The hon. Gentleman should address the Chair, not me directly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Bryant: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I feel strongly that the Spanish Government have made a mistake over many years in their failure to woo the people of Gibraltar. Many hon. Members have referred to ways in which they could start to do that, by sorting out delays at the border, sorting out telephones and regularising the situation concerning sports. There is a further way in which the Spanish Government could do significant wooing, which has similarities to the situation in Ireland. If they renounced their long-term aspiration of sole Spanish sovereignty, which would parallel the situation in the Republic of Ireland, it would go a long way towards reassuring the people of Gibraltar.

Many hon. Members have referred to joint sovereignty. I confess that I find that an attractive proposition. I believe that joint sovereignty in perpetuity, with no suggestion, as there was in the Matutes proposals, that Gibraltar would eventually go to Spain, would be a possibility. It is worth pointing out, however, that joint sovereignty is just a headline. The words mean nothing until questions are examined, such as what to do about passports, driving licences, the economic future of the country, Schengen, and a series of other issues.

My plea is for discussions. I should prefer it if Mr. Caruana were to join them immediately and I hope that the Government will do everything that they can during the next few days to make that possible for him. If he still feels unable to join the discussions, they should proceed none the less and be followed by a specific consultation process with the people and Government of Gibraltar before any further proposals are put to any kind of referendum.

5.13 pm

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): Having listened to the Minister and other Government Members, I am reminded of the Fats Waller song that starts:

> "Won't you come into my parlour said the spider to the fly?"

Fans of Fats Waller will remember that it continues:

> "Poor fly, poor fly, because he went into the parlour, unsuspecting little fly."

The fly in this instance is not Spanish, unfortunately, but Gibraltarian. Let us face it, what we have heard this afternoon, and are seeing at the moment, is the heavy pounding of the Government public relations machine, intending to soften up the enemy before the final attack. Whatever the Minister says, there is evidently a strong desire to terminate what the Government see as an embarrassing legacy of our colonial history.

The talks have been going on in one way or another for the past 18 years, but only recently has there been a feeling that there has been a done deal between the Prime Minister and Spanish Prime Minister Aznar. I hope that the Minister will be prepared to enlighten us further on some of those conversations. The Minister has been a little high-handed in some of his comments, given that all we are seeking to do is fulfil our role as Opposition Back Benchers in holding the Executive to account. I suggest that a deal has been done in return for Mr. Aznar's support of the Prime Minister's European Union ventures, not least in the liberalisation of the markets, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) alluded. We shall see.

Unfortunately for the Government, and despite their attempts to depict this as an inevitable step towards modernisation or harmonisation, there is an issue of principle here that sits uncomfortably with their attempt to bounce the Gibraltarians into a deal.

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman say on what basis he believes that a deal has been stitched up? Accusations have been flying around for which I have heard no backing and no evidence.

Mr. Swire: I hope to address those points later in my speech. I was simply giving my views, which are widely shared, not least by the Spanish press, including *El Pais*.

It is worth remembering that the last time Gibraltar voted on the issue in 1967, 12,138 were in favour of continuing ties to Britain and 44 were against—a convincing result—and I suspect that a new vote would look similar. At that time, a British diplomat said:

> "we recognise that it is going to be very difficult to convince the Gibraltarians that the option we offer them will be the best."

Despite Spain's welcome move from dictatorship to democracy, I do not believe that much has changed in the intervening 35 years. What certainly has not changed is Spain's continuing bullying and intimidation, and now it seems that that behaviour is to be rewarded. I have always found it somewhat ironic that the Minister, who originally made his name as an outspoken and, it must be said, highly effective critic of the bullying domination by a minority over a majority has now come full circle and is seemingly happy to live with the results of a majority successfully bullying a minority. That is certainly a voyage of self-discovery. I was amazed to hear him admit that part of the reason for the negotiations was because we had not been able to persuade Spain to soften its approach to Gibraltar. That is warped logic.

I went to Gibraltar just before Christmas, after my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram). I declare to the hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) that it was at my own expense. I talked to journalists, to people who work on the Rock and to those like the police who serve on it. All were of the same opinion: that the Government have already stitched them up. Symbols of their historic links, such as the figure at the entrance to Gibraltar holding the keys and the Union flag flying from the top of the Rock, had already disappeared. Token symbolism, perhaps, to

[Mr. Swire]

critics, but to the people their removal represented part of the softening-up process—the sense of inevitability that the Government are trying to create, as they are in the domestic population over the question of entry into the euro. Indeed, if this debate is about anything, it is about Europe. Spain continues to block some EU legislation because of its impact on Gibraltar—an irritation to the powers that be in Brussels.

The plans that followed the November meeting between Josep Piqué and the Foreign Secretary will give Gibraltar 100,000 extra phone lines and allow access to health services in Spain. However, that is cosmetic because Gibraltarians are entitled to those anyway. Once again, Spain is contravening EU legislation.

There appears to be embarrassment about how Britain first acquired Gibraltar through the treaty of Utrecht, but little parallel discussion about how Spain acquired its two enclaves in north Africa, Ceuta and Melilla, both of which are claimed by Morocco. I suspect that that is because the Spanish Government do not share this Government's embarrassment about their colonial past.

I agree with the Government that we need to look forward, but we should not ignore the past or the contributions by Gibraltar to Britain's international interest, which have been referred to this afternoon and in so many past debates. Gibraltar is home to many nationalities. Its 30,000 inhabitants descend from the Maltese, Genoese, Moroccans, Indians and British, among others. In two years time, we should be celebrating that such a diverse place has enjoyed a special relationship with the United Kingdom for 300 years. In the intervening period, Gibraltar and those living there must have the right to self-determination, which includes the right to maintain the status quo, if that is what they want.

I am pleased that there have been reports that the Chief Minister is moving towards joining talks if his two preconditions are met, and I hope that they will be. I wholeheartedly agree with him that once the Gibraltarian people have made up their minds in the promised referendum, that should be an end to it. I seek reassurance from the Minister that that will be the case.

The Spanish daily, *El Pais*, has recently reported that there is to be an unlimited period of co-sovereignty. That flies in the face of what the Government have said, and of what the Foreign Secretary has been publicly telling the House as recently as 14 January. He said, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) mentioned, that no agreement had been reached with the Spanish Government and that that Government have made no such claims. The dispute is not, as a recent article in *The Observer* argued, as anachronistic as the Schleswig-Holstein question; it is a straightforward one about a people's right to self-determination.

I hope that the new constitution, which the Gibraltar Government are shortly to discuss, can be a new basis on which Gibraltar may be administered in future. It should be an open-handed deal with no backroom stitch ups, and could result in the status quo. If the result is the status quo, that should be the end of the matter, and no agreed principles, framework or joint declaration hammered out by the British and Spanish Governments without Gibraltar's agreement should remain on the table as the joint Anglo-Spanish position.

5.22 pm

Geraldine Smith (Morecambe and Lunesdale): In making my brief contribution, I will confine my comments to three key questions that hon. Members need to address.

First, we must consider whether the Government should enter into negotiations with Spain over the sovereignty of Gibraltar at this time. We all know the history and that since the treaty of Utrecht in 1713 Gibraltar has been under British control. It has been under British control for longer than it was under Spanish control. It has already been said that throughout the years, the rock of Gibraltar has been of great strategic importance, and its people have been tremendous allies during two world wars. It has also been said that, at this time, there is no desire from the Gibraltarians for any change to the status quo of sovereignty. In fact, the reverse is true. The fact that sovereignty is again being discussed, coupled with the fear that they could be sold out, has caused great anger to many citizens of Gibraltar.

In recent years, Spain's attitude to Gibraltar has been appalling. Hon. Members will be aware of the anguish and hardship inflicted on Gibraltarians by Franco's action in closing the frontier with Spain. Even after the restoration of democracy in Spain and the re-opening of the frontier in the mid-1970s, there has been a catalogue of social, economic and administrative harassment of Gibraltar by the Spanish authorities. Excessive delays at the frontier crossing, absurd restrictions on issuing telephone numbers and a refusal to recognise Gibraltarians' passports and identity cards are a few examples of the deplorable tactics deployed by Spain in its efforts to disrupt the economic and social well-being of Gibraltar's people.

Despite those obstacles and the fact that it had to regenerate economically following the decline of the naval dockyards, Gibraltar has flourished and its people live in a free, democratic society. The issue of sovereignty built into the Utrecht treaty, the lack of desire for change demonstrated by the people of Gibraltar, a successful economy and the belligerence of the Spanish, all lead one to the view that no change to sovereignty should be agreed, unless there are compelling reasons to do so. I am far from convinced that such reasons exist. Having said that, it is vital that the Government maintain an on-going dialogue with their Spanish counterparts, and attempt to resolve the long-standing issue. Discussions about sovereignty will be an integral part of the process, but I do not accept that such discussions must inevitably lead to a change in sovereignty.

Nevertheless, the Government must make a genuine attempt to heal the running sore that is harming our good relationship with Spain. To allow it to fester is not in the interests of any of the parties involved. It is not in the interests of the European Union or NATO either. Those important institutions have already been adversely affected by the discord between member states, and any escalation of the dispute could seriously undermine their effectiveness. A lack of agreement, co-operation and trust is hampering the economic development of Gibraltar and southern Spain. The entrenched lack of trust, and the disinclination of the Spanish and Gibraltar authorities to co-operate lead me to my second point.

If discussions with Spain on the future of Gibraltar are to bear fruit and a lasting settlement is to be achieved, it is vital that Gibraltar is directly represented by its Chief Minister. It is amazing that talks can take place about Gibraltar while the Chief Minister is absent. I realise that he has been invited, but it seems unlikely that he can accept at the moment. If the Chief Minister participated in the talks and had to withdraw, negotiations on sovereignty would have to cease until the issues that prompted his withdrawal were resolved. The watchword of this House on behalf of the people of Gibraltar must be: no negotiation without representation.

We must avoid at all costs a bilateral agreement between the Spanish and British Governments that could be implemented only if it won the support of the people of Gibraltar in a referendum. The people of Gibraltar would overwhelmingly reject any proposal that was drawn up without the participation of the Gibraltar Government. They would then be in an isolated position, at odds with the British and Spanish Governments. If that were to happen, it would be a breach of the obligation that this country has to protect the best interests of the people of Gibraltar.

My final and most important point is about a promise made to the people of Gibraltar that any agreement with Spain that affects their sovereignty will be put to them in a referendum. That promise will be fulfilled only if a rejection vote in the referendum means that the agreement that led to the referendum being held ceases to exist. That is different from the agreement—or joint declaration, as the Minister called it—not being implemented, but remaining intact. I ask the Minister again to provide an assurance on this fundamental issue. If we are saying that the people of Gibraltar will have an open and honest referendum, we cannot then say that if we do not like the result, we will ignore it.

Mr. Hoyle: My hon. Friend believes that we should respect the right of the people of Gibraltar as expressed in a vote and I agree, but does she agree with me that we should go further than respecting their right to self-determination and allow them to choose between integration and independence?

Geraldine Smith: I agree.

Many dubious comparisons have been made with Northern Ireland. As has already been said, a sizeable minority in Northern Ireland would like to be part of the south of Ireland. Can we imagine the uproar if an agreement were made between the Irish Republic and Britain on the issue of joint sovereignty over Northern Ireland? What if that were put to a referendum in Northern Ireland and rejected by the people, but the Government said that, although they would not implement it, they would leave the joint declaration on the table? The fundamental point is that the Government must respect the wishes of the people of Gibraltar and must accept whatever decision is taken in the referendum. Otherwise, it makes nonsense of democracy.

5.31 pm

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): I am conscious of the clock and shall attempt to abide by your strictures, Mr. Deputy Speaker. For the record, let me tell the hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) that I have never visited Gibraltar, but I have been on holiday to Spain.

The Minister introduced Northern Ireland into the debate. He deliberately drew an analogy, which we must nail stone dead this afternoon. Yet another important difference between Northern Ireland and Gibraltar is that a groundswell of support arose within both traditions for talks to take place in Northern Ireland. Both sides wanted talks with the hope of reaching a compromise agreement.

Mr. Bryant: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Francois: No. As one sows, so shall one reap. No such groundswell of support for negotiations exists in Gibraltar. Absolutely none. If there were, the Minister would be writing articles in *The Spectator* about how much support was in evidence in Gibraltar.

Mr. Hendrick: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Francois: No, because of the time. The position is not at all analogous and it is disingenuous of the Minister to bring Northern Ireland into the debate.

Mr. Rosindell: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Francois: Very briefly. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Rosindell: I have only a brief comment to make. Is my hon. Friend aware that as our debate continues, "Panorama" in Gibraltar is reporting that hundreds of people are on the streets at this very moment, disgusted at their betrayal by the Labour Government?

Mr. Francois: I thank my hon. Friend for that important information.

What is the Minister attempting to achieve? He is trying to negotiate a joint declaration between the British and Spanish Governments and to place that declaration on the record and before the public in order to give the Spanish a diplomatic foothold on the Rock. In reply to my earlier intervention, the Minister said that any change in the status of Gibraltar might require the agreement of other members of the European Union, perhaps at an intergovernmental conference. That takes us to the heart of the matter.

Why are the Government doing this? Not because the people of Gibraltar want it, but because the Government have a higher ambition in the European Union and they want Spanish votes. I believe that a deal has already been reached between the British and Spanish Governments—in principle at least—and the payoff is expected to come at some future EU conference, or perhaps even an intergovernmental conference. The people of Gibraltar are being sold out by a Labour Government in return for Spanish votes at a future European summit. That is at the heart of this debate and I wish that the Minister would admit it.

5.34 pm

Peter Hain: I will not admit it because it is simply not true. It is another of the myths that is being propagated and the scaremongering that I deprecate. It is making the people of Gibraltar suspect all sorts of plots when what we are doing, and this follows a consistent theme throughout my political life, is seeking to protect the democratic and human rights of people on the Rock, as we do for people in the rest of Britain.

The Sunday Telegraph has been quoted in the debate, as has *El Pais*. I have not seen either of the articles. I invite hon. Members to read carefully what has been said consistently in the House and what I have said this afternoon. They should be reading *Hansard* rather than reports in newspapers by unnamed officials speculating about this and that. I am really worried that hon. Members are talking past each other. I said something rather important this afternoon. If there has not been clarification before, there could be a second stage to the negotiations after the discussions with Spain under the Brussels process have concluded.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) referred to a note of an exchange between the Foreign Secretaries of Britain and Spain. I was mystified by that. I can only assume that he is referring to a joint press communiqué that my Parliamentary Private Secretary has passed to me, issued by the Spanish Foreign Minister and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. That communiqué, in answer to a question from you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, was placed in the Library. My hon. Friend should not create mischief by suggesting that something underhand has been done when we have placed the communiqué in the Library. Such irresponsible scaremongering does not add to the quality of the debate.

The hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) asked me a series of questions. No, the Matutes proposals do not lie on the table. We specifically set them aside at the beginning of the Brussels process. They suggested a 50 year reopening clause on any agreement, which is a slippery slope to the Spanish historic claim to full sovereignty over Gibraltar. We will not accept anything like that. He asked me, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley, whether I was in favour of integration. No, I am not. I doubt, although it is a matter for them, whether the people of Gibraltar would be in favour of integration. Integration would mean a similar situation to that enjoyed by 30,000 citizens of the United Kingdom in Scotland, Wales, England and Northern Ireland. If he wants the status of a small town, and the parish council powers that come with that, fine, but I do not think that that is what he really means.

Mr. Francois: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Standing Committee on which I sit is about to divide. I shall dash off to vote and then return. I mean no disrespect to the Minister by leaving.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am not sure that that was a point of order.

Peter Hain: I accept the hon. Gentleman's apology.

The hon. Member for West Suffolk asked me whether the joint declaration would remain on the table even if it was rejected in a referendum. It could not be implemented and so to that extent it would not remain on the table. However, we will have produced joint proposals to put to the people of Gibraltar and their Government. Whether they go to a referendum depends on whether the Gibraltar Government want to negotiate on those proposals. We cannot air-brush them away. We will have published them and they will be there.

Mr. Spring: Will the Minister give way?

Peter Hain: I have to reply to a number of other points and if it is possible I will take the intervention later.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether the Chief Minister would be given a distinct voice in a single corporate delegation—

Mr. Spring: Composite.

Peter Hain: —composite delegation. The answer is yes, he would. I wrote to the Chief Minister today to explain that, and it was part of our constructive discussions last Friday. We invited the Chief Minister to all Brussels process meetings and would welcome his participation and input. We feel that he could take part under the two flags, three voices formula. He would be a full member of the composite British delegation, which would comprise distinct British and Government of Gibraltar parts led by the Foreign Secretary. The Chief Minister would have a full and separate voice on the British side of the table, with no restriction on the issues on which he could speak. The Spanish would address the Chief Minister and respond to him directly. Having outlined that formula to the Chief Minister as the basis for the Government of Gibraltar's participation several times, most recently when we met him on 25 January, I hope that he will think again. The offer has been there right from the beginning, and I do not think that empty-chairing the negotiations properly protects the interests of Gibraltar.

Andrew Mackinlay: Can the Minister—

Peter Hain: I will not give way. I must reply to the debate, and then I will come back to my hon. Friend.

My hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth) raised several points and said that Gibraltar had been a British strategic interest for many years. That is true; it remains one, and we have no intention of relinquishing it under any proposal that may emerge from the Brussels process.

The hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) said that the current situation was untenable. I agree with him entirely, which is why we have embarked on the discussions, and I welcome his argument that the Chief Minister should join the discussions. However, he said that he would reject a rigged referendum under duress, which was an allegation made by the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) as well. I would reject such a referendum, as would Her Majesty's Government. Why are critics of the Government's policy suddenly afraid of a referendum? We have always promised one, and will continue to do so if that is what the Government of Gibraltar want. The people will be able to vote freely and secretly, and the British Government will, of course, abide by the decision.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay), who has taken a close and principled interest in the matter over a long time, said that he thought that the process would all end in tears with Spain. I just say to him, "Watch this space". The discussions are taking place in good faith between London and Madrid—we wish that the Government of Gibraltar were there too—and there is a realistic attitude. I predict that it will not end in tears but that things will move forward. We do not want, in his words, to dragoon the people of Gibraltar into anything, and they will have a free and fair vote.

My hon. Friend asked why we were talking about self-government, because Gibraltarians have got self-government. However, the Government of Gibraltar do not think that they have sufficient self-government, and the Chief Minister has repeatedly said to me that he wants more. That is why a Select Committee of the Gibraltar legislature is due to report shortly on its own ideas for constitutional reform, and I look forward to the report. I understand from the Chief Minister and others that it has been discussing more self-government, and any agreement from the current process could, and probably will, bring greater self-government for Gibraltar. That is a big prize.

The hon. Member for Epping Forest said that the people of Gibraltar are British. Yes, they are and will remain so as far as this Government are concerned, and she will be pleased if we reach an agreement with Spain on a joint declaration to reinforce that point.

Mr. Spring: Will the Minister give way?

Peter Hain: I will in a moment.

The hon. Lady said that the previous Conservative Government had never discussed the issue of sovereignty. I invite her to talk to Lord Garel-Jones, the Minister involved at the time, who will confirm that similar discussions took place. We are not giving in to bullying but trying to produce a situation in which Gibraltar does not have to suffer any bullying from Spain or anyone else.

In conclusion, we are discussing in good faith a better future for the people of Gibraltar, and we will try to achieve it.

It being fifteen minutes to Six o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 5 February 2002

[Sir Michael Lord *in the Chair*]

Manufacturing Industry

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Wilson.]*

9.30 am

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Three weeks ago, 235 people in my constituency were made redundant, although on 18 December last year they had been informed that the company's orders had increased and that it looked good for going into profit this year. The blow was savage and brutal, and people who worked on the night shift were told when they came off it that they would not be paid. One such worker expressed his views to me in a letter:

> "The hammer blow was I would not be receiving the money owed to me by the company...That includes 3 months contractual notice, 3 months pay during the consultation period, salary for work done in January 2002, holiday pay, the return of money lost to 'short-time' working in 2001/02 (which was to be returned by the employee according to the agreements signed) and redundancy pay."

According to his calculations he was eligible for £12,000, which would have been a useful cushion against the loss of his job, but he will receive 10 per cent. of that. He is highly skilled and was devoted to a company at the pinnacle of high technology that ran one of the largest semi-conductor plants in Europe—a plant of the future. However, 235 jobs have gone this month, 179 went last year and the firm has gone into receivership.

On 4 December last year, Alcan announced the loss of 310 manufacturing jobs in its aluminium works, and by the end of the month a further 220 jobs had gone. We also debated the issues raised when 1,300 jobs went at Corus in February last year. That makes a total of 2,284 manufacturing job losses in one town. In the microcosm that is my constituency and that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Alan Howarth), there have been huge losses of manufacturing jobs, and that pattern has been repeated throughout the country.

Every statistic points to an accelerating slump in UK manufacturing. The job share of manufacturing has fallen from 18 per cent. in 1990 to 14 per cent. in 2001. Output has fallen from 23 per cent. to 19 per cent., and that has accelerated in the past year, which contained the worst year-on-year fall since the end of 1991. Job losses in manufacturing industry totalled 112,000 in 2001, and that process is occurring at the same time as another damaging trend.

In Scotland, Wales and the north of England we have relied on inward investment from other countries to replace those jobs. Many jobs in those areas consist of people working for firms that came into the country from elsewhere, but that flow has dried up. Those three areas are vulnerable to the downturn because they have all devoted a great deal of effort to luring firms that are involved in information technology and communications, which are now in recession across the world.

Why is that recession happening? It is complex and I would not suggest that there is a simple solution. One matter that comes up again and again, and which has great force, is our position outside the eurozone. We know that opinion in Denmark and Sweden has changed, and that they are likely to join. We see a future in which we could have the great dollarzone on one side, the eurozone on the other and the United Kingdom, with its small currency, isolated in the middle. Noticeably these days, very few Conservative MPs wear their £ badges. There is a good market for them—10 £ badges for a euro. That is a sign of the loss of conviction by those who oppose the eurozone.

Corus in Newport, and Alcan, have stressed time and again that, above all others, the problem that caused jobs to be lost in the UK was our position outside the eurozone and the lack of hope of entering it in the foreseeable future.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): If the hon. Gentleman sees going into the euro as the solution for Corus, Alcan and other hard-pressed manufacturing industries, can he tell the Chamber at what rate it would benefit those industries for Britain to lock into the euro?

Paul Flynn: I will come to that, but a further point must be made about the rate and another solution.

The problem for Llanwern was that the strength of the pound and the weakness of the euro meant a £15 premium on every tonne of steel. That was enough to ensure that jobs were lost in Newport, not Holland, which had a far poorer productivity record. There is the danger of seeing again what happened to the party represented by the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) when, in an unfortunate period in the 1980s, a huge chunk of our industry was lost because of a persistently overvalued exchange rate. We are now in a position in which that is continuously happening. We must find some way, even if it is not through the euro, to get an exchange rate that is acceptable and realistic. There may be different ways in which we can adjust our exchange rate accordingly, but it essential to move forward.

Jobs are being affected here. When companies have a choice and decisions are made internationally, they may find it irresistible, as we have seen in many cases, to lose jobs in Britain. We must consider measures to engineer a revaluation before more of our manufacturers migrate to eastern Europe, Ireland, Spain or Asia.

It came up last week, and last year, that it is easier to sack people here than in euroland. The information consultation on economic matters in the United Kingdom and Ireland is voluntary, whereas detailed requirements exist in almost all other European countries. The deal done between Alchemy and BMW last year would have been impossible elsewhere. Compared with our continental counterparts, employers in Britain are relatively free to decide and announce massive changes with no obligation to consult

[Paul Flynn]

their employees—the key stakeholders. The Select Committee on Trade and Industry looked at that and concluded that:

> "the suggestion that it is easier and cheaper to dispose of employees in the UK than elsewhere seems to us to have been shown to be factually correct.
>
> The national and local trade unions representatives we met felt that the decision to close Dagenham, rather than Cologne, owed more to the absence of constraints on shedding labour than to nice calculations of returns on capital or the inherent characteristics of the two sites."

We know that BMW would not have been able to dispose of a German subsidiary in the way in which it did Rover. That is a key objection that causes great anger and a sense of injustice among the work force. I look forward to the Minister's response to that.

The picture is bleak and sad. I have read the splendidly upbeat and positive speech by the Secretary of State in which she rightly praised all the aspects of British manufacturing industry that are attractive and forward looking, but while it is right to accentuate those positive aspects, it is extremely dangerous to ignore the negative. The Secretary of State pointed out that many other countries have suffered losses in manufacturing industry, especially since 11 September. That is true, but if we look at the picture in similar European countries during the past 10 years, our situation is worse than it is in theirs . The United States Bureau of Labour Statistics carried out an examination and published a comparison of European manufacturing companies' output. With the possible exception of Germany, all the other countries examined had a lower loss of manufacturing jobs and capacity than we did. They included Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.

There is the good news that the Secretary of State emphasised, and there is encouraging news even in the picture that I painted of Newport in that many of the people made redundant have found other jobs. However, I believe that the bad news of the slump in manufacturing industry is being masked by growth in other parts of the economy. It is a great credit to the Government that we have a strong economy, but the problem is that many jobs replacing those in manufacturing are in the candy floss economy—in call centres and dot.com companies that are here today, but gone tomorrow. We have seen them disappear rapidly. They are not as secure and permanent as manufacturing jobs.

A dangerous loss of critical mass is also taking place. Four years ago, Britain made more television sets than any other European country. Today, production of all small and medium-sized models has switched to lower-cost factories in eastern Europe. We still have a small, low-volume market of high-value televisions, but it is questionable whether that can continue. Electrical goods suffered the worst decline in output of all manufacturing sectors between 2000 and 2001. There is a danger that the telecommunications sector will shrink beyond the point of no return. We are all familiar with that phenomenon. Without the critical mass of suppliers and people contracting in, suddenly the service will implode and not have the necessary strength to continue.

The general manager of Sony UK has said:

> "What keeps us here is the quality of staff and research and development. These depend on the strength of the wider UK industry."

There will be trouble there if the wider UK industry is in trouble. Sir Ian Gibson, chair of the Department of Trade and Industry's automotive innovation and growth team, commented that, because of the loss of critical mass, the car industry may have gone beyond the point of no return already. He said:

> "It's like a man walking by the edge of a cliff in a fog. We don't know how close we are."

Why is manufacturing important? Why should we worry about it at all? Is concern about its replacement by other industries a sentimental attachment to the past? Manufacturing has special value because of its permanent nature. It is a matter of sorrow to see a blast furnace lying on its back. It cannot rapidly be re-erected without massive new investment. It has gone and the jobs have gone, not for the present generation but for the children and grandchildren of those who work there. If a high-tech factory is closed down, within six months or so the equipment is obsolete. If an aluminium factory is closed down and carted off to somewhere else in Europe, it cannot be replaced. Such jobs have a permanence that others lack, and their loss is often carried out in a way that shows indifference to the damage that is caused.

Manufacturing workers have a special pride that comes from creating something tangible instead of moving papers around or talking to people on the telephone all day. That is good for their psyche and morale. There is an especially fulfilling reward to be gained by those who can create an object of value, usefulness or beauty. We lose that at our peril.

Mr. Hammond: The hon. Gentleman is making an eloquent plea in support of our heavy manufacturing industries, especially those in his constituency. What has been the impact of the climate change levy, which was introduced last year at a critical time for those industries?

Paul Flynn: For the steel industry, the original plan was that the industry would pay £120 million. That was negotiated down to £8 million—a huge reduction—on the evidence that Corus gave to the Trade and Industry Committee. The climate change levy is unfair in that it hits the manufacturing sector in Britain, but the retail sector in other parts of the continent. It does act as a burden on the industry, but Conservative Members tend to forget that there was a quid pro quo in that £1 billion was taken from the national insurance scheme as compensation—although that is unfair to the extent that it goes mostly to labour-intensive industries such as call centres and Marks and Spencer. It is not an enormous factor, but it rankles with manufacturing industry. However, we are all environmentalists now, and there is not much point in putting a burden on call centres and Marks and Spencer given that some of the most prodigious users of electricity are large manufacturing industries.

This country has marvellous examples of success in high-tech industries. It is good to know that the Government are to invest more in nanotechnology, the technology of the future that will amaze our children and grandchildren. It is an area in which we, along with two other countries, have enjoyed a world lead, and in which the Government have accelerated investment.

Over the years, our extraordinary record in science has been reflected in Nobel prizes, of which we have won 70 in chemistry, physics and other technologically significant fields. Japan has won seven; many far eastern countries have won none. However, as was mentioned by the Secretary of State last week, the innovative genius of the British people has never been translated into large-scale manufacturing jobs and prosperity.

I shall conclude, because many hon. Members want to speak. Manufacturing is undergoing an almost invisible slump that does not sufficiently engage the attention of the nation or the press. Some suggest optimistically that it may be a U-turn and that we will bump along the bottom and come out of it. Others say that it is a V-turn, and that we will come out of it more suddenly. I fear that it is an L-turn and that, having reached the bottom, we will continue until we fall off the end. That will be the consequence of accelerating decline and lack of critical mass. We could well be at the edge of the abyss, and the fog is gathering daily.

9.49 am

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): I congratulate the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) on securing the debate at such a critical time for manufacturing industry. This is the second Westminster Hall debate on manufacturing in which I have participated, which reflects a wide concern with the continuing problems of industry.

Unfortunately, in recent months and years a host of manufacturing companies have gone to the wall in Wales, including Corus, Panasonic, Sony and Valeo. I have a list that goes half way down a page, but time does not allow me to name them all. The Welsh economy has suffered such ill luck recently that it reads almost like a roll call of first world war battles. Incredible damage has been inflicted, especially in manufacturing. In a sense, the problems in Wales go much deeper and much further back than the recent manufacturing recession. As an economist, I find nothing surprising about the asymmetric shock that the Welsh economy has suffered over the past eight years. Over the past five years the decline has quickened as part of the wider recession.

It is welcome that there is at last some resonance from the Government in terms of their recognition that manufacturing has problems. I read the Secretary of State's speech at Merrill Lynch. It was a good speech, in which she railed against the myths about manufacturing. That begs the question of who is propagating those myths. Commentators such as Will Hutton have been called paranoid for talking about the vested institutional interests of the City of London and the Treasury view, which has been the spectre haunting British economic policy for more than 100 years.

The manufacturing summit gave a higher profile to the problems of manufacturing, but the Government need to go much further. We have a Minister for Industry and Energy and a Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness, and it is high time that we had a designated Minister for manufacturing to get to grips with the long-term decline of manufacturing industry.

The hon. Member for Newport, West mentioned the problems in the early 1990s; there was also a massive haemorrhaging of jobs in the early 1980s. There is a 10-year cycle of huge, concentrated decline in manufacturing jobs. Like the manufacturing recession of 1979 to 1982, it was particularly severe in Wales and the regions of northern England, Scotland and Northern Ireland that are disproportionately dependent on manufacturing jobs.

The problems of manufacturing industry have a regional and spatial dimension. The Government need to grasp the tools of regional policy that are available. The main tool, regional selective assistance, goes back to the 1970s and an earlier age of regional policy. It is only discretionary assistance, which distinguishes it from the tools that were available throughout large periods of the 1960s and 1970s, especially the regional development grant, which was an automatic capital grant available to all firms in the designated regions. The regional employment premium invented by Nicky Kaldor was possibly one of the most successful examples of intervention in economic policy in the post-war period.

The Government are committed to the concept of evidence-based policy making—what works is what counts. I advise the Minister to look again at the evidence for the success of the more directive regional policy tools that were available in the 1960s and 1970s. Some of the firms that have not closed and remain in business were diverted to Wales in the 1960s, and some even go back to the 1940s. Those old-style regional policies were fairly successful. The emphasis in the Labour party's new regional policy is on bottom-up assistance and helping regions to help themselves. There is something to be said for that. We need a more judicious balance between bottom-up and top-down policies, especially with regard to the problems in the manufacturing industry.

We spend less on direct regional aid to firms in the United Kingdom than does almost any other European Union country. Spain is the only major exception, although many Spanish industrial regions spend more than we do. We spend less than one third of the EU average per capita on direct aid to firms. In the 1970s, we spent £2 billion a year at current prices on such aid. That figure is down to £400 million a year, which is a significant decline in regional aid. To be fair to the Government, most of that decline occurred under the previous Administration. The Government have kept the spending pretty much at the level that they inherited.

Now is the time to grasp the potential of reinvigorated regional selective assistance. We need to give the aid to more firms and to get nearer to the ceiling imposed by the EU. We should also make it more automatic, as there is a problem of uncertainty. Many consultants make a lot of money from helping firms with their RSA applications. The system should not work like that. There should be automatic trigger mechanisms. The Government should reconsider the issue of enterprise zones, especially in disadvantaged regions such as the heads of the valleys in Wales. They have taken a zonal approach in many of their policies, and should reconsider wide-ranging packages of tax incentives for local areas.

On the macro-economic aspect of the problems in manufacturing, the inept policies of the previous Administration in the early 1980s and 1990s led to the

[Adam Price]

major recessions that caused massive damage to manufacturing in Wales and many other parts of the UK. The Government are concerned not to make those mistakes again. I understand their emphasis on low inflation and low interest rates, but I do not understand the lack of concern for a lower and more competitive exchange rate. Several economists, such as Peter Spencer of the Item Club and William Keegan in *The Observer*, made yet another plea for action on the exchange rate. Labour Governments came unstuck on that issue in 1945, 1964 and other years. Action on the exchange rate is critical for the manufacturing industry.

The exchange rate has boosted imports and held down exports, especially in many sectors that are important for the economy of south-east Wales where there has been a large concentration of job losses, and in sectors such as steel, cars and textiles in other parts of the UK. It has hurt other sectors such as farming, coal mining and other primary producers that had to match the low prices of imports, and has increased joblessness in areas with an employment rate that was already below the average. There has been a convergence in unemployment rates, but a divergence in employment rates. The employment rate among people of working age in Berkshire is about 85 per cent. In large parts of south Wales the rate is below 60 per cent. The Government's unwillingness actively to intervene to make the exchange rate more competitive is a major part of the problem.

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): Will the hon. Gentleman specify what action he would like the Government to take with regard to the exchange rate?

Adam Price: The technical jargon is "sterilised intervention". It is a widely used tool in which pounds are sold and euros are bought through Government bonds, and is a neutral way of intervening in revenue, as distinguished economists such as Charles Goodhart, who invented Goodhart's law, have said. The head of the UK's leading investment fund, Gerry Holtham, who was formerly director of the Institute for Public Policy Research, has also widely made the same plea. It is a respected position among economists. We need a Government response on the issue.

The Government have been lucky on the macro-economic front, because of the state of the world economy. The international economic outlook has changed. The Government's mantra is that the best thing that they can do for manufacturing is to ensure macro-economic stability. However, if that stability disintegrates—there are many signs that that is happening—supply-side policies, which have been at the core of the Government's approach, will seem, however well intentioned, pretty irrelevant. As the hon. Member for Newport, West said, the problem with the damage to manufacturing capacity is that it is likely to persist. It is difficult to rebuild the capacity and the competence that have, in many cases, been built up over generations. Once they are lost, they are gone for ever. No Treasury Minister is present, but I stress to the Government that we need action on the exchange rate. It is the single most important thing that the Government can do to help ailing manufacturing regions.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Bill O'Brien (in the Chair): Order. If all the hon. Members who wish to speak are to do so, I must ask for brevity.

10.1 am

Alan Howarth (Newport, East): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) on obtaining the debate and on speaking with characteristic deep feeling and knowledge about manufacturing, in particular the problems faced by manufacturing industry in Newport. We are proud in Newport of our manufacturing tradition but, as my hon. Friend described, it has suffered a series of recent blows. The question is how we can rebuild our manufacturing capacity in Newport, as elsewhere, in modern form.

Steel, which dominates the economy of my constituency and of the south-east Wales economic region, is these days a high-tech business involving the highest level of industrial skills. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry interestingly noted the other day, 70 per cent. of the steels used in cars today did not exist 10 years ago. The industry is at the forefront of new technology.

The main problems facing British manufacturing are global recession and, in many sectors, including steel, global overcapacity. That is why manufacturing output in Britain fell by 5.5 per cent. last year; it also fell by large amounts in many competitor industrial countries.

What should the Government do? What is their role in addressing the problem? I read with interest and admiration the speech made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 23 January. I believe that her analysis is correct.

The Secretary of State stressed that the Government's primary role is to ensure financial stability—a stable economic context within which manufacturers can take necessary decisions. The Government have done that admirably, against a background of increasingly difficult world economic conditions. We have the lowest long-term interest rates since the 1960s, an achievement based on sound management of the economy. Low inflation has meant that the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England has been able to cut interest rates aggressively over the past year to mitigate the effects of impending recession. We have also enjoyed the benefits of the counter-cyclical expenditure increases that my right hon. Friends the Chancellor and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury have planned and announced and which not only give the promise of greatly improved public services but help us to weather the economic storm by enabling us to maintain levels of demand that would otherwise be lacking. It is crucial that we as a country do not throw away those two advantages—the freedom to operate both our interest rate policy and our fiscal policy on the basis of our judgment of economic conditions and what is best for Britain.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West mentioned the enthusiasm of manufacturers Corus and Alcan—important to his constituency—for Britain entering the euro. Global capitalism always wants to be footloose and to ensure that no inconvenient barriers to manufacturing operate anywhere—but we should consider what is best for the UK. Knowingly to embark on devaluation, for which my hon. Friend called and which the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) also found seductive, is a perilous course. The Secretary of State was right to say that one cannot devalue one's way to manufacturing success. It would be delicate, if not impossible, for the Treasury and the Bank to engage in "sterilised intervention" on any considerable scale. It might be possible to anticipate and go with the flow of major market movements, but it is impossible for us to turn the market around—and we could waste vast resources trying to achieve it, as discouraging precedents for that sort of effort suggest.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): The EU has one sector of massive intervention—agriculture. If we are looking for an example of getting things wrong, that is surely it.

Alan Howarth: I agree with my hon. Friend.

My right hon. and hon. Friends should be aware that devaluation has often ended in tears electorally. General elections following devaluations in 1951, 1970 and 1997 were lost by the Government of the day. I certainly hope that my right hon. Friends will reflect on that.

Paul Flynn: Has my hon. Friend forgotten that defending the pound was not an electoral success a short while ago?

Alan Howarth: I would love to debate history with my hon. Friend, but let me develop my theme first.

Devaluation is one matter, but entering a fixed exchange rate such as the economic and monetary union of the European Union is quite another. Let us recollect that sterling's membership of fixed exchange rate systems has not been a happy experience historically, whether under the gold standard, the Bretton Woods system—under which we did quite well for a period, but it ended in tears—or indeed the exchange rate mechanism catastrophe of more recent memory.

Adam Price: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Alan Howarth: If I may be allowed to continue, because I am mindful of Mr. O'Brien's admonitions.

Joining the euro will certainly not be a panacea. A "one size fits all" interest rate is difficult enough within the UK. The Monetary Policy Committee conducts its affairs admirably, but cannot establish a single interest rate that is appropriate for manufacturing in south-east Wales while at the same time restraining the excesses of the property boom and consumer spending in south-east England. We see the effects of that policy in the generation of inflationary conditions in Ireland and recessionary conditions in Germany. If we were to devalue in order to enter the euro, we would risk increasing inflation at the same time as we abandon our capacity—through a unilateral interest rate policy—to remedy it.

Under the Maastricht treaty, a limit of 3 per cent. of gross domestic product is set on public borrowing. That is dangerously compounded by the grotesque growth and stability pact, which fines countries that engage in counter-cyclical fiscal policy. Only last week, for the second year running, the Commission warned the British Government that, were we within the euro system, we would be obliged under the terms of the treaty and the pact to cut our public spending.The powers that be within the European Union fail to make the distinction between capital spending and current spending, which our Chancellor wisely and appropriately does make.

There will be enormous pressure to increase tax revenues going to the structural funds, which will be distributed extensively across an enlarged European Union in a fairly short time. It is clear that they will not be distributed to Newport. Under the present arrangements, Newport is not an objective 1 area. In my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West's constituency and mine there are wards with great poverty and deprivation, but under the present dispensation we do not receive assistance to help attack those problems, and that will be far less likely within an enlarged Community.

The United Kingdom, while outside the single currency system, was last year the number one destination for inward investment in Europe. My advice to hon. Members is that we should retain these advantages, at least for the foreseeable future. We stand a better chance of sustaining financial stability outside the system.

The Government have an obligation to ensure a first-rate infrastructure in the United Kingdom so that our industrialists have the best opportunities in a competitive world. In Wales, that means we urgently need a positive decision on building the M4 relief road. That will be good for not only my part of Wales, south-east Wales, but for south Wales and south-west Wales.

I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for taking advantage of what is permitted under the protocol between the Government and the Assembly in relation to issues of national strategic importance. I know that she has drawn this factor to the attention of Sue Essex, the Minister responsible in the Assembly. It matters a great deal that we have first-class infrastructure in Wales. Wales is poor in relation to the rest of the United Kingdom. Its infrastructure is in many ways inferior. There is a vicious circle; unless we get the investment we need we stand less chance of catching up with the performance of the rest of the United Kingdom, which otherwise we should be well placed to do.

I was disappointed that the Strategic Rail Authority produced no plans to do other than patch and mend the mainline railway system into Wales. We are talking of a system designed by I. K. Brunel, the great engineer. The Government have put the Great Western railway on the tentative list for future world heritage sites. That is fine, but it is not an industrial policy. We need not just patching and mending, but serious modernisation. Corus draws attention to problems of track access charges, which perhaps the Minister will be kind enough to look at. It mentions that port and shipping costs are high and discusses a curiosity relating to infrastructure: that the costs of maintaining it fall upon industry rather than on general taxation. It has to contribute £4 million out of the total £30 million cost of maintaining the lighthouse service. I thought that that was odd: perhaps the Minister will look at it.

[Alan Howarth]

In broadband I am pleased to say that Newport is rather ahead of the game. I am glad that the Assembly recognises the importance of that factor.

The Government need to make sure that in a global knowledge economy our institutions of education, training and research are the best they can possibly be. I am pleased that there is a new emphasis on technical education in schools. That is yet another attempt to remedy the failure following the Butler Education Act 1944, which was intended to set up a tripartite system of grammar schools, secondary moderns and technical schools. The technical schools were never established. More than 50 years on, we need that strong technical stream of educational opportunity.

As a former Minister with responsibility for science, I can only congratulate the Government and say how pleased I am that they have enjoyed greater success than I did in securing greater investment in science and a greater emphasis on technology transfer. However, unless the Government attend to the need to improve PhD stipends and lecturers' salaries, we will be at risk of not having a first-rate academic system.

I am conscious of the time, so I shall be brief on the framework for competition that the Government should maintain. If President Bush decides, perhaps in March, to invoke section 201 to impose steel quotas, I hope that our Government will take extremely tough action. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will assure us that vigorous diplomacy is already taking place. If, unhappily, the US Administration impose quotas on steel imports, and steel is consequently dumped in Europe, I hope that the Government will act vigorously through the World Trade Organisation and will also seek to reform the glacial procedures in the European Union for taking anti-dumping measures.

It is for the Government to ensure that we have the right structures of governance and administration to give effective, practical support to manufacturing and other economic sectors. I am talking about structures in which decisions can be taken rapidly, based on effective consultation and expert advice, and executed to a brisk timetable that matches the needs of the economy and communities. We do not have that, as I shall illustrate with the experience of Newport in the year since the Corus redundancies were announced. Of course, the prospect of redundancies loomed for many months previously.

Since the announcement a year ago, Newport has lost another 1,400 jobs, and I believe that we have yet to see the worst effects on the supply chain of the ending of steel making in Llanwern. Admirable support has been given to the workers who lost their jobs there, but trying to develop a regional or sub-regional economic strategy and a regeneration strategy has been like wading through treacle. We have had endless debate, and a plethora of agencies, boards and taskforces have been set up, all of which do useful and dedicated work. There have been endless meetings, academic studies, consultancy reports and announcements, including a number that have promised money to be spent. However, there has been little so far that is precise and actionable.

I am grateful for the First Minister's announcement that Newport is to have an urban regeneration company, with £10 million from the Assembly and another £10 million over three years from the Welsh Development Agency, particularly because elements in the WDA fought a bitter rearguard action against that policy. The simple decision has been announced, but we know nothing of the detail, and it is expected that another consultancy will advise on the structure and scope of the URC.

What do we need? We need a board, which I should like to see chaired by the leader of the local authority, because civic leaders should lead the process whereby their communities develop their own regeneration policies. The major players should be represented on that board: the council, the WDA, Education and Learning Wales, the academic and business sectors, environmental and voluntary organisations, and creative outsiders. They would all contribute to a strategy for Newport and contribute funding to what we might genuinely term a single regeneration budget.

I am told that to hope for such an outcome is pie in the sky, but I do not see why. The Government say that they want joined-up government and to restore powers to local government. We must be confident and decisive in putting that in place. My request may be too Utopian, but at least in the context of devolution and regional government, with all the multiple layers of government and the cat's cradle of accountabilities, let us design arrangements to ensure that decisions needed by businesses and communities are taken and can be carried through.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Bill O'Brien (in the Chair): Order. I appealed for brevity. Three hon. Members have still to speak, and I want the winding-up speeches to start at 10.30 am. Therefore some Members who applied to speak may not be able to do so, which is sad.

10.19 am

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): I shall speak briefly, to raise a matter of great concern that was brought to my notice this morning. I apologise to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) for not being in the Chamber for the start of his remarks, but I was listening to a press conference about the matter that I want to raise.

In my maiden speech in 1997, I praised Dyson, the vacuum cleaner manufacturers in my constituency, as one of the fastest growing and best manufacturing companies in the United Kingdom, for which it won a variety of awards. James Dyson typifies the best in British enterprise; he invented and designed his high-technology vacuum cleaner and was a leader in his field. His factory employed about 2,000 people at its peak. Just before Christmas, James Dyson announced that he would lay off 180 people, and at the press conference this morning he said that he would not continue manufacturing in the United Kingdom, and will move his entire vacuum cleaner manufacturing process to Malaysia, where the job costs are lower and there is greater proximity to the suppliers he needs to manufacture his vacuum cleaners. He will lay off 1,000 people in my constituency this year.

His announcement came hard on the heels of a similar announcement by Lucent Technologies, based in the town of Malmesbury in my constituency, which has a population of 4,000. The very successful, high-tech, American company announced just before Christmas that it is to close its manufacturing operation in the town, at a cost of 2,000 jobs. There is no manufacturing in Malmesbury now—a significant loss of jobs in a small Cotswold town.

The end of Lucent and Dyson is a severe crisis in my constituency. Dyson, especially, has been a beacon of excellence in UK manufacturing and the fact that even James Dyson is wrapping up his manufacturing operation in the United Kingdom shows precisely what is wrong with the nation's manufacturing sector. My constituents and those in Newport and elsewhere want the Government to do something that they have not done: focus on the manufacturing sector as opposed to the service sector. A country that cannot make things better and more cheaply than others and sell them overseas cannot prosper. This country is going in that direction and I call on the Government to focus on manufacturing industry.

10.22 am

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) on his brief speech. I want to pick up one of his themes. It is a tragedy for his constituents, and for the country, when a company such as Dyson disappears. I was interested in the reasons that the hon. Gentleman gave for Dyson leaving. Obviously, labour costs are significant, but Britain can never compete globally with the low labour costs of countries in the far east. Equally, we cannot compete on the same basis with countries that are close to the supply chain. However, none of those issues is fundamental. In the past five years, manufacturing in the United Kingdom has grown by about 5 per cent. At first, that appears to be a healthy figure, but it is less healthy when compared with the United States, where manufacturing grew by 33 per cent., or with Germany, where it grew by about 20 per cent.

There are issues concerning the pound. I disagree profoundly with the analysis of my right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Alan Howarth), who should consider the history of devaluation, especially the period when the pound was floating. The movement of the pound relative to other competitive currencies was extraordinary; it was valued upwards and downwards on an irregular basis, but the economic record of the time shows that the process of devaluation was good for manufacturing. What is less good is a sharp and precipitous devaluation. I join the calls to consider the competitive value of the pound, particularly in my constituency, where some two thirds of manufacturing companies are operating well below capacity. A significant issue that they raise is the value of the pound.

A rather different issue that should worry the hon. Member for North Wiltshire concerns the Dysons of this world. While Mr. Dyson has enjoyed enormous entrepreneurial success, he is not a good employer if he simply wipes out the livelihoods of thousands of his employees. I hope that hon. Members deplore the cavalier actions of that company.

Mr. Gray: I apologise to the House if I did not make it plain that James Dyson has made it clear that the matter is under consultation at this stage. There are 900 jobs under threat and he will go through the proper procedures, consulting the work force and seeking ways of fulfilling the conditions that the hon. Gentleman described. For the sake of brevity, I did not go into that, but I am confident that James Dyson and his managing director, Sir Richard Needham, will do all that they can to ensure that this is let down as gently as possible.

Mr. Lloyd: I hope that that is right, but there is a huge difference between being let down gently and not being let down at all.

One of the things that concerns people in the employment sector of manufacturing is that it is far easier to sack employees in this country and to waste their skills and talents than it is elsewhere. I received a letter about that recently from a trade union in the north-west. It wrote:

> "Rolls-Royce, for example, has had a lot of government money in the form of launch aid and it would seem it is repaying that investment by looking elsewhere abroad to manufacture its products, which to our point of view, is not why the money was lent in the first place."

That union was right. We need to look at the ability of firms to disinvest in the United Kingdom. We lag behind other European countries in the aid that we give to the manufacturing sector. While I congratulate the Department of Trade and Industry for its new attention to manufacturing, it is vital that we invest in research and development. We should rectify the imbalance and push Britain to the top of the research and development league.

10.27 am

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, Central): I thank the hon. Members for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) and for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) for their brevity. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) on securing the debate. Clearly manufacturing industry is extremely important to us. I want to focus on a narrow point that relates to a company in my constituency called Richards plc. Aberdeen, as the Minister knows, is the energy capital of Europe. We are perceived to have a fairly rich economy. The manufacturing industry that we tend to talk about is the oil and gas industry.

Richards has existed in my constituency for over 300 years. It is a textile company operating in a difficult market. It suffers from all the problems that hon. Members have described this morning. It is an exporting company and it has problems with the rate of the pound. Over the past few years it has faced serious difficulties. There were management problems and the management has been replaced. There is the problem of competition and the problem that the whole UK textile industry faces. Its main competitors are based in Belgium and it is concerned that the Belgians can invest more and pay higher wages but can still undercut British companies in the price of their carpets. The company has sought to address that problem through Europe and has lobbied the Government persistently.

[Mr. Frank Doran]

For some years the company has been attempting to refocus. It owns plants in Aberdeen, Cumnock in Ayrshire—close to the Minister's constituency—and Wetherby in Yorkshire. It has worked closely with the Bank of Scotland, which has been totally supportive. The bank's attitude changed slightly after the events of 11 September because of their effect on the export markets and, as one of Richards' largest customers is the Hilton hotel chain in the United States, there were problems for the company's exports.

In all respects, the company seemed to be moving forward. However, it recently went to the bank to ask for a restructuring of its finances and found that the bank's attitude had changed significantly. It decided that it wanted to have another look at the company and instructed the accountants KPMG to produce a report. The company was consulted in that process, but the directors were extremely disappointed by the narrowness of the report. It focused just on protecting the assets of the bank, not on the company's wider strategy, a strategy with which I was familiar because I had been closely involved in some of its aspects during the past three or four years. When the bank received the KPMG report, it decided that it could not support the company any longer. A pistol was effectively put to the head of Richards' directors, and it went into receivership just last Monday.

A decision was then made to appoint KPMG as the receivers. I find that difficult to understand. As a lawyer, I am conscious of the rules on conflict of interest and have brushed against them myself in the past. That is the clearest example of it. It is one that faces many small manufacturing companies that go through difficult times, have a close relationship with their bank and are constantly on the edge. I am concerned about not only whether the individual case of Richards will resolve itself, but what the case shows, particularly as another bank has taken a different approach.

The Bank of Scotland shares its attitude with almost all other British banks, but there is an example that I urge the Government to examine. Four or five years ago the Royal Bank of Scotland decided to change its policy on such incidents and chose not to allow firms that were sent out as consultants to be appointed as receivers. Consultants were clearly told that receivership work was not on offer to them. Such a move puts accountancy firms in a difficult position. In the Richards case, the estimate of receivership fees was in excess of £1 million, which is quite a carrot for a company. I am not suggesting that anything illegal or dishonest has happened—I have no evidence to do so—but the perception is important.

The Royal Bank of Scotland found that its customers were reluctant to comply or co-operate with consultants in such situations. That led to delays in final decisions being taken and uncertainty being created in the work force, so it changed its practice. There have been positive benefits. Figures given by the Royal Bank of Scotland show that, despite having 35 per cent. of business customers in Scotland, it was responsible last year for only 18 per cent. of receiverships. That is a positive benefit, which the bank believes has enabled it to have a different relationship with its customers. There is no fear, no gun is put to the head of companies, and a more constructive and managed approach to businesses is achieved.

It is a small point compared with the other points made by hon. Members this morning, but it is no less important to the thousands of small businesses up and down the country, particularly in manufacturing, that are facing difficulties in the present economic climate. I urge the Government to examine that practice, which will be on their mind after Enron's collapse and details of its relationship with its accountants have emerged. There is ongoing discussion about whether auditors should be allowed to do consultancy work, and that falls into the same territory. There are clear conflicts of interest that are not good for the accountancy profession or, in particular, for manufacturing in this country.

10.34 am

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) on introducing the debate. I have attended three of these debates over the past 18 months and have noticed a vivid contrast between the low-key way in which we debate the crisis in manufacturing and the reaction in Parliament and among the public to problems in agriculture. Clearly, that sector has problems that should be exposed but, lest we forget, it employs less than a 10th the number that manufacturing employs and contributes about a 10th of what manufacturing contributes to the national economy.

To put the matter in context, it was right for previous speakers to emphasise the problems of Wales, which are acute, particularly in the south. Manufacturing employment in Wales is slightly above the national average. However, we have not heard about the real manufacturing heartlands—the west midlands, followed by the east midlands, the north-east, the north-west and Yorkshire. The biggest contraction in manufacturing employment is taking place in those areas. [*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) made a valuable speech about his region.

In many ways, this is a long-term problem. Manufacturing has lost 2.5 million workers since 1979. There has been a staggering decline in manufacturing employment, from 30 per cent. of total employment in 1979 to about 15 per cent. now. Even within the western world, such decline is almost unprecedented. Some people glibly say that it does not matter much because the decline in employment is the result of higher productivity, and manufacturing still contributes to wealth creation, even if jobs are lost. Certainly, within the past couple of years, there have been striking increases in productivity of, I believe, 6 per cent. in 1999 and 4 per cent. in 2000.

However, we must not be complacent. Such an approach assumes that the workers affected find something more productive to do. I do not know whether the Department of Trade and Industry still does tracking studies, as it did in the 1970s, but I suspect that most of the people who have been displaced from manufacturing industries disappear from the labour force. Many are men in their 50s who do not register as unemployed but simply drop out of the labour statistics. Thus, in a meaningful sense, national productivity is not increasing.

In addition to the long-term problem, there is a short-term crisis. This is where the Government's responsibilities kick in. Despite the fact that productivity has been growing, manufacturing output has grown by only about 1 per cent. a year since 1977. Growth is virtually stagnant, and all the signs are that the situation is becoming worse rather than better. Two key studies have been done during the past few months. One is the Confederation of British Industry study of industrial trends, and the other is by the Engineering Employers Federation. Both produced extremely negative and worrying predictions about what is likely to happen in manufacturing in the next year or so.

That leads us to consideration of policy and the Government's responsibilities. There are three fundamental causes of the current crisis in manufacturing. One of them is international and is, largely, beyond our control. There are worrying signs that the temporary recession in the United States, which has a serious problem of debt overhang, may become more permanent. The right hon. Member for Newport, East (Alan Howarth) made a helpful intervention about trade. There is a real danger that, if the international recession drags on, countries such as the United States may deal with it through beggar-my-neighbour policies. Other countries would retaliate, and industries such as steel would be dragged into a trade war. The Government have a responsibility in Europe to make clear our commitment to an open trading system and our willingness to fight for it.

The second cause is home-grown policy. The Government have pursued policies that have been helpful to industry; for example, interest rate stability and low inflation. However, in some ways, they have made the problem worse. The climate change levy has been mentioned. The Government should not be allowed to get away with the idea that it is part of the price that industry must pay for an environmentally friendly future. The point has been made many times that, if the Government really wish to deal with carbon dioxide emissions and climate change, there are methods of taxation that can be applied upstream, such as the carbon tax, which would avoid problems for manufacturing industries. Instead, they chose a cumbersome route that is particularly onerous for industry.

The third cause, which the hon. Members for Newport, West and for Newport, East touched on at length, is the role of the exchange rate, on which I am closer to Newport, West than Newport, East. Two distinct aspects of that issue have been blurred. First, the exchange rate has nothing to do with the pros and cons of entering the eurozone, but if we are to enter the euro, it must be at the right rate.

Last week, the Chancellor took a key step by commissioning Professor Wren-Lewis of Exeter university to determine the right exchange rate for our entry into the euro. The exchange rate has appreciated by 30 per cent. in real terms since 1995 in relation not only to the euro but to currencies such as that of Korea—a country against which we compete in manufacturing. More than any other single factor, that has created the current crisis. Companies had their margins squeezed; because their margins were squeezed they stopped investing; they are now laying off large numbers of workers. The exchange rate is critical to the current debate about manufacturing.

Secondly, and this is a separate issue, exchange rate stability takes us to the heart of whether it is a good thing to enter the euro. In manufacturing one needs a stable environment. A variation in the exchange rate of 10 or 20 per cent. in a short period wipes out improvements that one may obtain by improving performance. The Government have a role in ensuring greater stability through the exchange rate. That is why a commitment to a zone of exchange rate stability should be a key part of their long-term strategy, which would mean entry into the eurozone.

10.41 am

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): The hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) has been assiduous in trying to get debates on the Floor of the House on job losses in manufacturing industry. That is the subject of today's debate, and I shall try to focus on it.

The facts speak for themselves: between 1998 and the end of 2001 nearly 500,000 manufacturing jobs were lost. Manufacturing jobs as a percentage of the total work force have decreased from 15.8 to 13.8 per cent., in sharp contrast with previous years during which the percentage of manufacturing jobs was stable and the number of such jobs rose slightly.

The right hon. Member for Newport, East (Alan Howarth) mentioned that manufacturing output fell by 5.5 per cent. during the past year. Turnover in the engineering industries was down by more than 7 per cent. in the last three months of 2001 compared with the previous three months. More worryingly, order books in the engineering industries were 12 per cent. lower in the last quarter of last year than in the last quarter of the preceding year. We are therefore running record trade deficits.

Manufacturing output and employment have been hit before, but we are seeing the sharpest fall in output for a decade, and it differs from previous recessions in that the manufacturing sector is being disproportionately hit while other sectors of the economy continue to do relatively well. Hon. Members have sought to put their fingers on the causes of the problem, and of course currency exchange rates and our ability to operate in the international arena have something to do with it.

I do not intend to debate exchange rates, because we have already been round that course, but it is apparent to Opposition Members and other observers that the Government have their own agenda in relation to the euro and currency exchange rates. That agenda does not include what matters to manufacturing industry; it concerns the politics of the decision on the euro, and the Government's particular problems over that decision. That is deeply unhelpful to industry.

Currency factors are only part of the package, because industry examines its total costs and burdens. The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) mentioned productivity, and despite the Chancellor's exhortations the gap in productivity between the United Kingdom and the United States has stubbornly failed to close—indeed, it is widening. Labour productivity in manufacturing is driven by several complex issues, but with profits squeezed and investment in new machinery and training down, productivity improvements are unlikely to be strengthened.

[Mr. Philip Hammond]

In the short term, the Government could help to offset the foreign exchange effects from which industry is suffering by fiscal policies, easing the burden of regulation and encouraging flexibility in labour markets. Unfortunately, in every case the Government have done precisely the opposite of what industry needs, despite their rhetoric. They have piled an extra £5 billion a year on business in taxes, many of which—the climate change levy in particular—are targeted at manufacturing. A report out yesterday suggests that there is worse to come if Britain is to meet its Kyoto targets.

The Government have piled on bureaucracy and red tape, transferring to businesses a large part of the burden of running our social welfare system. Last year alone, there were 4,642 new regulations, a 50 per cent. increase from 1997. The British Chambers of Commerce—not usually quoted as a friend of the Opposition—said recently that

> "government has dramatically increased the regulatory burdens"

on business it added.

> "Excessive red tape is stifling the very enterprise the Government is seeking to promote".

The list already in place includes the working time directive, stakeholder pensions, the data protection directive and IR35. In the pipeline are the waste and electrical appliances directive, the vibrating agents directive and the vehicle end of life directive. Together, they place a burden of at least £15 billion on industry, falling disproportionately on manufacturing businesses.

Just as our competitors are beginning to deregulate and recognise the need for greater flexibility in labour markets, Britain under a Labour Government is going in the opposite direction, reducing flexibility and making Britain's competitive position even worse. Government policy exacerbates rather than ameliorates the impact of the exchange rate on our manufacturing businesses. The response that we get from the Government is largely lip service. We have had manufacturing summits, the announcement of a new tsar for manufacturing and, perhaps most bizarrely of all, the announcement in the House of Commons in December 2000 of the ministerial group on manufacturing job losses. The Leader of the House told us that that would consider a range of manufacturing issues. Answers to written questions have established that the group, announced with such a fanfare, has never actually managed to meet, despite the shake-up of nearly half a million jobs in our manufacturing industries.

What manufacturing now needs is action: action on tax, on regulation and on skills and competitiveness. We need an immediate moratorium on the introduction of the new and costly environmental and employment regulations in the pipeline. We need a breathing space for manufacturing industry to regroup and recover so that profits, and therefore investment in plants and training, can resume in order to underpin the long-term health of our manufacturing economy.

This Government were elected promising to halt and reverse the decline in Britain's manufacturing base. We have a Chancellor who said in the Labour manifesto in 1997:

> "We will not impose burdensome regulations on business".

He has spent the last five years doing precisely that. We have a Prime Minister who said last November,

> "Of course ... manufacturing industry is going through difficult times ... The issue is not about tax or regulation."

If he talks to some business men, he will find that the issue is about tax and regulation. This Government stand charged with breathtaking complacency and gross hypocrisy as they now act out in office the caricature that they painted of the previous Government's attitude to manufacturing industry.

Manufacturing industry is failing.

> "This is not the failure of some other Government, some other Cabinet, or some other Prime Minister—today's failures are the failures of this Government, this Cabinet, and this Prime Minister."—[*Official Report*, 16 October 1991; Vol. 196, c. 340.]

Those are the words of the now Chancellor of the Exchequer in October 1991. I have the honesty to acknowledge that what he said then was true. I will be interested to see whether the Minister will have the decency to acknowledge that that is true today of this Government and this Prime Minister.

In 1993—at the bottom of the cycle of manufacturing job losses, just before the situation stabilised and jobs in manufacturing started to increase, as they did during the following four years—the Minister said of the Conservative Government:

> "They have had 14 years of power, but still lack the guts to accept any of the responsibility for what has resulted".—[*Official Report*, 12 January 1993; Vol. 216, c. 851.]

I acknowledge that mistakes in monetary policy were made in the late 1980s and early 1990s. With the support of the then Labour Opposition, a wrong policy was chosen. The question is whether he, as a member of a Government apparently committed to pursuing the same mistaken route, has the guts to accept responsibility for the disaster that is decimating British manufacturing industry and struck the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) only this morning.

In 1989, the Chancellor wrote that:

> "it is through manufacturing that we will succeed or fail".

On that test, the Government have failed.

10.50 am

The Minister for Industry and Energy (Mr. Brian Wilson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) on securing this debate. The Government believe that manufacturing matters and must play a central role in our future as a leading knowledge-driven economy. I shall be happy to discuss where responsibility lies and other issues to which the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) referred.

We accept that we have an immediate priority to meet, which is in gross contrast to our predecessors. Where difficulties arise, we get in alongside industry, the community and trade unions to work for the best possible outcome. We want to try to prevent the loss of jobs and, if they are lost, to find new ones. That could not be in starker contrast to the hands-off approach of our predecessors. Each case that has been spoken of today has shown an approach that we have taken when job losses have occurred, or one that we will take if there is a prospect of maintaining jobs.

Mr. Gray: If the Minister is determined to do things, what does he intend to do about the loss of Dyson jobs in Malmesbury?

Mr. Wilson: The hon. Gentleman has delayed me, even with his short intervention, by coming to Dyson. I will deal with that in the course of my remarks; unlike past Tory Ministers, we do not necessarily stick to the script in front of us and can improvise in response to issues that arise during debate.

Manufacturing accounts for more than one fifth of our national income, and almost £150 billion of output each year. The sector employs about 4 million people directly, and millions more depend on manufacturing for their livelihood, including 2.5 million in the service sector. It is led by some of our most innovative businesses investing heavily in research and development. Manufacturing drives innovation in the rest of the economy, creates jobs and prosperity, and is responsible for productivity improvements across the whole economy through advances in technology, new goods and processes.

As hon. Members have said, it is tough for manufacturing and its workers right now. Output in manufacturing has gone down by 5.5 per cent. in the past 12 months, and 153,000 jobs have gone from the sector in that period. However, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Alan Howarth) said, the problems that manufacturing industry is experiencing are far from unique to Britain: last year, manufacturing output fell by 5 per cent. in Germany, 6 per cent. in the United States, and 14 per cent. in Japan. The simple message of those statistics is that no country can isolate itself from the downturn in the world economy. For instance, there has never been a recession in the United States that has not caused a contraction in Britain.

It is worth noting that in the past 20 years the proportion of people employed in manufacturing as a share of the total employed fell from 23 per cent. to 13 per cent. At the same time, in real terms value, the goods that they produced rose by a huge 36 per cent. A big element is that fewer are working in manufacturing to produce more goods of higher value. That is why we must keep producing new products and companies, and try to create a self-renewing process. Only in that way will we prosper in competition with low-cost producers. Our aim is to have many highly skilled, highly paid people working in manufacturing.

I want to deal briefly with specific issues that have been raised, and will be pleased to pursue further discussions on each and every point. The hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) referred to the disappointing announcement by Dyson today. I want to make it clear that, according to the information that I have received in the few minutes since he spoke, the Department of Trade and Industry has had no contact with Dyson about that. No notice has been given of the announcement.

Through the medium of this debate, I say to Mr. Dyson, and to Sir Richard Needham, a former Tory Minister at the Department of Trade and Industry, that it would have been useful if the Government had had an opportunity to work with the company in advance of the announcement to see what could be done. I would welcome such contact now that the announcement has been made. In his press release, Mr. Dyson states:

> "If it goes ahead this will be a blow to all those who have put in so much effort."

I take comfort from the statement's conditional tense: there must be room for discussion, and I hope that there is more to Dyson's calculations than the obvious statement that labour is cheaper in Malaysia than in Malmesbury. There are other factors, such as loyalty, to be taken into account.

I hope that we can have meaningful discussions with Sir Richard Needham, with Mr. Dyson and with the hon. Member for North Wiltshire. We did not know of the announcement about this symbol of British industry and excellence until this morning; we should be able to discuss the matter to see what can be done to soften, or remove, the blow to the hon. Gentleman's constituents. I cannot do anything unilaterally: I can help only if the company says that it is interested in discussions and has not already decided to go to Malaysia.

I recently visited a plant in Indonesia that makes Royal Doulton pottery and pays its labour force $30 a month. I do not think that hon. Members, even on the right wing of the Tory party, would want their constituents to work for such a wage. If it is just a matter of wage rates, we lose, but there are many other factors in the Dyson case, and I hope that we can discuss them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, Central (Mr. Doran) raised several matters. I want the Bank of Scotland to tell me why it is appropriate for KPMG to occupy both roles in relation to Richards plc, but it is a matter—certainly in this instance—on which we cannot legislate. However, I note what my hon. Friend said and ask for a response from the Bank of Scotland.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East raised the matter of steel and the WTO. We are represented in these matters through the European Union, and if the United States acts in the way suggested, the EU will seek action through the WTO in response to such a threat. It is for individual member states and the EU to consider any compromise solution that the US may propose. Much thought has been exercised on the matter in the trade policy division of the Department of Trade and Industry.

I have dealt with individual cases, so I shall not say much more in general about manufacturing, except to state that the Government, particularly since the wave of manufacturing job losses, are not merely reacting to events. Our approach is to be proactive: we are working alongside companies, trying to improve our support and the flow of information available to pre-empt such developments.

There are many successes in manufacturing industries, and the worst thing would be to talk them down or to ignore them and thus to suggest that the entire British manufacturing sector is blighted. Most importantly of all for the future of modern manufacturing, we must continue to strengthen our

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science base and raise our game in turning new science and technology into businesses, products and jobs. The question whether there is more or less support for workers who face redundancy is tied into that, because when job losses are inevitable, we must help workers come to terms with them and move on to new employment with new skills and training. That reflects the dynamism that we need in our economy if we want a future for manufacturing. Where we recognise the inevitability of job losses and closures, we must always work with a view to placing something new and forward-looking in their place. That will continue to be our approach.

Tax System

11 am

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): I am delighted to be able to raise an issue that causes many people a great deal of concern. By way of introduction, I should admit that I am a chartered accountant. Many people may think that, as a result, the tax system is an open book to me, but it is not and therein lies the nub of the problem. The tax system has become sufficiently complicated that even people who are informed in financial matters find it difficult to understand.

There are several problems with a complex tax system. It allows the advisers—lawyers and accountants—the opportunity to examine the system of tax reliefs, breaks and allowances to minimise the tax bill for their clients, while those who cannot afford advisers feel a growing sense of suspicion and dissatisfaction as they cannot understand the linkage between the taxes announced by the Chancellor in the Budget and their tax bill. Another aspect of the raft of breaks, exemptions, credits and tapers, is that one man's tax break is another man's tax increase. Someone must pay for the tax breaks and the basic rate must increase to take that into account.

A complex tax system is inherently unstable for businesses, and I will give some examples later. The rate of change and the complexity of the tax system mean that it is hard for businesses to plan ahead and set up transactions in the knowledge that their tax treatment will remain unchanged for several years. The complexity of the tax system is also inherently unstable for the Treasury, because the linkages between taxes and the tax take become more complicated and it becomes harder to understand the effect of a downturn on tax revenues. A complex tax system is against the interests of both the taxpayers and the tax collectors, which is why I have raised this subject this morning and why I support simplification.

There are many examples of the complexity of the tax system. Capital gains tax was simplified in April 1998, but many issues arose from that alleged simplification. One example that has been put to me concerns the purchase of two parcels of shares, one before 5 April 1998 and one after. The treatment of the second parcel is relatively simple, especially when compared with that of the shares purchased before April 1998. If I wanted to sell the first parcel, I would have to work out the indexation of the base cost from the date of purchase to 5 April 1998 and I would be taxed on that. I would then have to assess the gain between 5 April 1998 and the date of sale and apply taper relief to that.

Unfortunately, the definition of some assets that are subject to capital gains tax has been changed in recent years. Some shares have been treated as non-business assets and then as business assets, and one must apportion the gain during that time. Those straightforward examples demonstrate why the capital gains tax calculations on relatively simple transactions, such as the sale of small packets of shares, are now beyond the ability of most taxpayers.

Complex taxes also have an impact on behaviour. In the Chancellor's first Budget in 1997, he moved away from a stamp duty regime of 1 per cent. on all transactions to a graduated tax: 1 per cent. up to

£250,000, 1.5 per cent. between £250,000 and £500,000, and 2 per cent. thereafter. In the 2000 Budget, the rate remained unchanged at 1 per cent. on transactions between £60,000 and £250,000, but increased to 3 per cent. on transactions between £250,000 and £500,000 and 4 per cent. on those of more than £500,000.

In the 2001 Budget, the Chancellor recognised the impact on property transactions in deprived areas by waiving the stamp duty on them. That fell foul of European Commission regulations, so he had to reduce the limit to £150,000. There are now four different rates of tax on transactions in deprived areas: 0 per cent., 1 per cent., 3 per cent. and 4 per cent. We are starting to see price points arising at those thresholds in the property market. The cost of moving between one band and another is significant. If one buys a property at £249,999, one pays stamp duty of only £2,500. If the price increases to just over £250,000, one pays £7,500. It is therefore not surprising that when one talks to estate agents about buying a property, there is much nudging and winking about how much the owners are prepared to sell the curtains for to ensure that the transaction falls below £250,000 and that stamp duty of only 1 per cent. is paid. Although we are considering stamp duty on residential property, we should not forget that that duty is applicable to commercial transactions, whether on the purchase of property or of goodwill. Such high stamp duties impose an additional transaction cost on businesses, but cash costs are not relieved in tax calculations until the asset is sold.

Another interesting aspect of stamp duty is how it has increased the Government's exposure to significant downturns in the value of houses or the volume of transactions in the property market. In 1997, the Government raised £900 million from stamp duty on property sales. In the most recent year for which figures are available, that figure was £3.4 billion. Under their revenue-raising powers, the Government have introduced more instability into their calculation of predicted tax revenues.

We could go on for hours and I have received suggestions of many examples of complex taxes. The Financial Secretary said yesterday that between 1 January 2000 and 1 January 2002 the Inland Revenue employed more than 2,000 additional full-time-equivalent staff. Under this Government, the number of basic rates of tax has increased from 15 to 38. The number of pages in "Tolley's"—the bible for tax practitioners—has increased by 30 per cent. from 2,559 in 1997 to a whopping 3,414 last year, even after the size of the typeface was reduced to accommodate all the legislation. In its response to the Finance Bill in 2000, the Institute of Chartered Accountants said:

> "The volume of tax law has doubled since the 1980's. I do not know how ordinary people have a hope of understanding their tax affairs. Even accountants are struggling."

John Whiting—vice-president of the Chartered Institute of Taxation—said in response to the 600 pages of that Finance Bill:

> "The whole area of personal tax is ripe for simplification".

A book by Peter Warburton and the noble Lord Saatchi, entitled "Poor People! Stop Paying Tax!" demonstrated another example of the complexity of the tax system. They proposed that the Government in effect collected 53 per cent. of tax revenues but then gave back 14 per cent. of gross domestic product by way of the more than 250 complex allowances, reliefs, credits and tapers that form part of the tax system in this country. The volume of regulation affects not only tax advisers but also businesses. In July 2001, the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants carried out a survey of its members. Ninety-six per cent. of respondents thought that they spent more time on pay-as-you-earn and tax compliance than in April 1997. Ninety-eight per cent. of respondents cited PAYE as a reason, 92 per cent. quoted IR 35, 78 per cent. cited the working families tax credit and 61 per cent. referred to the burden of collecting student loans, which has been passed on from the Student Loans Company.

The cost of payroll compliance falls disproportionately on small businesses. A business with between one and five employees faces payroll costs of £288 per employee, whereas the cost is only £5 per head for a large business employing, say, more than 5,000 employees. If one looks at the impact of stamp duty on business and at the payroll burdens, it seems the complexity and cost are discouraging job creation—the reverse of the Chancellor's intention. The Government are guilty of increasing the complexity of the tax system to unparalleled heights. Simple transactions are impossible. It is impossible for taxpayers to calculate the tax effects without consulting a tax adviser.

The complexity of the tax system is being exploited by advisers. For example, with inheritance tax, at the moment someone who gives their house to their child has to vacate it if they are not to pay tax on that transaction. However, if they have good tax advisers, they can construct a scheme whereby they give the property to their children but occupy it on licence, thus circumventing the constraints of the inheritance tax regime. That benefit is available only to those who can afford to pay expensive tax advisers.

The Government are committed to introducing a community investment tax credit, which would bring a credit of 25 per cent. of the value of the investment against income tax. I can imagine advisers up and down the country looking at ways to exploit that new relief. To try to ensure that advisers cannot take advantage of the tax credit, the Inland Revenue will draft complicated schemes to prohibit abuse. As a side effect, the scheme will be difficult to administer for those setting up the community finance development institutions, and it will be difficult to ensure that the schemes in which they invest comply with the rules.

The battle between tax advisers and the Inland Revenue is like a long rally in a tennis match, where both players bounce the ball backwards and forwards—the ball being tax policy—and the confused spectators, the taxpayers, try to understand what is happening and when the rally will conclude. The erosion of the tax base is also a consequence of that raft of breaks and regulations forcing up the basic rate. A simpler tax system will provide less incentive to advisers to find ways round the legislation, because there will be less incentive for them to save tax as the basic rate will be that much lower, reducing compliance costs both for taxpayers and for those in the Revenue who try to chase down these complex schemes.

In a debate on the Budget resolution on 7 March 2001, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) set out the impact of

[Mr. Mark Hoban]

introducing a flat rate of 10 p for all incomes and abolishing personal allowances. He found that that would increase the revenue from income tax by £9.6 billion a year. We can therefore have a basic rate that is much lower if we lose the allowances and it will act as a disincentive to tax advisers to find ways around the legislation. In an answer to me yesterday, the Paymaster General demonstrated that if the taper relief on capital gains tax were abolished, the 10 per cent. rate would come down to 7.4 per cent., the 20 per cent. rate to 14.8 per cent. and the 40 per cent. rate to 29.6 per cent. There are opportunities to reduce the rate of tax by looking at some of the reliefs and allowances in the system.

Tax rates distort people's behaviour. I referred earlier to the community finance tax credit. An investor faced with two schemes with a similar pre-tax rate of return will obviously be swayed by the tax incentives put in front of him by the Chancellor when considering the post-tax return. Where one tries to direct behaviour, taxpayers may take sub-optimal investment decisions, which would not always be in the interests of the economy as a whole. One hears many more examples these days of tradesmen who wish their customers to buy materials themselves. That is done for the convenience of not the customer but the tradesman, who, by not having to invoice the customer for the materials and having a low turnover, can escape registration for value added tax. The complexity of the tax system and some of the incentives that are introduced into it distort behaviour.

The fourth consequence of a complex tax system is that the Chancellor can use it as a shield when raising taxes. The headline rates of income tax have not increased, yet the Chancellor has in successive Budgets abolished the married person's allowance and mortgage tax relief. The rates of national insurance for employees have not increased, but for three years from 1999 the upper earnings limit on national insurance contributions for employees increased by more than the rate of inflation.

The biggest example of a stealth tax and the disconnect between the tax and its impact on individuals was the abolition of tax credits on dividends paid to pension funds—a cost to pension funds of £5 billion per annum. Most lay people did not understand that that was a stealth tax increase. They are starting to pay the consequences of that change in tax treatment, as the cost of contributing to their pension funds increases or their benefits on retirement diminish. I wonder whether the decline in defined benefit schemes, which used to be a mainstay of pension provision in this country, resulted from the change in the tax treatment of dividends going into pension funds.

The complex tax system brings inherent instability for businesses. The frequent changes in the capital gains tax regime since its simplification in 1998 have caused a great deal of uncertainty among business men. They wonder whether to undertake transactions when their tax treatment is so uncertain and unclear. When the Chancellor proposed the reform of double tax relief, only the outcry from FTSE 100 companies forced him to change those policies. Sadly, where there has been no consultation with business or the tax profession, the constant series of fine-tuning exercises has led to an unstable regime for businesses. The final consequence is that we may lose the direct understanding of the impact on the economy of a downturn and the consequent impact on tax revenues. I spoke earlier about the gearing up of the tax take on property transactions; that is a clear example of a change in the property market leading to a significant change in the Government's tax revenues.

What are the remedies to the problem? In a debate in another place on a similar issue a couple of weeks ago, much emphasis was placed on the tax law rewrite project presided over by Lord Howe; the fruit of its labours can be seen in the Capital Allowances Act 2001. It takes existing legislation and codifies it so that tax practitioners can understand it. However, simply rewriting and revising tax legislation to make it more comprehensible is not enough to simplify the tax system. We need to ensure that the Government take policy decisions that will lead to a much simpler system.

My first proposal is for more widespread consultation on tax matters. All Chancellors like to pull rabbits out of hats on Budget day—that has been a tradition of Budgets since time immemorial. However, that desire may stand in the way of producing a stable and comprehensible tax system. Springing significant changes on business without consultation denies businesses the opportunity to influence legislation, with the resulting constant fine-tuning that we have seen on such matters as CGT. I suspect and hope that the tax system that emerges from the consultation on research and development that the Chancellor has announced will be much better and more stable than the regime for CGT. Consultation will promote far greater stability in the tax system.

My second proposal is to move to simpler Budgets. This Chancellor, perhaps more than any other, is a great believer in announcing a little on the day, which means that everyone comes away feeling that they have got something. However, when one looks at such initiatives more closely, they are of little real consequence to anyone. The example that sticks in my mind—it is so dreadful that the Minister might say that it is apocryphal—is the six free breakfasts a year for employees who cycle into work. Indeed, employers can claim tax relief for those breakfasts. That sounds so far-fetched that it is hardly credible, but it is one of the small initiatives announced by the Chancellor. We have said how much the volume of tax legislation has increased in recent years. Legislation for each of the small initiatives adds to that burden and prohibits proper parliamentary scrutiny of the Finance Bill. Better scrutiny will lead to reduced compliance costs and increased simplicity in the tax system; that simplicity will restore the clarity of the link between the state of the economy and the level of taxation.

My third proposed remedy is greater transparency in the tax system. I have already cited the benefits of sweeping away some of the 250 allowances, reliefs and tapers, which would bring about a much simpler and more transparent tax system that laymen could understand. It would help people link Budget announcements to their tax liability, which would be good for the integrity of the tax system and for taxpayers. However, it will put pressure on the Chancellor because a more transparent system will make it far harder for him to raise taxes by stealth. If people understand clearly the levers that make the tax system work, it is much harder to effect changes that are obvious only to tax advisers and specialists and hidden from laymen.

In conclusion, the tax system is complex and the Chancellor has contributed hugely to its complexity. A simpler system would reduce the dead weight of compliance costs on taxpayers and collectors and would have a much more neutral effect on people's behaviour. Above all, a simpler system would enable taxpayers to hold the Government to account on their tax decisions in the Budget.

11.24 am

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): I congratulate the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) on raising this important issue and I agree with his conclusion. A simplified system would also remove much of the fraud in the tax and benefits system at a stroke.

When I heard about the debate, I searched through my files to locate a copy of the Saatchi and Warburton document that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, but I did not anticipate having the opportunity to speak. Indeed, I dashed to Westminster Hall this morning because I thought that there would be far more interest in the debate among other hon. Members than there is. The level of interest is surprising. I thought that, as hon. Members had to complete their tax returns only recently, the issue would have been weighing on their minds more, but apparently not.

We owe thanks to Saatchi and Warburton for pointing out the complexity of the tax and benefits system. As I recall, it has provoked me to table at least one parliamentary question, a copy of which I also managed to find. The answer to that question was that, in the year 2000-01, 69 per cent. of employees earning less than a third of male median earnings paid tax. Sadly, that percentage had increased from 56 per cent. in 1997-98. It is ridiculous that people on such low earnings pay tax and are probably at the same time forced to claim means-tested benefits.

The document entitled "Poor People! Stop Paying Tax!" points out that the tax system collects a staggering 63 per cent. of GDP, and the citizen must then claim back 14 per cent. of GDP by navigating more than 250 allowances, reliefs, exemptions, credits, tapers, indexations, disregards and so on. In the process, we employ 80,000 civil servants to collect the taxes and 60,000 to pay the benefits, at huge administrative cost.

I agree with many of the proposals suggested by people who might be considered my political opponents, which is important, because some consensus on the tax and benefits system is desperately needed. In opposition, parties are fond of highlighting the existence and availability of stealth taxes, but in government, they enthusiastically use them. Perhaps instead those in opposition and those in government should think ahead to how we might behave when our roles are reversed and try to achieve a consensus.

Yesterday, we had a debate about pensions. Bills on tax credits and pensions credits are currently passing through Parliament. Both types of credit increase the complexity of the tax and benefits system, which is deeply worrying, because the extension of means-testing and complexity creates disincentives to work and save and incentives to commit fraud. Surely it is not beyond the wit of man for us to agree on at least some broad principles.

I am glad that Lord Howe is involved in the tax rewrite project, but I agree with the hon. Member for Fareham that that is not sufficient. The system needs a radical overhaul, and I endorse the proposals made in the "Poor People! Stop Paying Tax!" document. A very large hike in the personal allowance is desperately needed, so that people can earn far more before they start paying tax. A £10,000 tax threshold is being advocated, which would be a radical change.

I have not done the sums, but the general principle of a large rise in the threshold, coupled with a simplification of the different income tax rates, is sound and reform is long overdue. Unfortunately, the Government have introduced greater complexity into tax bands. The 10 per cent. and 20 per cent. tax rates were merely a gimmick; it would have been better to put those resources into raising thresholds. We need to consolidate the various tax rates. We should have one basic rate, perhaps around 20 or 25 per cent., an upper rate that is higher than the present 40 per cent., and something in the middle, which would claw back the benefits from middle income earners—the bonanza that they would otherwise receive from large increases in personal allowances.

The interplay of national insurance contributions is also relevant. The Chartered Institute of Taxation and other organisations believe that the kink in the system—whereby between £29,900 and £34,000 the marginal tax rate for each extra pound drops from 32 per cent. to 22 per cent.—could be reconciled by raising the upper earnings limit for national insurance in line with the threshold for the higher tax rate. From my political perspective, that would also mean an increase in the tax take from higher earnings. That is unlikely to achieve political consensus, but agreement across the political spectrum could be achieved on the general principles if only the Government were willing to sacrifice some of their sacred cows.

To achieve a more simplified system, we need to restore universal benefits and reduce means-testing. I commend the Chancellor for increasing child benefit, but wish that he had not introduced the additional complexity of the children's tax credit, which effectively takes us back to the position when child benefit was introduced. At that time, family allowances and personal tax allowances meant that higher taxpayers gained more than others for bringing up their children. I acknowledge that the new children's tax credit system is more redistributive, but it is complex. A simpler system might continue with universal child benefit and ensure that it adequately reflected the additional cost of bringing up children. The better-off, including MPs like myself who receive child benefit, would have the additional income recouped through a progressive tax system.

I make no apology for wholeheartedly supporting progressive taxation and for being against increasing taxes for poor people, who should be less reliant on means-tested benefits. Such benefits will always be with us, but should be for the exceptional cases rather than for average groups of people.

[Lynne Jones]

When child benefit was first introduced, it effectively rolled up a tax allowance into a universal benefit—a process for which there is more scope in future for other tax allowances. If a large increase in the personal allowance is the first step, the next step is a flat-rate benefit, otherwise known as a citizen's income. Again, the idea initially came from the right. It may have been proposed earlier, but to my knowledge the first suggestion was from Christopher Monckton, a researcher in Downing street in the late 1980s or early 1990s, when the Tories were in control. The idea may have a longer history than that.

Such a policy would draw people from both ends of the spectrum. It would maximise personal freedom and incentives to save. Every time that it is raised, people say that its time has not yet come. I disagree; in Ireland, for example, there are interesting debates on the subject. However, it may be a second step. As a first step, I plead with the Government to consider the direction that they have chosen and the complexity and amount of means-testing. In the future, 65 per cent. of pensioners will be subject to some kind of means-testing, and I doubt that that will be conducive to the Government's aim of increasing private savings. Surely, we can broadly unite around such principles. If there were the will, such changes could be introduced.

11.36 am

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) on securing the debate and on beginning what should be a much more widespread discussion. As the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) said, it is restricted to a few aficionados at present.

As a former Treasury Minister, I share something in common with the Paymaster General. We have had to deal with the real complexities of the tax system in the form of the Finance Bill. If my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham thinks that everything that every Minister wants emerges in the Finance Bill, I can tell him that an enormous discard process restrains the well-meaning officials from the Inland Revenue who beaver away with a sometimes zealot-like commitment to ensure that money is raised in accordance with what they believe are the wishes of the Government of the day. Ministers must occasionally restrain their enthusiasm, however, and many non-starters in the budget process end up in the wastepaper bin.

My hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak gave several cameo observations to illustrate where complexity abounds in the present tax system. If we are to discuss simplification, we must first define what we mean by a simplified tax system. The world is a complex place. If the Government of the day are to secure revenue through the major areas of tax—personal, business and international taxation—to pay the national bills, complex systems will be involved.

We must determine whether we wish to start removing bits of the tax architecture. My hon. Friend the Member for Fareham referred to problems with capital gains tax, for example. I agree with his comments about the Chancellor's fiddly approach to tax. However, we must consider the justification for and implications of removing parts of the tax structure. For example, the Conservative Government removed the tax provision on performance-related pay because we felt that it had had its day, it was being abused and, if the truth be told, such a change was a good way of raising revenue. There were good reasons for doing it, and the tax system was simplified by the removal of that legislation.

If we are to have an honest debate, we must start by asking what should stay and what should go, if that is our definition of a simplified tax system. If we do that, we must have a wider debate, which we have not had in this country. We have not discussed tax, as we are all frightened of it. The political parties shy away from discussing it. The Government try to shield themselves from the debate by saying that they will not raise the basic and higher rates of tax. A great shield is held up against anyone who says that Labour is a tax-raising party. The Government, like every other Government, have been forced into raising revenue, however, and many things go on behind the scenes that we define as stealth taxes.

At the end of the day, we are avoiding the debate about what it is legitimate to tax. Our tax system has grown out of building on history; it is not an accident of history. Before the present range of income taxes, many capital taxes were invented: stamp duty, inheritance tax and so on. The world has moved on, but we have not discussed whether it is sensible to tax people's inheritance or to use stamp duty. The current Chancellor has found that stamp duty is a nice littler earner and the dog that does not bite. By putting in a little complexity here and a tweak there, we get a few more billions out of the tax system. Politically, I see the attractiveness of that.

A second way to simplify the tax system is to be honest enough in the 21st century to stop and ask what we are taxing. Are these the right ways for the Government to derive their revenue? We should go back one stage further and debate how much tax it is sensible for a modern economy to contribute as a percentage of gross domestic product. We seldom start the debate about tax from the size of the cake and then ask how we raise it. Instead, Governments have built on the substructure of the tax system that they have inherited from the previous Government. Usually, we add to it, but occasionally we take pieces away. If we are going to talk about simplification, we need to have a fundamental discussion about the purpose and architecture of the tax system. Otherwise, we will end up fiddling.

The Finance Bill is a fiddler's charter. Along the conveyor belt of Budget starters come individual measures, which are perfectly justified and formed in their own way, to tell the Minister of the day what needs to be done. The Paymaster General will have experienced that in her early days, as I did. The Minister, however, never saw the big picture—what he or she was bolting in or taking out of the tax system—or the added complexity until the tax law rewrite exercise brought forth its first product, the Capital Allowances Act 2001. We suddenly had the book on capital allowances, which was remarkably clear, and we could read it for the first time from beginning to end. The story unfolded. The previous system grew like Topsy. No one could understand it, or see where a review of schedule A might be sensible to take into account modern property transactions. Now, we can.

The rewrite exercise opened an important window on the operation of the tax system. I am glad that the process was begun when I was Financial Secretary and I pay tribute to the present Paymaster General for taking on the exercise. I just wish that she would increase the resources that are available to it, especially with regard to the drafting of the parliamentary counsel, so that the process can be speeded up. As my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham pointed out, the exercise is starting to tease out where improvements could be made. Excellent officials in the Inland Revenue have identified some of them.

The exercise could be a way of refining current law, rather than changing it, especially with regard to schedule E and earned income, but it needs to go further. The Government should not be frightened of having the debate to which I referred.

My hon. Friend pointed out the need for greater consultation—an ocean of consultation takes place on the mechanics of the tax system. All sorts of representative bodies spend half their lives whizzing in and out of Somerset house talking to Revenue officials. The problem is that we have not had that discussion about the tax system. If the Paymaster General was feeling brave, why did she not set up a group of interested parties to examine simplification? I would have volunteered my services to help in that task, for what they are worth.

I have met with many representative bodies, including the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales, the chambers of commerce, the Confederation of British Industry and the Chartered Institute of Taxation. I have told them all that if they want to talk about simplified tax, they should produce some. So far, they have not produced one piece. They have returned to the need for better written tax law—tax law that is more easily understandable and has fewer bells, knobs and whistles on it. If a cleaning up of the tax system is what we mean, that is fine and we should agree with that as a definition.

My hon. Friend the Member for Fareham mentioned one or two examples where the Chancellor has indulged in additional complexity. My position on tapers in the capital gains tax regime is well known. I thought that the taper system was wrong because it made an artificial distinction between long and short-term capital movements. We lack any form of economic appraisal to determine who is right about that. Will the new proposals do what the Chancellor of the day says that they will do?

When Ministers receive tax proposals, they get a generalised statement of their likely impact, but we do not. One classic example, which I raised during the Finance Bill proceedings last year, concerns the reduction in VAT on children's car seats. The Red Book included a series of vaguely connected sentences in justification of the tax. It gave the impression that reducing the VAT on car seats would cut the numbers of children who are tragically killed on our roads by inducing people to buy better seats that provide better protection for children. However, a helpful official at the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions told me that 50 per cent. of children killed on the roads are pedestrians. Would it have been better to deploy the £5 million that the measure cost on improved publicity and raising safety awareness for children on the footpaths of our nation? Have we had any justification for the measure? Has it worked and has the change been passed on in lower prices?

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): The right hon. Gentleman knows about that matter as it was dealt with in the Standing Committee. The Government simultaneously increased the grant funding to the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to deal with pedestrian accidents. He can check the record, but I am sure that he will remember that the figures were given to him at the time.

Mr. Jack: The hon. Lady shows sensitivity about the matter in rising to intervene. I will not rerun those debates, but the question was a good way of illustrating that we do not know whether adding yet another element to the tax system was effective. It is the same with capital gains tax. We have no economic analysis to tell us in capital terms whether tapered tax has had a better impact on industry than the previous system of CGT or having no taper at all. My hon. Friend the Member for Fareham mentioned stamp duty and we do not know its impact on property transactions. We do not know whether a cliff edge or a tapered version of stamp duty is the way forward. There are an awful lot of don't knows.

The complexity of our tax system is partly due to avoidance. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak touched on that and painted a picture of a pure world in which people would read the words of tax legislation and follow them exactly. I am sure that the Paymaster General will know of many examples of when clever people have read the words. I remember some gentlemen from Close Brothers getting terribly upset when I told them that they could not have a £55,000 personal equity plan. They had read the PEP legislation, thought "What a whizzo idea", bought £6,000 worth of PEPs, parachuted into them the income from £49,000 of an interest-earning asset and set the return so that no capital gains could be levied. It was a wonderful return and a fantastic way of investing, but it blew a hole a mile wide in what the PEP legislation was all about and had to be stopped.

The banks and insurance companies then came up with a whizzo wheeze on life assurance policies, which put at risk £750 million of tax revenue. The famous Glaxo case on transfer pricing—a dimension of international taxation—put at risk a further £600 million of tax revenue. So, any decent Financial Secretary or Paymaster General who is seeking to safeguard the public purse will always have to block up such holes in the tax system.

During the lifetime of the present Government, the need for general avoidance legislation—an all-encompassing super sentence that would stop it all—has been debated but they have rightly drawn back from that. Avoidance is an intellectual battle between clever people who examine tax law and try to interpret it in certain ways. That is the problem. Tax is not scientific; it is a best endeavour to raise money. The ways in which people get round tax legislation illustrate why tax law is

[Mr. Jack]

so complicated. If a truce could be declared on avoidance, a vast array of tax laws could be scrapped. That would help enormously, but is unlikely to happen.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): Will the right hon. Gentleman say a little more about why he is against general anti-avoidance provisions? The Ramsey test case helped considerably, but subsequent cases blew it apart and we ended up in the position that the right hon. Gentleman described. Could not the Government by statute return us at least to a Ramsey-type position and perhaps even better?

Mr. Jack: I said that tax is a set of words open to interpretation and the same would apply to general anti-avoidance provisions. Perhaps someone could provide a set of words to do the job effectively, but I have yet to see it and I remain to be convinced. I was illustrating how a vast amount of tax complexity is due to plugging avoidance holes.

The Chancellor has a tendency to fiddle with many little micro-measures. Research and development tax credits are a classic example. We have no idea what the effect will be. Until we can achieve some economic appraisal of these measures, the tax system will be an open door to fiddling, adding on small measures and providing a sense of well-being to whatever group has achieved something from the Budget. Greater complexity arises for questionable effects.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak referred to playing tunes with the tax system. When I was in the Treasury, I recall one of its officials saying, "Ministers, you can achieve the Conservative promise of a basic tax rate of 20 per cent."—no 10 per cent. from us, I hasten to add—"even though we are short of revenue". I thought that it was fantastic and wondered where they kept the Harry Potter magic wand. It meant moving allowances, changing national insurance measures, reforming rates here and there. I realised that it was possible to have umpteen variations on the theme and that the machine would continue to turn out money. What was the objective? That was the key point.

The hon. Lady also mentioned flat tax and advocated simple tax systems, with simple rates and allowances—great! Starting with a clean sheet, such a system might develop. I refer hon. Members back about seven years to parliamentary questions put by the then Member for Carshalton and Wallington, Nigel Forman, who wrote a good pamphlet on this subject. The answers showed the winners and losers under the arrangements that were current then.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak obviously has a keen knowledge of social security, but making changes means dealing with the winners and losers, which is difficult unless starting out with a brand new system. The Chancellor has gone too far. The hon. Lady was right that the 10p rate was unnecessary window dressing.

On the other hand, the PAYE autopilot, which works extraordinarily well, shields two thirds of taxpayers from much of the system's complexity. Those who have to fill in the self-assessment tax form wander into such complexity and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham said, greater transparency should be considered.

Lynne Jones: I accept the problem of winners and losers, but that should not stop us from moving towards the system that I advocate. I agree that it will be a slow process, but we could have a consensus that that is what we should aim for and work towards it.

Mr. Jack: I draw my remarks to a conclusion by saying that I agree with the hon. Lady. However, tax is one of the great politically sensitive matters. It is almost like death—no one wants to talk about it. The Government of the day want to be able to say that they are not raising too much tax or that they are doing wonderful things with the bits of their handiwork that they admire, but they will not talk about the legitimacy of what they should tax and how they should do it.

If there were a public debate on the matter, we might find new ways to raise revenue that the public would think legitimate. If that could be done, some of the superstructure could be dismantled. For example, in France there is VAT on food and people return from visits there saying how cheap the cigarettes and the booze are. The French have a nice little source of revenue and food seems to be cheap too. We cannot talk about that, however, because both our major parties say, "We will not put VAT on fresh food, children's clothes, books and periodicals." That may be right, but we have not discussed it because it is a no-go area.

To deal with simplification, we must first define "simplify", consider the history of the tax system and its legitimacy and have a proper, public debate about the matter. If we were not frightened to talk about tax we might find a way to simplify a complex system in a complex world.

11.56 am

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) on securing the debate and the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) on their excellent contributions to it.

I recommend to hon. Members the report of the debate sponsored by the noble Lord Howe in the other place on 23 January. I welcome the fact that both Houses are debating what the right hon. Member for Fylde was right to call a key issue. Liberal Democrats believe that a simpler tax system would be of huge micro-economic significance to the personal and corporate sectors. I shall deal later with the costs of complexity, which have been discussed and which are much larger than has been acknowledged.

I declare an interest of sorts. The tax law review committee of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, of which I am a member, established a working party chaired by Sir Alan Budd on the institutional need for tax simplification. The committee will publish a report in due course. I hope that the Minister and her colleagues will respond positively to the ideas advanced by the group, which includes members of all parties and many external experts.

The right hon. Member for Fylde talked about starting with a definition of a simpler tax system, which he seemed to define only in terms of the language. I want a wider definition. To build a simpler tax system, we must consider long-term tax policies, the reform of existing taxes, which have been discussed today, and the process of implementing those policies. We must bear in mind that some of the complexity arises from the way in which taxes are administered, not from the taxes themselves. We need to look at the bureaucracies and how they organise themselves. Often, their organisation leads to unnecessary complexity, such as the separation of Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue, about which the Minister has trenchant views.

Political parties need to assess their tax measures in the light of simplification. We need to widen the long-term debate and to deal with some of the sacred cows that have wandered into the polity of Britain. It is a shame that in the beginning of the 21st century we cannot discuss measures that we debated vigorously in the 1970s and 1980s. It is a retrograde step. It is a symptom of spin politics that we should de-spin for the sake of the taxpayer.

I want to talk more about the processes. In his Hardman memorial lecture Lord Howe emphasised simplicity and stability. He talked about the need to reduce the volume and pace of change, which is important. We should look at ourselves in the House as we are responsible for that in many ways. An examination of the processes involves both looking at ways to stop the situation getting any worse and reviewing what has already happened.

Lord Howe and others have suggested that we should get rid of the annual Finance Bill. I agree. The right hon. Member for Fylde talked about the need to protect the revenue yield to the Treasury. That is right. Nevertheless, we have an annual Finance Bill only because income tax and corporation tax are not permanent taxes on the statute book. If we reformed the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968 and made income tax permanent, we could think about tax policy in a longer term way. We could have a comprehensive tax review to go alongside the comprehensive spending review. We could look at tax policy over a period of three or four years rather than have this annual change, which is a dynamic in itself for more legislation and increased instability in the system.

Let us consider changing the Finance Bill regime. I am attracted by the idea of separating the Finance Bill into two parts—whatever remains of it after the reform of the 1968 Act. A change in excise duties requires a Budget resolution and a quick Finance Bill to put it in place. Perhaps every year, or preferably every two or three years, we could have a technical taxes Act to deal with some of the detailed changes in a more protracted way with greater consultation. Let us reform the Finance Bill system so that we do not make it any worse, and let us also look at the past and at some of the ideas floating around the various institutes and professions.

Let us look at building on the wonderful tax law rewrite project. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Fareham and to the Paymaster General for their work and support for that project. It produces a whole set of reform proposals, which it cannot deal with because its remit is tightly drawn only to rewrite the existing law. What will happen to all those ideas? Although Lord Howe and many other people could probably claim paternity for the idea, I suggest that we need a tax commission similar to the Law Commission or, preferably, a Select Committee in the House of Lords, charged with looking at the existing tax system and proposing sensible reforms to the Government. It would be up to the Government of the day to decide whether to adopt them. It would be a body with the political clout and expertise to ensure that the legacy of complication was reduced.

On the costs of complexities, some people question whether that is a problem, although business men or tax consultants readily admit that it is. What is the real cost? The figures are not readily accessible. We have had various estimates over the years, primarily from Professor Sandford and his team at Bath university. I saw a figure suggesting that compliance costs—I believe that his definition of compliance costs in this case is both private and public sector costs—equated to 1.5 per cent. of GDP, so we are talking about £15 billion to comply with and administer the tax system.

Professor Sandford's latest work is entitled "Why Tax Systems Differ" and was published by Fiscal Publications in 2000. It has a chapter on administration and compliance costs, which goes into some academic detail about how one goes about working out those costs. The major conclusions are that we are only beginning to develop the methodology of working them out; that it is difficult to make international comparisons, for a number of reasons; that high public sector administration costs might not be a bad thing if they reduce private sector compliance costs; and, that compliance costs are higher than previously thought and we must start to take them seriously, which is the key point. Professor Sandford talks about much greater interest in the issue and many more studies being commissioned, and I give the Government credit for commissioning some of them.

I hope that the Paymaster General will elaborate more today than she and her officials have done in recent months in answers to my parliamentary questions. For example, I asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he had received a final copy of the study by Professor Anne Hansford into the compliance costs to business of the UK tax system and when he would publish the study. The Paymaster General replied:

> "Studies into compliance costs for Corporation Tax and VAT were commissioned as the first stage of a four year research programme into the compliance costs to businesses of the UK tax system."—[*Official Report*, 27 November 2001; Vol. 375, c. 870W.]

In other words, we did not receive a clear answer, which is not unusual.

The Government have commissioned a four-year research programme, but I hope that they will not wait until the end of that period before sharing some of the lessons with us. We want to help, which is an important reason for them to do so. The Paymaster General is looking at me over her glasses because she cannot believe that Opposition Members want to help the Government, but this is a shared project. It is not a project of the Government of the day; it is a project through which we as parliamentarians can improve the system.

[Mr. Edward Davey]

I urge the hon. Lady to say more about the studies that have been commissioned, to share her thoughts on how the Government are looking into the issue and the research that they are doing and, as the right hon. Member for Fylde said, to involve us, because that is terribly important. To tempt her into doing so, I shall end by praising the Government on one or two matters. There is no doubt that consultation on tax measures has improved under this Government. The pre-Budget report is a big step forward and, as the right hon. Gentleman said, they have been supporting the tax law rewrite project.

In answer to another debate in which the right hon. Gentleman and I talked about tax simplification, the Paymaster General said:

> "I am sympathetic to their point."—[*Official Report*, 19 December 2000; Vol. 360, c. 323.]

Clearly, she is minded to support us and I hope that she will move from sympathy to activism by setting up the institutions, processes and policy review that will enable us, over five or 10 years, to tackle this major problem.

12.8 pm

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) on securing the debate, in which extremely valuable contributions have been made. I hope that this debate and the recent debate in the House of Lords will be the start of a much more open and focused public debate.

I should perhaps declare an interest, having established a Centre for Policy Studies committee under the chairmanship of Lord Young to consider the areas in which there may be scope for simplication and to make proposals. It is interesting that competing bodies are doing the same.

Unfortunately, the Government have made the tax system more complicated than it needs to be, particularly in proliferating personal tax rates, as is evidenced by the speedy increase in the length of "Tolley's" tax guide. I shall not name names, but I spoke to a Treasury Minister just this week who commented that they regretted having to employ an accountant to do their tax return because they did not have time to deal with the complicated forms. As more people are dragged into complexity, the risk of lack of compliance will increase, as will extreme annoyance.

I pay tribute to the Revenue staff. They do an amazing job in dealing with our tax system. For eight years in the 1980s I sat on a Treasury tax consultative committee. In those days, representatives of different parts of the country's economic life were sounded out in confidence about potential tax changes and their impact. It is a pity that the committee was eventually wound down in, I believe, the early 1990s.

It is important that Paymasters General remain in post for a reasonable period of time to gain intellectual mastery of the brief. I congratulate the Paymaster General on that, because I have observed in the past—not in the case of my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack)—that if Tax Ministers move too frequently, the situation tends to worsen.

Let me discuss some principles. My right hon. Friend raised the big question of legitimacy, but other obvious principles should be considered. One is as old as tax itself: the cost-efficiency of taxation. We should consider not just the costs to the Revenue of collecting taxes but the costs to businesses and people of paying taxes. Some areas of tax are extremely efficient and, manifestly, some are less efficient. That is one criteria.

I believe passionately in the principle of not distorting economic activity. There is a growing tendency for taxation to do that. It is crucial not to damage the gross national product and not to drive economic business activity abroad or allow it to go elsewhere when it might come to the UK. I remember fighting the cause of the investment management industry when I sat as its representative on the Treasury consultative committee. I pointed out that Dublin and Luxembourg were getting huge amounts of fund management business that London should have, that the business would be more honestly and better carried out in London, and that the central issue was whether tax should be stopped on interest paid by money and bond funds. For whatever reasons, the Revenue did not agree, and we lost huge amounts of income and employment because about £500 billion of business was done elsewhere.

I am cautious about using the tax system to encourage certain types of behaviour rather than simply to raise revenue efficiently. The most fashionable aspect of that at present is environmental taxation. One can see the logic, but I suspect that the results are often contrary to the intentions. It may drive some businesses to areas where there are less stringent environmental checks, and it can lead to nonsensical outcomes. For example, it is not surprising that many people ended up with wrong codes under the new car taxation arrangements. The requirement for employers who provide cars to report the carbon dioxide engine emission details to the Inland Revenue is strange. No doubt manufacturers of cars will eventually provide it, but it is not information that someone responsible for PAYE can easily find.

Mr. Edward Davey: Does the hon. Gentleman think that the Inland Revenue should instigate a completely new coding exercise or—as seems to be the intention—require individual taxpayers or advisers to contact the Inland Revenue?

Mr. Flight: In practice, it seems that a coding exercise may be necessary. As things are developing at present, there is the danger of a considerable shambles.

We all say that it is wonderful to take measures that are good for the environment, but I believe that they can lead to taxation that is economically damaging or misconceived. We should be wary of using the tax system for objectives other than solely raising tax. The taxation of cigarettes is complete madness—*[Laughter.]* Yes, I declare an interest. The revenues are far lower than they should be and it encourages smuggling on a wide scale. At least theoretically, the taxation of tobacco and alcohol should be on the supply and demand curve for maximising tax revenues. It is misconceived to think that people's behaviour can be changed purely by imposing taxation that is designed entirely for other areas.

I echo the points that were made about not changing the system of taxation more often than is necessary. The Government constantly revisit and tinker with elements that are of interest to them and leave unchanged areas that are not of interest, but where there may be scope for change.

It is crucial to keep the tax system for individuals sufficiently simple for them to understand. In a recent debate in the Committee that considered the Tax Credits Bill, I was shocked to hear the Financial Secretary say that we could have a system like a television set that was so complicated that no one would understand it, but that all people had to do was turn the switches on. Whether people are paying tax or receiving negative income tax, if they do not broadly understand the rules we invite chaos, if not semi-fraud. Clearly, complexity does create fraud.

There is a relationship between the number of Inland Revenue or tax officer staff and the amounts of tax paid and of taxpayers. Although the United States has a reasonably complicated tax system, the ratio of people working in the Internal Revenue Service to tax paid and taxpayers is much lower than it is here. The Paymaster General seems to be shaking her head. Perhaps we will have a chance to return to that.

Layer on layer of taxation is a problem that is most evident in relation to pensions taxation and company taxation. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde said, the solution may be to take bits of the architecture out.

Anti-avoidance measures are unavoidable. The principle of having only general anti-avoidance provisions was tested in Canada, where it created the problem that commercial transactions had to be pre-cleared, which occupied large numbers of inland revenue staff and considerably delayed the process of commerce. The clear distinction between evasion and avoidance is essential to the honesty of our society. It is understandable that people will want to pay as little tax within the law as they can, but they must know whether or not they are crossing the boundaries of the law. A degree of rough justice between fairness and efficiency is required. In recent years we have bent over backwards to honour fairness where it is both tax-inefficient and not necessarily appreciated by citizens at large. My hon. Friend the Member for Fareham described what was wrong with tax complexity and the problems that it could cause to government and business.

The Saatchi and Warburton proposals appeal to me greatly in principle, for the same reasons that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) outlined. One of tasks of the committee in which I am involved is to consider the viability of those proposals. The overlap between the number of people who pay tax and the number who receive benefits is about 40 per cent. It is not as easy as simply raising the tax threshold and doing away with many benefits because one is dealing with overlapping but not concentric groups of people.

Lynne Jones: The proposed citizen's income would deal with that because people who receive income support would be paid.

Mr. Flight: I thank the hon. Lady and look forward to co-opting her on to the committee.

The corporate area is not of great interest to citizens at large, but there is still scope for masses of simplification, and I commend the Institute of Directors' 11 quick wins, with which I shall not deal at length.

Dawn Primarolo: There are only 10 minutes of the Adjournment debate left. I know that the hon. Gentleman has many interesting things to say, but if I am to answer hon. Members' points, I implore him to be brief.

Mr. Flight: The last thing that I want to do is to deny the Paymaster General sufficient time to respond.

There is scope to deal with corporate taxation. On personal taxation, the major principle is that although it is okay to introduce complexity for those at the top end of the scale, if that creeps down to the majority, and especially to those at the bottom end of the scale, it becomes unworkable. That is where we are going, and it is largely unnecessary.

12.21 pm

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) on securing the debate. The convention is for short replies from Ministers in Westminster Hall debates and I hope that all hon. Members who took part will excuse the fact that I shall be unable to answer every question.

I shall assist the hon. Gentleman with some information that he quoted from parliamentary answers. If he returns to the question that he asked about capital gains, he will notice that the paragraph that gave him the answers of 7.4 per cent., 14.8 per cent. and 29.6 per cent. is preceded by a statement that those figures were calculated by "ignoring behavioural changes". The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), who experienced the tax law rewrite and is a former Financial Secretary to the Treasury, touched on that matter when he referred to simplification.

The hon. Member for Fareham quoted figures on the increase in Inland Revenue staff. Unfortunately, he did not mention that 8,400 staff were transferred directly from social security work in the Contributions Agency and that 3,700 were transferred in with tax credits. The increase in the number of staff in the Inland Revenue was around 245 in the period he discussed, which, given the vast increase in taxpayers due to the Government's economic reforms and success in getting people back to work, is not a large increase when compared with the increase in workload.

Mr. Hoban: I was careful in picking my numbers from the parliamentary answers because the disconnect clearly took place during the first part of the Administration as new functions were brought into the Inland Revenue. I was well aware of that issue, but time prevented me from pursuing the matter further with the Minister's colleagues.

Dawn Primarolo: I am happy to ensure that the hon. Gentleman gets that information on the record in a parliamentary answer if he would like it.

[Dawn Primarolo]

The point of the debate has been to suggest that the United Kingdom is suffering, but I remind hon. Members that the UK has more direct foreign investment than a large number of other countries and that we are now fourth in the worldwide league table. Both the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the International Monetary Fund have pointed out that the United Kingdom is one of the most conducive environments in which to do business and continues to attract half of all new headquarters of multinationals. The UK and its economy are in a very buoyant position.

Simplification involves a number of propositions. We would all agree that simplification is correct and that we should try to achieve it, but it must be balanced with certainty, fairness and what we intend the tax system to do. As the right hon. Member for Fylde pointed out, to start from the proposition that whatever we do in the tax system no one will try to circumvent it and do something else, is simply to fail to face up to what is really happening. There must be intervention on the basis of fairness. I intend the tax system to be used as it is supposed to be and for relief to be given as it is meant to be. I will come back to anti-avoidance.

Another question involved in simplification is whether Members of Parliament believe that there is any role for the tax system to intervene on market failure. The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) says not, but that is not business's view, nor the view of many of his Front-Bench colleagues. It seems to me that people want complexity when they believe that it suits them. The capital allowances legislation is an example of that. People do not want complexity if it means that their taxes are higher.

What the Government must do, and have been doing, is to examine how to balance simplicity, fairness and equity and look at what it is acceptable for the tax system to do and not do. The Government have clearly laid out our objectives for the tax system. They are to ensure economic stability, raise productivity, increase employment opportunities and tackle child poverty in a fair tax system. Within our complex world and our complex economy, we try to take those principles forward.

Of course, fairness to one person can be uncertainty to another. The hon. Member for Fareham mentioned tax planners. I find it breathtaking if he is seriously suggesting that there will be a truce and that tax planners will say that they will never try to put bits of legislation together that were never intended to go together to minimise relief. Of course that is not the case. There is always that intellectual challenge, as the right hon. Member for Fylde pointed out.

The next question is how to defend ourselves against that possibility. How do we have simply written and easily understandable legislation? I wholeheartedly support the tax law rewrite project, and the capital allowances legislation, in particular, is fantastic. We have tried to get to such a truce and asked if we could have general anti-avoidance legislation, but business said, "No, that is no good". Can we have smaller, or mini, general anti-avoidance legislation? The problem with the anti-abuse legislation is that it is so large. Again, business says, "No." The hon. Member for Fareham says that we should consult more. We consult, and business says, "No."

I do not mind having the debate that right hon. and hon. Members have suggested this morning. It is important, however, not to enter that debate with rose-tinted glasses, believing that the tax system is neutral and that people do not try to manipulate it. The purpose of the tax system is to raise money fairly to invest in public services. I am happy to have had this short debate and I do not mind having it again and again because the more people who understand what goes on in the tax system—how people try to manipulate it and where the winners and losers are—the more they will understand that the process of simplification, fairness and certainty in investment is a difficult balance, which the Government are striking.

Health Inequalities (Huddersfield)

12.29 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): It is a great pleasure to introduce a debate on a topic close to my heart, and to have it presided over by you, Mr. Illsley, a fellow Yorkshire Member of Parliament. I want to make general points before coming to the specifics of Huddersfield. Huddersfield is a typical place when considering health inequalities because it is close to the national average—so, when we talk of the place, we talk about the United Kingdom.

When we celebrated the 50th birthday of the national health service, not long ago, it was a time for reflection. An interesting part of that reflection was that when the NHS was founded, there was a tremendous confidence in the fact that health inequalities would be tackled. Some who were euphoric believed and wrote that by and large the NHS would eventually disappear, as all ill health would be cleared up, problems of health inequalities would be solved and there would no longer be a need for a health system. We have learned a few lessons since then.

I want to point out the important fact that after some initial success in delivering health care to a broader audience, and in involving more people in high-quality health care, something significant happened. When we became the Government in 1997 and looked back over the previous 20 years, we found that, astonishingly, health inequalities had widened. For two generations, the gap had widened between the two extremes of those who had good health and were enjoying longer, healthier lives in social class 1, and those in social class 5. That is worrying for someone who represents an average constituency such as Huddersfield. So, why did it occur?

First, I will give some chilling figures. In the early 70s, the mortality rate among men of working age was almost twice as high for those in social class 5 as it was for those in social class 1. By the early 90s, it was almost three times as high. Those are unacceptable figures. Between 1970 and 1972, the mortality rate per 100,000 men aged between 20 and 64 was 500 in social class 1 and 897 in social class 5. By 1991-93, the number had fallen to 280 in social class 1, but was 806 in social class 5. That is not to suggest that there had not been a general improvement across the piece, but the gap was widening substantially.

Interestingly, Professor Richard Peters, who was responsible for a clinical trials study in Oxford, believes that smoking was a relevant explanation for up to 30 per cent. of that disparity—another chilling figure. We know that such disparity in Huddersfield and the average constituency such as yours, Mr. Illsley, or the Minister's, is centred around income. To paraphrase President Clinton, "It's income, stupid"—how much disposable income is necessary to promote a healthy life.

Income is not the only important issue because factors such as family, smoking, alcohol, drugs, poor diet and a lack of good exercise are also relevant. Those on lower incomes with lower education are prone to a range of diseases. I have spent my lifetime in Parliament campaigning for public health measures such as seatbelts, and I was interested to learn that social classes 4 and 5 are most likely to die in accidents.

The answers lie in education, and poverty alleviation through the income tax system and other benefit systems to address poor incomes. Employment is important because there is a clear relationship between having a job, feeling good about oneself and having good health. One great thing that the Government have achieved during the past five years is a record level of employment. The disparity between social classes 1 and 5 becomes more worrying when one realises that the statistics leave out unemployed and disabled people. That is the nature of the statistics, but many that look pretty darn awful are in fact even worse because they only take into account people in work.

Given your constituency, Mr. Illsley, you know about accidents, the mining industry and the health of miners, and you know what that environment did to the health of both your constituents and mine. The chemical industry had a heavy presence in both the Minister's constituency of Pontefract and Castleford and mine, and it caused diseases, especially in the dyestuff industry in Huddersfield, which are a serious indictment of former industrial practices.

Wearing another hat, I am Chairman of the Select Committee on Education and Skills. On becoming Chairman, one of the first inquiries that we conducted concerned school meals, which are important for children from deprived backgrounds. For many years, especially under the previous Administration, there was a move away from a balanced and healthy school meal regime. The Committee visited schools where there was a broad choice from salads to what I call "proper food", but sadly many children were eating burgers, chips and other unhealthy stuff. Worryingly, a recent survey asked school children to identify a range of fruits and vegetables, but they did not know what they were. There are worrying trends in our diets.

In Huddersfield, we have just reached the stage at which we no longer see old men with bandy legs who had worked in textile mills and whose children must have suffered from rickets, because that generation has died out. There is, however, a new generation with symptoms of obesity, who we can predict will die early of coronary heart disease or other diseases because of their diet and lifestyle. Couch-potato syndrome is a problem because people are not getting enough exercise. There is too much watching sport on television and not enough participation in it.

What can we do about these matters in Huddersfield, and what can we do about them nationally? I have been involved with the launch of the new health forum and the new parliamentary group on health. Until now, we have been unable to identify the statistics on health that influence our constituencies because most data have been collected on a regional and sub-regional level, which is too broad and unfocused. The Dr. Foster organisation enables us to identify, in some focus and detail, health statistics in our own constituencies. The service is accessed by using a private pin number. You could use it, Mr. Illsley, to access the health statistics in your Barnsley constituency. It could be of great benefit to Members of Parliament, and I hope that they will use it. The House of Commons Library can provide marvellous statistics on employment—unemployment rates, length of employment, male, female and youth unemployment, the shift between manufacturing and service jobs, and so on—but health statistics remain vague.

[Mr. Barry Sheerman]

Many of our parliamentary colleagues are remiss in their approach to local health problems. In Huddersfield and elsewhere, the regime should be much more focused on making MPs pro-active leaders—knowing about community health issues and assuming a leadership role. To do that, they need the relevant statistics. Now that they are available, I hope that Members will use them.

For too many MPs, their only contact with the health sector comes from sitting in their advice surgeries hearing complaints about the health service. One always hears a lot about the people who complain—"You never did anything for me, Mr. Sheerman"—but not much about the contented people whom one has helped. Sometimes they write a letter, but more often one meets them in the street and they say, "All those years ago, you helped me." Many people are happy with the good service that they receive from the NHS, but those cases do not come to prominence and the Leader of the Opposition does not drag them into Question Time.

MPs should be more pro-active. I do not want their relationship with the health service to be limited to involvement only when a ward or a cottage hospital is closing down and they rush in like the fire brigade attending a fire. MPs are always invited to and are good at attending ceremonies at which a Minister unveils a plaque for a new hospital extension, but the prescription for changing health understanding in this place is to make Members commit themselves to spending seven days—a whole week—in a hospital talking to patients, doctors, nurses and ancillary and care staff to find out what is really going on. Too many of us talk about health without any real focus.

In Huddersfield, the town centre has more deprived wards than less deprived wards. In other words, more people from the lower socioeconomic classes live in the centre. We are surrounded by higher-income and more affluent areas, especially in our valleys. Data from the Library shows a clear difference between the centre and the wealthier periphery. I am sure that the same applies in your constituency, Mr. Illsley.

I applaud the Government for taking two brilliant steps. First, they have introduced a 10-year national strategy for the health service. Secondly, they have set targets for tackling health inequalities over that period of time. Even better, statistics are emerging that show that since 1997 the gap between social class 1 and social class 5 has started to close, not to widen further. As with education, the resources that the Government are putting into health care seem to be paying off, although it is early days.

Primary care trusts are part of the answer. The Government's ambition for the not-too-distant future is for 75 per cent. of health spend to be in the hands of the primary care trusts. There has recently been consultation on whether there should be one or two primary care trusts in the Huddersfield area. Until now, one trust, Huddersfield Central, has covered most of the deprived wards in my Huddersfield constituency and the neighbouring one, Colne Valley, and another trust, South Huddersfield, has covered more affluent areas.

During the public consultation—surprise, surprise—there was an enormous furore of activity in the more affluent area, led by GPs, who lent on their patients, disgracefully in my view, to write to the Minister and sign letters and petitions. In more middle-class, professional residential areas, it is so easy to organise such things, but we saw less of that activity in the Huddersfield Central area.

After a long deliberation, Huddersfield health authority came down firmly in favour of one primary care trust for the area. Huddersfield is one community. It does not contain a more deprived community and a more affluent one, it is one community. I would have thought that, to tackle health care inequalities, one primary care trust would have been the answer.

The Minister might be going to tell me that there is a reason why the Government overturned the health authority's recommendation, ignored it and said that we will have two trusts—one for the affluent and one for the less affluent area. Those trusts go across constituency boundaries. Will she tell me the rationale for that decision? I think that people in this House know that I am a reasonable Member of Parliament and that I can accept a reasoned argument, but I have not heard the rationale and logic for that move. Pontefract or Barnsley, for example, do not have one primary care trust for the more deprived part and another for the more affluent, but the Government have decided that my town and my community should. If the Minister can give me a rationale, and assure me that the reason for the decision is that money will be poured into Huddersfield Central, and that it will be given an enormous amount of resources per head compared with South Huddersfield, which is more affluent and does not need so many resources, I shall be content and we can resume our normal good relations.

I hope that the debate has put in context why I, as a Member of Parliament, feel strongly about health inequalities. The Government have done some good things and are on the road to tackling inequalities, but I am part of the coalition that wants faster change. I want to know why, in the Huddersfield area, it is deemed right to have two primary care trusts, one for the more affluent area and one for the less affluent area.

12.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) on securing the debate and on raising the important issue of health inequalities in his constituency. He made some general points and some specific ones about his area, particularly about the primary care trusts. I shall attempt to address those in turn.

I concur with my hon. Friend's points about the scars that health inequalities leave right across the country. It is fundamentally unfair that people on higher incomes on average live longer than those on lower incomes, and that people in some parts of the country live significantly longer than those in other areas purely on the basis of region and background. That is unfair, and we must address such inequalities in our broad programmes to tackle the causes of ill health and in more local structures and health service programmes.

The scale of health inequalities is stark. For example, a baby boy born in Calderdale and Kirklees health authority can expect to live three years less than a baby boy born in Barnet—at the end of the 20th century.

The teenage pregnancy rate for girls under 18 in Calderdale and Kirklees is 60 per cent. higher than in Barnet, resulting in health and social inequalities being passed from one generation to the next. The infant mortality rate in the most deprived areas is 70 per cent. higher than in the most affluent areas and babies born to low-income families are more likely to have low birth weight, which is linked to health and education problems for many years. I share my hon. Friend's anxieties about those health inequalities and his welcome for the fact that the latest figures show that the life expectancy gap for men in the most affluent and most deprived social groups has, at last, begun to narrow. The latest figures are extremely welcome, but, as he said, we have a long way to go.

The provisional findings of the Centre for Health Economics in York suggest that the majority of people are shocked when they become aware of such health inequalities and believe that action should be taken to narrow the gap. The Government are right not just in investing to improve and reform our health service, but in investing to improve and narrow health inequalities.

Much of the work in this area stems from that of Sir Donald Acheson and his team who were commissioned soon after the 1997 election to carry out an independent inquiry into inequalities in health and the causes of those inequalities. It was the first time since the Black report some 20 years before that a major report was produced on health inequalities in this country. It examined the root causes of ill health, ranging from child poverty, unemployment and poor housing, and more immediate factors such as smoking and poor diet. As my hon. Friend said, smoking is indeed one of the greatest causes of health inequalities because the highest rates of smoking are among those on lowest incomes.

Since the 1997 general election, we have taken action to try to narrow those health inequalities. For example, the minimum wage and the working families tax credit have lifted 1 million children out of poverty. I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees that that measure alone will probably have more impact on his constituents in Huddersfield and mine in Pontefract and Castleford than almost any other measure to narrow health inequalities. Widening educational opportunities for children, initiatives such as the new deal programmes and many of the measures that he, as a member of the Select Committee on Education and Skills, has examined will also have an impact on health.

The sure start programme is one of the most important in helping to narrow health inequalities early in life by providing help and support for the under-fours and their families. Two fifth-wave sure start programmes have been approved for Huddersfield, both of which will have an impact on the population in Huddersfield Central primary care trust area. One programme is based in Deighton ward, which was identified in the neighbourhood renewal programme as among the 10 per cent. most deprived wards in England. It is being led by local trusts, with responsibility passing to Huddersfield Central primary care trust from April 2002. It is developing in parallel with other local programmes, including the Deighton Brackenhall initiative and the second sure start programme, which covers parts of the Crosland Moor and Paddock wards and is led by Kirklees social services.

We are also targeting specific help at key risk factors—for example, nicotine-replacement therapy on prescription to help people to stop smoking, and the national school fruit scheme. I agree with my hon. Friend that the diet and nutrition of school children is particularly important, and I am a strong supporter of the national school fruit scheme, which will ensure that all infant school children are entitled to a free piece of fruit each day. That is probably the biggest programme to support children's nutrition since the introduction of free school milk after the war. The teenage pregnancy strategy is clearly also having an impact.

My hon. Friend expressed concern about PCTs and their configuration in Huddersfield. He also raised the issue with my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Health, the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), who took his views seriously and who has spent some considerable time weighing the arguments. My hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield is right that the role of the PCTs is critical in tackling health inequalities, as they have so much money—they will have 75 per cent. of the budgets—and as they commission work that can have a huge impact on health inequalities. They also provide services that can help reduce those inequalities, such as smoking cessation, statins for heart disease and managing hypertension.

PCTs can have an impact on all those things, as well as in the untapped source of working more closely in partnerships. They work more closely in some areas, but not as far as they could in others. More partnership work is needed on sure start and teenage pregnancies, and more local partnership work is needed on housing. I understand my hon. Friend's concern that PCTs are established most effectively to address health inequalities. My hon. Friend the Minister of State and the Department of Health considered those issues when they made their decision.

PCTs need to be rooted in their local communities and be endorsed by them to have the greatest effect. My hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield will be aware that the public responses to the consultation were overwhelmingly in favour of two PCTs for the area. I recognise his concerns, but we have made it clear that the PCTs and the health economy in Huddersfield need to work closely together across the patch. If the community is not ready to embrace a single PCT with enthusiasm, it is right to establish two PCTs, but with the clear direction that they work closely together and look forward to the future. That means joint appointments, such as the director of public health and the director of finance. The director of public health is the most important appointment, as issues of health inequality need close joint working. We expect the director of public health to lead that work in a PCT.

We also expect strategic health authorities to explore greater joint working throughout the health and social care sectors. I assure my hon. Friend that we have considered those issues and that the decision was not easy to take. Nevertheless, on balance, it was the right one to take at this stage. The two PCTs can make considerable progress in narrowing health inequalities by working together and in partnership with the local community, local authorities, voluntary organisations and community groups.

[Yvette Cooper]

As my hon. Friend made clear, we have set two national health inequalities targets and recently ran a major consultation throughout the country on how to meet those targets on life expectancy and infant mortality. A group of organisations in the Calderdale and Kirklees area responded jointly to that consultation. The group included the Calderdale primary care group, the North Kirklees PCG, the Central Huddersfield PCG, the South Huddersfield PCG, the Calderdale and Kirklees health authority and a range of community groups. Although they supported the consultation document and much of the work that is being done, they urged us to do more work to ensure that mainstream resources are devoted to action on inequality. I agree. They also said that two groups had been prioritised locally because of the changing demographics of older people and black and minority ethnic communities, to which they urged us to pay more attention. We will certainly take their remarks seriously.

I welcome the fact that such bodies worked together on the consultation on narrowing health inequalities. I urge them to continue to do so. We will consider their comments seriously and are working as part of a cross-cutting review involving all Departments on how best to address the narrowing of health inequalities. We have made considerable progress, but must recognise that fundamental injustices still scar our nation and that there is much more to do.

Role of Lord Birt

12.59 pm

Norman Baker (Lewes): I am delighted to have secured this debate today; it is, in many ways, a journey into the unknown. I hope that by the end of it we will all know more about what Lord Birt does. The Minister has a blank canvas on which to paint, for we know precious little so far. I draw the Minister's attention to the title of the debate. I have deliberately chosen a narrow topic, so I hope that when he replies he will address himself to it. If he is tempted to range far and wide without actually hitting the target, I will look to you, Mr Illsley, for assistance and protection.

What do we know about Lord Birt's latest appointment? I can list that very quickly. According to the Prime Minister's answer to one of my questions, we know that he has been appointed to the forward strategy unit in No. 10 and that he works with the unit on "a range of projects", that he is unpaid but can claim expenses, and that he last travelled by train on 28 November. We also know that he is engaged in blue-skies thinking, whatever that is. Someone suggested that it may be gazing out of the window of the Cabinet Office. In any case, when one adds up that information, it is not very revealing.

What we know about Lord Birt himself, as opposed to his new role, hardly fills us with confidence that he is an appropriate person to occupy a key Government position. Let us take his time as Director General of the BBC. It was hardly a success. He took a unified organisation and split it into atomised pieces, each fighting the other. Morale plummeted while management costs soared. Broadcasting house became virtually empty of broadcasters; they were all shipped at vast expense to White City to make more room for the managers and accountants and the army of consultants that Lord Birt employed. Fortunately for the BBC, Greg Dyke has reversed much of the damage.

The profile of John Birt in *The Observer* in 1996 put it thus:

> "Here is a man who has embarked on the total reconstruction, many would say destruction, of Britain's most visible and successful cultural institution. For years the BBC has been churning with turmoil, its staff confused, alienated and depressed by the authoritarian rule of a Director-General despised by most of them. At the same time the governors of the BBC, nominally Birt's superiors, have consistently been patronised, manipulated and sidelined by him."

The man who was chairman when Birt was Director General, Marmaduke Hussey, told *The Guardian* last August that if he had been given a new term as chairman, he would have sacked Birt. He said:

> "I wouldn't have reappointed him if I'd had the chance, I would have got rid of him. He was dogmatic and difficult and slow to take decisions. He did have some fine qualities, but admitting that others on occasion might be right was not one of them."

Is that the sort of man we want creating transport policy?

We also know that Lord Birt was installed as Director General at the BBC without a formal interview or application process. Lord Birt appears rather good at securing jobs for which he is ill-equipped without having to bother applying for them. He joined the BBC as Director General in November 1992 and it was not until

March that it transpired that he was not on the staff but was employed through an organisation called John Birt Productions Ltd. He then asked people to believe that he had been too busy to join the staff. Naturally, his little wheeze was financially very rewarding in tax terms—although it meant less money for the Exchequer, as tax avoidance always does. None of that stopped him from retiring from the BBC with a golden handshake reputed to total £784,000. Is that the sort of man we want creating transport policy?

Of course we need not look back to the BBC to examine John Birt's record. Prior to being given his transport blue-skies role, he was the Prime Minister's crime tsar. His brief, according to a parliamentary answer to me, was

> "to take a long-term, strategic look at criminality and long-run social trends."

And if that was not clear, the Prime Minister helpfully added:

> "Lord Birt brings a strategic outlook and an understanding of social trends".—[*Official Report*, 24 July 2000; Vol. 354, c. 443W.]

It was interesting to know what the Prime Minister thought he brought to the job, for it certainly was not a knowledge of crime.

What did Lord Birt manage to contribute? We do not know officially, of course. That, like everything else to do with Lord Birt, is kept from MPs and the public. However *The Guardian* managed to piece things together a little. An article entitled "Crime tsar Birt leaves to the sound of mockery" stated:

> "Lord Birt...has been quietly pensioned off amid mounting criticism that he failed to deliver...'It's just been a deathly silence since he was appointed—he's made no impact at all,' said one Whitehall source... insiders say he was in effect limited to poring over the Offenders' Index—records of crime statistics for the past 50 years—in an attempt to discern trends."

The article went on to say that John Birt had not met the Association of Chief Police Officers, the National Association of Probation Officers, the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders or, it appears, any organisation with a knowledge of crime. One would have thought that he might have started on that tack if he had wanted to carry out some useful work in that role.

We are told that his work was "considered alongside" contributions from Departments for the report "Criminal Justice: The Way Ahead", although the Prime Minister has refused my request and those of others to place a copy of John Birt's work in the Library. Why is it not in the Library? Is he worried that it might look a little threadbare or amateurish? In any case, the consensus is that his work was distinctly underwhelming.

Is this the sort of man we want creating transport policy? Why has he been asked to look at transport? Well, it gives him something to do, as the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions neatly put it when giving evidence to the Transport Select Committee. He implied that Lord Birt was a harmless diversion, but I wonder whether he knew about Lord Birt's financial connections with Virgin, which has railways and air services as part of its empire. He should know that Lord Birt became chairman of Lynx New Media in 2000, as he disclosed in the Lords' register of interests. However, Lord Birt did not disclose that Lynx is in effect managed by Virgin Media Group. Was the Prime Minister informed of that connection when he asked Lord Birt to undertake transport policy?

Perhaps that explains why Lord Birt has an office with Lynx New Media on the fourth floor at 45, Old Bond street. That is where Downing street will refer callers on ringing up to find out how to contact him. It might also explain why a life-size cardboard cut-out of Richard Branson adorns the office. Of course, 45, Old Bond street is very exclusive. I have a photograph that the Minister might like to see if he has not seen it before. It shows John Birt's office, two doors from the Gucci shop, with a Rolls Royce parked opposite. I am reliably told that rents there average £80 per sq ft. Is the taxpayer paying for office space for Lord Birt there?

Is it appropriate for the Prime Minister's personal transport adviser to have a £100 million financial relationship with a leading supplier of transport in the UK? Is that the sort of man we want creating transport policy? I believe that the link with Virgin represents a clear conflict of interest for a person charged with developing transport policy. Unless the Prime Minister and Lord Birt himself can show categorically that no conflict exists—bearing in mind that no information whatever has been provided so far—Lord Birt should resign forthwith.

However, neither Lord Birt nor the Prime Minister seems to want to show anything. For a start, the Prime Minister refuses to give out anything but the barest information about Lord Birt and his role, little more than the fact that he has been appointed. I refer to some of the questions that I have asked so far but the Prime Minister has refused to answer. The Prime Minister will not tell us for how long Lord Birt has been appointed to the forward strategy unit. He will not tell us how many times he has met Lord Birt this year. He will not tell us whether Lord Birt has access to Cabinet papers. He will not tell us how many hours a week Lord Birt works. He will not tell us how much he has claimed in expenses. He will not tell us to which Ministers Lord Birt reports. He will not tell us which transport organisations, if any, Lord Birt has met since his appointment. He will not tell us what secretarial support is available to Lord Birt, although a helpful inside source tells me that between eight and 10 civil servants are working for him. Is that correct? He will not tell us what office space has been made available to Lord Birt. He will not tell us which projects Lord Birt has worked on or will be working on.

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions will not tell us—no doubt under orders from No. 10—whether he was consulted prior to Lord Birt's appointment or what access Lord Birt has to civil servants in his Department. Was the Secretary of State consulted by the Prime Minister prior to Lord Birt's appointment?

I wonder whether the Prime Minister recalls the magic words he issued as Leader of the Opposition:

> "Labour would change the whole style of government. Our bill of rights and freedom of information act would get rid of the culture of secrecy".

Those are hollow words when it comes to finding out about Lord Birt or much else in the internal mechanism of No. 10.

[Norman Baker]

This farrago of non-answers, which the Minister appears to think is consistent with democracy—he is laughing about it—treats Parliament with contempt. I have requested basic information that would in no way compromise the principle that advice available to Ministers is confidential. Some of the questions that were refused an answer had previously been answered by this Prime Minister and the previous Prime Minister, who in many ways was more open. I refer the Minister, and the Prime Minister, to the Speaker's statement of 28 November—

Mr. Eric Illsley (in the Chair): Order. I must remind the hon. Gentleman that "Erskine May" details particular conventions on comments about Members of Parliament. Lord Birt is technically a Member of the upper House, so I ask the hon. Gentleman to follow those conventions and ensure that his language is temperate.

Norman Baker: I shall try to do that, Mr. Illsley. I thought that my language was temperate, but I have listened to you carefully.

I refer to the Speaker's statement of 28 November, in which he said that

> "when Ministers refuse to answer questions, they are expected to indicate in their reply why they have refused by reference to the Government's code."—[*Official Report*, 28 November 2001; Vol. 375, c. 971.]

In none of the cases that I mentioned was that done, and the reason is obvious. Nothing in the code could possibly justify the contemptuous non-answers that the Prime Minister has given to me and other Members. If there is, the Minister should tell us about it in his reply. I give the Minister notice that if he fails to provide answers to those outstanding queries today, I will lodge a formal complaint with the Public Administration Committee to take the matter further. I will also pursue the whole issue by other means.

This matter does not only concern questions. We now learn that Lord Birt has decided—or the Prime Minister has decided for him—that he is not prepared to give evidence to the Transport Committee, despite the formidable and vocal objections of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). I hope that the Prime Minister has also noted the points of order raised last Thursday in the Chamber by the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) and my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler).

What on earth has possessed the Prime Minister to appoint someone whose record is patchy to say the least, who is ill suited to the task in hand and, according to the press, widely derided by civil servants and the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions? Given his involvement with Richard Branson and Virgin, he also has a clear conflict of interests. If Lord Birt is the answer, the question must be a strange one.

What on earth has possessed the Prime Minister to deal with the matter in such a secretive and contemptuous way? Why will he not answer basic questions? Why should Lord Birt not be answerable to the Transport Committee? The immediate answer that I fear is that it is because he is a friend—or should I say a crony. Lord Birt was ennobled by the Prime Minister, he attended Cherie Blair's 40th birthday party, and at his 50th birthday celebration, the Prime Minister took part in a pantomime skit based on his life. The wider answer, I regret to say, is that the Prime Minister appears to believe that he can simply bypass normal rules and conventions if his friends are involved and he feels like it. It seems that the rules and conventions that work to hold the Government to account are optional if he so decides.

The Prime Minister came to power in 1997 with a Labour Government who had a huge majority on the back of public revulsion at the sleaze that had dominated the latter Tory years. He arrived committed to a new way of doing things—a new Bill of Rights and a Freedom of Information Act, ending the secrecy in government and the corruption, patronage and sleaze. Fundamentally, the Prime Minister is a decent man, but he is slipping into the seductive ways that make life easier today but store up trouble for tomorrow. His decision to withhold from Parliament almost all information about Lord Birt is a symptom of a wider malaise. He must remember, as should his Ministers, that freedom of information is ultimately a friend of good government and the governing party. Subterfuge, secrecy, contempt of Parliament, withholding information unnecessarily and thwarting Select Committees are dangerous roads to go down for both democracy and the Government.

Lord Birt is the wrong man for the job, and he should be relieved of his post forthwith. However, if the Prime Minister wants to keep him, he should provide answers to justify the employment. He must recognise that Members of this House have a right to ask questions and a justifiable expectation that they will be answered, whether they are inconvenient or not. That is how this place works. Members are entitled to ask questions and expect answers, not to be fobbed off. Let us have Lord Birt before the Transport Committee to answer basic points about his role—not about the advice that he has given, but about his terms and conditions of work. If Lord Birt is to win any respect in his present post, that is the only way forward. Without basic accountability, he will be able to limp on in his closed world, sheltered from the biting wind by the warm, enveloping cloak of the Prime Minister and all at No. 10, but the price that he will have to pay is derision.

The price that the Prime Minister will have to pay is greater. It will be to water the bitter seeds already planted—the seeds of distaste at the naked patronage of cronies, the seeds of anger that the Government's fine promises of openness and accountability have been betrayed, and most of all the seeds of disappointment that the new start in which so many people believed back in 1997 has finally spluttered to a halt and that the Prime Minister, in the public's eyes, is just like any other politician.

1.15 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie): Convention dictates that I congratulate the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) on securing the debate, but so far it has not been characterised by his more usual generous and magnanimous approach. I was starting to feel worried:

he is desperately trying to maintain his reputation by portraying himself as a man with the bit between his teeth. I felt that he was grasping at straws today and the level of intemperance said a great deal about his mindset and focus in the debate. I am truly disappointed and sorry about that.

I should like to deal with Lord Birt's role and directly answer the hon. Gentleman's questions. Lord Birt is appointed by the Prime Minister as an unpaid strategic adviser and has an overarching role on several projects supported by the forward strategy unit at No. 10. His role is to provide analysis and advice on a range of strategic issues, including long-term options for transport over future generations. Lord Birt's position is simply another in a long line of external unpaid appointments that have been made by Governments of all parties when they want the benefit of wider advice. His role is in parallel with the work and objectives of the forward strategy unit, and he provides private policy advice to the Prime Minister and his Cabinet colleagues.

It is important to set out what Lord Birt is not doing: he does not have an executive role; he does not execute or make policy decisions; he does not receive a salary from the taxpayer; he does not change the nature of decision making because Ministers and the Prime Minister are ultimately accountable. Ministers are in the hot seat, taking decisions and accepting full responsibility. Ministers are properly held to account and have to answer for the consequences of their decisions. Ministers have always sought private advice from a range of sources. They have always had private discussions about long-term trends and developments in policy across departmental barriers. The unpaid advisers in the forward strategy unit provide useful analysis in order to inform those discussions.

Advice comes to Government from several quarters—even, I suppose, from the Liberal Democrats. Policy is not made in a vacuum. Suggestions, recommendations, guidance and opinions are all taken to Ministers, who weigh up options and arguments, and take decisions themselves after careful consideration.

Their choices are defended when Ministers are held to account in Parliament. Ministers go before Select Committees, make statements and answer at Question Time in the Chamber—and, indeed, in Westminster Hall Adjournment debates. As the ministerial code of conduct makes plain:

> "The Minister in charge of a Department is alone answerable to Parliament for the exercise of the powers on which the administration of that Department depends."

Nothing Lord Birt or the forward strategy unit does changes that.

It might help the hon. Gentleman if I explained the context and practice of appointing unpaid advisers. The ministerial code of conduct clearly sets out the provisions and parameters in the appointment of unpaid advisers. Such advisers are personal appointments by Ministers; there is no contractual relationship between adviser and Department; all normal codes of government apply; the Official Secrets Act and the business appointment rules—introduced, incidentally, by this Administration—cover unpaid advisers and special advisers. Those arrangements have worked well in the past, and we believe that they will continue to do so.

There are virtues to having two unpaid advisers in government. Advisers volunteer their time and expertise because they want to contribute to improving public services and the country at large. They offer the benefits of their experience and knowledge to help Ministers to make better policy. No financial rewards are involved. Advisers simply wish to contribute to the common objective of delivering improvements to the work of the Government. They are public-spirited individuals, with no vested interests or axes to grind, or profit to gain. I wish that I could say the same about axes to grind in respect of the hon. Gentleman. We would all be much worse off if we resisted taking fresh perspectives and challenging concepts to the heart of government.

Ministers receive advice all the time from a huge range of sources, some of which is requested and some unprompted. There are many professionals and experts with ideas that may be worth listening to. It would be idiotic to have a closed mind and a blinkered approach when alternative strategies and options may provide the right solutions. It is right to be able to tap into advice from outside on an unpaid basis. That must be a feature of a mature democracy.

I want briefly to set in context the work of the forward strategy and the performance and innovation units. There is a long-standing tradition of strategic units at the centre of government. They hardly represent a radical new departure in No. 10 or a major constitutional change. In the Heath Administration in the 1970s—I cannot recall it precisely—the central policy review staff were known as the Think Tank, which was intended to look at issues in a detached, strategic manner, while Departments focused on delivering day-to-day policies. The Think Tank was headed by an outsider, Victor Rothschild. It lasted throughout the second Wilson Government, the Callaghan Government, and the Thatcher Administration, and then merged into the No. 10 policy unit.

Governments of all parties have from time to time felt the need for outside advice and a fresh perspective from new angles. In 1997, when the Labour Government took office, the policy unit was not sufficient to give proper capacity for strategic thinking. Therefore, we set up a performance and innovation unit to look afresh at different issues across normal departmental boundaries. The PIU undertakes its work in several ways, using outside advisers to bring in new skills and expertise. It conducts structured, intensive and focused projects and has a commitment to the use of hard evidence to ensure that policy decisions are built on firm foundations. Let us consider two examples of the PIU's work and outcomes. Its report on the recovery of the proceeds of crime led to the Proceeds of Crime Bill and the Prime Minister's review of adoption led to the Adoption and Children Bill.

The PIU has been increasingly recognised as a successful model, so the establishment of a forward strategy unit inside No. 10 gives a stronger strategic function capable of giving the Prime Minister and the Cabinet long-term, private and strategic advice. The forward strategy unit is a panel of senior individuals with a wide breadth of expertise working in small teams drawn from the civil service and outside.

[Mr. Christopher Leslie]

The hon. Gentleman mentioned appearances before a Select Committee. Ministers are accountable to Parliament, not officials, except for accounting officers. Ministers make and execute policy. It is the Executive who are held accountable. Ministers give evidence and submit written material to Select Committees all the time, and it is proper for them to express a preference on who should explain their policies. As an unpaid strategy adviser, Lord Birt has no executive role. The invitation to Lord Birt from the Transport Committee was to give evidence on the 10-year plan, which is the responsibility of the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. Ministers therefore decided that Mr. Willy Rickett, a senior official from the DTLR who is working with the forward strategy unit on transport issues, would be better placed to give evidence, and he did so last week.

There are ample opportunities for Select Committees to make inquiries and cross-examine people. The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has appeared twice, and the Minister for Transport and a Parliamentary Under-Secretary in the Department have also appeared before the Committee. There is no deficit in accountability, because the buck stops with Ministers.

The Government are strongly committed to a healthy system of scrutiny through the Select Committee process, and the Leader of House will soon bring forward proposals to further it—for example, making nominations more independent of Government, providing more resources to conduct investigations and broadening the scope and jurisdiction of Select Committees.

It is nonsense for the hon. Gentleman to refer to some grand, dark conspiracy theory at the heart of government. In many ways, I worry for the workings of his mind. There is bound to be lots of media excitement, especially in the BBC, about the issue. The desire to concoct such theories is a bit excessive.

Norman Baker: The Minister should not worry about my mind. It is perfectly all right, and I shall look after and treasure it in the years ahead.

Before he sits down, will he address the long list of questions that have not been answered by the Prime Minister and the others that I inserted later, including those on the relationship with Virgin and the costly offices at 45, Old Bond street? Does he agree that answering those questions would not in any way interfere with the advice given to Ministers but would be proper accountability in Parliament?

Mr. Leslie: If the hon. Gentleman had been listening to my comments, he would have heard me mention that the business appointment rules apply to unpaid advisers. He suggests that there is a conflict of interest, but that would not be allowed under the ministerial code or the business appointment rules.

As for the theory that there is a cost to the taxpayer for offices in Old Bond street, there is no cost to the public purse at all. As I said, whenever new units are created or appointments are made, there is bound to be some interest, but the role of Lord Birt and the forward strategy unit are hardly radical constitutional innovations. If the hon. Gentleman reviews previous discussions, he will discover that.

Ministers can accept or reject advice as they wish. The simple aim is to broaden the thinking in the Government and widen horizons in policy development. Surely there is nothing wrong with that. The Government are making genuine efforts to manage and improve public services. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will see all these matters in that light.

Running Government and public services—schools, hospitals, the police service and transport—is an immensely complicated and important task. The Government are trying as hard as they can to advance the quality and efficient management of those vital services. To do that, it is necessary to tap into the expertise of people who have a track record of running large and complex organisations and institutions. In the process of reforming and modernising our public services, getting the right solutions is, surely, vital. Thus, the ability for Ministers to listen to advice volunteered by those with useful experiences—for example, in managing major projects—should be welcomed, not discouraged. Reasonable Governments do not just dwell on the problems facing a nation; they face the challenge of devising practical solutions as well.

Mr. Eric Illsley (in the Chair): We come to the next debate, which is about the outcome of Government initiatives to combat the social exclusion of young people through work.

Social Exclusion

1.28 pm

Mrs. Helen Clark (Peterborough): Back in May 1997, the new Government pledged to get 250,000 young, unemployed people off benefit and into work. The target had been more than reached by September 2000, when more than 254,000 young people had been brought into work through the new deal programme. Young people, employers, private and public sector providers, environmental and voluntary organisations and the Government's Employment Service worked in partnership to achieve the objective—vital for a fair, inclusive society and economic growth—of cutting youth unemployment.

The achievements of the new deal were celebrated in November 2000 at a conference in London that was attended by Ministers and an invited audience of new deal participants, personal advisers—they are central to the delivery of the programme—employers, taskforce members and delivery organisations. Included in that invited audience as a representative of the new deal in Peterborough was Ken Shackleton of Shackleton Associates, who has long been involved in employment and training provision.

The day after the event, I was delighted to attend a ceremony in Peterborough where I presented personal advisers with awards for NVQs in guidance which they had successfully completed to develop their professional competence. Anyone who has met young people on the new deal scheme knows what a difference one-to-one skilled advice can make. "He was the father I never had", one young man said. Even those with helpful parents may find them unable to give adequate help and guidance in today's fast-changing employment market. The most recent edition of the newsletter for new deal partners, *Partnership Practice*, points out that new deal programmes have been helped by the economic recovery and that the new deal is not a "job's worth", job-creation programme. It is designed to help unemployed people compete more effectively for available jobs.

Peterborough used to have an unemployment rate higher than the national average, but in July 1997 it fell below that average for the first time in a decade. Much of the growth over the past five years—comprising approximately 6,600 jobs—has been in five sectors: distribution and catering, financial and business services, public services, construction, and transport and communications. According to a report by Peterborough city council, there is a projected increase of nearly 8,000 jobs by 2006.

We are fortunate that large Government and quasi-Government agencies provide employment in Peterborough. Appropriately in one of the four environment cities in the UK, some of them are working together to promote a cluster of environmental businesses, which are due to be launched officially next month by Department of Trade and Industry Minister, Lord Sainsbury. I believe that the city will rightly be regarded as a centre of excellence, bringing new opportunities to its residents and those who travel into it from the surrounding region to work.

However, against that rosy picture must be set the less well known fact: three wards in my constituency—Central, Dogsthorpe and Ravensthorpe—are among the 10 per cent. most deprived in England. That is according to the Government's overall index of multiple deprivation, which combines indices of income, employment, health deprivation and disability, educational skills and training, and geographical access to services. Indeed, Central ward is the most deprived ward in the eastern region.

I recently asked Ken Shackleton for an update on the programme. I am glad to say that it is mostly positive. All the targets for the most recent six-month period have been met, sometimes by an extensive margin, despite the fact that most of the new deal 18 to 25-year-old trainees face a range of barriers that make it hard for them to get a job. Those barriers can include basic literacy and numeracy needs, lack of job skills, poor personal skills, debt problems, drug problems and, increasingly in the Peterborough area, lack of English, to which I shall return.

Most trainees have experienced only casual or part-time work, usually unskilled, and come from homes with little history of work and where the benefit culture is deeply embedded. Training and support must therefore tackle lack of personal skills and poor literacy and numeracy before it can tackle job-related skills. The programme needs to re-motivate people, giving them the belief that there is another way than benefit, in which they can begin to take responsibility for their own future.

The initial gateway stage of new deal, where advisers build a relationship with individuals to help them develop an action plan suitable for them, is therefore vital. That stage, as the Minister knows, can include literacy and numeracy training, training needs analysis, job-search, debt, drug or substance counselling and a gateway-to-work course. As part of the gateway programme, the course lasts for two weeks, usually occurring between weeks four to seven. It uses new situations and experiences, often based on outdoor activities. It involves employers at all stages and includes a two-day work placement. Individuals then have a choice of route, with placements in the environmental taskforce, the voluntary sector, full-time education and training. Trainees who find the transition to work particularly hard are matched with a mentor, whom they meet weekly. There have been teething problems, but a major redesign is due in April, which should address all the shortcomings.

The environmental taskforce has already been redesigned to be more individually based, with individual placements. The voluntary sector option, which is a placement and training in the voluntary sector for up to 26 weeks, has always proved successful and popular. I regret that the full-time education and training option, for up to 52 weeks, is not as fancied, perhaps because the £15.38 supplement does not apply. I understand that the Government are addressing the issue through the Learning and Skills Development Agency, fostering better links between colleges and new deal providers.

However, the most significant change reported by providers in Peterborough is a significant increase in the need for basic skills, and English for speakers of other languages—ESOL. In the providers' opinion, that means that many trainees may need longer than the 26-week gateway period. Although providers have

[Mrs. Helen Clark]

increased staffing to cope with that need, there is no extra funding for ESOL. Those questions need to be addressed.

Shackletons emphasises that the success of the new deal to date has depended on partnership working, and the working relationship between it and the Employment Service has become very effective. They work together at all levels and operationally have a joint development plan for the delivery of programmes. There are joint training sessions, workshops and regular operational meetings. Shackletons believes that all the right building blocks and funding are in place, and that the action being taken now is the best ever in its professional experience of more than 25 years.

Success demands that all the relevant partners continue to work together to keep abreast of the always-changing employment market, whether in terms of the type of jobs or skills available. Almost by definition, those first into employment will be the easiest to place, and as new employment sectors develop, so new skills and training will be necessary.

Two weeks ago, my right hon. Friends the Deputy Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions were key speakers at a conference in London entitled "Building Partnerships for Social Inclusion: Next Steps for the National Anti-Poverty Strategy". The Deputy Prime Minister began by recalling the appalling rates of social exclusion that faced the Labour Government in 1997. There was mass unemployment, with one in five children living in a family in which no one worked. There was more adult illiteracy than anywhere else in Europe. Yes, there were higher incomes, but there was also a larger gap between rich and poor. We had the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Europe and almost 2,000 rough sleepers every night.

As the Deputy Prime Minister pointed out, those factors too often operate together and feed a cycle of deprivation: the poorest communities have the highest unemployment, the least access to public transport, fewer GPs per head of population and the lowest achieving schools. As he said, that situation was a direct result of the wrong economic and social policies. Previous Tory Governments did not address or take responsibility for the causes and consequences of poverty; the trickle down from economic growth was supposed to be the answer. According to that theory, people who do not succeed have only themselves to blame. That is an eccentric and increasingly minority view.

For the Labour Government, combating poverty and social exclusion has been a priority from the start. A range of initiatives besides the new deal is designed to do so in a variety of ways. The new Connexions service provides a personal adviser for every young person—the focus of this debate. That means a single point of access to advice on careers, health, education, benefits and so on. Other programmes focus on younger age groups to give them a head start in life. That ambitious long-term strategy involves much creative thinking and cross-boundary working by people in government and out of government.

I should like to call attention to the contribution that voluntary sector organisations can make in targeting the groups most in need of help and in fine tuning Government programmes to have maximum impact in particular and individual circumstances. I shall focus in particular on the varied and extensive work of the Prince's Trust, which enables 14 to 30-year-olds to develop skills that help them to move forward with their lives. It offers a range of opportunities including training, personal development, business start-up support, mentoring and advice. It focuses on unemployed and under-skilled young people who are in or leaving the criminal justice system or care, who are disabled, parenting alone or facing discrimination. It operates in every constituency in the United Kingdom and has three country offices in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, nine regional English offices and numerous local offices.

Since the trust was founded by His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales 25 years ago, it has provided funding and support to more than 400,000 young people, including more than 47,000 who have been helped to set up in business. More than 10,000 volunteers and 700 staff, including secondees, work to deliver programmes across the United Kingdom.

I am particularly impressed by the work of the trust with minority groups. As we know, belonging to certain minority groups can lead to higher levels of disadvantage. I am glad that Government financial support for the Prince's Trust is considerable. The Department for Work and Pensions provides substantial financial support for the business programme. However, the trust is keen to work with Government to develop and pilot new services for disadvantaged young people. The Government could make better use of the trust as a source of expertise and, where appropriate, for piloting new initiatives.

The Prince's Trust can do things that the Government cannot easily do. It is well placed to reach out to the most excluded who are often alienated by the so-called official channels. The trust is able to engage with people because it is not seen as part of the Government machine, and has a network of staff and outreach workers who remain close to the ground and to those young people who are hardest to reach. The trust targets specific groups that are more likely to be at risk of exclusion.

The trust also has the freedom to try out new, innovative ideas. It is an informal, enterprising organisation that conducts regular research with young people to initiate new ideas and programmes. That means that it can sometimes be quicker off the mark than Government, and offer speedy solutions to emerging issues or problems. If piloting programmes are successful, they can be taken up by Government. The core work of the Prince's Trust to start business and support personal development has been acknowledged as the inspiration for parts of our new deal, as well as for other things.

The trust pioneered study support centres that became part of Government policy. The new opportunities fund now has a target of 8,000 such centres across the country. More recently, the Excel network of clubs and schools reaches out to year 10 and year 11 pupils at risk of exclusion and aims to reintegrate them into the learning process by offering them an alternative way to learn. Excel is a good example of a way in which the Government could partner the trust in delivering supplementary education services.

I welcome and applaud the achievements to date of national and local government and their partners in the business and voluntary sectors in combating the causes and effects of social exclusion, and particularly in tackling the barriers to employment for our disadvantaged young people. I reinforce the message from both sides that future progress depends not only on our thriving economy, or on well designed programmes and funding for them, but on a readiness to recognise one another's strengths and contributions. As in so much innovative policy implementation and development, partnerships are key. Through effective working partnerships between all experts in the area, any initiative can be swiftly modified and adapted to suit local and changing conditions.

We have been good at partnership working in Peterborough; it is part of a proud tradition. I am sure that it will continue in the development of important programmes to assist young disadvantaged people who are such an important plank of economic and social policy. The benefits of our predicted economic growth will then be shared by them, and that includes the residents of Central, Ravensthorpe and Dogsthorpe wards in my constituency.

1.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Clark) on securing a debate on an important subject. Although, as she said, unemployment in her constituency is below the national average, she is right to have sought this debate and to have highlighted issues relating to a particular group of disadvantaged people in her constituency. Her remarks of course resonate far wider than Peterborough, but I understand her natural inclination to comment on the city and in particular the thr[illegible]wards to which she referred.

My hon. Friend hit the nail on the head when she said, towards the end of her remarks, that partnership is the key. We agree it is the key to further progress. Let me make it clear that this Government believe in promoting equality and giving everyone the opportunity to reach their full potential. That includes the people in Central ward and the other two wards to which she referred who are still disadvantaged and cannot play their full part in society by obtaining the jobs and opportunities that they want.

We believe in ensuring that people in my hon. Friend's constituency and elsewhere have the opportunity to reach their full potential. Not having a job is one of the main reasons for low income among people of working age. That has to be tackled. Paid work is the best form of welfare for individuals and families and the most secure means of lifting people out of poverty and dependence. We are determined to continue to bear down on the causes of unemployment and inequality in this, our second term in government.

We have also set out a clear strategy to provide work for those who can work and security for those who cannot. Our goal is clear: to create and sustain employment opportunities for all during the next decade in every part of the country. Of course, that includes Peterborough. Our strategy is based around three main priorities. The first is building a welfare state that is active, making work possible and making work pay, rather than just being a passive doler out of benefits. The second is to encourage lifelong learning to ensure that people have the skills and education that they need to play an active role in a modern labour market. It is no longer enough to be able to get one job, because people no longer remain in one job for most of their working lives. They have to be flexible and able to move around. Lifelong learning ensures that they can do that.

Our third priority is to support those most at risk from discrimination and disadvantage by promoting equality and diversity in our work force. Rather than just passively paying out benefits, our task is to deliver a system that works in partnership with individuals, employers and local voluntary organisations, to get people back into the labour market and able to compete for jobs.

Sustaining a strong economy underpins everything that we do, and my hon. Friend referred to that. There are problems and uncertainties in the world economy, but the UK is coping well, not least because we have given huge priority to sustaining a strong economy. The economy is growing, and although the labour market has weakened a little since last summer, activity continues at a high level. Employment is at a record level, with 28.2 million people in work—an increase of 1.3 million during the past four years. Unemployment is at its lowest level for 30 years. That is a real success story, and it has not just happened. This Government have made it happen.

With the support of the new deal, more than 600,000 people nationally have been helped into work. We must remember that the official Opposition and the Liberal Democrats opposed the new deal. We should not let them forget that. We now have the right policies in place to deal with change so that those who lose their jobs can return to work quickly, and those who have been out of work for some time or who are disadvantaged can have the chance to reconnect with the world of work.

The measures that we are taking not only help break down the barriers to work but ensure that, when people take up work, work pays. The working families tax credit is part of our first stage of the modernisation of the tax and benefits system to ensure that work pays and that we tackle child poverty. By August last year, the working families tax credit was helping nearly 1.3 million families. The national minimum wage has benefited around 1.3 million workers, of whom 70 per cent. are women. The combination of the national minimum wage and the working families tax credit guarantees that a family with one person in full-time work has a minimum income of £225 per week, or almost £12,000 a year. That is what we are doing to make work pay.

We recognise that more needs to be done, and we have made clear our commitment to increasing and improving the support available to families to make work pay and to tackle poverty further. The working families tax credit is a decisive step towards those goals. The introduction of new tax credits in 2003 is the next stage of reform because it will allow the Government to make further progress in delivering our objectives. The new credits will integrate child support into one

[Maria Eagle]

payment, delivering a simpler, seamless system for all families, in and out of work, and it will extend the principle of in-work support to those without children.

My hon. Friend talked a lot about the new deal for young people, and it is something of which the Government are proud. In the 1980s and 1990s, generations of young people were abandoned to unemployment with little help; what a betrayal of our future that was. Since 1997, we have tackled the waste and damage that comes from youth unemployment. The new deal is giving young people the skills, confidence and motivation to help them find work and improve their prospects. It has already helped 345,000 young people into work nationally, including nearly 700 youngsters in Peterborough.

My hon. Friend made it clear that Peterborough has been doing well. Because we have built a strong economy and introduced measures such as the new deal, claimant unemployment in Peterborough currently stands at 2.2 per cent., which is 1 per cent. lower than the national average. The number of young people unemployed in that constituency has fallen by 35 per cent. to just 421. Of those, only 77 people have been unemployed for six months or more. We are doing well in Peterborough. Overall, unemployment has fallen by more than a third, and long-term youth unemployment has decreased by an average of nearly 60 per cent. The latest figures show that in Peterborough the numbers are becoming very small because there are only about 80 young people who have been unemployed for more than six months—although that is of course 80 too many. We are determined, even in areas like Peterborough that are doing well, to provide a personal service to all those who want to work, and we will join with partners to achieve that.

My hon. Friend referred to two voluntary organisations, Shackleton Associates and the Prince's Trust, that have experience of the local labour market and that are especially active in her constituency. We value partnerships between the Employment Service and such organisations because they can take innovative approaches and know what can be achieved locally. We want to work with them, and we do. For example, we have a valuable partnership with the Prince's Trust in delivering the new deal. It currently holds more than 200 contracts to provide for young people options either as lead contract holders or as sub-contractors. Lead contracts are in place in 136 of the 142 Employment Service new deal delivery units.

Under the new deal options, the Prince's Trust is, for example, involved in delivering a 12-week team challenge programme involving team-building activities, an outdoor residential week, work experience and team projects in the community, and a further 14-week individual challenge programme designed to provide opportunities for further skills development through work experience in voluntary or environmental work. My hon. Friend referred to people who are not job-ready, and that type of work builds confidence and self-esteem, which are essential prerequisites to success in the labour market. It can help people who are at a disadvantage and do not believe in themselves to realise that they have what it takes and should believe in themselves.

More widely, the Prince's Trust business division is helping young disadvantaged people to set up in business by providing business advice, grants, loans and on-going mentoring support. By giving grants and loans, it offers an invaluable source of start-up capital to young people who cannot find finance from other institutions. More than 47,000 young people have received finance, mentoring and support from the Prince's Trust since 1983, creating more than 41,300 new businesses, and around 60 per cent. of trust-supported businesses are still trading in their third year. That is a fine record and a tribute to the energy and skills of the young people involved and to the professionalism and hard work of the trust.

My Department is match funding the programme. We contributed £5.8 million last year and in the current year our commitment is even greater at £7 million. We are committed to assisting with what works and to making the partnerships work properly at local level. Our agreement with the trust aims to help up to 35,000 disadvantaged young people into self-employment over seven years. We are also working with the trust to promote its programme more intensively to lone parents and disabled people wishing to enter self-employment. We realise that for many of them self-employment is a viable and attractive option, if only they can obtain the start they need.

We are determined to take our strategy forward during our second term of Labour government. We shall not rest on our laurels because we are determined that everyone who can work should have the opportunity to do so, not just those receiving jobseeker's allowance. The majority of lone parents say that they would like to work, with the right support, and the Disability Rights Commission quoted the labour force survey, which shows that 1 million people with disabilities are not in work but would like to be. We want to ensure that those aspirations become reality, and we must build on the new deal to do so. We must provide a personal service to help young people and those at a particular disadvantage to overcome the problems that they face in their communities.

Our new jobcentre plus service, which is operating in 56 pathfinder offices, will give all benefit claimants the opportunity to find out about the help and support available to help them to move into work with work-focused interviews, intensive help from personal advisers and follow-up assistance once they are in work. We are building on the success of the new deal, providing more help for those who need it most and more individually tailored support, and engaging further with employers to ensure that their needs are met.

We also aim to provide more help for those who face the greatest barriers in the labour market. That includes the labour market in places such as Peterborough that are generally doing well. We must ensure that disadvantaged people who are still unemployed are not forgotten because they happen to live in an area that is doing well, and that they can access the help that they need and make a success of their lives by getting into work.

We are aiming to provide more individually tailored support for young people—for example, through more flexible use of the new deal options and more use of subsidised employment, which is the most successful route back to work—and allowing them to enter the option on the day that they join the new deal instead of making them wait. We want to encourage even greater employer involvement in the programme, including the introduction of specific new deal provision for the information technology, retail, construction, security and hospitality sectors, and to test the provision of transitional jobs as a stepping stone for long-term unemployed people through the StepUP programme that we announced last November.

My hon. Friend referred to the Connexions service. We continue to roll out the service, which is of particular help to teenagers who are at risk of social exclusion or of being marginalised. It offers integrated advice, guidance and personal development opportunities to all 13 to 19-year-olds in the country and helps them to make a smooth transition to adult and working life. The service also helps young people to review their strengths and weaknesses, to boost their confidence, to recognise their potential and set their goals, and to receive advice on planning to achieve their educational and life goals. It also helps them to obtain impartial careers information and, when required, information and advice on health, lifestyle, housing, financial support and other personal issues, as well as information and access to personal development opportunities such as volunteering, community service activities, sports, arts and recreational activities. Fifteen of the planned 47 Connexions partnerships are up and running and the whole of England will be covered by 2003 with Government investment of £420 million for that year. We expect a further 19 partnerships to begin operations in April, including one in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. It will be interesting to see how that proceeds in my hon. Friend's constituency.

Our objective is to ensure that everyone who can and wants to work has the opportunity to do so. Not enough was done in the past and too many people found themselves written off. We shall not put up with that in future. We are offering more support through jobcentre plus and the new deals, tax and benefit changes to make work pay, more help with work preparation and training. Our new approach, backed up by jobcentre plus, will provide a major contribution to tackling exclusion, combating poverty, and providing more opportunity and choice for all. That must be good for Peterborough and vital for the future of the country.

I hope that my hon. Friend will return in due course with an update on what happens in Peterborough, and will be able to say that no young people in her constituency are without jobs and hope.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 6 February 2002

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Territorial Army

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

9.30 am

Patrick Mercer (Newark): I am grateful to have the opportunity to speak on a subject on which people often expend a huge amount of air and noise—but on which they do not cast much light. The Territorial Army is a deeply emotive subject for many reasons, not least because it is one of the few remaining links between an increasingly isolated Regular Army, an army that spends much of its time behind the wire or overseas—or recovering from overseas operations—and the civil community. We shall probably hear more about those links. However, much of the subject is clouded in the mysteries of time.

I pay tribute to Corporal Ted Chapman, a Victoria Cross holder from the second world war who died recently. He was entirely a territorial soldier—by instinct, enlistment, courage and achievement. The fact remains that there are no more of his type today, but there are good reasons for that and I hope to shed a little light on them.

Things have changed since 11 September for the regular forces and for the territorials. The President of the United States of America, in his state of the nation address, said:

> "Thousands of dangerous killers, schooled in the methods of murder, often supported by outlaw regimes, are now spread throughout the world like ticking time bombs, set to go off without warning."

In September, the Prime Minister said that however the United States decides to proceed, we will stand "shoulder to shoulder" with it, providing moral, physical and military support in the war against terrorism. However, it is a new style of terrorism. It is not the terrorism that we have grown used to, mainly republican or loyalist. It is asymmetric warfare, and the threat is just as likely to come from within our shores against civil targets in an unexpected and wholly asymmetric fashion.

The Secretary of State for Defence, speaking on "Westminster Hour" last Sunday, said:

> "We have to develop a force to protect key points and similar targets above and beyond our regular forces."

His choice of words was interesting. The term "key points" is known to many hon. Members. It was a title that the old Territorial Army, the TA that we used to know, used to describe a task with which it was familiar. It indicated threats to our homeland, and the forces that would be available to achieve protection and give us a feeling of security.

I suggest that the Territorial Army is in dire straits, and that it may not be able to achieve that sort of operational stance. Our regular forces are deployed abroad, waiting to deploy abroad or recovering from operations. I shall not say that that is unprecedented, and I shall not use the much-used word "overstretched", but our forces are stretched almost to the limit. There has never been a more pressing need for the Territorial Army.

Since the strategic defence review, the Territorial Army has been used to support the regular forces in dribs and drabs by means of individual reinforcements, section reinforcements and, occasionally, platoon reinforcements. It has become used to operating at that low level. It has done a fine job, but difficulties and anomalies have arisen because of the new threat that is emerging. I am thinking particularly of the teeth arms, with the exception of the Royal Engineers, who can and will deploy independently because they have complete unit autonomy up to squadron and, I believe, regimental level. The Yeomanry, the Royal Artillery and the much-depleted 15 battalions of infantry are, however, incapable of deploying at anything above company or squadron level, and even that would be extremely difficult.

Let us take the example of an infantry battalion from the curiously named East of England Regiment, which is made up of several fine old county regiments and whose companies now extend throughout the midlands and into East Anglia. Each company is commanded by a territorial company commander, who is supported by territorial platoon commanders, when they can be recruited. There is, however, no battalion staff worth speaking of, apart from a regular commanding office, a regular regimental sergeant-major and a handful of captains at battalion headquarters, although that is not always the case.

Such an arrangement has a couple of implications. First, that battalion of the East of England Regiment cannot deploy as an entity. Let us suppose that an infantry battalion was needed—this would be a reasonable task—to defend Fylingdales and to provide armed force beyond that available from the police. The East of England Regiment could not fulfil that role, although a regular unit could. A Territorial Army battalion is not configured for such a role, because it has no autonomy of deployment much above platoon level.

It is also difficult to train junior and middle-ranking officers and middle-ranking non-commissioned officers. Ted Chapman VC won his Victoria Cross as a corporal at the Teutoburger Wald and ended up as a company sergeant-major, having held, with great distinction, every rank from private to company sergeant-major in the third battalion of the Monmouthshire Regiment. That would not be possible today. There can be no such thing as a battalion exercise created by the Territorial Army, because everything that it does must be strapped on to the Regular Army. It is difficult to train company sergeant-majors, company seconds-in-command or even company commanders, because no intrinsic training mechanism exists. By the same token, it is impossible to deploy a battalion without heavy regular Army support, and the Territorial Army is no longer configured for such tasks. That is, I imagine, why the Secretary of State for Defence referred to developing a force to protect key points.

I must also underline the pay anomalies faced by territorials who are called to the colours. The battalion to which I used to have the pleasure and honour of belonging was deployed to Bosnia and received

[Patrick Mercer]

territorial reinforcements, despite being one of the few fully recruited battalions in the Army. TA soldiers came forward wearing the badges of sergeants and corporals, but had to be paid as private soldiers when they were deployed, and that anomaly was deeply unsettling for those non-commissioned officers. Furthermore, they could not fulfil the role of corporal or sergeant in a regular infantry battalion, despite receiving two weeks' training at the reserve mobilisation and training centre and, indeed, training from their regular battalion on arriving in Bosnia. They wore the badges, but they did not draw the pay and could not fill the boots of their regular counterparts. That is a severe oversight and difficulty in the treatment of our territorials.

There has been much unhelpful talk about the call-up of the Intelligence Corps reservists in the wake of the emergency created by 11 September. I choose my words carefully, because the Minister will be exceedingly bored by now of my colleagues and me prodding him about procedures that have been reported extremely unfavourably and improperly by the press. The response of the 3rd (Volunteer) Military Intelligence battalion to the call was splendid. Its soldiers are extremely specialist, as the Minister is aware, so their call-up was going to be unusual and slightly more difficult, especially as the procedure had not been practised since the Suez crisis.

Newspaper headlines stating that territorials were reluctant to come forward, or were backsliding when the call came, were extremely unhelpful and insulting to the men and women of that battalion and the Territorial Army. I deeply regret that, as it makes our territorials look like something that they are not. I do not want to dive too deeply into history, although I have every inclination so to do, but the majority of honours on the colours of every infantry battalion or yeomanry regiment have been won by territorials. Precisely the same spirit to respond to the call of the nation is alive and well inside the territorials.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. I have heard, anecdotally, that one person in the battalion wanted to join and was called up, but his employer was reluctant to let him go. That is a modern development.

Patrick Mercer: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. If one reads the newspapers, one would be forgiven for thinking that employers had been universally difficult with territorials called to the colours, and that there was a great deal of backsliding from the soldiers themselves. I think that I am right to say that there were only two or three examples of soldiers in the battalion whose employers impeded their call-up.

Call-out procedures must reflect the information age in which we live and its style of asymmetric terrorist and conventional warfare, if that is not a contradiction in terms. There is no doubt that the procedures used to get these men and women under arms were rusty and difficult. The soldiers have not yet joined their units, despite the fact that it is nearly six months since the emergency occurred. I will not labour the point, because I am grateful to the Minister for all the work that has been undertaken on the problem, but I want to underscore the fact that some of the staffing procedures in the call-up of the battalion were slow. That is probably the kindest thing that I can say about them. A huge burden fell on the commanding officer and staff of that battalion, who did magnificent work to produce a magnificent response.

I shall return briefly to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan). There have been difficulties with some employers, but the Minister has assured me that they are being tackled.

I move on to the vexed question of recruiting. I see a hobby horse dashing past the window, but I will not jump on it. The Territorial Army is in a strange position. The directive about infantry recruiting from the director of infantry suggests that the aim for a territorial infantry battalion is for 66 per cent. of the 76 per cent. recruited to attend camp every year, which is fine. A territorial unit, especially an infantry unit, is always under strength, being only ever three quarters manned. That allows a budget for the commanding officer who, unlike a Regular Army commanding officer, is charged with recruiting for his unit. If he is undermanned, there is money in his budget to allow him to recruit more effectively.

We are in an invidious position. Should a territorial battalion have 100 per cent. manning, there would no money left in the budget for recruiting. The point is arcane, but there is a substantial difference between the Regular Army and the Territorial Army in terms of recruiting. The territorials should have an independent budget at unit level or at central level to allow them to recruit effectively. The lack of such a budget is one of the reasons why so many of our territorial units, hand-in-hand with our regular units, are chronically under-recruited.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): Although some may be undermanned, others are overmanned.

Patrick Mercer: I am grateful to the Minister. The fact remains that the majority of units are undermanned, and I ask the Minister to consider carefully this anomaly in recruiting policy.

Turning to the issue of retention of morale from the perspective of a former regular officer, I am conscious of the fact that regular units, particularly infantry units, are overmanned with majors and lieutenant-colonels, all looking for commands. They want battalions or regiments to command, in order to progress with their careers. The trend for territorial commanding officers to be regular Army officers—less so in the yeomanry, but increasingly in the infantry—means that there is a grave disincentive for the territorial officer to serve through the ranks and endeavour to achieve the rank of lieutenant-colonel, commanding his local unit.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Is my hon. Friend aware that my hon. Friends the Members for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) and for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne), who are present, are holders of the territorial decoration? The Government scrapped that decoration in 1999. What does he think that that has done for the morale of Territorial Army officers?

Although the Government introduced a new decoration common to both officers and other ranks, which is a good thing, Territorial Army officers no longer have the incentive of the right to place letters after their name. Is it not ironic that that should have been done by politicians, who are only too glad to give themselves awards that permit them to place many letters after their names?

Patrick Mercer: The old territorial decoration was an important incentive for those who give up so much of their spare time to serve for paltry rewards in the defence and the support of their country. That decoration was an important adjunct to territorial morale. Also, I am so glad that the title was changed to territorial decoration from volunteer decoration, as the initial letters for the latter were somewhat unfortunate.

It is important in terms of retention that the commanding officers of territorial units should come exclusively from the Territorial Army. The territorial decoration is also important in those terms.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): On retention, does my hon. Friend agree that there has been a breakdown in the ability of men and women to remain loyal to the unit in recent years? He mentioned the East of England Regiment, in which, through the Essex and Hertfordshire Company, some of my constituents serve. Pride in the TA is based on its team strength, its unit loyalty and its cap badge. Does he agree that retention has been undermined by the loss of such loyalty through amalgamations?

Patrick Mercer: It is interesting that I can recall a battalion of the Royal Anglian Regiment being changed from an infantry battalion into a logistics regiment, some 10 years ago—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Tempting as it may be to face the hon. Member who intervened, the hon. Gentleman's remarks should be addressed to the Chair.

Patrick Mercer: I beg your pardon, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): May I assist my hon. Friend? The battalion in question was the 5th (Volunteer) battalion, the Royal Anglian Regiment, in which I had the honour to serve and which became the Royal Logistic Corps battalion.

Patrick Mercer: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for supplying those facts. The Royal Anglian's 5th battalion transferred from being an infantry battalion to being a Royal Logistic Corps regiment. It was widely supposed that that would damage morale. In fact, it did not matter because local men continued to serve with their comrades and with those with whom they had joined. Cap badge was relatively irrelevant.

Furthermore, I urge the Minister to continue the trend for the director of reserve forces and cadets to be a territorial. I appreciate that the current post holder is a Royal Marine reservist. However, it is important for the post to be filled by someone who has a civilian job. If he does not, that individual cannot empathise with the men and women whom it is his duty to represent effectively. I hope that the Minister will reinforce the resistance to the imposition by the regular forces of an officer who is either a regular or a recently retired regular, recalled as a reservist. I shall be grateful for the Minister's support.

Over the years, our territorial forces have given huge service to this nation, largely unrewarded. The casualties that they have suffered and the honours that they have garnered for the nation are innumerable. Things have changed; the threat has changed. However, we need a force that can deploy quickly, flexibly and, above all, autonomously, if the threat about which we hear so much is to be countered effectively.

9.51 am

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East): I congratulate the hon. Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) on having secured the debate and on having put his case so eloquently and authoritatively. I cannot claim to speak with his authority—he is obviously well versed in the subject. I am also delighted that the Minister is to sum up. He is no stranger to my constituency. He has visited it and is familiar with my territory, so he will recognise what I am going to say. I am also pleased to see my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor) is present. I have often heard her making a passionate case for the Territorial Army.

I have listened to many debates on defence matters, but this is the first opportunity that I have found to contribute to one of them. I should like to record the contribution of the Territorial Army in my constituency. My sentiments are similar to those of the hon. Member for Newark. My constituency has a great military history, with traditions that run deeply. Generations of young men and women from Cleveland have served in the armed forces, many of them with our local regiments, most notably the Green Howards—who are closely associated with Cleveland and North Yorkshire—and, in the past, regiments such as the Durham Light Infantry and King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, as well as in the technical disciplines of the Royal Engineers, the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers and the Royal Corps of Signals.

I think of the sacrifices of many of those young men, who died fighting for their country and their democracy in the conflicts of the past century, and I grieve to see the familiar local surnames on the war memorials in the towns and villages of my constituency. However, threats to our way of life and to the democratic process, from wherever they come—from hostile nations or organised terrorism—must, in the last resort, be overcome by force of arms. In that endeavour, as the hon. Member for Newark eloquently explained, the Territorial Army plays a vital role in backing up the regular forces and ensuring that there is an adequate reserve of trained men and women ready to meet every eventuality.

On my patch, the Territorial Army is based at Colby Newham on the southern outskirts of Middlesbrough. At Colby Newham there is a detachment of B company, the Green Howards, otherwise known as the Tyne Tees Regiment. Also at Colby Newham is 104 Pioneer Squadron of the Royal Logistic Corps, a detachment of

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the Army Cadet Force and a squadron of the Air Training Corps. Altogether, there are 140 Territorial Army soldiers training there. There are 68 youngsters trained by 12 adult instructors.

Those people do not only train, valuable as that is. They take part in valuable community events. The refurbishment of Albert park, the main park in the centre of Middlesbrough, was carried out by 104 Pioneer Squadron. Over a few days it helped to repair boats from the park's boating lake and to erect new railings. It makes school visits in the area. It assists in fundraising for local charities, and only last year the Army Cadet Force took part, with good results, in the Imperial Cancer Research Fund "race for life".

This morning, my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South reminded me that last year, during the flood crisis, the Territorial Army played an important role—including its work in Skinningrove in my constituency. It makes an important contribution to the spirit of Teeside. I note its support and recognition of multiculturalism in our society. A few members of our ethnic community are serving with the Royal Logistic Corps, and I am sure that that phenomenon will grow in the years to come.

The Army Cadet Force also participated in the Middlesbrough Mela 2000, which is a festival of the Asian community. That has been happening for several years and the Territorial Army has played its part, mingling with the Asian community. I know that because I have seen it myself; I have not attended every year, but when I have, I have seen the Territorial Army regularly.

Issues need to be tackled if the Territorial Army is to grow and be sustained—certainly in my constituency. I hope that the Minister will take the points I want to raise with him in the spirit in which they are meant. There is a need for the Ministry of Defence to pay closer attention to the standard of the buildings in which the Territorial Army in my locality is housed. A shoddy, down-at-heel building will certainly not attract young recruits. I have been to the premises at various times and there are always big repair bills. Recent bad weather has caused costly damage to the buildings, which could have been avoided if thought and cash had been applied to keeping them in reasonable repair.

As the hon. Member for Newark mentioned, there is a need to examine how the Territorial Army recruits officers. Locally, the Royal Logistic Corps has an establishment of six officers, but only three are in post. The Green Howards had similar vacancies, but that has been eased by the recent arrival of a permanent staff instructor. More thought needs to be given to that and, possibly, greater budget provision needs to be made available.

If there is no one to command our soldiers, training is attenuated and commitment must suffer. More thought must be given to the wages and allowances made to Territorial Army soldiers as well as to the legal obligations of employers to allow time off for training and service. The recent experience of Territorial Army personnel being reluctant to serve in Afghanistan because of job pressures shows that change is needed. Locally, our TA detachments are in fine heart. If we give them the backing and funding that they need, I am sure that we can show that our area can provide excellent soldiers with spirit and determination.

As the hon. Member for Newark said, the Territorial Army serves this country without fear or favour. The Government are doing everything possible, while they make hard choices in restructuring our defences to meet our new challenges. Those challenges are brought about by the end of the cold war and the ever greater challenges that confront all of us after 11 September.

In conclusion, I hope that the Minister takes what I have said in the right spirit, because people in my area are looking forward to a positive response from the Government.

10 am

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) on securing the debate and on giving a detailed analysis of the problems suffered by the Territorial Army. I recall that his last job in the Regular Army involved reservists, so he knows more about that subject than many in this Room, and on both sides.—*[Interruption.]* The Minister shakes his head, so we must look forward to the Minister's speech to find out more.

I was on the Army reserve until recently, but I have fallen off the top because I am too old. I put my name down to volunteer for the TA in October, in case there was a possibility of going to Afghanistan. However, I do not think many soldiers from the TA have gone to Afghanistan.

As a young regular officer, I had a certain disdain for reservists until, along with one other person in this Room, I attended staff college. I was required to engage in a presentation of what was known as "One Army", which was a concept whereby the TA and the regular Army were as one. Having to do this presentation revealed to me that the TA was extremely important and that reservists were crucial to the defence of this country, which in the arrogance of youth I had not realised before. Later, I worked with the reserve special forces and was impressed by what I saw. People gave their time freely—well, not exactly freely because they were paid for it—but had to juggle that with their responsibilities as employees or employers.

On this point, I recall the German concept known as "citizen in uniform". By having reservists, one relates the armed forces—and particularly the army—to society. The "citizen in uniform" concept, which is part of the Bundeswehr, is crucial because the fewer reservists we have, the wider the division grows between the armed forces and society. The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East (Dr. Kumar) referred to the importance of military aid for the civil authority, which is when people see the TA in action. However, if there are fewer and fewer soldiers, the Territorial Army will be seen less and less, so we need the TA to be part of society.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Newark has already mentioned, suddenly, after 11 September, we are involved in a long-term conflict, perhaps for the first time since Korea and certainly for the first time since the end of the cold war. It is not the same as the conflict during the second world war, but it is a long-term conflict. Suddenly, we must ask where the reserve is when we need it, because whether one thinks of Fylingdales, local defence or whatever, it is not there. That is extremely important to the defence of the country. Perhaps it has brought us back to what we realised before 1989; that there are threats out there. We need home defence in the face of international terrorism. That is not fanciful.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newark mentioned the reinforcement in Afghanistan. I understand that several TA people from London were called up and that their employers were difficult about it. I hope that the Minister has made note of that point.

There is a general philosophical point about the importance of the reserve forces. It is often easy to deal with big projects—a big airbus or fighter planes—but we must understand that reserve forces are crucial. The reduction in the TA was intended in the strategic defence review. I quote from paragraph 109, which states that

> "numbers will fall to around 40,000 volunteers with reductions concentrated in yeomanry, infantry and supporting combat services"—

in other words, in what used to be called the teeth arms. Since 1997, we have been selling off buildings, such as the Duke of York's headquarters, which used to be a big TA headquarters. Some units have been scrapped and some have been pushed further out of London. That has reduced the impact of reserve forces on society.

We now need the reserves, but where are they when we need them, Mrs. Deputy Speaker?

Mrs. Marion Roe (in the Chair): Order. I remind hon. Members that I should be addressed as Mrs. Roe, as I am not a Deputy Speaker but a member of the Chairmen's Panel.

10.5 am

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) on securing the debate and on introducing it so well. I am pleased to participate in the debate as part of the Back-Bench platoon. I served in the Territorial Army for seven years, including service in two officer training corps and then in a NATO role infantry battalion, the 5 Royal Anglian. Its successor today, at least in the infantry role, is known as the East of England Regiment.

I want to raise three issues. First, I shall speak about formed units. Secondly, I want to refer to filling appointments with TA and regular officers, and, thirdly, I want to speak about home defence, not least in the light of events on 11 September.

One of the main thrusts of the Governments strategic defence review, at least in theory, was to make the Territorial Army more integrated with its regular counterpart. As a result, however, most TA soldiers now know that, in the event of war, their units would, effectively, be broken up and they would be fed piecemeal into regular units to reinforce them, perhaps as battle casualty replacements. It is difficult to maintain morale and unit cohesion in TA units when many of the soldiers understand that, if they have to fight—in the event of their training coming to fruition and deterrence failing—they will not fight as one unit.

Dr. Moonie: That is not true.

Mr. Francois: The Minister says that that is untrue, but I understand that that is likely to be the case. For example, under current arrangements, most infantry battalions would be broken up, but I shall return to that point when I speak about home defence.

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the central elements of serving in the armed forces is the cohesion and camaraderie that is created by serving together? When I served in the Territorial Army, I remember being astonished during my first assessment weekend that from a Saturday morning until a Sunday evening such camaraderie could develop between a group of people in the space of 36 hours. Surely that is the whole point.

Mr. Francois: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. When people volunteer to serve in the reserve forces, we need to keep them interested so that they continue volunteering. An undermining of unit morale and cohesion has an effect on not only recruitment, but retention. For many years, the TA has faced the problem that, although it has recruited people to serve, it has had a challenge retaining them. If the cohesion of units is undermined, the challenge of retention for commanding officers becomes all the greater.

Before the Minister quotes figures at me and says that everything is all right, I wish to make a comparison with other reserve forces. I recently tabled a written question to his Department in which I said that, good though it is, the Royal Marine Reserve is 10 per cent. below establishment. The Royal Naval Reserve is nearly 20 per cent. below establishment and the Royal Auxiliary Air Force is approximately 30 per cent. below establishment. The hon. Gentleman certainly cannot tell us that all is well because a simple comparison with other reserve forces reveals that not to be the case.

Appointments have been a long-running issue within the Territorial Army and, it is fair to say, within the Ministry of Defence. It was touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Newark. The TA has a particular challenge with officer retention. The sort of people who make good TA officers also tend to be good in business. They are promoted and come under increasing pressure to choose between their TA career and their professional career. The Minister is nodding. One of the incentives for officers to remain in the TA is to hope to have the honour one day of commanding a unit.

If, however, more and more unit commands—battalion commanding officers, for example—go to regular officers because the Regular Army needs to find slots for people of that rank, that is a disincentive for TA officers to stay on. If it becomes apparent that those slots will not be available, they will think that they may as well concentrate on their professional career. A judicious balance must be struck between these

[Mr. Francois]

competing objectives. I make a plea to the Minister on behalf of those in the TA to bear it in mind that, each time a TA slot is given to a regular officer, that has knock-on implications for the retention of TA officers further down the line.

There has been a great deal of talk since 11 September about so-called asymmetric warfare. It is said that some may not wish to attack members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation by the usual conventional means, but may use terrorist techniques, such as chemical or biological weapons. To give credit to the Select Committee on Defence, it identified that threat in the previous Parliament and used the phrase "asymmetric warfare" in some of its excellent reports. In a sense, the Committee was ahead of the game. It said that if there were an asymmetric threat to the United Kingdom—and, after what happened in the United States, we know that that can happen—more troops would be needed to respond to it. It said also that, in many ways, the TA was ideally suited for that purpose.

Let me conjure up circumstances in which there was a concerted asymmetric attack on the United Kingdom by people using chemical and biological weapons in tube stations, railway stations and other transport modes in large public buildings. To reassure the public, a large presence of troops would be needed. We would need troops in the past with the relevant equipment, who had been trained in chemical and biological warfare. The Territorial Army has trained for that purpose for many years and has that capability. However, there were fewer troops than there are now. In the circumstances I am describing, there would not be enough regular troops to go round the United Kingdom. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newark said, that is because a proportion of the Regular Army is always deployed abroad in one capacity or another.

If we take the threat of asymmetric warfare seriously—I believe that we should, particularly after what happened on 11 September—there could be a new role for many TA units. They could work as formed units and be trained for a home defence role, specifically to assist citizens in the event of an attack. The Minister may recall that a Home Service Force was formed in the 1980s. It was trained and constituted to protect key points against saboteurs, and was specifically orientated for a home defence role. There could be a modern and relevant role for the TA in the 21st century. In particular, its infantry battalions—if I may be allowed that small plug—could train specifically to provide a layer of defence for the United Kingdom in the event of such a threat. That would mean more units, and the defence budget would need more money. However, given what happened on 11 September, I believe that the money would be well spent.

Mr. Prisk: My hon. Friend is right to highlight the potential of the TA in defending the homeland. However, I ask him to comment on the danger of restricting the TA solely to that role, because there are other functions that it could fulfil. It may be difficult to recruit the breadth of skills that are needed, and many people would like to be able to serve in the front line elsewhere.

Mr. Francois: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The two roles are not mutually exclusive. If some TA units were to train in that role, that does not mean that they could never do anything else. Part of the concept of the armed forces is that they are inherently flexible. My argument is that there are not enough TA units. I would like to see extra TA units re-established, which may specialise in home defence but could also be deployed for other tasks. For example, a TA infantry unit that specialised in home defence could assist in flood defence, if the town in which it was based was threatened by rising floodwater. The two roles are not mutually exclusive.

In conclusion, history shows that when our country has been in great danger, the Territorial Army has often rallied to the colours. It has an honourable record of service. Whenever the bugle has sounded, it has responded to the call. As a result, it has sometimes been taken for granted. Its contribution should be properly recognised and honoured. The TA also needs to be resourced.

10.18 am

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): For the purposes of transparency, I want to register an interest. I serve on the regular reserve of officers and think that I will do so for at least another 10 years. I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) on obtaining the debate, and I thank the Minister for listening.

In any debate about the Territorial Army, it is appropriate to begin by paying tribute to all those who give up so much of their time, because serving in the TA demands sacrifices in family life, social life, and work. It has a huge amount to offer the Regular Army. It provides a link between the Regular Army and the civilian world, and the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East (Dr. Kumar) has paid tribute to that. Critically, when members of the Territorial Army join the Regular Army, they bring with them skills that are not usually available to the Regular Army. I had direct experience of that when I assembled a battle group to go to the British Army training unit, Suffield in the mid-1990s, about 15 per cent. of which was made up of members of the Territorial Army. They were easy to slot into the order of battle, and as the battle group went on, they contributed more and more. By the end, some of them were more useful than some of the regular troops that were there in the first place. Let no one doubt the real contribution that they make.

There is much that is right about the Territorial Army. The debate comes down to two simple questions: first, what is the Territorial Army's role in the modern army, particularly post-11 September, and secondly, how will it meet that role? As is appropriate for a Westminster Hall debate—they tend not to be party political—I shall make my remarks as constructive as possible. In trying to assess the Territorial Army's role post-11 September, I considered the strategic defence review of July 1998. In it, the Government said that the Territorial Army was then about 56,000-strong and still at 80 per cent. of its size at the end of the cold war.

Dr. Moonie: That was its establishment.

Hugh Robertson: It was largely made up of formed units at low readiness that were intended to defend the United Kingdom against invasion or to reinforce the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation in Germany.

We need a smaller, more readily deployable and usable Territorial Army that is closely integrated with regular force elements. Although numbers will fall to about 40,000 volunteers, with reductions concentrated in the yeomanry, infantry and support-combat arms, we will be able to deploy more rapidly and bring the Territorial Army to full operational readiness. To achieve that, we will create an Army mobilisation centre and ensure that TA units are fully manned, trained and equipped to the standards needed to undertake their tasks effectively.

We must ask whether, as a result of the strategic defence review, the TA is indeed now fully manned, trained and equipped. I suspect that it is not. We must also ask whether the review's vision is still correct after 11 September. To answer that question, we must consider the three types of operations that the Army is likely to undertake post-11 September. The first must now be the war against terrorism. The second is an uneasy grouping of United Nations and Northern Ireland-type peacekeeping, peace-enforcement, counter-terrorist low-intensity operations. The third is conventional war.

There is still a clear need, which we often forget about, to reinforce the Regular Army with proper formed units. I strongly suspect that the TA is not geared up for a wholesale call-up. We would be extremely foolish to forget its role in conventional war. We rediscovered it when we had to fight the Gulf war. I have no doubt that, post-11 September, such expeditionary warfare may once again be on the agenda. We never know when such events are round the corner, and we must make sure that the TA is ready to meet them.

Mr. Robathan: Surely that is the crux of the matter. Suddenly, we are in a new ball game in which, notwithstanding the strategic defence review, we might have to deploy force overseas. The strategic defence review does not have the capability to commit a formed TA battalion or unit of that size.

Hugh Robertson: That is right. At a time of endless UN operations and the war against terrorism, it is tempting to forget about the conventional warfare role, but that remains extremely important.

I shall now deal with the rough alliance of peacekeeping, peace-enforcement, counter-terrorist low-intensity operations. Those were the operations envisaged for the Territorial Army in the July 1998 defence review, but the fact that it is not fully manned at the moment must undermine that. The estimates that I have seen suggest that there is a shortfall of about 18,000 recruits, and that must be addressed. The TA has a vital role to play in reinforcing the Regular Army, and in releasing its units to take part in the war against terrorism.

Many solutions to that shortfall could be implemented. For a start, the Territorial Army must be more proactive about the way that it recruits people. When I left the Regular Army—hon. Gentlemen may look puzzled—no one made any attempt to recruit me into the Territorial Army. That must be addressed. *[Interruption.]* At the end of the debate, my hon. Friends may know why.

Secondly, the Territorial Army must be more flexible about how it incorporates people into its ranks. An extremely good scheme for watchkeepers has now been abolished. Regular Army units regularly need watchkeepers, and an obvious pool of people with ex-Regular Army experience could fulfil that role. When we took a battle group to BATUS—British Army training unit, Suffield—each of the company squadron groups had a Territorial Army regular reserve watchkeeper. The scheme was abolished four or five years ago, and such flexibility needs to be restored.

Thirdly, a legislative review is necessary in the wake of changes in employment law to ensure that people can leave their work easily and be called up for operations and for the Territorial Army, as many of my hon. Friends said. Fourthly, we need to tackle pay differentials, which have, as far as I am aware, applied for five, six or even 10 years. It is simply wrong that people who serve in the Territorial Army are treated differently from those who serve in the Regular Army. That must be addressed.

Recognition is important. We have already discussed a territorial decoration. People who give up their free time for public service like to be recognised for that, and it is wrong that they are not.

The question of real estate has been touched on in previous speeches. People who give up their spare time for such activities want to do so conveniently. Many of the buildings being sold off are in the centre of town. The question of the Duke of York's has been raised. We must stop that process now.

The final matter that I should like to discuss is the war against terrorism. Many hon. Members have been enormously impressed over the years by the United States National Guard, a force that can deal with all types of civil emergency. The United States places a much bigger emphasis—and not merely because of the events of 11 September—on what it calls homeland defence. The Secretary of State suggested in a recent speech that in his view the Regular Army is not available for that task. The Territorial Army is ideally suited for that role, for two reasons in particular. It has excellent links with local communities, which need to be developed and improved. In that respect, we should note the importance of county regimental links, which draw people into the Territorial Army and allow them to feel that they are making a genuine contribution to their local community.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): I am grateful to my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Hugh Robertson) for giving way, and to my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) for having secured the debate. Glancing around the Chamber, I noticed my old

[Mr. Bill Wiggin]

squadron leader sitting behind the Minister, but I shall not embarrass him further.

Does my hon. Friend feel, as I did when visiting America, the close link between the general public and the National Guard? A National Guardsman told me, "The best thing about this is that the public keep coming up to me and saying how pleased they are to see us here." That is exactly the same link as the Territorial Army has with society as a whole. Does my hon. Friend agree that because of that link the money that is so desperately needed and richly deserved is vital?

Hugh Robertson: Absolutely. I endorse my hon. Friend's comments and conclude by emphasising that point. The link between the Territorial Army and the county that it serves is important.

The Territorial Army is ideally placed to achieve co-ordination between the various civil authorities—fire, police, ambulance and the new strategic health authorities—and the military, which is critical in fulfilling the role of homeland defence effectively. In the summer, I spent a lot of my time in my constituency on the question of Kent Ambulance national health service trust. It was obvious that we did not have proper contingency plans to deal with a big civil emergency in Kent. Enormous infrastructure issues are involved, including the channel tunnel and the ports. There was a sort of plan to deal with a disaster in any of those places, but an all-embracing plan looking after fire, police, the strategic health authorities and the Territorial Army, which could be easily called up to provide the manpower, was noticeably missing.

We must review the role of the Territorial Army post-11 September and not forget its traditional role of reinforcing the Regular Army in times of conventional warfare and in low-intensity, peacekeeping operations. That review must be conducted in concert with the main defence review, not as a postscript tacked on to the end—the Territorial Army is too important for that.

Mr. Prisk: As my hon. Friend pointed out, the integration of the regulars and the reserves is crucial. Does he share my concern that, because some members of the Army Board lack direct experience in sharing civilian and military roles and of the practical difficulties involved, they are not aware of sensitivities?

Hugh Robertson: My hon. Friend makes his point well—we must review the Territorial Army in concert with the Regular Army—but I shall steer clear of criticising the Army Board.

Mrs. Marion Roe (in the Chair): Order. The hon. Gentleman must bring his remarks to a close. I am sure that he understands the rules of Westminster Hall.

Hugh Robertson: I shall certainly do so, Mrs. Roe.

The review must make use of the Territorial Army's new role in homeland defence and, critically, we must ensure that service in the Territorial Army remains as attractive as possible.

10.31 am

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): I am delighted to take part in today's debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) on securing it, and on the effective way in which he deployed his arguments. He raised issues of great importance to the armed forces not only after the events of 11 September, but because of the wide range of challenges constantly faced by the armed forces that go beyond that of terrorist threat.

I also enjoyed the speech by the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East (Dr. Kumar), who set a good example to hon. Members, especially new ones, by skilfully weaving together his constituency experiences and, at the end of his speech, making some powerful points about the general debate. He tempted me to alter my own comments by making additional references to helicopters, but as I am speaking on behalf of my party, I will keep to more general points.

We benefited from the comments made by the self-styled platoon of Conservative Back Benchers, who deployed their considerable experiences and talents in this subject. I cannot imagine anyone daring to challenge our facilities knowing that such skilful and able individuals defend them.

I wish to frame my comments today on the basis of questions raised by the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Hugh Robertson), who asked what was the Territorial Army's role in today's armed forces and how it could be fulfilled. Whether it could fulfil that role effectively is also the subject of today's debate.

The key point about the Territorial Army is the flexibility and resource that it offers to our armed forces. It produces a reserve that we can deploy in several ways. I recently read the excellent biography of Churchill, by Lord Jenkins. I have reached the section on the second world war, which tells us that whenever Churchill met a general, he took the opportunity to ask him about his reserves. From the general's answer, Churchill determined his effectiveness in winning the battle, by finding out whether the general had deployed reserves that are available and could give flexibility. That is the key role that the Territorial Army can fulfil. It is wide and varied, and I hope that the Territorial Army will play it with flexibility.

It would be all too easy to conclude from recent events that the whole posture of our armed forces must be changed, and end up with a set of armed forces and a Territorial Army that is attempting to fight the last battle, although the next battle may be different. I argue, as did the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent, that we need a Territorial Army with flexibility to deploy the specialist and skilled troops who were sent to help our armed forces in such places as Bosnia and Afghanistan. The TA must also have the flexibility to deal with homeland issues that have been raised since 11 September, on which many hon. Members commented, and the flexibility to deploy more forces if we must fight a larger-scale conventional war. We all hope that that will not be the case, but we cannot guarantee that. It is only a few years since we had to deploy large forces in places such as Kuwait.

I hope that our Territorial Army will fulfil all those roles, and although the Government developed plans to allow the Territorial Army to fulfil a home defence role following 11 September, I urge them not to turn the Territorial Army into a form of home guard. That would demotivate some people who want to be part of the Territorial Army, and the TA would not meet the challenges that we may have to face in several years.

The second issue that I shall cover is whether the Territorial Army's present configuration meets the challenges of a flexible reserve to fulfil the roles of back-up for special forces, a conventional reserve and homeland defence.

Several hon. Members touched on the problems that the Territorial Army faces. The size of the Territorial Army has reduced over the past few years from 75,000 personnel in 1998 to around 59,000 in 1997. The figure is closer to 41,000 today. To be fair to this Government and the previous Conservative Government, that decline occurred alongside shrinkage of defence expenditure and the number of people in the main armed forces. That was a consequence of the end of the cold war and we should therefore welcome some of the contraction of the forces.

However, there is a worry that further shrinkage of the TA will mean that it will not be able to fulfil the roles that I mentioned. We must consider the 41,000 troops in the light of Government figures that suggest that only 50 to 60 per cent. are deployable at any point.

We cannot compare that percentage with previous years in entirety. The Minister wrote a letter to my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) in December 2001, which revealed that, unfortunately, somebody in the Ministry of Defence seems to have destroyed the records of the proportion of the Territorial Army who were available during years before 1998. However, recent figures show that only 50 to 60 per cent. of 41,000 people are deployable at any one time. I hope that the Minister agrees that that figure is too low. Does he plan to increase the availability of the 41,000 troops?

The role that we envisage for Territorial Army forces has a bearing on their availability. Several hon. Members touched on the problem faced by some members of the Territorial Army who were asked to go to Afghanistan or other foreign countries. That may be disruptive, and I understand that individuals and their employers could be reticent about long-term deployment. We must consider how to deal with that problem, and we must not demotivate people who want to be part of the Territorial Army by giving the impression that it is a home guard that will stand guard over various establishments in the event of terrorism. I hope that the Minister will address that and acknowledge that the motivation of personnel in the Territorial Army is linked to the role that the Government envisage for them.

The other issue that relates to the number of troops that can be deployed is the amount of wastage from year to year in the Territorial Army. The Minister provided figures in a recent written answer that suggest that wastage is as high as 25 to 30 per cent. That might be significant with regard to several issues that hon. Members have raised, such as motivation, pay and—even—facilities. We must reduce that wastage, if we are to ensure that as many as possible of the 41,000 people are available at any time.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Newark for securing the debate. It has given hon. Members the opportunity to hold the Government to account on the issues under discussion. My party supports the key work that has been done by members of the Territorial Army, and we look forward to hearing the Minister's comments on how their role can be strengthened.

10.40 am

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): I draw the Committee's attention to the entry under my name in the Register of Members' Interests: I remain a serving officer in the Territorial Army.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) on securing the debate, and the hon. Members and my hon. and gallant Friends who have spoken. They have brought a wealth of experience and expertise to the debate. It has been a high-quality debate, and I will endeavour not to lower the tone.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newark made a plea to the Minister that the director of reserve forces and cadets should be a proper, pukka reservist. That relates to an important issue, about which I wish to add my own request. The reservists are embedded in the civilian community from which they draw their livelihoods, and they have a different ethos from the regulars, whose life style is predominantly closed and military, and who are much more amenable to central direction. It is important that the man who is charged with advising the Minister about the reserves should be a reservist with a proper day job. We have recently done well in that respect, but I wish that to be maintained.

I share the concern that has been expressed about the number of Territorial Army command appointments that have been taken up by regular officers. However, during the many years that I have been a Territorial Army officer I have received many regular commanding officers and, although I always found that experience profoundly shocking at the outset, it gingered up the regiment. The regiment benefited a great deal from occasionally having a regular commanding officer. Therefore, I would not wish to see that possibility ruled out, although it would be undesirable if too many regular officers commanded Territorial regiments.

Mr. Robathan: Is there not merit in the idea that Territorial Army regiments should have a reservist commanding officer and a regular adjutant to ginger up the troops?

Mr. Swayne: That consideration is worth taking on board.

The Opposition's position remains the same as it was at the time of the strategic defence review, and throughout the previous Parliament. We believed that 59,000 was the correct figure with regard to the size of the Territorial Army. If that figure were significantly reduced, that would damage the Territorial Army's ability to deliver its historic tasks of providing the civilian and military link, regenerating the reserves, and providing support to the Regular Army—and more of that support is required in the post-SDR environment, with its increased demand for expeditionary forces, and for support to the civilian power.

[Mr. Swayne]

We hold to that position—although, given the events of 11 September 2001, perhaps we should review our assumptions, particularly in respect of what may come out of the additional chapter to the SDR. New roles have already been mentioned this morning by my hon. Friends. Even if we held to our view that 59,000 was the right figure, we might have to review whether a larger establishment was required to deliver a trained strength of 59,000, so there may need to be some expansion of the Territorial Army. Such issues need to be considered at great length. The measures would not be inexpensive. We shall issue a consultation document in the next few weeks that invites a debate on the subject.

The principal asset that the Territorial Army brings to the table in which the Regular Army is interested is the 3,000 serial reservists—serial mobilisers, should I say—who go from one mobilisation to another. One can understand the belief on the part of some regular officers that if all that is wanted and needed from the TA is those 3,000, there is no need for an establishment of 59,000 or, as it now is, 41,000. We must be aware that the reduction in the establishment of the TA took place at the same time as the change in emphasis in its structure, which reduced formed units that were deployable as such, and placed much greater emphasis on an individual training organisation capable of filling gaps in the Regular Army.

That has led to two problems. First, we are now fishing in too small a pond to find the required number of deployable reservists. The SDR reduction in the TA hit most severely the units that provided the bulk of its commitment in the Balkans. Secondly, the formed units are the goose that lays the golden egg, in terms of generating serial mobilisers.

The previous director of reserve forces and cadets described the TA as a broad church. Let us say that one third of it is young, with few financial commitments or family responsibilities. Such people are readily able to deploy, and gain a great deal from such experience. At the other end of the broad church is a third made up of older people with family responsibilities and developed careers. They are less able, but not impossible, to deploy. A constituent of mine—a judge—has recently returned from the Balkans. He can deploy, but is much less flexible than someone in the third at the other end of the spectrum. The other third is somewhere in between the two.

We rely disproportionately on the third that is much less deployable to provide the training infrastructure of the formed unit and deliver the third that is deployable. The reduction in the emphasis on the infrastructure and the formed unit is already beginning to show, in terms of the damage that it will do to the TA's ability to deliver the number of men that the Regular Army requires.

We have already begun to see evidence of that. My hon. Friend the Member for Newark referred to the level of undermanning. The Minister referred to some units that are overmanned, but most of those are a consequence of the reduction in establishments in SDR and it will be a relatively short-term phenomenon. We must not ignore the warning signals. The footprint of the TA is already far too dispersed to fulfil properly its function of recruiting and retaining. In many respects, the TA lacks critical mass to train effectively. My hon. Friend referred to the inability to train at battle group and brigade level. Such quality of training makes the TA capable of delivering the 3,000 serial mobilisers that are so important to it, because it provides the infrastructure for those who will train them. It is a vital resource.

There is already a severe shortage of young officers. I am involved in that aspect of the TA. At the territorial commissioning board, a large number of high quality candidates are coming through. However, not enough of them reach Sandhurst. The courses there are under strength and some are being cancelled. Sandhurst is now complaining about the quality of the training of the candidates when they initially present themselves at the college. They are effectively untrained, and what was designed as a testing course is increasingly becoming a training course. That is a severe problem that must be avoided. I can think of many initiatives that we could adopt to deal with that, but time prevents me from listing them, and I am interested to hear what the Minister has to say.

10.50 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): As usual I have a long, and I must say, as I did not write it myself, beautifully crafted speech. However, in the interests of trying to reply to the points that have been made, I will have to abandon it. I shall start with some general issues and then move on to more specific ones. I shall try not to miss anything out, but if anyone wanted to catch my eye towards the end, I would be happy to respond.

I shall start by considering the exact meaning of the ability to deploy. In a written answer to the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne), I said:

> "Under the Strategic Defence Review (SDR) the Territorial Army (TA) was restructured to make it more relevant and usable and more fully integrated into our armed forces and defence plans. As a result, more TA units are now held at a higher state of readiness than pre-SDR and we continue to assess that the TA infantry battalions have the capability to be deployed on operations as formed units. As such they are an essential part of the Army's order of battle."—[*Official Report*, 12 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 517W.]

We must recognise that in the old Territorial Army, at its pre-SDR strength of 58,000, there was no level of readiness for the type of operations that we envisage. We have reduced numbers and increased the quality of the tasks that we demand of the TA. As with German reservists and conscripts, the option of forming static infantry battalions for the defence of the homeland is no longer there. Nor is it considered necessary to the same extent as it was in the past. That is not a party political point, but a military one.

We must recognise that as rules change, we must change the ability of our men and women to cope with them. Hence the development of the centre at Chilwell, which has yet fully to make its mark but which is rapidly proving a valuable resource in the mobilisation of Territorial Army personnel. It will continue to play a growing and important role in the future. There is a gap in capability, which we are trying to meet. Our aspiration is to create fully formed units to perform the tasks that we expect of them. Yes, at present they do much in the way of individual reinforcement, but that always has been and always will be a role for reserves.

This is the first opportunity that I have had for a debate, as Minister responsible for reserves, with so many of my reserve officers actually present and speaking to me. I can assure them that, as with any reserve officer that I meet, I will listen to them very carefully.

To make a general point, as hon. Members will know, we will shortly publish a consultation paper on material that ought to go into the new chapter. I would welcome their responses and I will be happy to talk to them individually about that if they so wish. I include the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for New Forest, West, who, despite many grey hairs, is still well within the age limit, unlike the unfortunate hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), who has had to drop off the twig—I will not make the obvious remark.

The TA is about 1,300 short of its establishment of 41,200. There is a high turnover of TA personnel, and we are trying to find out why. However, the rate has always been high. Perhaps it is something with which we have to live. Given the rate of flux, a shortage of about 1,300 is not considered to be critical. We are trying, for instance, to recruit into medical units, but it takes a great deal of time because we need specialised personnel.

We need to strike a balance. Yes, we want more highly skilled personnel, but we also need flexibility. I agree that we need both, but there is a dissonance between the two. We cannot have extreme flexibility and extreme skill, so when looking to build up a highly skilled specialist unit we must recognise that it may be a role for other parts of the TA. We must be careful when doing that, because the concept of the home guard must be avoided at all costs. Indeed, I would utterly reject that as a role for the Territorial Army. That is not what it is for, and it is not what we want.

As far as we can, we are trying to do away with different decorations for officers and men. It is generally accepted to be an outmoded concept.

The regulations with regard to commanding officers of the TA are clear. TA officers who are recommended in confidential reports will always get command in preference to regular officers, but we must remember that the pressure of their civilian jobs often makes life difficult for TA officers. Frankly, I do not see a way out of that dilemma. By and large, officers hold responsible jobs in the community and many do not have the option of continuing as part-time senior officers, given the necessary commitment that it requires.

The present director of reserve forces and cadets is Brigadier Tom Lang, who is a Royal Marine. I know Tom well, and meet him regularly. His is a part-time appointment. There is no question of the directorship being taken over by a regular officer, but we are giving the director more roles and increased responsibilities, and we will need either more part-time officers or a full-time reserve officer. Another possibility might be for the cadets to be moved from the TA. I am talking about possibilities, not about Government policy. I am thinking on my feet. It is a complex situation, but I guarantee that that post will be kept as a reserve post, although the increasing workload may make it a full-time past rather than the present part-time post of two days a week.

Mr. Robathan: It is a most important point, and I am grateful to the Minister for giving it due cognisance. I understand that for the Royal Marine reservist—I appreciate the nuances—only someone who holds down a full-time job is able to empathise, recommend and advise correctly. I therefore strongly submit that anything that can be done to keep such a person in that post, even if it involves a dissolution of responsibilities, should be done. I am grateful that the point has been acknowledged.

Dr. Moonie: I am happy to acknowledge it. The ideal would be for someone in normal full-time civilian employment to do the job, but I recognise the importance of the director having empathy with what goes on. I recognise that an increasing amount of work needs to be done.

I do not think that I have ever had to reply to a debate to such a senior former officer as the hon. Member for Newark, and I am glad that he secured the debate.

Mr. Robathan: Will the Minister answer a question from a much more junior officer? Our defence needs have changed since 11 September, not only at home—this place was a target—but on overseas expeditions. We played a supporting role in Afghanistan, and we may need to do so in other places.

Dr. Moonie: I accept that point, but there is a shortage of officers. The reasons may be demographic or societal; and young people may have a more selfish attitude or be more materialistic. I could ramble on for hours about the possibilities, and I cannot honestly say that I have an answer. There are some typical officers on the Opposition Benches. If that is good enough for the hon. Gentlemen, I do not see why it should not be good enough for others.

My hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East (Dr. Kumar) asked some questions. I must make it clear that reservists will not be going to Afghanistan. Some have been compulsorily called up, and I support that call 100 per cent. I have argued for it at the Ministry of Defence for the past year or so, because I think that it is right, but no reserves will be going to Afghanistan. They will be based in this country. There might be a possibility of them going to Afghanistan in future, but certainly not now.

Ethnic minorities are important in helping us to increase the numbers. Tomorrow, I am going to an exhibition in Hounslow about the role of Sikh regiments, which will be interesting. I am happy to visit the centre to see for myself how dilapidated it is, although I am sure that it will get a coat of paint at some time.

I think that I have covered as many points as I can, so I shall end by quoting a letter from the colonel of the 3rd (Volunteer) Military Intelligence Battalion, who said:

> "The battalion's officers and non-commissioned officers accept the personal, financial and professional disruptions that attend mobilisation willingly and with good grace."

He adds that the vast majority will serve, and that has always been the case.

Housing (London)

11 am

Mrs. Marion Roe (in the Chair): I call Mr. Jeremy Corbyn.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. This is—

Mrs. Marion Roe (in the Chair): Order. I remind hon. Members that I should be addressed as Mrs. Roe, because I am a member of the Chairmen's Panel.

Jeremy Corbyn: I have had trouble on that score before. Good morning, Mrs. Roe, and thank you.

This is not the first, and certainly not the last, Westminster Hall debate on London housing, and I hope that there will be further debates on the Floor of the House. It is clear from the number of hon. Members present that there is serious concern about housing shortages and housing problems in London. The housing crisis affects almost everyone: those on waiting lists, those in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, those who are homeless or, unfortunately, still roofless, and those who are desperate to pay high private rents or buy a flat in London.

The situation demands large-scale public intervention, which has helped people out of poverty and misery in London in the past. There were large-scale council house developments after the first and second world wars and right up until the advent of the Tory Government in 1979. Many people owe the fact that they live in reasonable accommodation to the enormous efforts that successive Labour Governments and many Labour local authorities put into expanding their social rented stock, and such an approach remains the only long-term solution to London's housing problems, which the market alone cannot solve.

I am sure that the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble), will refer to this when she replies, but it is important to recognise that London's housing problems are markedly different from those in other parts of the country. Its problems are driven as much as anything by the property boom, which has a pernicious effect on all housing sectors and particularly on public services and on the ability of public service workers to live in London.

Lists and figures abound, and they tell a terrifying story. In 1998, 19,000 homeless households were in accommodation in London, but the number has now gone up to 48,000. The figure has increased from 2,000 to 4,600 in the borough of Haringey, and from 500 to 1,400 in my borough of Islington. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) will catch your eye, Mrs. Roe, because he wants to say more about that. Throughout London, the figures tell a similarly terrifying story.

Some 7,000 families have been placed in bed-and-breakfast accommodation throughout London. That is an entirely miserable way to exist, and such accommodation is supremely inefficient and a gross waste of public money. We are giving millions of pounds to bed-and-breakfast landlords and making millionaires of people who often provide abominable accommodation. Anyone who cares to visit bed-and-breakfast hotels in Finsbury Park in my constituency and in many other parts of London will see the sheer misery in which people must live. Such accommodation is not cheap and is paid for by the public sector, because housing benefit pays the rent of a large proportion of the people involved.

If I may, I shall quote briefly from the Shelter briefing for this debate, which states:

> "The Government has made tackling homelessness a policy priority. The Homelessness Bill, the National Homeless Strategy and the new unit dedicated to reducing the use of B and B are testament to this."

Shelter is very favourable to many of the Government's policies, but the briefing goes on to say:

> "But these polices must be backed up by resources if the Government is to deliver on its pledge to halve child poverty by 2010 and end it in a generation. The Spending Review 2002 presents a key opportunity to put in place a sustained programme of investment backed up by challenging targets to improve the lives and life chances of homeless children."

Shelter has given us part of the important story. It is true that the costs of poor quality housing are borne by the public sector, in that we pay for extortionate private sector rents through housing benefit or through homelessness and bed-and-breakfast landlords. However, the children also pay. They pay in ill health, poor school achievement, endless moves from one set of homeless person's accommodation to another and family break-up. The damage to our communities resulting from the inadequacy of housing in London is astonishing. We must tackle that issue.

However, we must also look at the problems of communities that are being priced out of their geographical area. The borough that my right hon. Friend and I have the honour to represent is now one of the areas of the country with the fastest rising property prices. That means that even Members of Parliament moving there could not, unless they had substantial equity, afford the mortgage on a two-bedroomed flat. Price rises of that magnitude, which are similar to those that have happened in neighbouring boroughs, mean that unless families on average or below-average incomes obtain social housing through a council or a housing association, the possibilities of remaining in the community where they grew up are pretty well zero. Inner-city areas of London are simply exporting people on average or below-average incomes. That problem needs to be dealt with.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): According to figures released this morning by the Halifax, the average loan taken out by a first-time buyer in London at present is £127,000. Does not that make for the sort of affordability crisis that my hon. Friend describes?

Jeremy Corbyn: Absolutely. As that is a Londonwide average figure, many people in inner urban areas will have to pay substantially more. The costs of living in London are very high.

We need to look for solutions. The Labour Government who were elected in 1997 inherited a legacy. The outgoing Labour Government in 1979 were funding an enormous council and housing association building programme. Those of us who served on London boroughs will remember that between 500 and 1,000 new dwellings a year was a routine achievement. That figure dwindled so that at the end of the period of Tory Government very few were being built. We looked to the election of a new Government to encourage the expansion of the social sector. Unfortunately, that expansion has not happened to any great degree, and indeed, with the number of sales—particularly of existing council property—happening at present, the new build is barely keeping pace with current stock.

The Government have done much to try to improve existing stock, and I acknowledge the amount of money released through capital receipts that has been injected into areas by way of regeneration money. My constituency has benefited from that, as have the constituencies of many colleagues. We welcome that money; we welcome the new roofs and windows and the improvements to estates, including security and community and play facilities. Those are very welcome. However, they do not solve the problem. The solution is expanding the stock.

I am concerned that the Government seem to emphasise regeneration to some extent and estate transfers to a great extent. I hope that the Minister will deal with that question. I share the concern that many people feel about tenants being virtually forced into estate transfers because they believe that there is no alternative. It is interesting that despite a pressurised campaign to vote for a transfer, the tenants of the Aylesbury estate in Southwark voted to remain within the council. I hope that the Minister will tell us that in future there will be a genuinely level playing field on estate transfer votes, so that money will be invested whether or not the estate is transferred.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): My hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) cannot be present, and he apologises for that. However, he told me about that vote. He would agree with the hon. Gentleman that the choice facing tenants means that, in effect, they are being bribed to move to the stock transfer option. However, tenants voted against that by three to one—so they would back the point that the hon. Gentleman made.

Jeremy Corbyn: We are all sorry that the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey cannot be here today, but I agree with what the hon. Gentleman said.

I ask the Minister, where do we go from here? The Government have done a lot in terms of estate improvements, improving the quality of life for people on estates. They have also done much to promote key worker housing through some funding of teachers' schemes. However, it seems ironic that, while the Government invest to enable teachers to buy homes so that they may stay in the community—and none of us has any problem with that scheme—the police and other Government agencies are selling Government property. There seems a complete lack of co-ordination in that respect. We should retain in the public sector specialist homes that were built for the police, nursing staff, fire officers and so on. It seems that something has gone badly wrong in that regard.

Key worker housing is not a solution in itself, however. There is a desperate problem with getting nurses, police officers, firefighters and others to work in London, but there are other key workers who are not included. If no one sweeps the streets, they become filthy, so the street cleaner is a key worker. Hospital porters and catering workers are key workers, as are workers in many other grades.

I hope that the Minister recognises that, in the longer term, the only way in which to ensure good quality public services and a good standard of life in London as a whole is to expand the affordable rented sector. The Minister should recognise that, over the past three or four years, many in London have spent much effort and time examining the housing situation. That effort includes the Mayor's strategy document for London and statements on the subject by the Greater London Authority, London boroughs, Shelter and employers who have difficulty in recruiting skilled workers. Not least, it includes those views expressed by inner-city and outer-London MPs, who share those concerns.

I hope that, when the Minister replies, she can tell us a number of things. First, she may tell us that, when the restrictions are removed on local authority borrowing and authorities are allowed to borrow against capital assets, there will be no restrictions on councils' borrowing against those assets to build council stock if that is what they decide, democratically, to do. I hope that she will tell us that the Government are prepared to invest in new build or purchasing existing properties for conversion, so that we may expand the social rented sector. They should recognise that although different housing problems exist in other parts of the country, we must retain and expand the rented sector in London, so that we may look forward to a cohesive city instead of one that is increasingly divided by housing shortages and associated problems.

I know that these are difficult times, but it is too easy for the Government to say that they will leave the market to deal with such issues. The market has had a pretty free rein in the past few years in London, and it has shown that it can make a great deal of money from shortages but can do nothing for the poorest and most vulnerable, or for the cohesion of our city. I hope that the Government will recognise those issues and be prepared to invest massively in expanding the social rented stock, which, in turn, will lead to the better communities that we want.

This is not the first debate on this subject, and I am sure that it will not be the last. Week in and week out, some of us have to face people in our surgeries and speak to families with three or four children who share two-roomed flats. We see all the tension and anger that goes with that situation, but we have to tell them, "Sorry; you are not really a priority and you have no chance of being rehoused." It is hard, it is brutal and, above all, it is totally unnecessary for us to have to say that. Public intervention is necessary to save us from that situation.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mrs. Marion Roe (in the Chair): Order. I remind the many hon. Members who wish to speak that the winding-up speeches begin at noon.

11.14 am

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): I congratulate the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) on securing this important debate, which concerns inner and outer-London boroughs. Some might think that those of us in the outer London boroughs have an easier time. That is true in some respects; I am aware of the problems in inner London. However, to imagine that, outside the inner core, we are all in leafy boroughs is far from correct. I am pleased to see that my neighbour, the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), is present. I am sure that he will add to my comments on our borough.

Our problems are much the same and we do have deprived areas. However, the principal problem, which the hon. Member for Islington, North has elucidated, is that of rising house prices. Property prices have risen by over 100 per cent. since 1996 and most of our residents and their children are being priced out of their communities. I echo the point that the hon. Gentleman made about the importance of keeping communities together; this pricing out is having a very bad effect on our areas.

There is no affordable housing for purchase—that is a frightening prospect for anyone considering being a first-time buyer in central, inner or outer London. The average price of a flat in the London borough of Hillingdon is £104,000, and a semi-detached house is £170,000—anyone would regard that as an impossible first step. We are lumbering people with incredible debt, even at this time of low interest rates. If those change, we shall have extreme problems.

The issue of key workers is as relevant in outer London as it is in inner London. Key workers include everyone who works there—someone has to work in the shops and provide other services. Like the hon. Gentleman, I welcome teachers and other public service sector workers. However, it is not just the public sector that is affected. I regret the sale of police houses and other dwellings. It started some time ago and I am sorry to say that it is continuing. That is an accountant's measure—the short-term gain looks good on paper. However, the long-term loss is huge and we are now suffering greatly from it.

In outer London we have another problem—we do not have enough houses. However, the dichotomy is that we do not want too many to be built, because the places where they might be put are our open spaces. Week after week, people come to my surgery with stories of chronic overcrowding and they all have the same problem—they are not deemed to be priority cases; they have no chance of being rehoused. However, I also see people who do not want a development to be built because parks and open spaces are valuable. I recognise that; those are the green lungs of our communities. If we are not careful but build on those, we shall ruin the quality of life that the residents of suburbs value. Many of the people who live in Uxbridge moved out from central London just after the war because they did not like the pollution and thought that they were moving to a better quality of life. However, unfortunately, the quality of life that they left behind is extending further out.

When I speak to other Members of Parliament, I often find that the problem in the north of England is the reverse. Those of us who live in London wonder what can be done about the places around the country where the houses and vast estates cannot be filled. Government after Government have considered how to change the situation and it seems to be impossible to socially engineer. People come to London as a honeypot.

Mr. Love: Two suggestions for dealing with the problem that the hon. Gentleman is hinting at are as follows. First, 50 per cent. of all new build housing on any size of site should be affordable housing and, secondly, we should increase the density of housing on any site. Does the hon. Gentleman support either of those suggestions?

Mr. Randall: I am not a housing expert, but I do believe that those suggestions should be considered. There is a real problem and something must be done to deal with it.

There is another problem, which I am sure is also faced by other hon. Members' constituents. Because of the lack of housing, a blame culture arises among those people who find that they cannot be rehoused, and they blame asylum seekers. My constituency is near Heathrow, so it includes a certain number of asylum seekers. It is a fallacy that people cannot be rehoused because of asylum seekers, but the shortage of housing creates a problem and increases social tension. Unless we can deal with that problem, the situation will get worse. It is difficult to explain to people that what they perceive to be true is not the case when there are so many urban myths around. It is difficult to tell people that they cannot be rehoused when they know of someone who has just moved in. That causes big problems in our communities.

We have individual problems in the area, such as a large university—Brunel university—and students to be accommodated. I am sure that most hon. Members share my concern about student debt. We will have another problem when the building of Heathrow terminal 5 goes ahead. Vast numbers of construction workers and other businesses associated with the construction of terminal 5 will require temporary housing. There might be an opportunity for those people who are involved in that work to house their workers and then allow the local authority to use the accommodation afterwards in some sort of planning gain, but that is for the London borough of Hillingdon to work out.

As time is short and many hon. Members wish to speak, I shall not go into detail on the situation in Hillingdon and the number of families in temporary accommodation. The London borough of Hillingdon has put in a bid to the void transfer scheme, and we are waiting to hear the result. That will not provide the whole answer to the problem. Almost certainly, the correct solution lies in the creation of more permanent housing that is affordable to households on low incomes. The hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) made some suggestions that we should all consider. Many families on limited incomes in Hillingdon are unable to afford market housing, whether it is owner-occupied or rented. That is the fundamental cause of housing need in my constituency.

11.24 am

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) on choosing this subject for debate. It is of enormous salience to our constituents, as it has been during my 1[illegible] years in Parliament. It remains the biggest issue for my constituents by a long way. It would not be inappropriate to say that we have a genuine housing crisis throughout London, particularly in inner London. That crisis has not suddenly occurred; it has been happening for a long time. It results fundamentally from a lack of investment. I will return to that point in a moment, but let me first echo much of what the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) said in his extremely interesting and honourable speech. His warning that we must all avoid looking for scapegoats when considering the difficulties faced by our constituents was well said and well taken.

The problems of investment for the creation of new accommodation at affordable rents for our constituents and the regeneration of existing council accommodation have existed for many years. Throughout the period of Conservative Government, there was a decline in investment. I am pleased that, in the past four years, more money has been available to boroughs such as Islington to renovate and create housing, but it is nowhere near enough. I welcome that extra investment. This year, Islington has double the amount of investment money for its housing work than it did four years ago. That is an enormous improvement, and it is welcome. In the coming financial year, it will amount to a little more than £40 million.

I spoke to the director of housing last week, as we visited one of the estates in my constituency that are in need of improvement. He said that, given the condition of Islington's existing housing stock, before we even think about creating necessary new housing, improvement measures costing about £440 million will be needed. It does not take a genius to work out that if we have only £40 million a year, it will be a long time before that existing housing stock is put in decent order.

The problem is becoming worse. Many estates built in the London borough of Islington, and in the old borough of Finsbury, were built in the immediate post-war years. Those estates have now reached the point at which major structural difficulties occur. That is bound to happen after 40 or 50 years. The concrete is starting to crumble. The structure needs major attention and that problem will become worse during the next few years.

My first and most important plea to the Government is for them to understand the need for sustained and increased investment in the housing capital stock in boroughs such as Islington. It is needed to put existing housing in a decent condition and to ensure that people no longer have to live in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, in overcrowded accommodation and, in some cases, in no accommodation at all.

The Government have rightly identified the provision of public service as their major priority for this Parliament. In areas such as inner London, it is not just health, education and transport that need attention, but housing. I hope that we will begin to hear much more from the Government about that, and that they will identify it as one of the key public service priorities—because it certainly is a key priority for my constituents.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the article in *London Housing* that estimates that, if the capital funding proposals of the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions were to go ahead, London would lose out, in comparison with the rest of the country, to the tune of £128 million of resources? London and the shire counties also lost out in the revenue support grant settlement of the past three years. Therefore, it is clear that London and the shire counties are losing out with regard to the Government's local support grant settlements.

Mr. Chris Smith: I have not seen the article to which the hon. Gentleman has referred, and I am unsure whether I share his analysis of the provisions for London and the rest of the country. The floor and ceiling proposals in relation to revenue support grant—which the Government have rightly put in place—must also be taken into account, as must the many other ways in which they are assisting, such as the single regeneration budget schemes and the neighbourhood renewal fund. London rightly benefits from all those forms of assistance, as do other areas of the country. However, my key point is that the Government must specifically address funding for housing work in the London boroughs.

My constituents' problems are currently compounded by the appalling service that they receive with regard to the administration of housing benefit, which was outsourced four or five years ago to a firm called IT Net. Forms are lost, not just once but twice or three times. Delays of months occur in the sorting out of even the simplest cases. Letters are occasionally sent out, on the same day and to the same person, that give a different housing benefit assessment. Tenants are sometimes issued with eviction notices—and they might face court action, or receive a visit from the bailiffs—because their housing benefit has not been properly assessed.

Unbelievably, the Liberal Democrat council—that party currently controls Islington, alas—did not send IT Net packing, as it should have done. Instead, it extended the company's contract and gave it more money. That was absolutely the wrong decision. However, a month and a half ago the new contract was signed.

I ask the Minister to draw to the attention of her colleagues at the Department for Work and Pensions the problems that the people of Islington are facing because of the failures of IT Net, and to ensure that the Department's housing benefit team takes the matter seriously and does whatever it can to help the tenants of Islington to receive a better service.

Mr. Edward Davey: Can the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the original contract for IT Net was signed by a Labour council? Before the 1998 local elections, the Labour administration agreed to a poor supplier and signed a weak contract. It would have been extremely

[Mr. Edward Davey]

costly to end that contract, and it would have led to short-term chaos—which has happened in other London boroughs.

Mr. Chris Smith: The hon. Gentleman is right on one point: the contract was signed by the previous Labour council. I said at the time that that was the wrong decision. The Minister and I have told the council so many times since. Now, it accepts that it was wrong. It was far worse to compound the error by continuing and extending the contract.

I make a brief final comment. I fear that there is considerable uncertainty about our tenants' likely fate on rent because of the Government's rent restructuring proposals. I understand why the Government wish to establish a more rational system of setting rents for council tenants throughout the country, but I urge them not simply to attach council and housing association rents to market rates. Market rents in inner London are astronomical and getting worse. If market rents are used as the lodestone for setting social housing rents, I fear that our constituents are in for substantial rent rises. I hope that that will not happen. A problem is that the Government have not given us precise information about how their proposals will affect what our constituents must pay.

I hope that the Government take account of the worries that my colleagues and I have about the proposals, which I know that many of our constituents share. We need more and better housing at affordable rents in our constituencies. That is a major issue of importance. The Government have done much to improve on what they inherited in 1997, but there is further to go.

11.36 am

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I endorse everything that hon. Members have said, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn), my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) and the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall). I will not repeat the details that were furnished about the severe housing crisis under which London is groaning—that is no exaggeration. Undoubtedly, the Government have invested more money in affordable social housing than was invested under past Governments. However, I regret to tell the Minister that the money is not sufficient for London.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury pointed out the problem of a lack of investment over decades. We need more investment in London to create more affordable housing. The Government should adopt the policy that has been promulgated by the Mayor—I must declare an interest because I serve on the Mayor's advisory cabinet with the portfolio of homelessness—that all new projects should consist of 50 per cent. affordable housing.

The hon. Member for Uxbridge was right that we must protect London's green spaces. That causes higher density, and would require higher standards of build quality so that we do not encounter the problems of neighbour disputes caused by noise and harassment, which all London Members have heard about from people in their advice surgeries. Therefore, costs will inevitably rise, which is why the Government must examine how there can be more investment for London housing.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury said, there is little point in the Government's prioritising long-term investment for education, health, transport and tackling crime if housing is not addressed. I am sure that every London Member knows of a surgery case of a child who is treated for asthma in hospital and returns home to a flat in which mould is growing out of the child's bedroom wall, producing spores. In addition, there is a problem if an elderly person who eventually has a hip replacement must return to a building in which the lift is out of order and there are 68 steps up to her flat. It is impossible for children to benefit from the Government's vast investment in education if their home is so overcrowded that there is nowhere for them to do their homework. I shall not list specific examples in the two other subject areas that I mentioned—transport and the prevention of crime—but we all know that inadequate, unacceptable housing can feed the root causes of problems.

The Government must seriously and speedily address the need for increased investment in affordable housing in London. I acknowledge that investment is a medium and long-term solution to the problems that we all face in our advice surgeries. I would argue that the Government can take action in the short term to begin to improve matters now.

The overriding issue of housing benefit has already been mentioned. I represent half the borough of Camden, which has received two charter marks for the excellence of its housing benefit system. However, because of the inadequacies of the system in other London boroughs, landlords in my constituency are now refusing to accept tenants if they would be paid via housing benefit. That seems entirely improper, but there is nothing that the Government can do. However, they could certainly take the payment of housing benefit to landlords out of the hands of the tenants. The local authority should be able to pay directly to the landlord. That should also be the case with other types of housing, such as temporary housing. We have already mentioned the scandal of bed and breakfasts, and I am delighted that the Government have introduced the bed-and-breakfast unit. There is much that the Government can do in the short term.

On the subject of keeping communities together, I should like to mention local reference rent. I dealt only this week with the case of a constituent who was made redundant. She had lived in a flat for many years. The LRR officer visited and disagreed with the rent that her landlord was charging her. The result is that my constituent has to find an additional £100 a month from her unemployment benefit, as I still persist in calling it. There are huge discrepancies in rents charged in my constituency. As there is so much pressure on housing in London, inadequate properties can command very high rents. In the short term, the Government could consider and change the existing structures.

Mr. Love: Does my hon. Friend recognise that the difficulties with housing benefit that she outlines, particularly in London, are leading to additional pressure on the affordable rented sector, which is no longer available to some people? The private rented sector is therefore a factor in increasing the numbers of the homeless.

Glenda Jackson: I thought that I had already made that point, but I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making it clearer. That is absolutely the case. We are experiencing the break-up of communities. More people have to leave the places where they, their parents and grandparents have lived for years, because they cannot afford the rent.

Far too many organisations in London have partial responsibility for tackling such issues. The Government's overarching strategy is to be welcomed, and the Bills that the Government have introduced will help to tackle homelessness and attempt to prevent it. However, there are also the Association of London Government, the 33 boroughs, the Government office for London and taskforces hither and yon.

We are in a real crisis, and the Government should consider the issues and accept the argument that I am urging on them. There should be a single strategic group, which I think should be the Greater London Assembly and the Mayor, to devise strategies and implement speedy and co-ordinated measures to begin to tackle an issue that, if not dealt with in the short, medium and long term, will lead to vast bills further down the line for London. We have heard from the hon. Member for Uxbridge about the potential for severe social disruption; I have heard similar stories. Only the other week, someone said to me, "If you are black, you can get a house. If you come into the country, you are guaranteed a house immediately." We all know that that is not the case, but if such urban myths are not challenged, London will never be a world capital city. The housing issue will be a constant pressure on everyone.

I strongly urge the Government to deal immediately with the issue of increased resources and, in the short term, to amend the existing structures that I mentioned with regard to housing benefit and local rent referral. We must devise one statutory body—I made it clear where responsibility for that should lie. That body should be responsible, if not for actually delivering new houses, for devising the strategy and the overview to tackle the problems for London as a whole.

11.45 am

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): I shall try to be brief because other hon. Members wish to speak. I agree with an enormous amount of what has been said. The first political job that I did that carried any responsibility was that of chairing the housing committee in the London borough of Waltham Forest in 1973. I may have thought that things were difficult in housing then, but they did not compare with today's problems—we have waiting lists so long that the computers might as well be turned off. The number of homeless exceeds the number of lettings available to local authorities and social landlords. The single homeless are, for the most part, not even covered by homelessness legislation. The Homelessness Bill will make some changes and provide that local authorities should give advice, but I despair to think what that could be in the current circumstances.

I echo the comments made about the need for investment. It is crystal clear that, unless we significantly improve investment, we shall not begin to tackle the problems. I have never understood why local authorities are not allowed to borrow against their assets, or why, in cases involving housing associations, the right-to-acquire receipts are ring-fenced for new provision, but councils' right-to-buy receipts are not. The removal of that inconsistency could make a difference straight away.

It is clear in boroughs such as Waltham Forest that, whatever is done in terms of new build—I agree with making available 50 per cent. affordable housing in new developments—it will be no quick fix and will not provide the whole solution. As long as London housing is organised on a borough basis, individual boroughs will have difficulty in managing.

I recall a time in my borough when the council bought properties—there were programmes in which 200 to 300 properties a year were bought. It seemed a simple and straightforward way to increase the supply of rented social housing.

Mr. Love: There are significant numbers of empty properties in London—perhaps we could start with those.

Mr. Gerrard: Absolutely; that would be a good place to start. We should also remove some of the barriers encountered when local authorities try to lease in the private rented sector—such as the housing benefit threshold—which make it more difficult for them to run leasing schemes.

I want to comment on some of the points that my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) made about the private rented sector. Although I do not pretend that the whole sector is wonderful or that some people are not living in horrible conditions within it, I despair when people come to my surgery who are being evicted from decent private rented sector homes, usually because of housing benefit problems. We had an experience in Waltham Forest of the privatisation of housing benefit. Fortunately, the council decided to terminate that contract. In doing so, it did not face making payments to the contractor but received money from the contractor because of the contract's failure. Surely part of the strategy must be to deal with such problems in order to prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place.

We should reconsider the system of local reference rents. Gaps between the housing benefit that people receive and the rent that they are required to pay can eventually make them homeless. It is argued that if we did not have local reference rents and keep the lid on, market rents would spiral out of control, but they are doing so anyway. That argument would work only if there was a genuine market in which people had some choice and could tell their landlord, "I'm not paying that money. I'm going elsewhere." The London housing market does not offer the sort of choice that allows people to operate in that way.

Linda Perham (Ilford, North): My hon. Friend mentioned homelessness prevention. Is he aware that

[Linda Perham]

the neighbouring borough, Redbridge, has a homelessness prevention team that is doing very good work and, indeed, saving money? There is also a scheme that gives boroughs choice in housing allocation.

Mr. Gerrard: I am certainly aware of the choice-in-allocation scheme, and it will be interesting to find out how it operates. I was not aware of the specific work being done in Redbridge on homelessness prevention, but I should like more local authorities to put more effort into that. It is difficult for them when people have such problems in the private rented sector.

We could also make some other small changes to housing benefit—changes to disregards, tapers and thresholds—which would make a significant difference to some people. We should stop tinkering with the system. Local authorities receive a new circular every week on another change to be made to the system. It is no wonder that the administration starts to falter.

The long-term solutions must involve investment. There is no answer in the medium to long term but greater investment. However, we should also consider shorter-term measures such as letting local authorities buy and considering what we can do to improve the housing benefit system so that at least we prevent some people from becoming homeless and putting extra pressure on the social sector.

Mrs. Marion Roe (in the Chair): Order. I remind hon. Members that winding-up speeches begin at 12 noon.

11.53 am

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): Given the lack of time, I shall try to reduce my speech to a few points. The first, and the most salient, is that we must fund the welcome changes that the Government have introduced. Following legislation, for the first time 18 to 21-year-old care leavers will be given priority, as will all 16 and 17-year-olds. In Tower Hamlets, that will mean a minimum of an extra 300 young people turning up at homeless services. We welcome the fact that they will be given priority, as they must be in any civilised society, but we must have the money to back that up, and it is not there at the moment.

Secondly, we must reduce temporary accommodation, especially among families with children, as has been said. Shelter estimates that an investment of only £250 million, which is surely crumbs from the table, would bring about 10,000 empty private properties back into use as temporary accommodation, with much cheaper rents. Will the Minister respond, if not now, perhaps in writing, to that proposal?

Thirdly, we must tackle and prevent homelessness among those who do not qualify for priority need. That can be done only by increasing the amount of affordable housing.

Fourthly, although all hon. Members have many problems with stock transfer in our constituencies, it is fair to say that, according to the DTLR's deprivation index, I have the worst. Recently, the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble), who is in the Chamber today, and Lord Falconer, the Minister for Housing and Planning, visited my constituency. He saw a family of 16 people who lived in two bedrooms and described that as the worst housing that he had ever seen. It is shocking that such housing problems exist. We cannot sit back and allow another generation of children to grow up in slums. [Hon. Members: "Hear, hear."] I am glad that I have my colleagues' support on that issue, as I shall lose it on my next point. Having seen two cases of successful stock transfer, which has turned slums into very good quality housing, we must consider that route and deal with the problems that arose with the first wave of stock transfers 10 years ago.

Fifthly, the right to buy is another controversial matter. At the very least, it must be suspended in areas of regeneration where it is sucking up Government money that was made available to improve housing.

Sixthly, I am horrified by the prospect of rent restructuring. I seek the Minister's reassurance that it will not be dire for housing associations. Some housing associations in London, for example, have said that they do not want to increase their rents but will be forced to do so.

Finally, I commend the Minister on her decision to review the housing health and safety rating standards. I hope that she will deal with the overcrowding regulations, which have not changed since the 1930s. I welcome her comments on all the issues that I have raised. We are millions of pounds better off under the Labour Government, but it is still not enough for our housing problems. Please could they give us some more?

11.57 am

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): All that I can do in the few minutes that are left is to impress on the Minister why there is a crisis in my borough of Lewisham. It has 250,000 people with high deprivation rates. Its constant population growth is now reckoned to be about 7 per cent. over the next 10 years. In the past six years, the number of lettings that have become available from council stock has decreased by nearly 50 per cent., to 2,000 per annum. That is because people cannot get out. They would have purchased homes, but during the same period the average cost of a flat has increased from £64,000 to £155,000. That is an impossible price for the average person to pay.

There are 15,000 people on the waiting list and they are in serious need. My borough is one of only four in London that do not use bed-and-breakfast accommodation. It is to be commended for that. However, as a consequence, no one else can acquire council house stock because 1,400 homeless households are in temporary accommodation. During the same period, only 260 new homes have been produced in the whole borough. That is not even enough to house my case load of homeless people. My borough could have taken the close on 4,000 units that were produced throughout London last year by social landlords, and still not met our needs. That is the extent of the crisis. It is a catastrophe for individual families. As so many hon. Members have said, families are breaking up under the strain. Children's health and education are being sacrificed. The position is unacceptable.

I agree with all that has been said and must impress on the Minister the need for more public intervention and more investment. The right to buy should be suspended in cases of great shortage, such [illegible] that in my borough, and allocating 50 per cent. of development to social housing is the least that we can do.

The Government have given my borough considerable good news. However, today we need to complain because people are suffering and there are remedies that the Minister must put into effect.

12 noon

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) on securing the debate. He initiated a debate on housing in London last July and I agree with him that we should keep bringing the issue to the House until we get a solution. We have to keep arguing and must convince Ministers that the matter is urgent. Those of us who represent inner-city and outer-London constituencies hear about it in our surgeries every week. I am sure that others feel as I do after their surgeries: frustrated, angry and impatient—and lots of other things for which I would be called to order if I said them—about our inability to deal with some of the problems that are brought to us, not least overcrowding. A lot of my constituents have many points on the housing list, representing their need, but that need is unmet.

The misery out there is beyond words and it is getting worse. That is happening for a series of reasons that are well known and have been mentioned. Consider the history of housing policy in London. After the second world war there was plenty of land on which to build and large amounts of money did make an impact on the housing crisis in those years. Now we have population growth not seen for decades but land is scarce, so prices are high. The problem is possibly at its most acute in London's history. Despite some of the proposals and policies that have been mentioned, the Government have yet to meet the challenge. It is a major challenge and they should recognise that.

The hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) gave a moving example from her constituency. My example is from a report produced by Fordham Research for Kingston council on the housing needs in the borough. That estimates, after detailed research, that every year for the next five years there will be a shortfall of 1,365 dwellings for affordable rent in Kingston. That is an indication of the need in one area. If we multiply that across London, we shall get an idea of the problem.

The Government have introduced a few welcome measures. At least the starter home initiative recognises the problem despite not meeting it by any means. However, the Metropolitan police and the national health service are selling off homes, so we are taking one step forward and two back. It is questionable whether the way in which the starter home initiative is set up deals with the problem for key public workers. I ask the Government to consider whether shared equity is a better way—it might produce more money per buck.

Rent restructuring has been mentioned. That is incredibly worrying on affordability grounds and because of wnat it says about the Government's underlying attitude to public subsidy for housing in London. It seems to suggest that there will not be much subsidy—that will have to come from the tenants. Is that really the way forward? Does it solve the problems that we see in our advice sessions? It is also creating uncertainty for the future of the registered social landlord sector in that it is unclear what will happen because the Government have made such a mess of it so far. With that uncertainty, landlords will not conclude the deals that the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow talked about. We shall not see the advances that have been made in other parts of the country. The Government must act quickly. They must get it right and they must understand the problems of affordability as they affect London.

There are other solutions that the Government should seriously consider. The GLA has been good at promoting use of the planning system to tackle some of the problems. That is a medium-term solution, as hon. Members have said. We need to consider the 50 per cent. affordable housing proposal for new developments, and we should apply it to sites of smaller numbers. The floor needs to come down.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I apologise for my late arrival, but I had a constituency engagement that was arranged some time in advance. It is obviously useful for me to play an active part in the debate.

I want to tackle the Mayor of London's 50 per cent. blanket housing proposal for key workers. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will comment on my concern, which is that it may have unintended consequences, especially if there is a downturn in the property market as a whole during the next two or three years. A limit as high as 50 per cent. across the board may discourage developers from building at all.

Mr. Davey: I suppose that I am grateful for the intervention, but I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman misrepresents the GLA's proposal, which is about more than key workers. Moreover, if the Mayor went down the road of a much lower limit, as some developers have suggested, we could not tackle the problem. We may have to adjust and tweak as we go along. I am sure that the GLA is aware—I hope that Ministers are—that if the problem makes the market dry up, we may have to consider other measures. Land values and property prices in London show that the idea that developers could not still make a handsome profit does not hold water.

There must be more than a planning solution, as the Government must do their bit. The affordable housing planning permission is well and good, but a public subsidy is still needed to build the houses through the social sector. The Government do not seem to be putting that money forward. Perhaps we shall see in the comprehensive spending review in July that they have changed their mind, but the GLA briefing for the debate suggests that the total public subsidy requirement for London needs to be £600 million a year to deliver the social housing if we have the 50 per cent. affordable planning guidance. If one compares that with the public subsidy of £240 million provided at present, one sees the size of the increase needed—it needs to be almost trebled, year on year.

That is a challenge to the Government. I hope that the Minister will say that she and her colleagues will hear the voice of hon. Members in today's debate and argue

[Mr. Davey]

strongly with Her Majesty's Treasury for such increases. They would be an effective use of public subsidy, as they would use the benefits of the planning system effectively to reduce the land price, and would lever in financial capital with a relatively small public subsidy. Although the increase may seem large, it is good value for money for the taxpayer and is worth defending on Treasury terms. If the sum required was considered in historical terms, it would still not be as great as the amount that was spent in the 1950s and 1960s in real prices. What the GLA argues for in terms of resource requirement for London's social housing is relatively reasonable.

I want to talk about one other solution for the problem, which may be more controversial. People who want to leave London to live elsewhere—the necessary houses are available in other parts of the country—should be able to do so if they wish. A recent experiment in my borough facilitated that by bringing landlords to Kingston, providing details of job opportunities and vacancies from jobcentres and providing packages in which local authorities have supplied money for relocation. People are starting to take up such offers. Recently, people have relocated to Lincoln, Easington in County Durham and elsewhere. Such people are still economically active and are moving for jobs as well. That may be part—I emphasise that word—of the solution.

The Government have to recognise the extent of the problem. They have to back the GLA's actions and tell the Treasury to come up with the goods.

12.9 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I am grateful that you have allowed me to catch your eye in this debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) on securing it. It is a matter of consensus that the problem of homelessness, and particularly the problem of people living in temporary accommodation and bed and breakfasts, is getting decidedly worse. The subject is important and needs to be addressed by the House.

I would like to start, if I may, by administering a minor rebuke to the hon. Gentleman. The idea that everything in public housing was wonderful up to 1979, but suddenly got worse between then and 1997 and then suddenly got better again between 1997 and today, is farcical. I think that we would all agree that the problem is one of under-investment during a long period, under Governments of both parties. We must try to find ways of putting that right and improve the lot of people living in London.

London is by far the most expensive place to live in Britain. Even people on average incomes cannot afford to buy or even rent decent accommodation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) pointed out in his excellent speech, house prices rose by 23 per cent. between September 1999 and September 2000, to an average, in London, of £194,000. Such a figure would require a single person to earn over £50,000 a year to get a mortgage. As the hon. Member for Islington, North said, even Members of Parliament would be in difficulty.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge said, the population of London continues to grow, which will further exacerbate the problem. The total population of the capital is approaching 7.2 million. That is an increase of 28,000 every year since 1983. Those figures are taken from the Office for National Statistics' "Focus on London 2000". The population is increasing partly through net inward migration from the rest of Britain—a north-south drift—and partly through net inward migration from the rest of the world. We need to take those figures carefully into account.

I hope that the Government are examining the latest census. I doubt that the Government's figures are accurate, because of the number of uncompleted forms. They need to be accurate so that a proper revenue support grant can be made to the London boroughs. I want to return to that aspect of the allocation of resources to London, which I mentioned in an intervention.

There is a staggering estimate that, by 2016, one-person households as a proportion of the total will rise from 37 per cent. to 40 per cent. Married couples are expected to decline as a proportion of households from 44 per cent. to 30 per cent. That will require a substantial number of empty houses. It is not only the increase in one-person households that will determine that, but the fact that we are all living longer and that more people want to live in London. The problem is acute and getting worse, and to solve it more investment will be required.

Many hon. Members have mentioned the issue of homelessness and people living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. I have only a short time available to me, but the rate of increase in the number of people living in such accommodation is a scandal. We know, from a written answer supplied by the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble), that the number of families living in bed-and-breakfast in the United Kingdom rose between June 1997 and June 2001 from 4,500 to a staggering 11,340, of which 6,270 families are currently housed in bed-and-breakfast in London. I would say to the Minister and every Member of the House that that figure is far too high. It is a scandal and a waste of precious resources.

The hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) quoted the Shelter brief prepared for the debate. She quoted the figure of £250 million, which is the sum required to provide 10,000 units of privately leased accommodation. It is estimated that £60 million is spent on bed-and-breakfast accommodation in London alone. That money, therefore, would provide 2,500 units of accommodation. The figure is not huge, but it is there. Money is being misapplied. Furthermore, the standard of accommodation in bed-and-breakfast is often very poor, so we must get away from the idea that we are providing a service for those people when, in fact, we are doing them a great disservice. The Government should regulate to set standards for bed-and-breakfast accommodation, so that the huge amount of money that we pay is at least spent on something of reasonable value.

Mr. Love: The hon. Gentleman talked about the so-called scandals. In the past year, 11,000 properties in London were sold under the right-to-buy legislation and only 3,000 new properties were built. Nationally, it costs about £50,000 to build a property, but the right-to-buy receipts are for an average sum of about £28,000.

Last year, over £1 billion was spent on the right to buy. Does the hon. Gentleman want anything to be done about that?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Gentleman is part of the governing party. If he could persuade his Minister to abolish the right to buy, he would have a point. Until he can persuade the Minister to do so, he will have to live with it. There is no point in his intervening on me because I am not in the Government—they sit on the hon. Gentleman's side of the House.

The most serious problem that I shall cite in this debate relates to the estimate by Crisis, among others, of the number of hidden homeless. The problem is really tragic. Crisis estimates that as many as a staggering 400,000 people in the country as a whole may be hidden homeless. In London, it is estimated that some 112,000 women and children—and, perhaps, a further 75,000 men—are hidden homeless. There may be 200,000 people in London who are hidden homeless. Those figures are far higher than the Government have ever admitted in their official figures. The Government need to address all those categories, including people sleeping rough on the streets, living in bed-and-breakfasts, and sleeping on a sofa or the floor in friends' houses. No one knows exactly how many there are.

Will the Minister state clearly that she will initiate some research, so that we have at least some idea and are given an authoritative figure of the number of people who are homeless in London? An easy way to do so would be to include a question in the census form. I know that there will not be another census for another 10 years, but these things take a long time to plan, and we might plan for the future. Meanwhile, some academic research should be conducted to allow us to discover how many hidden homeless there are in London, and in which boroughs, so that we can begin to allocate resources to each borough on a sensible basis.

A number of people have said that one problem that leads to homelessness is the non-payment of housing benefit to people, who are subsequently evicted from their homes. We have raised that point in Westminster Hall before, and the hon. Member for Islington, North intervened in another debate on that matter. It is no wonder that there are problems with housing benefit when the system is changed almost weekly; there have been between 70 and 90 new directives in the past three years. No one can administer the housing benefit system correctly if it is changed with that rapidity. I have sympathy with the hon. Gentleman for the fact that his council has contracted out the management of housing benefit but, equally, I have some sympathy for the company administering it, because the Government continually make changes to the system.

Finally, I shall mention the allocation of resources, which is a subject that I raised in an intervention. I quoted from a *London Housing* article from October 2001, which showed that the DTLR proposals would mean that, over three years, London would lose out in resources for capital investment in housing by £128 million, which includes £91 million for local housing authority strategies and £37 million for housing associations. Given the picture that has emerged of the number of homeless people increasing and the number of social housing units that are being built declining in the current period of Labour Government, it seems wrong that the resources allocated for London are being reduced. Indeed, we know that in the past three years, the resources allocated for London have been reduced by £91 million. It is worth noting that the Government use the index of deprivation to replace the old index of local deprivation. In a sense, that is to compound an error twice because that is the mechanism used to distribute regeneration grants and it does not take account of other factors, such as rising populations, in each borough.

It has been a worthwhile debate. Many hon. Members have emphasised that there is a problem of under-investment, but we know that, under the Labour Government, homelessness has risen substantially, the number of people living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation has risen substantially, the number of social housing units has fallen substantially and Labour councils have more empty council houses than Conservative councils. Those councils should turn houses around more quickly. Conservative councils can manage their housing stock better than Labour and Liberal councils—

Hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): Order.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We know that the Government will have a real job to do to reverse the tragic human misery caused by the problem of homelessness in London, which is getting worse.

12.21 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) on securing the debate. It is not the first time that he has raised the issue and I am sure that it will not be the last. I also congratulate all hon. Members who have taken part in the debate. I shall not reply to each point in detail because many general points have been made, but the debate has raised our level of thinking and awareness of housing problems in London.

I want to start by making a few general points. I agree with much of the analysis of problems in London. The Government of course recognise the real pressures that exist in the capital. I also want to make two specific points. First, I want to remind hon. Members of the history of under-investment in housing over many years, especially during the 18 years when the Conservative party was in power. All of us whose political memories predate 1997 and who have had anything to do with housing in London—

Mr. Clifton-Brown: It is pathetic.

Ms Keeble: It is not pathetic. All of us who have longer political memories and practical experience in housing know exactly what price communities in London paid as a result of that under-investment.

Secondly, in addition to under-investment, there has been a failure to tackle some of the issues surrounding housing standards. Some of those issues have been

[Ms Keeble]

mentioned: how we calculate the fitness of properties and overcrowding, how we define who is homeless, how we determine rents and how we plan to provide decent support, through housing benefit, for people who cannot afford to pay their rent. That adds up to a big agenda, which the Government must tackle by dealing with investment issues and with the standards and legislation that underpin housing provision.

It will be impossible to deal with all those issues in the time that I have available, but I hope to make progress on some of them.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): I want to pick up the point raised by the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall). We have 2,000 families in temporary accommodation—almost on the scale that existed after the second world war. At that time, Clem Attlee came along and launched almost a Marshall plan to allow local councils to borrow to build. Will the Minister address that central question? Why cannot councils borrow to build?

Ms Keeble: I shall deal with a range of issues raised in the debate, but I shall refer specifically to investment and the procurement of investment for affordable housing. As hon. Members acknowledged in their speeches, since coming to office we have reversed the decline in investment in housing and have aimed for significant increases, including in London, not just through council accommodation but also through registered social landlords. Where the money goes is an important issue, and one of its major uses is bringing the existing housing stock up to a reasonable standard.

I can see no justification for authorities—including the Government, who are responsible for the provision of housing through local authorities and housing associations—to tolerate unfit public sector housing stock. We have made it a priority to bring the housing stock in question up to standard and have applied a substantial amount of money to that task. We have set a target of bringing all public sector housing to a fit standard by 2010, and a third of it by 2004. That will be a challenge. The argument about finding alternative sources of investment, in particular through stock transfer and other options, is partly to do with increasing the speed of funding streams to bring housing to a decent standard.

As to the shape taken by our proposals, hon. Members will be aware that we have a range of options, including not just stock transfer, but arm's length management companies. Now there is the discussion with respect to the Prudential code, which will shape the possibility of councils' raising funds in the private sector to use in upgrading their housing stock.

I am well aware of the vote on the Aylesbury estate. Thought will be needed to ensure that council tenants are still provided with the housing improvements that they want, and to which they are entitled. However, in many ballots throughout the country tenants have voted for stock transfer and it has been successful in many instances. It is now a realistic option, which has produced good results.

The points that were made about rent restructuring must be tackled if we are dealing with a diversity of providers of public sector housing. I point out to my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) that safeguards are built into the system with respect to both the year-on-year increases and the total cap. I pay tribute to the London Members of Parliament whose vociferous lobbying was partly responsible for the incorporation of those safeguards.

My hon. Friends the Members for Islington, North and for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) both raised the issue of overcrowding. We are investigating that. It is an important factor because it has repercussions for so many other Government agendas, especially ensuring that children have a decent education. The overcrowding regulations are probably among the most difficult standards with respect to improvements because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow mentioned, they were introduced in 1935. The arguments that Labour Members of Parliament made about improvements then are the same as those made today, and it will be a major task to make progress. However, it makes no sense that in this day and age people should still be expected to sleep in the kitchen.

Hon. Members made an important argument about the need to increase the supply of affordable housing in London. That is of course right. There is not enough time to go through all the arguments, but hon. Members will know of the starter home initiative. Important factors in that, besides the need to deal with the high property prices, are recognition of the need for high quality public services in the capital of the country, to ensure that it maintains its position as a world-class city, and the importance of good public sector workers to deal with key services. The initiative is not a universal panacea, but it is designed to tackle a specific problem. We are also taking other measures.

As to the question of future action, the debate comes at an opportune time. Later this week a conference will be held to launch the consultation process for the 2002 London housing statement, which will set out the key housing policies and priorities for the capital. It is important that all partners take part in the consultation, so that the statement may have a real impact. From what I have heard this morning, the debate will be trenchant and lively; I hope that it will tackle the real issues of homelessness and housing in the capital.

New Africa Initiative

12.30 pm

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): Before I call the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry), I give notice that the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) has sought permission to speak from the initiator of the debate, the Minister and myself. I am happy to give my permission, and I shall certainly call him.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): In light of 11 September and in a week when the Prime Minister is visiting Africa, it is timely that we should be debating the New Partnership for Africa's Development, which was formerly known as the new Africa initiative. I welcome—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Will hon. Members who are leaving do so quietly?

Tony Baldry: I welcome the Prime Minister's visit and the Government's commitment to Africa, but Africa's chronic crisis will not be solved by one man on one visit. The Government clearly recognise that the new partnership will need the support of wealthier countries to succeed. I agree with the sentiments that the Prime Minister expressed at the Labour party conference following 11 September, when he said that the state of Africa was a scar on the conscience of the world. If we focus on Africa, we can help to heal that scar; if we do not, it will become deeper and angrier.

A coalition against Africa's poverty is crucial. It is obviously no good the UK Government performing well on debt relief, for example, if the G8 coalition of which it is a part also includes underperformers. A coalition means collective responsibility, and the new partnership can succeed only if it is built on a firm coalition, which includes several players, the first of which is the United States.

Friends of America must wonder whether it is delivering enough. President Bush's state of the union speech mentioned evil five times, but poverty not once. Of course, it is right that we must fight terrorism throughout the world, but we must also fight poverty. Colin Powell is on record as asserting:

> "While Africa may be important, it doesn't fit into the national strategic interests, as far as I can see them."

We shall have to persuade colleagues in Congress and friends in the American Government that the United States could do more. The United States claims to be the largest development donor in the world, but that does not change the fact that it also gives the most parsimonious percentage of development assistance, at just 0.1 per cent. of gross national income. President Bush will attend the forthcoming financial summit in Monterrey, but it is questionable whether he intends to announce that the United States will increase overseas development and assistance. Instead, it looks as if he will offer poor countries a change in the way in which the International Development Association operates. That might look attractive in the short term, but it will be unsustainable in the longer term, and it is not what Africa needs. Africa—particularly sub-Saharan Africa—needs all Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries to meet the target of 0.7 per cent. of GNI for overseas development as soon as possible.

The second part of the foundation that is necessary for the new partnership to succeed is the European Union. Its communiqué following the first Africa-Europe ministerial meeting last year stated:

> "The European Union welcomes the New African Initiative which reflects many of the essential elements of the EU's own external relations policy."

There must, however, be concern, because seven of the top 10 recipients of EU external assistance are middle-income eastern European countries, which will soon join the EU. Last year, Poland received three times more aid than Uganda, which is the only African country in the top 10. The Secretary of State told the Select Committee on International Development that the amount of European Union development aid that was given to poor countries was actually dropping and was now less than 40 per cent. We must, therefore, persuade colleagues in the EU, the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers that the EU's development assistance and budgets must focus much more on poverty and on Africa.

The third part of the foundation of the new partnership must be African countries themselves. Nigeria's President Obasanjo accurately asserted that the resolution of conflict will be central to the success of the new partnership.

For African countries, the rhetoric of partnership features prominently. As a press release by the South African Department of Foreign Affairs succinctly notes, the new partnership will be

> "a common vision and a firm and shared conviction...to eradicate poverty and to place their countries...on a path of sustainable growth and development, and at the same time to participate actively in the world economy and body politic".

Those may not be new commitments. They are the conditions for which the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have provided aid for years. Importantly, they are now clearly stated African commitments. We need a firm partnership that involves the United States, the European Union, which obviously includes the United Kingdom, and African countries. We must then consider how that could impact on specific policy areas.

The first crucial building block of the new partnership will be Africa's health and education. HIV/AIDS infects someone in Africa every 25 seconds. Even those better off countries such as South Africa and Botswana are suffering catastrophic levels of HIV infection that may kill off a quarter of young men and women in the next few years. That is a fairly horrific figure.

Wealthier countries are clearly failing to deliver more directly for two reasons. First, the global health fund has revived only a fraction of the $10 billion that it needs to combat the pandemic, and we need to ensure that other countries contribute to that fund. AIDS is undoubtedly fuelled by poverty. Secondly, wealthier countries are partially failing on drug patents. I welcome the declaration signed at Doha on TRIPs—trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights—but it remains undecided whether developing countries can import cheap copies of patented drugs from third countries. That would benefit only countries that have their own manufacturing capacity, and that often excludes Africa.

[Tony Baldry]

Education is equally important. According to UNICEF, infants born to mothers with no formal education are twice as likely to die before their first birthday as those born to mothers with post-primary school education. Again, the European Union is the most culpable, as it allocates only 3 per cent. of aid to basic education through the European development fund, and the gap between disbursements and commitments can mean that as much as 40 per cent. of aid is returned to member states. That must change in order to meet Africa's needs. Furthermore, the lack of public funds now means that in countries such as Tanzania, Ghana and Zambia many poor people cannot afford basic education. In Zambia, as much as three quarters of basic education spending must be met directly by poor parents themselves.

Poor countries are sick because they are poor, but they are also poor because they are sick. That need is even more apparent when we consider the other two building blocks of the new partnership—debt relief and access to market economies. The new partnership clearly sets out how debt relief should be linked with costed poverty reduction: wealthier countries should commit themselves to deeper debt relief for African countries that show a commitment to poverty reduction. However, I am not sure that it happening under current World Bank criteria. The debt payments of Zambia, Tanzania and Cameroon exceed their combined health and education budgets. The poor people in those countries will see the World Bank giving in principle, but taking in practice.

The World Bank's constriction on development sustainability is compounded when we consider the economics of African countries since 11 September. Commodity prices are falling. African countries rely on coffee, cotton and tobacco, but the prices of those commodities have already fallen by 7.4 per cent. this year; and the International Monetary Fund expects them to fall even further. We need to ensure that Africa is given a strong voice in institutions such as World Trade Organisation, but adequate economic access for African goods to the markets of Europe and the developed world.

The erosion of Africa's share in world trade between 1970 and 1993 represents a lost annual income of $68 billion. We have to work out how African economies might benefit from increased trade; that must mean rich countries allowing quota and tariff-free access to their markets. It is particularly important that African agriculture is not undermined by unequal competition with industrialised agriculture.

The new partnership will want to emphasise the importance of developing the private sector in Africa and promote foreign direct investment. Such investment has never been high there; it has fallen dramatically since the Asian crises. Indeed, the *Financial Times* recently observed that sub-Saharan Africa's neglected ports had significantly held back the progress of their economies.

We will all watch with interest the emerging Africa infrastructure fund that was announced last week. Perhaps the most telling sign is that the nine African countries that are experiencing the worst civil conflicts all have one thing in common. Each has a per capita GNP income of less than $200. Conflict resolution will be crucially important to the success of the new partnership. The onus must be largely on African countries, and I support the comments made by the Prime Minister today in *The Times*. Some of us were disappointed that the countries of southern Africa were not more effective in helping, for example, President Mugabe of Zimbabwe find a resolution for that troubled country's current difficulties.

I have no doubt that the world will meet the United Nations 2015 targets on poverty, not least because of the improvements in China and India. The danger is that as four continents of the world progress, one—Africa—is at best standing still, and at worst, going backwards. Of course, it is an important matter and it is right that the Prime Minister should be there. None of us should be under the illusion that unless there is a massive political commitment—involving us as parliamentarians, colleagues in the European Union, colleagues in Congress, and importantly, colleagues in Africa itself—there will not be the progress in Africa that all of us want to see at the start of this new millennium.

12.41 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) for allowing me to contribute to the debate. I congratulate him on putting the matter on the agenda of the House of Commons. It is not before time, and it is important that it is not only on today's agenda, but that it remains on the agenda of the House of Commons, and is a popular campaign in Britain.

There is a real danger that the African continent will be completely locked out of the process of globalisation. While the rest of the world gets richer, it is evident that Africa is getting poorer. At the start of the 21st century, sub-Saharan Africa includes many of the world's poorest countries. In a reverse of some of the improvements of the 1960s and 1970s, Africa became poorer in the 1980s and 1990s. Average income per capita is lower now than it was at the end of the 1960s. In Britain, the average income is about £16,300 per annum, or about £313.60 per week. In Africa, it is £320 per annum, or £6.50 per week. That is less than £1 per day. Prices are lower in Africa and money goes further, but it does not go that much further. The discrepancy is huge.

Life expectancy in Britain is 78 years; in Africa it is 49 years. Of the 25 million people worldwide who have AIDS, two thirds are African. Therefore, the continent includes a growing share of the world's absolute poorest. Many problems of development are endemic to African countries. The World Bank recently published a table that showed that, while a few countries have moved forward, other countries—such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Niger, Sierra Leone, Madagascar, Zambia, the Central African Republic, Mauritania, Chad, Ghana, Rwanda, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, Burundi, Senegal, South Africa, and Nigeria—have all gone backwards in terms of GDP per capita. In other words, the endemic problems—for example, poor primary school enrolment and high child mortality—remain.

I refer to the summary of the World Bank report, "Can Africa claim the 21st century?" It says:

"Moreover, many development problems have become largely confined to Africa ...including malaria and HIV/AIDS—that impose costs on Africa at least twice those in any other developing region. One African in five lives in countries severely disrupted by conflict.

Making matters worse, Africa's place in the global economy has been eroded, with declining export shares in traditional primary products, little diversification into new lines of business, and massive capital flight and loss of skills to other regions. Now the region stands in danger of being excluded from the information revolution."

The response of recent times has been insufficient to tackle those searing problems. There has been deteriorating capacity, weakening institutions and inadequate infrastructure. Great changes are needed. There must be a concentrated focus on the challenges that face Africa in order to move things forward. Due to the rapidly growing population, 5 per cent. annual growth is needed to stop the numbers of poor from rising. If severe poverty is to be halved by 2015, annual growth of more than 7 per cent. will be required, along with a more equitable distribution of income. That is a massive challenge.

We must link the global and local. We should not think globally and act locally, but simultaneously think and act locally and globally. What do I mean by that? We should address local development projects without neglecting the global need for infrastructures. There are more telephone lines in New York than in the whole of Africa. We must do something about telecom infrastructure and transport and communication infrastructure to allow Africa to be included in the global world.

I welcome the Prime Minister's initiative to visit Africa, and the building of a coalition and a Marshall plan. I also welcome the infrastructure fund, which is greatly needed. I hope that the Prime Minister's visit will be a catalyst for a new, continuing and sharper focus on Africa. That would be linked to initiatives on good governance and conflict resolution.

In addition to challenging politicians in America, we must do more in our communities to build popular support for initiatives in Africa to give resonance to politicians' measures.

In May 1990, a BBC television film called "The March" showed people from Africa who were locked out of the economy. They could see images of Europe getting richer, and they wondered why they should stay in Africa rather than move to Europe. If we want to face the challenges of migration and refugees, we must accept that we live in an interdependent world. If we do not address peoples' needs in parts of the world that are small and vulnerable, we should not be surprised that people want to move to where the goods are.

It is in our interest to focus on the initiative. However, I ask for the new initiative on Africa to be not only a high-level initiative, but to be supported by popular campaigns in schools, neighbourhoods and residents associations in our communities. That would give people basic information to make them aware of how Africa is locked out. We should campaign to say that the globe's real challenge in the 21st century is the inclusion of Africa as a whole.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before I call the Secretary of State, I am sure that I reflect the views of hon. Members by expressing our gratitude to her for coming to reply to the debate. That clearly indicates the important role of Westminster Hall.

12.47 pm

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): I very much welcome the debate, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) on securing it. I agree with him and my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) that we desperately need a stronger international focus on Africa because of the needs of the people of that continent and the future security, safety and stability of the world. If a whole continent becomes ever poorer and mired in conflict, that is a desperate tragedy for its people.

Africa is Europe's near abroad. If it is in trouble, that trouble and conflict will spread across the world. For example, bin Laden was in Sudan before he went to Afghanistan. Africa contains rich minerals, which leads to criminality around diamonds. That may lead to drug dealing, which may cause destruction. That may lead to the spread of disease and massive refugee movements. There are more displaced people in Africa than anywhere in the world. There is no conflict among what is morally right, what is necessary for social justice and what is in our intelligent self-interest. It is in our intelligent self-interest to ensure that Africa has better hope for the future.

Poverty in Africa is deeper and wider than anywhere else in the world. Two thirds of the absolutely poor, who live on less than $1 a day, live in Asia, the most populous part of the world. That figure uses purchasing power parity, so it shows what $1 a day would buy in the United States, not in Africa. It is a desperate level of poverty. Some 1.2 billion people live at that level and just about scrape enough to survive. One third live in India; we must keep up our efforts in Asia. One third live in Africa, and nearly half the people on the continent live in such poverty.

At current rates of economic growth, more people will become poorer, because population growth across the continent of Africa is faster than average economic growth, so we can expect further deterioration under present trends. That is desperately serious, and we should pay better attention to the problem.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West said, conflict is also an issue. Some 20 per cent. of people in Africa are living in conditions of conflict. The permafrost of the cold war, which controlled disorder and conflict to some extent, has thawed. Conflict breaks out often because states are so weak that they are not able to provide security. Any bunch of gangsters can go around with a gun and enrich themselves. The conflict in Sierra Leone is about diamonds and everyone having kalashnikovs. Many small arms are circulating and breeding disorder in weak states across the continent. When there is such disorder, people can do very little to improve their lives.

In a moving and eloquent publication from the World Bank, "Voices of the Poor", 60,000 people from 60 countries—among the poorest people in the world—were asked what they felt about the world in the year 2000. Some of the descriptions of the grindingly difficult nature of their lives are very moving. What they ask for

[Clare Short]

most is security. No one can begin to grow cabbages, keep chickens, take children to school or gain access to health care if there is total disorder and no security. Conflict oppresses people, destroys infrastructure and sets back development. It is an enormously serious problem, and it will get worse unless we do better. However, matters are not hopeless.

There has been much reform in Africa in recent years. There is much more democracy across the continent. Important reforming Governments are making progress in economic growth and the reduction of poverty. More than 20 African countries achieved a growth rate of 4 per cent. in 2001, and Uganda, Botswana and Mozambique achieved growth of 7 to 10 per cent. If we are to succeed in halving poverty, there must be 7 per cent. growth across the continent. Some African countries are achieving that. Therefore, Africa can do it if we make a greater effort to resolve conflict and support reform.

Our great opportunity is that Africa is now setting the reform agenda. The world has been hectoring Africa for a long time. In the past, all sorts of reform agendas were written in Washington and flown to Africa, where they were accepted by reluctant Governments who needed the money but never really believed in the agendas and the reforms failed. We have learned that there is a greater chance of success when there is local commitment and ownership and people design their own reform agenda. That is the real importance of the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

Leading African Governments are now supported in the African Union by all the countries of the continent. They can now say that they are going to reform themselves and resolve conflicts. They know the conditions for which they will get the inward investment that will give them access to modern technology: decent democracy, cracking down on corruption, providing security, enabling the local private sector to grow and investing in infrastructure. Africa is now telling itself so, and is taking the leadership. That is an important opportunity.

In his second term, the Prime Minister has made a commitment to partnership with Africa's agenda for reform, because of the needs of Africa and the danger to the world. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West said, the United Kingdom can help, but cannot alone rise to the challenge sufficiently to offer the continent better prospects. The United Kingdom is a member of the Security Council, the European Union—which is significant with regard to trading rights—and the G8, which represents the richest countries in the world, and which promised at its Genoa meeting to offer a response to the New Partnership for Africa's Development. Therefore, the United Kingdom, with all of its alliances and relationships, can respond and begin to help.

More aid is needed—it has been declining, and things have got worse in Africa—but it must be better deployed. It must be deployed to build up the capacity of African Governments to successfully manage their economies so that they can provide services for their people. It should not be used to fund a proliferation of projects, which weakens the capacity of Governments, because they have to spend all of their time accounting to the donors for how the money is being dispersed, instead of strengthening their health and education systems and providing basic universal services for their people.

What happened in Somalia and Rwanda represented disastrous and shameful failures by the international community in its attempts to resolve conflict in Africa. Sierra Leone is a small country, but the success of the peace effort there—to which the United Kingdom made a significant commitment—was important. It marked a turning point. There is now peace throughout the country: all of the rebels have been disarmed, and elections are planned for May.

However, several larger countries must move forward. The Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan are ready for peace. The Democratic Republic of Congo has never been well governed. Its colonial experience was crude and exploitative. Mbutu was a corrupt kleptocrat, whose regime was propped up by the west because he was a pro-western corrupt kleptocrat. He misused the country's rich natural resources. Now it is divided into three parts. It experienced a civil war, partly as a result of the genocide in neighbouring Rwanda. However, the Lusaka peace accords are sensible. They were made in Africa, and they were endorsed by the Security Council and by all of the regional players. They should be driven forward, so that peace can be delivered.

Since it gained its independence in 1956, Sudan has suffered from civil war for all but 10 years. Both sides want a peace process. The Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan are massive countries; each of them is as big as western Europe. If we put some energy into their peace processes, the prospects of the entire continent would begin to be transformed. We could then begin to turn things around by supporting the reformers, deploying aid well, improving economic performance and increasing the numbers of children who attend school—which is being achieved in countries such as Uganda and Mozambique.

HIV/AIDS is a disaster for Africa, as it is for other parts of the world. Infection rates are increasing in India, Russia and the Caribbean. We must not think that it is only an African problem. However, with regard to the problem in Africa, Uganda shows the way forward. The infection rate among its young children is rapidly falling. In Zimbabwe, one in three adults is infected and life expectancy will fall by 20 years, but the situation in Uganda offers hope. We must campaign, make condoms available, tell the truth about how the infection spreads and treat sexually transmitted diseases early because when they are endemic in a population they spread much more rapidly. We know about many things that must be done. They should be done, so that every African country can do as well as Uganda.

The Prime Minister is going to Africa to listen, so that when he returns he can generate energy in our country, and use that and our historical relationship with Africa to mobilise the G8 and to encourage the Security Council to make a better effort, so that the people of Africa can have more hope of a decent future.

People often ask me about my travels. They say that it must be depressing to meet so many poor people. They are wrong; it is inspiring. The poor of the world are among the most hard-working, creative and dignified people. They live in conditions that we could not survive. They grow their own food, build their own houses, give birth to their children without any healthcare system, and raise them without help. They deserve the chance to use their energy and commitment to make a better future for themselves, their children and their continent.

Things are so bad in Africa that if any of us lived there, we would not be able to get out of the mire. The people of that continent deserve decent Government, peace, basic healthcare and education and the chance to develop their economies. If they were to have those things, we could turn things around. By means of a real partnership of mutual respect, responding to the lead coming from Africa, we could begin to turn that continent's prospects around.

People say that there is nothing to believe in in politics any more. That is not true. We are more responsible for the state of the world than ever before and there is a chance for a great advance if we are big enough to grasp it. Responding to Africa is crucial to the future of the world.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I thank the Secretary of State for her reply. We now move on to the next debate, initiated by the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke). Before I call him, I should inform hon. Members that the hon. Members for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Wright) and for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) have shown their interest in taking part and sought the permission of the initiator of the debate, the Minister and me.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

1 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): I am very grateful to you for those words, Mr. Deputy Speaker and I am pleased to have obtained this debate on such an important subject. It gives us the opportunity to focus on an important milestone when dealing with the scourge of myalgic encephalopathy, or chronic fatigue syndrome. The report published this month, after painstaking activity and work, entitled "A Report of the CFS/ME Working Group: Report to the Chief Medical Officer of an Independent Working Group" is addressed to Professor Liam Donaldson. I am sure that we would all want to thank him for his considerable interest and contribution.

I hope to be brief in order to accommodate the contributions of my hon. Friends—especially my hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Wright) who chairs the all-party group on myalgic encephalomyelitis with such distinction—and to give them the opportunity to make known their views on the report.

ME is an unfashionable cause—some people go as far as to say that there is no such thing. They claim that if it exists at all, it is a mild illness that only the middle class can get—it is all in the mind. People are told to pull themselves together, get a grip and face reality. We now know what reality is. ME does exist. Thanks to the Donaldson report, we are told

> "Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS/ME) is a genuine illness and imposes a substantial burden on the health of the UK population"

Much of the scepticism that has been so harmful to sufferers of ME stems from the 1980s, when a phrase to describe the illness popped out of thin air—yuppie flu. The report acknowledges what a disservice that was to ordinary men, women and children who succumbed to the illness. It dispenses brilliantly with those misunderstandings, disposes of them and gives us the response for which we have been waiting for far too long.

What is ME, or CFS as it is sometimes called? The term ME was coined in the 1950s following an outbreak 20 years earlier in the Royal Free hospital in London. The term CFS is a more recent invention. We now know that the illness has been around in one form or another for at least a century, possibly even longer. The report estimates that there are approximately 150,000 people in the United Kingdom with the illness. It is often, but not always, triggered by a viral infection. Labyrinthitis, an inner ear infection, is specifically cited in the report. The symptoms are often bewildering: total and overwhelming exhaustion; severe muscle pain; debilitating problems affecting concentration and short term memory; digestive difficulties; and, sometimes, intolerance to food, light, alcohol and even medication.

Contrary to myth, CFS/ME can affect anyone, regardless of their background, age, sex or ethnic origin—even children under five. How can children of that age imagine or invent such an illness, with all those symptoms? Those who have it most severely—about 25 per cent. of the total—cannot do even the most personal task without help.

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

I declare an interest in that I had the illness for 20 months in the early 1990s, but I was one of the lucky ones who made a full recovery. However, even those who have what might be described as a mild form of ME are in my opinion entitled to recognition and, indeed, a care package, which has hitherto not existed. Yet, as the report discloses, we invest virtually nothing in research into an incredibly destructive illness that varies in intensity among people. Are we therefore surprised that so little is known about the illness right across the board from patients to professionals in health care?

Following the Donaldson report, there can be no excuse for such indifference or indolence. In its own words,

> "inaction due to ignorance or denial of the condition is not excusable."

We can no longer tolerate circumstances in which specialists are few and far between and it can be virtually impossible to see a specialist because there are only a tiny handful in the country and those that exist are massively oversubscribed and often collapse under the burden. We are often no better further down the line. General practitioners are never given proper guidance. Some perform heroics, but others are openly hostile. Indeed, I know of one GP who sent a message to a patient that said "Stop being so nice to people and start digging the garden as I am doing", a view flatly contradicted in the report, which states:

> "All clinical interventions carry a potential risk of harm, especially if applied incorrectly; for CFS/ME in particular, imposed, rigid programmes can be actively harmful."

Much better, surely, is the report's recommendation that all management approaches should be done in full partnership with the patient. That also applies to diagnosis. GPs are encouraged to spot the illness early and to put in place a sensible plan for coping. Surely that is far better than what happens now, when many patients wait up to six months merely to be told that they are ill.

Should hon. Members have any doubt, I refer to the study undertaken by the charity Action for ME, "Severely Neglected". It surveyed almost 2,500 patients—the most ever—and revealed that a third waited more than a year and a half to be diagnosed, two out of three received no advice from a GP, and people were made worse by treatment and denied access to health care and benefits. It is not surprising that 50 per cent. of those interviewed in the survey said that they felt suicidal.

I welcome the positive and practical proposals in the report—early diagnosis and advice and much better treatment and care. It says that professionals should be properly trained and that the NHS—GPs and secondary and tertiary care—should be equipped to deal with the problems. The report strongly recommends proper research into all aspects of the illness to achieve a big breakthrough.

For the reasons that I have given, I shall conclude by saying that an enormous number of people have worked tremendously hard to get us to this point, not least Action for ME and its chief executive, Chris Clark. In an interview with Brian Dow in response to the Donaldson report, he said:

> "I wish I could believe that every single sceptical doctor, nurse, therapist and member of the public will suddenly have their minds changed, but that's not going to be the case. What should and will happen though is that the day after publication, if a doctor uses the immortal words 'I don't believe in M.E.' the patient has the power to say 'I'm very sorry but the Chief Medical Officer says that it does exist and here's the evidence'."

In that spirit, I commend the report to my colleagues.

1.11 pm

Mr. Anthony D. Wright (Great Yarmouth): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) on securing this important debate. It is always difficult to cram all that needs to be said into the allotted half-hour, so I thank him for his generosity in allowing me to make a small contribution.

I believe that the most significant aspects of the report relate to improving diagnosis, treatment, care, research and health service planning. I and everyone else with an interest in the issue would welcome a clear statement today from my hon. Friend the Minister on the Government's plans for implementation in those areas.

Equally important is the question of diagnosis. There is, of course, no single diagnostic test to prove that a person has ME. Until now, it has simply been a question of eliminating other possibilities. However, as early diagnosis seems to have a direct link to the likelihood of recovery, that must be resolved as a priority. The study by Action for ME showed that a third of people took more than a year and a half to be diagnosed. Most thought that that had made a "huge difference" to the severity of their illness.

The Chief Medical Officer's report is very strong on that point. It states that a provisional diagnosis can be put in place after six weeks, with accompanying sensible advice on rest and activity. The diagnosis can then be confirmed if the patterns continue. That has been almost universally welcomed, not least because it may help to break the spiral of a patient becoming worse and having to pay more visits to the GP.

On treatment and care, the report made it clear that because of the lack of serious research, there is no magic pill that helps all people. None the less, much can be done to alleviate some symptoms. Moreover, for those at the less severe end of the scale, rehabilitation programmes involving pacing, graded activity and cognitive behaviour therapy can be beneficial. The report makes it clear that none of those are cures and the latter two in particular are not appropriate for all people. Care must be taken on an individual basis. The report notes that awareness and understanding of ME as a serious illness needs to be increased among the general public, schools, the media, employers, agencies and Departments.

All in all, the report's publication marks a long overdue watershed moment in the history of ME. However, what we do next is every bit as important, if not more so. I therefore have several questions about the Government response to the report. The Government stated that they would refer the issue of providing guidance to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence in due course. I hope that the Minister understands that we need to be clear on when that will be. I believe that NICE's own period for producing guidelines is two years.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): I understand that the Donaldson report referred only to England and Wales. Perhaps the Minister will say if anything similar is planned for Scotland.

Mr. Wright: I believe that the issue will be debated in Scotland and I am sure that the Minister will answer the question. Will she tell the House when advice on diagnosis will be passed to GPs and if it will follow the outcome of deliberations by NICE? Does the Minister think that the UK charities' suggestion of implementing interim guidance on management is a good one, and if so, when will it be done?

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important that patients are fully involved in the urgent research called for in the working group report? It is important, too, to listen to support groups such as the Beccles and district ME support group in my constituency. I am sure that my hon. Friend joins me in praising and congratulating the new Norfolk and Suffolk CFS/ME service under the leadership of Dr. Terry Mitchell, who serves both our constituencies, for its pioneering work. We need to build on that work and ensure that it is carried out elsewhere in the country.

Mr. Wright: I have no hesitation in applauding the work done by charities, especially the local groups in Norfolk and Suffolk. It is a matter of postcode prescriptions; whether one gets the treatment depends on where one lives. Dr. Mitchell is a pioneer on the issue in the Yarmouth and Waveney area.

On health services, the report identifies grave deficits in primary, secondary and tertiary care, which urgently need to be plugged. We need to take action to ensure that the changes happen as soon as possible, so those who are most severely affected do not continue to receive the worst deal from the NHS. What assurances will the Minister give on the matter? Does she intend to implement specific funding for such services? If it is to be left entirely for primary care, we will be making a rod for our own backs and condemning patients to years of frustration.

What are the Government's intentions on research? For many sufferers, that is the area in which they are desperate for leadership. The York review, which was incorporated into the chief medical officer's report, highlighted the chronic lack of serious research. Indeed, only 43 studies worldwide met the York criteria. The report stated categorically that there should be a programme of research on almost all aspects of the illness.

The report is being forwarded to those responsible for developing the national service framework for chronic disease. That is welcome, but the outcome may be achieved only over a 10-year period starting in 2005. Given that the report indicates that the deficits identified, particularly in relation to the severely affected, need addressing urgently, does the Minr agree that we cannot afford to wait more than a decade for a clear national strategy to be put in place?

I am pleased that the matter was referred to the Medical Research Council with a request that it should convene an independent scientific advisory group and produce a broad strategy by the end of February. To date, the severely affected have been excluded from serious research and that needs correcting. It is essential that all aspects of the illness are covered. It will go down very badly indeed if research that may help those who are more severely affected is ignored. More work is needed in immunology, virology and endocrinology, among other areas.

At a conservative estimate, ME costs the country £4 billion a year in lost earnings and benefit payments. Does the Minister support the concept of ring-fenced money for research and, if so, what amount does she consider appropriate?

In essence, the chief medical officer said that from 11 January people with ME are entitled to the same support as those with other long-term, chronic illnesses, which is what sufferers and patient groups have been saying for years. They do not want special treatment, just parity with those who have other serious illnesses.

I welcome the recommendation that there should be public awareness campaigns to highlight the seriousness of the illness and I hope the Minister will tell us whether she intends to implement that recommendation. The report also recommends that the education and training of doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals should include CFS/ME and that there should be specific postgraduate education and training in the subject. What assurances can the Minister give in that respect? For example, can she say when that will happen? Finally, can the Minister say how the recommendations on children with ME will be implemented? The impact of such an illness on a young child and their family can be devastating.

As hon. Members know, ME has suffered a curious history, and those who have it have had to face a peculiar double burden over the years. They must cope with an illness that to a great extent destroys their lives and suffer the prejudice and ignorance that has followed the illness around. It is hard for any of us to imagine what it must be like to endure the effects of a serious condition and a constant barrage of scepticism, cynicism and disbelief from those who should have helped them. Since I co-founded the all-party group on CFS/ME in 1998, I have heard from many sufferers whom GPs, health professionals and others have disbelieved. Although those sufferers were lucky enough to receive a positive diagnosis, they had to wait for years before they got to see an ME specialist.

Many more sufferers have experienced protracted battles with their benefits agencies, as they tried to receive the benefits to which they are clearly entitled. Further problems have been experienced at the hands of private health insurance companies, social service agencies and unsympathetic employers. The response to the report has been overwhelmingly positive. People are genuinely relieved that at last the Government are taking their illness seriously and that the problems that they face may finally begin to be addressed. Thousands of people saw a bleak future stretching before them, in which their quality of life became gradually worse. Those people can now have a sense of hope and begin to believe that one day they will be better. It is a huge

[Mr. Wright]

breakthrough to be able to say at last that we have official recognition that ME exists and is a serious condition.

I commend the Government for their work in getting this far. They have seriously tried to grapple with the issue and, as a result, have made important progress. However, this must be viewed as the start of the process, not its conclusion, and we must act with an urgency that has been absent so far. People with ME want that, and after years of neglect, that is the least that they deserve.

1.21 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) on securing the debate. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Wright) for his contribution, and my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) for his intervention. I welcome the debate, not least because it gives the Government the opportunity to state their response to the independent working group's report on CFS/ME. A group is also being established in Scotland to consider how best to take the report forward.

I want to start by recognising how distressing and debilitating the condition can be for individuals, their carers and their families. If the illness is not enough of a problem in itself, as my hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth pointed out, the report makes it clear that some patients have found it difficult to get the treatment and care that they need to help them manage their illness and make a recovery. That is why the independent working group gave high priority to harnessing the views of patients, parents, families and carers to underpin the guidance. Two sounding board events were held to enable patients to participate in the development of the report, and were designed to capture some patient voices and to ensure that major stakeholders could identify issues that are pertinent to people who live with CFS/ME. Voluntary organisations also contributed to the independent working group by providing material and sponsored surveys that informed the report throughout.

Some patients have had a positive experience and have worked with health and social care professionals to manage their own care. The report gave the example of a patient who said that

> "a diagnosis of CFS was made and I was advised how to manage my energy".

Another said:

> "My GP was brilliant. He said he didn't know how to cure me, but we would work together to make me better."

We want everyone with CFS/ME to receive the treatment and care that they need, when and where they need them. Like the patients quoted in the report, we want those with CFS/ME at least to be listened to when decisions are being made about the type of treatment and care that would best meet their individual needs. I want to make it clear that we fully endorse the view of the independent working group that CFS/ME is a chronic illness. Health and social care professionals should recognise it as such, and the Government welcome the publication of the report as the start of the process of improving awareness and understanding of CFS/ME.

I acknowledge that the working group faced a difficult task. Widespread uncertainty surrounds the condition, along with disbelief and controversy about its existence and disagreement about the best way to treat it. I should like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the working groups, including the children's and reference groups, who carried out such a difficult and complex task. I am confident that the report will act as a catalyst for improving care and treatment for people with the debilitating illness.

My right hon. and hon. Friends made an important point about the contribution that patients can and should make in determining the best way forward. Patients with a chronic illness have a wealth of experience in managing their condition, and the Government recognise that. The report entitled "The Expert Patient—a new approach to chronic disease management for the 21st century" sets out how the national health service will empower those with long-term illnesses to become key decision makers in their own care, and that is relevant to this subject.

Key challenges face clinicians who care for people with CFS/ME. First, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston outlined, there are no agreed diagnostic criteria. Diagnosis is often made by eliminating other conditions through a series oftests, and although it is agreed that overwhelming fatigue is one symptom that characterises CFS/ME, debate continues about which other factors should be taken into account when making the diagnosis. Secondly, we do not know the cause of CFS/ME, although there are many theories. Thirdly, no one form of treatment suits every patient, and it is for doctors, in partnership with their patients, to decide how to relieve the wide variety of symptoms that individuals can experience. Fourthly, we are aware that there is controversy about some approaches used for managing CFS/ME.

We must ask all the stakeholders to work together and establish the treatments, or combination of treatments, that will help patients to get better. One possible way forward would be to develop clinical learning networks that allow clinicians and patients to develop expertise. That is in line with the approach of using patients and users to develop expertise. Although most people receive treatment in the primary care sector, I recognise the concerns of my right hon. and hon. Friends about the tertiary and secondary care sectors, and there is potential to develop service networks between tertiary and secondary care. That is another matter that the Government must explore with strategic health authorities. It would improve access to the skills, experience and resources of secondary and tertiary centres, and incorporate the principles of stepped care.

Services for people with CFS/ME have been too patchy. We expect that the report and any further research that may be commissioned will help health professionals feel more confident about caring for patients. The fact that the report has been published should help to increase awareness of CFS/ME, throughout both the medical profession and the public. The report is not intended to provide a comprehensive clinical guideline and has not been developed as such, and a referral to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to provide guidance on management and treatment is being considered. Thought must be given to what is the most appropriate clinical tool for helping patients with the condition. It may be that an audit, referral protocol or guideline best meets the needs of the patients with CFS/ME, and those matters must be discussed in some detail with NICE. It would be better to consider all the evidence rather than to rush in and develop something that is inappropriate.

As was outlined, we will ensure that the external reference groups who are developing the national service framework for both long-term conditions and children's services consider the report and its recommendations for improving treatment and care. Although CFS/ME may not be examined as a specific condition in those NSFs, they will address some generic issues that affect the management of illness in childhood and adolescence and long-term medical conditions in adults. NSFs set out standards for treatment and care and provide support to health and social care professionals to deliver high quality services. Although they may span over 10 years, they do not take 10 years to make an impact.

On research, it is clear from what I said about the challenges facing clinicians that we agree with the working group that the evidence base is poor. We fully support the need for more research on a wide range of aspects of CFS/ME and have asked the Medical Research Council to develop a broad strategy for advancing biomedical and health services research. To do this, the MRC will appoint an independent scientific advisory group. The terms of reference and timetable will be agreed in the spring of 2002. However, I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware that it is a long-standing, important principle of successive Governments not to prescribe to—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): Order. I must tell the Minister that time is up. I regret that I must cut off her reply. We now move on to the final debate, initiated by the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable).

Mason Family (Sierra Leone)

1.30 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I express my appreciation for the opportunity to raise this Adjournment debate. Normally, I would not seek an Adjournment debate for an individual case, but the history of this case is one of almost monumental incompetence. The lack of humanity demonstrated by Government Departments has been so gross and protracted that I felt that I had to pursue the matter to this stage.

Before I go any further, I should mention that this morning I received a letter from the Under-Secretary on the matter. The letter is courteous and helpful, and she apologised graciously on behalf of the Department for the way in which the case has been conducted. She has accelerated an appeal and given dates. Indeed, she has anticipated the outcome of the debate; the letter may foreshorten our proceedings somewhat. I wish to thank her publicly for responding in this way and being helpful to the family.

None the less, the case has many lessons. It would be right to review the history, simply to place on the record what has happened. In essence, the problems arose from nothing more complicated than the transmission of papers for an immigration appeal from the Senegal embassy to the appellate authority in the UK. The transmission of papers has taken three years and involved seven Ministers—two from the Foreign Office, three from the Home Office and two from the Lord Chancellor's Department—and correspondence with 10 Downing street. Today, it appears that we finally have a resolution to the problem. It is not the final resolution, because I do not know and cannot anticipate the appeal decision, but at least the bureaucratic procedures have been dealt with.

I also wish to raise the issue publicly, rather than leave it with the Minister's letter, because it involves a wider foreign policy issue. The Prime Minister is going to Sierra Leone on Saturday. In general, the Government and the Prime Minister have acquitted themselves with enormous credit on the Sierra Leone crisis, in which British troops have been involved. In many ways, it has been a success story for British foreign policy. However, a dark underside is the way in which the British Government have dealt with the cases of individuals from Sierra Leone. This particularly appalling case must be set against the highly creditable role that the Government and, in particular, the Prime Minister have played.

Let me explain how the problem arose. The Mason family lived in Freetown, Sierra Leone, where Mr. Mason was a prison officer. About three years ago, the family went into the interior on a business trip. That was a time when the Revolutionary United Front rebels were gathering strength. On the way back, the family were stopped by the rebels, who took their car and their possessions and left them destitute by the roadside. They had to walk for two days to get back to Freetown.

On the way back, Mr. Mason's daughter Victoria, then 18 or 19, was raped by RUF rebels. Unfortunately that seems to have been standard procedure in Sierra Leone during the civil war; it was something many young women experienced. When the family arrived

[Dr. Vincent Cable]

back in Freetown there was disorder in the township. Some of the rebels and their friends gathered around the house of the Mason family because they knew of Mr. Mason's background in the prison service. He was called out into the street. He refused to come, knowing the fate that awaited him. He was then burnt alive in front of his family.

Over the next few hours and days the family witnessed some appalling scenes. The RUF rebels were in the habit of taking people and cutting off either their whole arm or half of it. Many of the Masons' friends and neighbours suffered this experience. During that terrible period an elderly mother died of shock. The rest of the family managed to escape to the football stadium where they at least had refuge and some food to keep them alive. They then fled to Guinea, the neighbouring country, which refused to accept them. From there they went to Dakar in Senegal, where they took refuge in a slum colony in the early months of 1999.

At that point the family consisted of Mrs. Mason, her three sons, ranging in age from early twenties to a young boy of seven, who is now nine, and the daughter who was raped and was by now carrying the rapist's child. They sought help from the UNHCR and the British Red Cross to survive in Senegal. That is where I came in and it became a matter for the British Government, because Mrs. Mason's sister, Etha Brace, is one of my constituents. She runs a successful, well-known restaurant serving west African food in Twickenham, and she received a message from her sister asking for help. They had not seen each other for many years but they were very close during childhood.

The sister did what she could to help. She said, "Why not come to Twickenham? We have a restaurant which is only operating at half capacity because we don't have any staff." There is virtually no unemployment in my constituency and there are certainly no unemployed people with a speciality in west African cooking. She told her sister, "Come to my restaurant. We will give your family work so you won't be dependent on benefits. There is work here and I have a spare flat. We have plenty of accommodation and we can look after you".

The family were encouraged to apply to the British embassy for visas to settle with the Brace family in Twickenham and did so. At this point the story becomes complicated because of the turbulence in that environment. Although a democratic country, Senegal was then in the early stages of an election campaign in which there was a lot of violence and intimidation, and extortion of refugees. The environment was exceedingly unsettled. When the Brace family sent £1,000 to pay for visas, the Masons were tricked by a Member of Parliament in Senegal who presented himself as having been particularly close to the embassy; he turned out to be a confidence trickster. The Masons then had their passports and money stolen, and they were offered their passports back for a large bribe. Their whole experience was horrific.

Eventually, after some weeks they managed to apply to the embassy for settlement visas and were turned down by the entry clearance officer, a Mr. Sean Burns. Two arguments were advanced; first, that he was not satisfied that there were exceptional personal circumstances. In view of their history that struck me as extraordinary. Throughout the correspondence over three years, Ministers have kept repeating that phrase; they are not satisfied that exceptional circumstances apply to this family. That seems bizarre to me and almost insulting. Secondly, the embassy would not accept that the family could be solely dependent on the sister in Twickenham, although this could demonstrably be shown to be true.

I became involved and asked for the case to be re-examined. That was done, and my appeal was rejected by the entry clearance officer at the embassy in Senegal in early 1999. The family appealed and asked to have its visa rejection heard through the proper appellate process, under which the entry clearance officer has to send to the appeal directorate in London an explanatory note that will form the basis of the appeal. However, nothing happened. After six months, the documents had not appeared in London. The members of the family in Twickenham were by now so distraught that they went to Senegal to find out what was happening there and to explain the position to the British embassy.

What the Brace family found horrified them. First, the entry clearance officer showed no sense of urgency and put the six-month delay in sending the documents down to the fact that he was busy. They found that their relatives were utterly destitute. The three boys were sharing a pair of shoes, trousers and a shirt so they could not all go out at the same time. The situation was desperate. The Braces tried to provide the Masons with money and help and appealed to the embassy to speed up the processing of the papers.

Months went by and, again, nothing happened. The message from the embassy was that the official was too busy to deal with the problem. As far as I can establish, the papers did not progress beyond the desk of the entry clearance officer in Senegal for the best part of a year, although some of the facts are a little murky. I became sufficiently concerned that in May 2000—over a year after the original application—I got in touch with the then Minister, the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) at the Foreign Office, and asked him to intervene. Although this is a sorry tale, he showed great courtesy and efficiency and genuine compassion. I know that he is in trouble in the House for other reasons, but the way in which he dealt with this matter was exemplary and reflected considerable credit on the Government. He wrote to the Lord Chancellor's Department to ask whether the appeal process could not be moved on more quickly. It was then discovered that the papers had still not reached there. Were they in Senegal or somewhere else?

After a long search, it was established in August 2000—eighteen months after the original application—that the papers were neither in Senegal nor in the Lord Chancellor's Department; they were in the Immigration and Nationality Department of the Home Office. I received a letter from the then Minister, the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), who was both apologetic and gracious. She accepted that mistakes had been made and that there had been unacceptable delays. She also said that the matter would be dealt with urgently. However, nothing happened.

Time passed. Nine months later, in April 2001, a letter was received from Lord Bassam at the Home Office, saying that the papers had been lost there, but not explaining how or why, and that nothing further could be done because there were no papers. I wrote to follow that up. Five months later, in August 2001, I received a reply from a person who had clearly not bothered to look at the file and was completely misinformed about the background to the case. At that point, I wrote to the present Minister. I might have over-egged the pudding a little in that I wrote an extremely rude letter drawing her attention to the whole sorry history, with which she has only been involved at a late stage. That is why we are here today.

I am aware that the story has moved on and that the Minister has acted, but it is important to have the story on the record. It reflects appallingly on different bits of the British Government—particularly on the embassy in Senegal and its officials, who were callous and inefficient in equal measure. The Home Office was also inefficient. At least it had the excuse that it was dealing with files rather than with real people, but, none the less, its inefficiency was inexcusable.

Three years on, we are dealing with the prospect of an appeal against a visa decision. I realise that the situation in Sierra Leone has now moved on, but the family are still terrified after what happened to them and are clinging to the possibility that they may be able to come and stay with their family in Twickenham. I acknowledge that that is not something for the Minister to decide because there is an appeals process, but I am grateful to have had the opportunity to put on record that sorry tale.

1.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Angela Eagle): I am extremely grateful that the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) wrote me a rude letter because it helped me to realise that something very wrong was happening with this case, which is one of many thousands that cross my desk. It also enabled me to examine closely what had happened.

I begin by offering my unreserved apologies to the applicant and her family for the delay and distress that has been caused, and to apologise to the hon. Gentleman for the fact that some of his inquiries about the progress of the case received inaccurate replies from my predecessors and, initially, from me in my letter of 14 December.

I and my officials in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate are deeply embarrassed at the string of errors that have made these apologies so necessary. The mistakes were not made deliberately, as the hon. Gentleman was gracious enough to accept, but unfortunately, it was one of those cases, among the hundreds of thousands that we deal with every year, in which everything that can go wrong does, not only at the embassy but, subsequently, in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate. For that I am very sorry.

The only thing to do in such cases is to apologise, which I have done, and to do everything possible to try to put things right. We also need to learn lessons for the future. The first of those actions has already been taken, as the hon. Gentleman was kind enough to acknowledge. The appeal papers are now with the Immigration Appellate Authority, where they should have been a long time ago, and dates have been set for a preliminary hearing this month and a substantive hearing in April. Of course, that in no way compensates for the delays that the applicant has experienced or the additional stress that must have been caused.

I should also say that the examination of what went wrong in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate has highlighted several problems involving entry clearance officers in particular. Some have already been addressed and will not occur in subsequent cases and others are being addressed now. I hope that that sort of oversight will never happen again. As a Minister, it is especially difficult to discover that one's replies to other Members of Parliament, signed in good faith, have not been acted on. The loophole in the Department, whereby there is no system for ensuring that ministerial replies are acted on, is being closed.

I do not want to spend time on the details of the case, as the hon. Member for Twickenham has already outlined it. None of that is in doubt or an issue between us. He is right to say that the process of appeals against entry clearance decisions from overseas is that they are lodged with the entry clearance officer and passed to the IND for the papers to be checked, copied and assembled into an appeal bundle and passed to the appellate authority, with a copy to the appellant's legal representative. The appellate authority then lists the case for hearing. Both the delays at the embassy and the unfortunate delays at IND meant that this case was not progressed.

I hope that the hon. Member for Twickenham will accept my apology and my reassurances that I am doing all that I can to ensure that this loophole for entry clearance cases is closed. I can assure him that I will not be signing any other letter to an hon. Member on an entry clearance case before I have checked that the matter has been actioned by officials in my Department.

The case has been unacceptable in many respects. I did my best, as soon as it came to my close attention, to ensure that progress was made. The hon. Gentleman has been quite gracious and correct in saying that I cannot influence the outcome of the case, but at least we have ensured that action is taken. Although that does not compensate for what happened, we will at least be in a position for a decision to be made on the case in the not-too-distant future.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that we will ensure that it does not happen again in other cases. I also hope that he will accept not only my apologies but my congratulations, first for writing me a nasty letter and secondly for raising the issue in Westminster Hall, which has given me an opportunity to explain what went wrong and set out what we are doing to ensure that it will not happen again.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): I am sure that hon. Members are grateful to the Minister for that fulsome response to this important matter.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at nine minutes to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 7 February 2002

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Child Health and Maternity

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

2.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): I welcome the debate this afternoon. Maternity and child health is a vital issue. It forms a huge part of the work of the national health service and has a wide Government and community purpose. Improving the health of our children was part of the motivation for establishing the national health service and it has been important over centuries of public health. The well-being of our nation's children is of particular importance to the Government, who are committed to giving each child the best start in life.

The health and well-being of a child are the key to helping that child achieve his or her full potential. Each child and young person deserves the best possible start in life and to be brought up in a safe, happy and secure environment. Children deserve to be consulted, listened to, heard and supported as they develop into adulthood and maturity. By investing in the health of our children, we will have healthier adults.

Children's health is closely linked to, and impacts on, many other aspects of children's lives. Perhaps more tangibly than at any other stage in our lives, social, emotional and educational development are closely linked to health in childhood. That is especially true throughout pregnancy and in the years when children are very young. Health in the early years can affect health throughout life, and health problems that develop in childhood can haunt people throughout their lives. Deep-rooted health inequalities in society often stem not only from childhood but from what happens in pregnancy.

The Acheson report was commissioned soon after the 1997 election to examine health inequalities across the board. It was the first time that such an assessment had been carried out for 20 years. It concluded:

> "For every child there must be an equal start in health and in life, because health at the beginning of life is the foundation for health throughout life."

Fundamental inequalities impact on the health of young people. The blunt truth is that a boy born to a low-income family at the end of the 20th century can expect to live, on average, seven years less than his classmate from a professional background. Babies born to low-income families are more likely to have low birth weight, which will have an impact on their health and education for many years. For example, low birth weight babies develop high blood pressure by the age of 11, thus increasing the risk of heart disease later in life.

Improving health in pregnancy and childhood involves the NHS, public health and wider initiatives from the Government and the community. Substantial progress has been made in all those areas, but we still have considerably more to do. I shall refer to some of the key areas where progress has been made. I wish also to highlight some of the challenges that will face us in the future. Maternity and child health is a massive subject, so I do not pretend that I can cover all the issues involved comprehensively. However, I shall be happy to respond to any particular worries that hon. Members have.

The main measure under which improvements can be made to maternity and child health in the next few years is the national service framework—the NSF—for children. NSFs have been developed in respect of coronary heart disease, mental health and cancer. They are the mechanism for improvement, reform and investment in the national health service, and they establish national standards and set out priorities for change. That is why I am so pleased that we are now developing the NSF for children.

In July last year, the children's national clinical director, Professor Al Aynsley-Green, was appointed to spearhead the development of the NSF. Like other national service frameworks, it will be developed by teams of people drawn from social care, the voluntary sector, the national health service and parent groups. Young people will also be involved in establishing the priorities and national standards as part of the NSF.

The NSF will implement many of the recommendations in the Kennedy response to the Bristol tragedy that specifically relate to children and hospital services. Because the NSF has such a wide range of topics to cover, we decided to adopt a modular approach. The module dealing with hospital services will be delivered this year. The NSF offers the most important opportunity in terms of future developments, but it must build on the progress that we have already made. I will outline some of the areas in which progress has been made, but important challenges lie ahead.

Wider issues that go beyond the NHS have a huge impact on children's health. One of the most obvious of those is the child poverty target, which falls outside much of the work done by the NHS. However, meeting that target and taking every child out of poverty within a generation will probably do more than anything else to improve children's health and tackle health inequalities.

Other direct programmes and measures supporting children and children's health also go beyond the NHS. For example, the sure start programme, which aims to improve the health and well-being of families and children from before birth through to the age of four, also looks ahead to their futures.

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): I welcome the sure start programme, so I hope the Minister will not think that I am carping. However, I feel very strongly about how my constituents are affected. My constituency contains an area that would easily qualify for the sure start programme if it were bigger, but because it is only part of one ward, it is difficult for the people living there to access any services or sure start money. They face an uphill struggle. Will the Minister introduce a scheme to ease that problem?

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Lady makes an important point. The current sure start model applies to areas of a particular size. They tend to be urban and are assessed

[Yvette Cooper]

on the basis of the level of deprivation. The programmes are community based and look at different services operating together and concentrate on working with parents to improve opportunities for families with children under the age of four. This is the first time that there has been a real focus on the under-fours that examines how the different agencies work together. That could have a huge impact on those children.

The hon. Lady is right to suggest that the main sure start model that is implemented throughout the country applies only to certain types of communities—those of a particular size or level of deprivation. One of the challenges facing us in terms of where we go next with sure start is to determine what we can do about smaller pockets of deprivation and about those who live on low incomes in wealthy areas. Such people may also suffer from disadvantage and deprivation.

Sure start currently reaches a third of children under the age of four who live in poverty.

2.39 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

2.54 pm

On resuming—

Yvette Cooper: To continue the discussion on sure start, I believe that problems are faced not only by families who live in pockets of deprivation but by low-income families in other areas. Sure start will reach one third of children under four who live in poverty. Many children who live in poverty do not reside in poor areas—or in poor areas that are large enough to conform to the current sure start criteria.

To address that problem, we have begun piloting work in smaller pockets of deprivation and in rural areas. Thirteen sure start programmes are currently operating in rural areas and they are addressing the different challenges posed by deprivation in such communities. We are also investing £22 million to establish 15 mini sure start programmes that are intended to reach 7,500 children under four years of age who live in rural areas or pockets of deprivation. I will happily write to the hon. Lady to give her more details about how that initiative will develop. However, she also rightly referred to the longer-term challenge. Sure start has been very successful, and its principles must now be mainstreamed, so that we can offer effective support to families on low incomes throughout the country.

In addition to sure start, action is being taken to prevent teenage pregnancies. They are a reflection of social inequality. The risk of becoming a teenage mother is almost 10 times higher for a girl from a poor family than it is for a girl from a wealthy background. In 1999, almost one in 20 girls in England aged 15 to 17 became pregnant. That has huge health consequences, because the infant mortality rate for babies born to teenage mothers is more than 50 per cent. higher than the average, and the rate for babies born to mothers of under 18 years of age is more than double the average. There is also an increased risk of maternal mortality.

The teenage pregnancy strategy has operated throughout the country, providing local partnerships to reduce teenage pregnancy. The early signs are positive. Teenage conception rates are falling. The conception rate for girls aged under 18 has been falling for the past eight quarters. It fell by 4 per cent. in 1998 and 1999, and the conception rate for girls aged under 16 years of age fell by 7 per cent. in that period.

Another programme operating outside the NHS that works to improve children's health is the children's fund, which will provide £450 million over three years. It supports a wide range of services that help to prevent children and their families from suffering the consequences of poverty. Bad health is one of those consequences.

There is much to be proud of in the programmes that I have mentioned. Work in local communities is starting to have a positive impact on the health of children and families. One of our challenges for the future is to integrate that work with other services and support for children and young people. Another challenge is to apply those programmes—and the lessons that they teach us about the strategies that make the greatest difference—to every area in the country. I have already referred to that objective in my remarks on sure start.

I shall now consider how the NHS can play a greater role. Pregnancy is an issue in which I have had a personal interest over the past few years. The interesting thing about being a pregnant Member of Parliament—as I am sure that other hon. Members who have been in that situation will testify—is that one experiences maternity services in different parts of the country. When I was heavily pregnant, I started to work out where the hospitals and maternity units were located along the GNER route between London and my constituency just in case I were to require rapid admission to one of them.

Access to supportive antenatal care during pregnancy is essential. It can make a huge impact on subsequent health. Evidence of that is provided by the recent confidential inquiry reports into maternal deaths and into stillbirths and deaths in infancy. It suggests that there is a direct link between poor antenatal care and poor outcomes for mothers and babies, including premature birth and low birth weight. Although such babies often suffer from complications immediately after birth, they also frequently suffer from far-reaching health and developmental problems.

Pre-term births are most common where mothers are very young, have poor health, are poorly nourished or smoke during pregnancy. Almost half neonatal deaths are linked to conditions of immaturity, which is why we must work to continue to improve antenatal services across the board and address risk factors, such as smoking during pregnancy.

Sure start programmes are doing much to improve maternity services and outreach for neonatal care, especially for people in low-income areas. Additionally, specific support is available for the many pregnant women who wish to give up smoking. The NHS pregnancy smoking helpline has been set up to give advice and support to women who wish to give up smoking. Dedicated support is being developed in every area. In sure start areas, programmes aim to reduce the number of pregnant smokers by 10 per cent. by 2004.

Of course, we must improve not only antenatal care but care during labour and the critical post-natal period. The Government are working with the Royal College of Midwives to expand the number of midwives who work in the NHS, and to improve women's choices and control over their care during pregnancy and labour. Our most recent survey showed that nine out of 10 women were happy with the services that they received during pregnancy and childbirth. However, we know that there are wide variations in the care that people receive.

We recognise that we need more midwives in the NHS. We are committed to recruiting and training an additional 2,000 midwives over the next five years, and 500 of them should be working in the NHS by the end of the year. The NSF will build on that.

In addition to improving standards of clinical care, we are investing £100 million over two years in a capital programme to improve the environment in more than 200 maternity units. The money will pay for major refurbishments, new facilities for fathers and families, and the modernisation of antenatal units. More than 80 units will receive better bereavement facilities.

National standards on inductions, caesareans and other matters are being developed through the National Institute for Clinical Excellence.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): I hope that I am fortunate enough to catch your eye, Mr. Beard, to make a speech in which I shall suggest how the Minister may allocate some of the money to expand maternity services. I flag up the real problem of recruitment of maternity nurses and midwives in London. Can she throw any light on further initiatives that her Department, perhaps in collaboration with other Departments with responsibility for public sector workers, may introduce such as rents-to-mortgage packages or other residential accommodation?

Yvette Cooper: Recruitment is a serious issue. My hon. Friend knows that many of his concerns apply not only to midwives but to nurses. There are areas in the south-east, especially London, in which the cost of housing and living is high, and such areas may suffer the greatest pressures. An immense amount of work has been done to improve recruitment, and that has been successful in recruiting additional nurses. We must apply the lessons that we learned from that to midwives. Work has been under way in the past year or so with the Royal College of Midwives to ensure that we apply to midwives the techniques that were successful for nurses. If my hon. Friend wishes, I shall say more about that when I wind up.

As part of the NSF, we must build a framework of national standards for our maternity services and the care that women, their new babies and families receive. That has huge potential. Many people who are involved in care or who have used services throughout the country are participating in drawing up and developing the maternity services module of the NSF.

There are excellent examples throughout the NHS of the provision of greater support and information for women and their partners. However, we know that some families are greatly frustrated because they do not receive the care that they want.

We must build on the work that is being done to improve screening for children, such as the introduction of newborn hearing screening during the first few days of a baby's life. The programme is being piloted with a view to rolling it out nationally. Early detection of deafness allows parents and children to obtain the treatment and support that they need at a much earlier stage. That can help a person's development throughout childhood and later life.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I declare an interest inasmuch as several of my children were born at Stroud maternity hospital so I have some expertise in the subject. I attended the retirement of one of the midwives, Jo Moon, a week ago. Stroud is unusual in that it has one of the two remaining midwife-led units in the south-west. How does my hon. Friend view the debate about what women want—the choice to use midwife-led services—and safety and other issues that consultants tend to push in more acute child delivery settings?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend is right. Midwife-led maternity care has huge value. There is a focus on midwives and their work in all maternity units, whether they involve consultants or are separate. The role of midwives in leading care can be critical. There are examples throughout the country of midwife-led units that are hugely popular with the women and families who attend them, who receive the choice and care that they want in maternity services. We need to increase choice for women in maternity care, and midwife-led units are an important part of that. That is one of the issues that we shall consider as part of the maternity services element of the national service framework.

In advance of that, we have a maternity work force working group that involves members of the royal colleges—the Royal College of Midwives, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health and the Royal College of Anaesthetists—and representatives of maternity groups, including the Maternity Alliance and the National Childbirth Trust. One of the issues that it is examining is how to provide safe, high-quality care in different settings and establish standards that apply in different settings in order to ensure that whatever the setting and the arrangements we can ensure that women and their babies and families receive the high-quality care that they need. I hope that that will provide a more secure framework for the development of different models of care that allow for women's choice.

Immunisation is a further important aspect of child health. We have made huge progress in the eradication or decline of some terrible diseases that in previous centuries killed hundreds of children in this country. Our immunisation programme has been largely responsible for the most immense improvements in children's health, and we should be proud of it. It has saved many lives and prevented much serious morbidity throughout the country. Living at the beginning of the 21st century, many of us take for granted those health improvements and not having to worry about the infectious diseases that haunted families in previous centuries.

[Yvette Cooper]

Hon. Members will be aware of the current debate about MMR—the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine. I shall say a couple of words because it is so relevant, but I shall not dwell on it unless Members want to discuss it, and I shall return to it in my reply.

The strong medical advice given to the Government is that MMR is the safest way to immunise children against some very deadly diseases. We are advised that the evidence considered by countless independent committees shows no link between MMR and autism. Of course research must always be thoroughly scrutinised and examined by independent committees, and it is. Along with the royal colleges and medical experts from all over the world, 90 countries recommend MMR as the safest way to immunise children.

Sandra Gidley: I support the MMR programme. Does the Minister accept that there may not be a statistically proven link, but there is powerful anecdotal evidence of a link between administering the vaccine and the development of autism? That tiny risk, if there is one, must be considered in the context of the risk of death from measles and other childhood diseases if children are not vaccinated. It is a comparison of risks that—

Mr. Nigel Beard (in the Chair): Order. This is becoming a rather long intervention.

Yvette Cooper: The medical evidence that I have received does not say that. This is not simply about balancing the risks presented by particular diseases; it is about examining all the evidence. The clear advice from the chief medical officer and the Royal Colleges is that the evidence shows that there is no link between MMR and autism.

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East): Is it not dangerous to get into anecdotal evidence? The scientific evidence demonstrates amply that there is no link in 99 per cent. of cases, and MMR has been recommended by people in the medical profession. We should take their wise counsel on this. Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be dangerous to suggest for even a nano-second that we should be guided by the anecdotal evidence?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend has made an extremely important point. In the end, all that we can go on is the evidence that we have. In some matters the evidence is limited and we have to be careful about what we say and not protest too much or claim that we know things when we simply do not. For example, there is simply not enough evidence to make claims about how safe or unsafe it is for children to use mobile phones, which is why the chief medical officer has given cautionary advice to parents on that. However, there is considerable evidence about MMR. No Government can ever give guarantees about any form of medical treatment, but we can look at all the evidence, which, according to our best medical advice, shows no link between MMR and autism.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): Is it not true that a rise in autism occurred before the MMR vaccine was introduced and there was no change after its introduction? One of the things that fuels the concerns is that people start to notice autism in children at exactly the same age as the vaccine is given. Autism is an awful thing, and one can understand parents wanting to attach something to it. That may be why we are having this debate when, as the Minister says, the scientific evidence clearly favours MMR as the safest option.

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend is right. The number of diagnosed cases of autism was increasing before MMR was introduced. It has continued to increase since then and, even though the levels of MMR have remained stable, the number of reported cases of autism has increased. She is also right that problems can start to emerge and be diagnosed at a similar age to the age at which children receive the MMR vaccination.

One important point that can get lost is that we need to know more about the causes of autism. We have quite a bit of evidence about MMR and autism, which has concluded that there is no link. We need more evidence on what the other causes might be because there is too much anxiety, albeit completely understandable, about autism among parents, particularly those with children suffering from autism. The Medical Research Council has done a major review of the research into autism to point out where further research is needed. That research is taking place. That is an important part of the work that we do here.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: May I ask the Minister to comment specifically on autism? We need more research into how autism develops and what are the best solutions for carers of children with the condition. More funding is needed for packages of support for carers and children.

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend is right. There have been many discussions about the causes of autism and about the right kind of treatment, intervention and support that families with autistic children need. Autism is one of a small number of key issues that we want to trace through the national service framework for children. Maternity and other services should be considered not in isolation but in the light of case studies of conditions such as autism, which would benefit hugely from being tackled through the national service framework.

Other forms of immunisation have made a big difference. The meningitis C vaccination programme was a huge success and is a great tribute to the NHS. School nurses, GPs, health visitors and nurses throughout the country delivered the meningitis C vaccination programme at immense speed. The UK was the first country to develop the vaccine and the first to implement it so rapidly.

In 1998, meningitis C caused an estimated 1,500 cases of meningitis, with 150 deaths, mainly of young children and teenagers. The new vaccine has resulted in a reduction of the disease of up to 90 per cent. in the main immunised groups.

Improving children's health means considering issues involving diet, nutrition exercise and health in the early years. The national school fruit scheme will offer every infant school child a free piece of fruit each day in school. More than 80,000 children between the ages of four and six are already benefiting from the scheme, which will cover all of the west midlands region in the summer and later be extended throughout the country. It is the most ambitious programme to improve childhood nutrition since the introduction of free school milk in 1946. Experts say that children should eat five portions of fruit and vegetables a day, but on average they eat only two portions and children in low-income areas eat one or none.

Mr. Drew: Does my hon. Friend acknowledge the benefit of measures to reduce food poverty? Governments get nervous about targeting and targets, but if there was more joined-up thinking and action between health, education and other Departments we could eradicate child poverty. It would improve people's quality of life if they could eat better food.

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend is right. There is a potential for health services to work with others, perhaps as part of local strategic partnerships, especially in neighbourhood renewal areas, and that could make a huge difference. There are some good examples from the five-a-day programme and community-based programmes to improve access to healthy food. They will be expanded using funding from the new opportunities fund in the next few years.

For older children, improving health can be part of personal, social and health education in schools, and the healthy schools programme can help them to avoid the risks of drugs, alcohol and pregnancy later on. We need to consider not only the needs of healthy children and how to keep them healthy but the needs of children who become sick. Most children will suffer some illness in their lives, perhaps one of the common childhood illnesses, which can be handled by parents or with the help of the primary care sector, but some, sadly, require more intensive and specialist care in hospital. I know from personal experience that NHS Direct can be a huge reassurance for parents. The 24-hour nurse-led telephone helpline assists callers to access the right service at the right time—perhaps at night or during the weekend. Five to 10 per cent. of the calls relate to children under 12 months and 20 per cent. relate to children under five. That is a hugely useful resource for anxious parents who want advice on the necessary care when a child is ill.

When children become critically ill, they need immediate attention from those skilled in caring for children. Improvements began to be made in paediatric intensive care with the introduction of the paediatric intensive care strategy in 1997, and an additional £60 million has since been invested in the strategy. Key improvements have been the development of lead paediatric intensive care centres for the most critically ill children and of retrieval teams to collect children and take them to those specialist centres, which have staff expert in caring for sick children. However, we need to go further by expanding our capacity and also considering neonatal intensive care.

Children with life-limiting illnesses require particular specialist support. They may be ill for many years and need constant care day and night. Eight Diana nurse teams provide a range of palliative care support to children at home. In addition, children who need palliative care will shortly benefit from £48 million that has been made available from the new opportunities fund to provide respite care in the home, the community and hospices.

Disabled children are a priority in the "quality protects" programme. I am talking about work with some of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children in society, who may need additional support from social services, education services and local authorities.

It is not simply a question of physical illness. We must ensure that mental health and well-being are maintained and promoted in schools and elsewhere. A recent survey shows that 20 per cent. of five to 15-year-olds have a mental health problem, and 10 per cent. of that age group have a mental health disorder that significantly affects their ability to lead a normal life. Access to high-quality mental health services is essential for those children. The NHS plan and the mental health national service framework have set out an ambitious programme of change, which will have a major impact on child and adolescent mental health services. However, we are starting from a low base, and services need to be expanded. That is why it is vital that the children's NSF take forward the work that has been done to make a real difference.

There is much to do across the NHS, social services and the community to improve children's health and to involve parents, children and young people in their care. The NHS needs to work in a spirit of openness, as the tragedy at Bristol and Professor Kennedy's report have again highlighted. Special efforts and new thinking will be required to implement many of his general recommendations in services for children. The quality of care must be improved, which is why the work of the paediatric cardiac review group, which is picking up on the Kennedy report, is particularly important. The group is due to report this spring.

We have made substantial progress in improving children's health, but we need to recognise that new problems and challenges emerge and that we can do much more. The NSF provides us with a great opportunity to take forward the good work that is being done, but which is often too fragmented. That is vital for children and parents, as this week has shown.

There have been immense improvements in children's health in terms of the dreadful childhood diseases that killed so many in the past. We have improved treatment, diagnosis and vaccinations. In the past, childhood cancers killed many, but this country is now expert in treating them and leads the world in many respects. We must not turn the clock back. We have made huge progress, but we have a long way to go. I hope that the next few years will provide a great opportunity to improve maternity services and children's health.

3.23 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): I welcome you to the Chair, Mr. Beard. I think that this is the first time that I have spoken in Westminster Hall under your chairmanship and I am sure that it will be a pleasure.

I echo the Minister's words of welcome for this debate on child health and maternity. I cannot speak as a pregnant Member of Parliament, but I can speak as the husband of a previously pregnant MP's wife. Indeed,

[Tim Loughton]

I was speaking in the Chamber when my pager went off to tell me that my wife was going through the first pangs of producing one of our children, so I know the cut and thrust of this place and how it affects our family existence.

It may be slightly ironic that I am speaking for the Opposition today as a representative of Worthing, which has the oldest population in the country and might be thought the furthest away from child and maternity matters. However, I am a father of three children and I have two excellent hospitals—the Worthing and the Southlands—in my constituency, so I speak with some experience.

It is appropriate that our debate takes place just a week before Valentine's day, when Great Ormond street hospital celebrates its 150th birthday. Few better centres of excellence for child care exist anywhere and the hospital is internationally renowned.

As the Minister said, this is an enormous subject, to which neither the Government or the Opposition will be able to do full justice. I shall focus on maternity services, the sure start programme, the national service framework— particularly with respect to mental health—and, more topically, immunisation.

I stress from the outset that we welcome the NSF for children's health. The test of its success and thoroughness, however, will not be how many committees sit to arrange and organise it or how many tsars for children's health are appointed, but the real health improvements during children's crucial early stages that result from it. As the children's tsar, Professor Aynsley-Green, said, we have possibly the best chance in 50 years to put children's lives and health at the centre of Government policy. We welcome that, though it is a considerable task to live up to. The NSF is comprehensive, embracing maternity and social services; prevention, care and treatment; support for children with disabilities; transition to adult services, which are a particularly grey area; and children and adolescent mental health services.

I am pleased that the Minister spent some time dealing with that difficult mental health sector, which the NSF covers. This country has a big gap in mental health services, especially for children and adolescents. The United Kingdom population includes about 14.9 million children and younger people under 20—some 25 per cent. of the population—and it is estimated that at any one time, 20 per cent. of them experience psychological problems. The majority who experience such problems face difficulties that could be made much better by early intervention, which does not happen enough.

A consensus exists among professionals that substantial increases in the psychological disorders of youth—not just in this country but worldwide—have occurred since the second world war. Risk factors such as poor education outcomes and antisocial behaviour overlap considerably with later mental health difficulties, but we face big gaps in provision for dealing with those problems. Young people who are caught in the gap between services for children and those for adults acutely feel the lack of specialist provision across the spectrum of child and adolescent mental health services.

Difficulty gaining access to specialist health care is a problem. Young people with mental health problems can be placed on adult hospital wards because they are the only provision available in the area. The young people often describe that experience as frightening and disorienting. Excessive use of drugs as a chemical cosh—instead of the one-to-one personal care that they desperately need—is another major problem.

For some time mental health provision in this country has been too patchy; mental health services for children and adolescents leave a great deal to be desired. We now have an opportunity to deal with the vast gaps in children's provision.

As vice-chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on autism, I welcome the inclusion of autism in the NSF. I shall not go into further detail, however, because we debated the subject a few weeks ago to celebrate the start of national autism awareness year.

The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) made a comment about better services for carers. Early intervention is absolutely essential. We have no standard detection system in this country to pick up cases of autism and provide appropriate care at an early age. As the hon. Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) rightly mentioned, autism has been increasing for many years or, rather, detection of it has because we now know more about it. However, we still do not know nearly enough, and we need to spend more time and resources finding out about it. There is no obvious link between vaccinations and incidents of autism.

There are three problems with maternity services. There are big variations in the standard of service across the country, there is still a shortage of midwives, and there are moves towards greater use of caesarean section, which has caused increasing alarm.

We welcomed the "Good Birth Guide"— an interesting title for a report; it is not quite the "Good Wine Guide"—which was produced in January. It gives a guide to maternity hospitals and is by Dr. Foster, an independent group. It is interesting that it is not just big city hospitals with midwives who have heavy work loads that experience problems. The report reveals that there are 21 hospitals in which more than one baby is born per delivery bed a day. That means that some pressured units are operating in conditions of substantial overcrowding. Roger Taylor, the editor of the guide, said:

> "Mothers have a right to consistent standards wherever they live."

Ipswich hospital was top of the league table, and has a delivery rate of 1.3 babies per bed a day. That overcrowding gives many maternity departments in hospitals a production-line feel. That is not the only consideration when measuring the effectiveness of such departments; in many cases, the delivery rate reflects the efficient intervention of midwives at home with mothers who arrive at hospital only when they have reached the advanced stages of labour.

I speak from experience. I took my wife to Chelsea and Westminster hospital for the birth of our second child, and we were caught on the underground car park ramp with the "car park full" sign blazing when things were getting close. I had to reverse up the ramp with cars behind me to dump my wife. When I returned, having parked the car, she was in labour and gave birth some 20 minutes later, so I know that there are different ways of giving birth. I am sure that the Minister did not experience such alarming incidents.

The criticism has been made that general practitioners tend to book women into the nearest big hospital, and do not always discuss with them the availability of smaller community hospitals and midwife-led units, which are to be greatly praised. The hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) referred to such a unit in his constituency. Big is not always best. There is still too much of a maternity lottery in the provision of services.

I think that it was the Minister who last summer announced a shake-up of maternity services, which would result in continuous one-to-one care for every woman during childbirth. We welcomed that. That was to be done, first, by means of a £100 million plan to recruit 2000 extra midwives and modernise childbirth services—perhaps an ambitious target. Secondly, national standards were to be set up by 2003, giving women maximum choice in type of delivery and support. Thirdly, there were to be improved facilities to enable fathers to play a full role in births, and more sensitive treatment for bereaved parents in maternity wards. We praise those objectives.

It had been announced previously—on 2 May 2001—that there were to be more midwives and more money for maternity. It was said:

> "Every maternity unit will receive a share of a new £100m fund for their childbirth facilities".

On 10 October 2001, the Minister of State, Department of Health, the hon. Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), announced that maternity units would receive £100 million. Was that a treble announcement of the same money, or was new money being announced on each of those three occasions? I should take a stab at the former solution.

There is a crisis in midwife recruitment in maternity services. It might be better to judge the work load of maternity services by the number of babies delivered by a midwife in a year. It is generally agreed that the maximum figure should be 35. At Wexham Park hospital, the figure is as high as 51. At St. Peter's hospital, Chertsey in Surrey, it is 49 and, at the King George hospital maternity department, it is 45. That means that there is a greater possibility that a midwife will have to deal with more than one woman in labour at any one time. Research shows that women do better with one-to-one care. Last month, Louise Silverton, the deputy general secretary of the Royal College of Midwives, said that the figures showed how precarious and under-resourced the service was. There are still few returners to midwifery. The Minister put forward an ambitious bid to recruit 2,000 new midwives.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Did my hon. Friend notice that the Minister made no mention of the return-to-practice scheme that was launched in February 2001? Many of the representations that I have received make it clear that work load pressures are one of the reasons why some midwives have left the profession. It is important to ensure that such pressures are dealt with inside the profession before that return-to-practice scheme is successful. Clearly, it has not been successful over the past year.

Tim Loughton: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. It is all very well trying to recruit new midwives as, indeed, we need to do, but far greater efforts with nursing generally need to be made to retain experienced midwives. Genuine, practical moves must be made to make the profession more attractive to experienced midwives who may wish to return. Louise Silverton said that returners were few, and that remains the case.

Will the Minister confirm my figures? In 1997, the number of whole-time equivalent midwives was 18,050. At the end of 2001—the last date for which figures are available—that figure was unchanged at 18,050. We were still 2,000 short. Even the head count, which is the Government's favoured measure, does not deal with the problem. If more midwives are working shorter hours, the problem still exists. In 1995, the head count was 20,020; in 2001, it was 23,080. However, the whole-time equivalent is the crucial figure.

Let us consider the qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff numbers and break them down into areas of work, as the Government do. In the September 2001 NHS work force census, the whole-time equivalent figure in 1996 was 23,190 and, in 2001, it had fallen to 22,680. Worryingly, those figures show not only that there have been no increases in the number of full-time midwives but that there has been a fall in the number of staff in related midwifery services. It certainly casts doubts on the ambitions of the Minister.

There are especially big shortages in certain parts of the country, not least in London and the south-east. The average age of midwives is getting older, and that suggests that there is a problem with new recruits entering the profession after training. Does the Minister have the latest recruitment figures for London and the south-east? What improvements of choice are now available to women in maternity wards? What special considerations have been made for women from ethnic minorities in London? Perhaps the Minister could comment on what help has been received in the south-east for housing for maternity staff and say whether any of them have been included in the keyworker housing scheme.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Royal College of Midwives, the Royal College of Anaesthetists and the National Childbirth Trust published a report on caesarean sections in October last year. It revealed that 21.5 per cent. of women were giving birth surgically. That is an alarmingly high figure. In Northern Ireland, the figure was 23 per cent.; in London and Wales it is as high as 25 per cent. That is a six-fold increase since the 1970s, when the average figure was about 4 per cent. It is nearly double the figure that was recommended by the World Health Organisation. More than half the obstetricians surveyed admitted that caesarean section rates in their units were too high. Mary Newburn, head of policy research for the National Childbirth Trust, says:

> "Caesareans are unnecessary surgery which increase health risks for women and babies, including haemorrhage, decreased fertility and problems with subsequent pregnancies."

Why, then, are rates so high? Of the total number of caesareans, 7 per cent. are elective—a trend increasingly encouraged by celebrities such as Victoria Beckham and

[Tim Loughton]

Patsy Kensit. There is something of a culture of women who are "too posh to push" and who opt for the convenience of choosing the time to produce their baby before returning to work, a drinks party or whatever it is that is far more important to them. Also, more women are giving birth later in life, when there is a greater risk of needing an operation. More worryingly, many hospitals fear lawsuits if difficult births go wrong. As Bill Dunwoody from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists says:

> "Litigation is more likely to occur if a caesarean section has not been done."

That is not a good reason for promoting caesarean section.

There is evidence that electronic foetal monitoring has increased caesarean section rates without any long-term benefit to babies, suggesting that it is over-sensitive and inaccurate and that most women should not have it during labour. There is also a suggestion that pressure from doctors in under-staffed hospitals lacking midwife support and reassurance also discourages women from having natural births. My constituent was quoted in *The Sun* recently. Jenny Lesley now works for the NCT. She wanted to give birth naturally, but ended up having all three of her children by caesarean section. She says:

> "The intervention rates are very high, particularly in London because staffing levels are so low...when obstetricians give more support to junior doctors, the intervention rate is lower."

The Minister mentioned sure start. In many ways, it is one of the better regeneration schemes. I visited a scheme in Hastings last year and saw a travelling play bus and a mobile health clinic. Several flats in a block had been knocked into one to create a centre for mothers in the middle of a deprived estate. At the centre, mothers could use the nursery facilities, see the district nurse or get medical help. It was very impressive. Although it had been open for only a few weeks when I visited, it was already a seething mass of people and was obviously appreciated.

As with most regeneration projects, sure start schemes, as the Minister said, are concentrated in urban areas. I hope that she will make a more detailed comment on the extension of the scheme to rural areas. As the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) said, under the current classification system, there are small wards of deprivation that do not qualify for such schemes because they lie side by side more affluent areas. That is a particular problem in parts of the south of England and around my constituency.

The sure start programme has targets to reach by 2004. The first is to reduce by 20 per cent. the number of children aged nought to three in the 500 programme areas who are re-registered on the child protection register within 12 months. That is a laudable aim but, as those of us who considered the Adoption and Children Bill know, the number of looked-after children has risen over the past few years and currently stands at 58,000. We therefore have an urgent task.

A second objective is to achieve a 10 per cent. reduction in the number of mothers who smoke during pregnancy. Again, we applaud that aim, but why is the gap widening between the number of young men and women smokers? It is much harder to persuade young women to give up smoking, so resources should be targeted to help with that problem.

Thirdly, sure start aims to achieve a reduction of 5 per cent. in the number of children with speech and language problems requiring specialist intervention by the age of four. There is an acute shortage of speech therapists, and that is one of the biggest gaps that we face. It is also difficult to determine which body is responsible for the provision of speech therapists—the local health service trust, social services or the education department attached to local county councils. Something of a vicious triangle, or buck-passing, exists between those three parties. We need joined-up thinking, especially given the intense pressure on social services departments throughout the country. They are spending £1 billion more than the Government think they ought to be spending and are given credit for in the standard spending assessments.

I welcome some of the targets and the thrust behind the sure start programme. However, will the Minister tell us the basis on which the success of sure start will be judged? Are the targets realistically attainable? What progress has been made to date?

I shall now consider immunisation and, especially, the MMR debate that is raging at present. I agree with everything that the Minister said on the subject, and I welcome the progress that has been made over the past 20 years on immunisation programmes, such as meningitis C and the other programmes before that. We have a good record of which we should be proud. That is why the current problems with MMR vaccinations are worrying.

I was surprised by the comments of the hon. Member for Romsey, who spoke on behalf of the Liberal Democrats, because the Liberal Democrat health spokesman seemed to say something different yesterday when he referred to an element of risk. The Minister is right to say that the issue is not about balancing risk, because there is no scientific evidence to suggest any link between the MMR vaccination and autism or other side effects.

The Minister and I are on record as saying that our children have had the MMR vaccination, and I have no difficulty repeating that point. As vice-chairman of the all-party group on autism, I say that it is imperative that parents should accept the MMR vaccination for their children. It is the best alternative on offer. It is not 100 per cent. risk free, but nothing is 100 per cent. risk free. The Minister drew a good analogy with mobile phones. Parents who have any doubts should be encouraged to give their children the MMR vaccination. That has always been our position, and it categorically remains so. We share the confidence of the British Medical Association, the royal colleges and the 35 European, north American and other countries that use the vaccination.

Sandra Gidley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tim Loughton: I shall if the hon. Lady is willing to clarify her party's position.

Sandra Gidley: I was actually going to ask the hon. Gentleman to clarify his party's position. I think that the shadow Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), is on record as saying that there should be open access to the individual vaccines. That seems to be at odds with what the hon. Gentleman said.

Tim Loughton: That kind of misrepresentation is not helping the present debate. The fundamental point—this has always been the position of the Conservative party and its health spokesmen, and remained as such yesterday when we made a further announcement—is that no vaccination provides a better alternative to the MMR vaccination. We want all our constituents' children of a suitable age to have the MMR vaccination. We offered the Government a bipartisan approach two years ago when some "rogue" reports that cast doubts on the safety of the MMR vaccination were published. We offered to promote the message about the safety of the MMR vaccination and to point out that the dangers for a child who was not vaccinated were much greater than those for a child who had received the vaccination. We said that the MMR vaccination was as safe as it could possibly be, and that there was no concrete evidence to the contrary.

The simple reality is that the hon. Members in this Chamber do not need convincing. We must convince the public outside. The Government have given assurances over the past few months, but mixed messages have come from Ministers and, especially, from the Prime Minister, and those messages have led to misinformation and disinformation. The public have lost confidence in what they are told, and they are voting with their feet to such an extent that the vaccination rate is below 70 per cent. in parts of London.

Yvette Cooper: I have listened to the hon. Gentleman carefully. I welcome his support for the medical advice that we have received about the importance of the MMR vaccination as the best way to immunise children. Does he believe that the Conservative party's call—not only this week, but over the past 12 months when records show that for much of the time coverage was 83 per cent.—for the introduction of separate jabs has contributed to what he described as a decline in confidence in the MMR jab?

Tim Loughton: The hon. Lady is wrong. Until yesterday, our party's policy was that MMR was the only option. That remains the policy but, as from yesterday, we have said that single jabs should be available for those people who are not being vaccinated. That was not the position before yesterday when what we said was purely a response to the dangerously low take-up of the MMR vaccine.

Yvette Cooper: Does the hon. Gentleman deny that a year ago, before the last election, Conservative spokespeople called for separate jabs to be made available on the NHS?

Tim Loughton: Members on both sides of the House have called for separate jabs. Official Conservative party policy was to support MMR. Now, however, levels of cover are so low that a choice must be made available. MMR or nothing is not a choice. The difference between 70 per cent. and 95 per cent.—the former level, which needs to be achieved again—of 591,000 children leaves a gap of 25 per cent. That could mean that, according to the prevailing figures, 148,000 or so children are not being vaccinated. That is the simple reality. Whatever the hon. Lady's assurances, and whatever the attempted assurances of the Prime Minister, which have patently failed, a number of children are not being vaccinated at the moment and have no cover. That is why something needs to be done.

Ms Drown: The hon. Gentleman said that different information was coming from the Government. I have seen nothing that is inconsistent. I should be grateful if he would clarify his remarks, because if he believes that there has been inconsistency, we need to clarify what he means. All the information has been absolutely consistent in saying that MMR is the best thing.

The hon. Gentleman himself recognises that MMR is the best thing. Does he not realise that, by saying that people should be allowed single vaccines, he is fuelling their concerns? A responsible Opposition would say exactly what he said earlier—that MMR is clearly the safest way of protecting children.

Tim Loughton: The hon. Lady misses the point. Before yesterday vaccination levels in parts of the country had fallen to less than 70 per cent. No fuelling of concerns was required; the problem is already raging out there. Many people are sufficiently worried to take the option of no vaccination. The most irresponsible thing would be for us to allow parents to go ahead without providing any vaccination cover for their children, but that is what is happening.

Measles is not a soft option, and I make one criticism in particular. We have not made enough of the danger of mumps and rubella and especially of measles, which is a killer and can cause serious brain damage. A few weeks ago, I met the 41-year-old son of a constituent. He caught measles as a baby and has been brain damaged to the extent that he has been unable to communicate ever since. The dangers need to be rather better communicated. Some people still seem to believe that measles is a soft option. It is not.

Ms Drown: The hon. Gentleman points out the dangers of measles. If the Opposition are to recommend single vaccines, what order and what intervals between them will he recommend? He also knows about the huge dangers of rubella and the damage that it can cause. Mumps is one of the biggest causes of viral meningitis, and we do not need to describe how awful that is. Have the Opposition thought through their policy? They do not seem to have done so.

Tim Loughton: The hon. Lady makes my case for me. However, she is happy with the status quo in which 30 per cent. of the children in some parts of the country—that is the equivalent of up to 150,000 children—will have no vaccination and no protection against the horrendous diseases and symptoms that she mentions. That is the reality of the situation to which we must respond. It would be highly irresponsible to do nothing.

Yvette Cooper: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tim Loughton: I wish to make progress, as many hon. Members wish to speak.

[Tim Loughton]

I gather that the chief medical officer remarked that single jabs are equivalent to Russian roulette. That is an irresponsible comment. People who have gone to the trouble to seek out—and pay for—individual jabs are now having doubts cast on the efficacy of that treatment. That fuels the public's concerns.

Nothing is more universally effective than the treble jab in one. The Conservative party has always said that, as have the Government. However, the public are not heeding our advice.

Mr. Lansley: My hon. Friend is right about what our party has been saying. Before yesterday, the official Opposition's policy was to support the Government's assurances about the efficacy of the MMR vaccine, and the undesirability of the alternatives to it. Before the last general election, we consistently stated that we held to that policy because it was important to try to retain public confidence in the MMR vaccine. However, a new ethical question has now arisen: when does the principle of defending the MMR vaccine begin to be outweighed by the need to provide alternative protection to children whose parents will not accept it? However, I will not express my opinion on that at present.

Tim Loughton: That is a fair point when the safety of the MMR vaccine becomes a hot issue, and the vaccination rate falls below 70 per cent. Unsurprisingly, measles outbreaks are now occurring, and they cause much grief.

Dr. Kumar *rose—*

Yvette Cooper *rose—*

Tim Loughton: I am reaching the conclusion of my speech, and I am tempted to finish it. The Minister spoke at length, and many other hon. Members wish to contribute.

I reiterate that we urge everyone—our constituents, and every parent who is considering what to do—to choose the MMR vaccination for their children. There is no dispute about that between the Government and the Conservative party.

Yvette Cooper: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, because he has generously allowed many interventions. However, I wish him to clarify one point. Is he saying that he rejects the advice of the chief medical officer, the British Medical Association, the royal colleges and the Faculty of Public Health Medicine? All of them have advised us that the introduction of separate jabs would reduce coverage—it would not increase it—and that it would increase the number of children who are exposed to deadly diseases.

Tim Loughton: It is clearly the case that, if the choice is between MMR and nothing, more people will be exposed if they do not choose the triple vaccination.

I have said all along that the triple vaccination is the best option; single jabs are not as effective. There are questions marks about the timings between them. There are also question marks about the licensing of vaccinations that come from France and other countries, the way that they are administered and the charges for administering them. The Government must address those questions.

Despite the Minister's reassurances, hundreds of parents are telephoning private clinics to get hold of the individual vaccinations. How much less effective they are than the triple vaccination is a matter for debate, but they are better than nothing. The Government are currently offering all or nothing, which is the worst policy of all.

I have spoken for long enough but, not surprisingly, my final comments on MMR have been the most topical and contentious and will continue to be so. In practice, there is a crisis of confidence among many hundreds of thousands of our constituents, and we must restore that confidence to ensure that vaccination coverage is as thorough as possible.

This is an important debate. We are dealing with many complicated issues and, when it comes to children, we need a comprehensive approach. As I said, the measure of the success of the Government's programme will not be the number of committees and the structures that they set up, or the number of tsars whom they appoint, but the health improvement outcomes that result from it.

We all agree, I am sure, that the health of our nation's children is one of the most important aspects, if not the most important aspect, of the national health service and health care in this country. I welcome the contribution that this debate can make to raising the profile of these matters.

4 pm

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): I welcome this debate and the action that the Government are taking on maternity and children's services, particularly the emphasis on inequalities. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister is committed to that.

I shall start by responding to the comments of the Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton). The policy that the Opposition have dreamed up over the past week is outrageous and a serious matter, because of the potential implications—I need hardly say "potential"—for children.

The hon. Gentleman is right to say that a lack of confidence has been fuelled by irresponsible media stories, but the Opposition do not help by jumping on the bandwagon and trying to extract political advantage from it. That seems to be the only explanation for the Opposition's policy, because all the Front-Bench spokespersons, including the hon. Gentleman today, have clearly said that MMR is the best option. To suggest otherwise merely undermines confidence and fuels more unjustified speculation.

At a push, the Opposition could say that we may need to consider the issue if they talked about particular constituents who had read all the evidence, had received counselling and had come to particular decisions, but I would feel uncomfortable even with that. Having considered all the evidence, every major college, doctors, paediatricians, health visitors and all such bodies have clearly said that the best option is to stick with MMR.

The Opposition should be backing the Government. This issue should not be a political football because the health of thousands of children is at risk, and the Opposition have not answered my question. They have not given us their recommended timetable for when children should have the measles vaccination and those for rubella and mumps. Without that timetable, we do not know which ones they think people should be exposed to first. The Opposition's policy is risky. I hope that they will review it and return to the position that they held a while ago, which was to do the sensible thing by using the evidence that clearly exists and backing the Government's advice on MMR. There seems to be no other option if we are to protect children.

Mr. Lansley: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Lady, but we have discussed the issue and we must keep various subjects in balance. I am on record as supporting MMR and I would say the same today; I would not be ambiguous about that. However, the hon. Lady and the Government must consider at what point the undermining of the MMR vaccine and the take-up level raise the question whether it has become safer for children and ethical to offer the single vaccine—admittedly, establishing protocols is intensely difficult—as compared with leaving the population wholly unprotected.

Ms Drown: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's point, but it would be insane to say that we had reached that point. Take-up of the vaccine is still huge. We need everyone to back the evidence that is clearly there to create a balance. We must try to get the media to step back coolly and rationally to consider that evidence. If the Opposition could help us to do that, rather than proceeding in the other direction, we could make some progress and see the uptake increase again rather than decrease.

Tim Loughton: When the official Opposition offered the full weight of our party on a bipartisan approach to supporting MMR before the public at large, why was that rejected out of hand by the Minister and her colleagues? Why does she think that happened? Was our approach not helpful?

Ms Drown: I am aware that my hon. Friend the Minister wants to intervene.

I have heard nothing to suggest that we would not welcome support from the Opposition on that basis. There might be a debate about exactly how and what.

Yvette Cooper: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Opposition offered a bipartisan approach about two years ago? They were invited to an all-party group meeting with the Liberal Democrat spokesperson and me. They never turned up and we have not heard from them since.

Ms Drown: I feel that I am beginning to chair this meeting.

Tim Loughton: The Minister knows that that is complete rubbish. This is not to be done through an all-party group. The shadow Secretary of State for Health went to see the Minister. Unqualified support was offered, but it was never taken up. For her so to misconstrue those events is shameless and shows that she and her Department have been using this issue as a political football, not the Conservative party.

Ms Drown: We are getting into silly bickering about who did what and who said what. The real people who can suffer as a result of this issue are children. This is not a matter for laughter. There may be a debate about which meeting and whether people liked the exact proposal that was coming from one area or another. If anyone is cross about that, that is not a reason to change policy on such an important issue. Instead, we should keep going and say that we need to have more of a campaign and to try again. This is where politicians' pride, pigheadedness and arrogance get in the way of what is best for children. The Government have been clear throughout: they have said what is in the best interests of children, and that is MMR. The Opposition need to rethink their policy because they are putting children's health at risk.

I shall take the wise suggestion of the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) and move on to another important issue: maternity services. I start by paying tribute to all the staff in maternity services who do fantastic things throughout the country. I pay tribute also to all volunteers such as the National Childbirth Trust, the breast-feeding counsellors and the wider family networks that often have the greatest input into births and maternity services.

There are real issues of concern in maternity services, some not relating to Government policy. The Cumberledge report, which was produced under the last Conservative Government, showed a way forward for maternity services and was widely welcomed. Achieving some of those aims has been difficult and is not happening in so many places. A fundamental problem is that a medical model is applied to too many maternity services. Giving birth to a healthy baby, which should be a problem-free experience for most healthy women, in too many instances is turning into a major medical event. Medical events that are generally not justified by the evidence produce a worse experience for the mother and a cost to the NHS that far outweighs the cost of a less medicalised model. That is not to say that there are not many instances in which medical interventions are necessary, and generally the NHS is fantastic at dealing with those instances.

The most serious issue, raised by the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham, is the rising rate of caesareans that are not justified by the evidence. There is a huge variation in caesarean rates across the country; although sometimes they are clinically necessary, there are questions about whether the NHS offers the best treatment in areas where caesareans are not clinically justified. Obstetricians tell me of their concerns that caesareans that are not medically needed are hard to justify, yet they are carried out. Having a caesarean in such circumstances increases a woman's risk of dying by at least three, if not four or six, times. It also increases the risk of urinary infections, infertility problems and inflammation of the womb. The incidence of respiratory distress in babies is four times greater in elective caesareans than in a vaginal birth. There are serious questions to be asked about the rising rate of these operations.

[Ms Drown]

Given that evidence, why does the Government-sponsored booklet that goes to all mums describe a caesarean section as "safe"? I appreciate that the Government want to give assurances to those women who have to have a caesarean because it is medically the best option, but it is major abdominal surgery and saying that it is safe, with few qualifications, may be a factor that encourages women to ask for a caesarean when it is not medically required.

Obstetricians in this country and abroad suggest that a caesarean should not even be offered as a choice when it is not medically indicated. The Committee for the Ethical Aspects of Human Reproduction and Women's Health, the international umbrella organisation of national obstetric organisations, states in a 1999 report that

"performing caesarean section for non-medical reasons is ethically not justified",

yet it is happening in this country.

This is a matter of serious concern, where more government action could produce better health outcomes. We could learn a lesson from Canada, where they have had some success in tackling the matter by focusing on and celebrating hospitals with low caesarean rates. In this country, midwife-led services that have produced lower caesarean rates could show how best to make improvements.

Caesareans are the most serious form of intervention in childbirth, but there are also questions to be asked about other interventions. The real problem is having a doctor-led rather than a midwife-led service. There is good, scientific research that shows that when doctors, rather than midwives, attend low-risk hospital births, unnecessary interventions increase and women's satisfaction decreases. In New Zealand, the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries, more than 80 per cent. of women see only midwives during pregnancy and birth, either in or out of hospital, and they have some of the lowest maternal and perinatal mortality rates in the world, which suggests that lowering intervention rates and having a more midwife-led service could help us.

The definitive study of the safety of midwife-attended birth, which was published in 1998, took account of all births in one year in the United States—more than 4 million births. It considered only singleton, vaginal births, removed social and medical risk factors and compared outcomes between midwife-led births and physician-attended births. Compared with physician-attended births, midwife-attended births had a 19 per cent. lower infant mortality rate, a 33 per cent. lower neonatal mortality rate, and a low birth-weight rate that was 31 per cent. lower. That is clear evidence of the need for midwives to be in the forefront of the service.

Birthing centres such as those in Edgware and Crowborough have great success in letting the midwife lead the service and have better health outcomes, lower caesarean rates, high breast-feeding rates and much higher satisfaction for the families involved. The other great spin-off is that the midwife's job is so much better and there is no problem with recruitment. Indeed, Edgware still has a waiting list of people wanting to work as midwives there. Once again, letting midwives lead the service brings further benefits.

A midwife-led service should also allow more women to experience home births. I receive letters throughout the country from women pleading for home births, but facing health authorities that refuse to help by providing a midwife in support. The evidence clearly shows that home births are safe, if not safer than hospital births. The National Birthday Trust survey of 6,000 home births found that outcomes were just as good as from hospital births and that women's satisfaction levels were much higher. With fully trained midwives, a home birth should be a feasible option—particularly for low-risk women, but also for many others currently denied that choice. If we could lower the caesarean rate, finding the resources to ensure sufficient midwives to meet women's choices would not be such a problem.

I mentioned the letters that I receive from women wanting home births. I also received a letter that arrived last year when we were discussing regulations affecting the Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting. Home births were debated then and the fine imposed on medically unqualified people attending home births was increased. The Government have not yet clarified the issue, however, because some women who had lost confidence in hospital births were going ahead with a home birth, irrespective of whether a midwife could be provided. Some were confident in the ability of the husband to attend the birth but, because they were worried about the fines, they intended to send their husbands out of their homes and give birth alone—a seriously dangerous prospect. Will the Government make it clear that the regulations were intended to fine not people trying to help with home births but people who impersonate midwives?

I have dealt with where and how women want to give birth and move on briefly to discuss the delivery of care. Much of the difference between a good and a bad birth experience lies in the manner in which the care is delivered. One-to-one midwifery care is clearly crucial and the greater the continuity of care, the greater likelihood of building trust between the health professional and the woman giving birth.

A recent study of 20 women who, along with professionals, permitted their births to be videoed showed some surprising results. Of the 20, 11 had to go through one shift change of professionals and three went through two changes. One woman saw 11 different health professionals during her birth experience, which makes it difficult to build up trust. The women were observed for 111 hours, during which midwives were out of the room for 30 hours. There was record keeping for 21 hours and sitting at the bedside for only 16 hours. Time clearly needs to be reallocated. Building midwives' confidence about spending time with the woman and viewing that—rather than record keeping—as a priority is important. We understand that litigation is a problem, but midwives must be encouraged to spend more time with their women. The research also examined how doulas added a positive element to the birth experience. I hope that the Government will reflect on how that might benefit the service.

The advantage of midwifery-led care could also mean better post-natal support. One of the first tasks after giving birth is to establish breast-feeding. Clear evidence shows that it benefits both mother and child. Yet, rates in many parts of the country are still extremely low. The key to increasing the number of women who breast-feed is to encourage consistency and advice, and for there to be a supportive attitude and training. The low level of breast-feeding training that is given to midwives and health visitors is shocking. I hope that the Government will deal with that problem.

I wish to read out a letter that I received last year about breast-feeding. It states:

> "On my first night alone on the ward, a vicious and scary auxiliary stood over my attempts to breastfeed on my first night alone on a reluctant feeder and angrily re-latched him again and again until it hurt—telling me, 'It SHOULD hurt, start again if it doesn't' and later 'Why are you crying? You are such a woos—it'll get much worse you know'. Three hours later my baby was hungry and sobbing and hadn't fed and I was a wreck and sneaked to the phone to beg my husband to come in early. She returned to shout at me saying: 'He'll get ill if you don't sort this out, you know', whilst pulling him off again.
>
> The next night she asked patronisingly, 'Is it harder than you thought, dear?' giving another nurse a 'one of those' look."

That shows just how much we need to do to encourage women to ensure that they receive consistent advice and that training and breast-feeding counsellors are available. Efforts should be made to tackle the social stigma of breast-feeding. Some communities still reach for the bottle-formula milk, and there is far too much advertising by baby milk companies. We are not giving enough of a lead nationally. It is also an international issue; 1.5 million babies die because of breast-feeding rates. The more than we can do to encourage breast-feeding, the healthier will be the outcome.

The House could take a lead and allow visitors, staff and Members to breast-feed. All professional organisations back such a practice. It should be allowed. I hope that through you, Mr. Beard, we can encourage Mr. Speaker to reach a decision. Women are the best people to judge where and when to feed their babies. We have been arguing about the issue for years and it is important that the House takes a lead, both for national and international reasons.

There is only sparse training in respect of domestic violence in pregnancy. It is frightening. Maternity is a key area in which domestic violence happens. It is a trigger for women to report such instances. There are more domestic violence incidents when a woman is pregnant than outside pregnancy. In 1997 to 1999, a confidential inquiry into maternal deaths in the United Kingdom showed that only 12 per cent. of the women—45 of the 378 women—had reported incidents of domestic violence to health professionals yet, few, if any, were offered help to deal with it. None of those women was routinely asked about violence but, during pregnancy, women are more likely to die from domestic violence than from pre-eclampsia or gestational diabetes. We screen for those illnesses, but not for domestic violence. I hope that the Minister will consider such matters. Women must build up trust.

4.33 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

4.38 pm

On resuming—

Ms Drown: I was talking about the need for women to build up trust and to report domestic violence. I am sure that more could be done to stop many women being battered. Unfortunately, too many women are killed by domestic violence during pregnancy. I stress the need for the Government to do more to support midwifery-led care. I hope that they will consider a more flexible transfer from midwives to health visitors in the post-natal period to maximise the chances of supportive relationships being created.

I hope also that the Government will consider ways in which to add to maternity care and to ensure that more woman are supported in their choice to give birth at home. More needs to be done to tackle the high caesarean rate and low breast-feeding rate. I congratulate the Government on the work that they have done so far and I am looking forward to the national service framework for maternity and children's services. I hope that as much as possible can be done in advance of that. The result will be a more satisfying job for both midwives and obstetricians, and recruitment and retention will be improved. The key test is whether there will be better experiences and health outcomes for both women and children. I am pleased to support the Government in their work.

4.40 pm

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): I welcome the debate. The subject is huge, and it was difficult to decide on what to concentrate in the time available. I thought that I would approach the issue chronologically, discussing the normal progression of pregnancy, then childbirth and then what to do with a child after he or she is born, and how to do the best for him or her. Those are certainly among the most difficult experiences that I have faced in my life.

I had my first baby nearly 20 years ago—that makes me feel terribly old. I vividly remember meeting my general practitioner and midwife. The awful truth suddenly dawned on me that those people, in whom I had great trust, were not going to be there when I needed them, at the birth. I asked my GP who was going to deliver the baby. He said, "If you're lucky, it'll be a midwife, and if you're unlucky, it'll be a doctor." I was horrified by that reply. To someone like me, who had not really researched pregnancy and to whom it was a bit of a shock, it seemed inconceivable that someone should be surrounded by strangers when most vulnerable and having a life-changing experience. That concept seemed fairly alien.

Thankfully, the position is better in some parts of the country. I later started to work with the National Childbirth Trust and began campaigning for better maternity services. I then learned about team midwifery, which has been mentioned, in which a group of midwives are responsible from early pregnancy through delivery until after the birth, when they can give the support that the hon. Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) mentioned is so vital in breast-feeding. They are a reassuring presence throughout. Women are almost guaranteed that, at that daunting time when they are about to give birth, one of those midwives will be available.

Sadly, although there has been a general increase in such arrangements, some trusts have stopped providing the service due to midwife shortages. We have heard some of the figures. I looked at the 2001 figures, and

[Sandra Gidley]

there is no huge shortage of midwives in Scotland, Wales or the north-west. However, shortages are a huge issue in London and the south-east. There is an overall vacancy rate of at least 10 per cent., rising to 16.5 per cent. in London hospitals. Many of the posts—up to 10 per cent. in London—are vacant for more than three months. Much has already been said about the cost of living, and I endorse those comments, because it is vital that we keep a good midwifery service in London and the rest of the country.

I hope that the Minister will enlighten us on what is being done to retain and attract midwives and to ensure that there are enough of them to cope with demand. I cannot over-emphasise how important a midwife is in ensuring that a women is happy with her birth experience. I do not think that the shortage is getting worse, although I have not been able to compare figures for different years. However, we urgently need to address the issue.

I wish to consider the choice issues surrounding the birth. Rates of home births vary widely, and in many areas they are actively discouraged. The choice is better than it was 20 years ago. There are many more midwife-led units, and there is greater acceptance from obstetricians that midwives are professionals in their own right, and are capable of performing the role that they are trained to do, and I welcome that. Whatever the birth method, my overriding concern is that women should retain some say in the process. The issue is one of how, not just where, women give birth.

I have some worries about the concept of a national service framework. It has been widely welcomed, but I hope that the Minister can reassure me on several points. I shall highlight foetal monitoring, which is one aspect of childbirth, to illustrate my point.

Many women would be happy with a low-key approach of being monitored only by a midwife with a stethoscope during labour. The midwife could detect any problems, especially if her skills were up to date, and there is no evidence to suggest that that is a poor way of approaching the matter. Many women do not want to be continually strapped to a machine; they do not even want to be strapped to a machine for a quarter of an hour every few hours, because that is restrictive and uncomfortable. Of course, if a midwife is worried, she may say to a woman, “I'm a little worried about the baby's heartbeat, so we'd like to put you on a monitor.” Most women would accept that because they want a healthy baby and they trust their midwife.

A fundamental difference with maternity services that is often forgotten is that they deal with not an illness but what I prefer to think of as a modified state of health. However, obstetricians, especially, think that they are addressing a medical situation. If an obstetrician insists on electronic monitoring at regular intervals, it is likely that the odd unusual trace will be produced. Some suggest that that can lead to more interventions. The hon. Member for South Swindon highlighted the problems that might be caused by such interventions.

If the NSF states that electronic monitoring is a good thing, which it might, because obstetricians believe that, that would become the norm despite the lack of clear evidence to support it. I want reassurance that women who want a natural birth may have that. If women want a high-tech birth that involves all the drugs in the world, maybe that should be available. Electronic monitoring is an example of trying to apply a procedure that is used in many medical models to a process that is not totally medical. I could highlight other similar aspects, but time is short.

One-to-one care during labour is a concept that is often bandied about as the holy grail. I saw figures—I could not believe them—showing that more than 95 per cent. of women enjoy one-to-one care during labour. Will the Minister tell us the official definition of one-to-one care? My local midwifery unit believes that one-to-one care means that a midwife stays with a woman throughout her labour, rather than going off to fill in records. In a busy maternity unit, midwives sometimes must dash between two women and pray that the women do not deliver at the same time. Does the Minister agree that a woman should be able to have a midwife present throughout her labour if that is her wish? Many people who are involved in maternity services would welcome a precise definition of one-to-one care.

We cannot leave the discussion about the delivery room without commenting on the alarming increase in rates of caesarean sections. A report by the World Health Organisation says that the rate should be 10 to 15 per cent. However, the United Kingdom's national rate is 21.3 per cent. Department of Health figures show that the average cost of a normal delivery is £700, but the average cost of a caesarean section is £1,700. That represents a significant difference. Every 1 per cent. rise in the rate costs the NHS an additional £5 million, which could be spent on employing more midwives or attracting midwives to areas with many vacancies. We must examine closely the reasons for the rate's steady increase. It is alarming, and a proportion of women undergo an unnecessary caesarean section.

I was alarmed to learn from the World Health Organisation's report that Afro-Caribbean women have a caesarean section rate of 31.3 per cent. What is being done to investigate the reason behind that huge difference? Is the reason cultural? Is it due to something simple, such as that different races have differently shaped pelvises? I doubt that that is the reason—indeed, I am unsure whether there is more than one pelvis shape. Perhaps communication in hospitals is the problem. We must ensure that everyone receives the optimum service. In general, I am opposed to setting targets, but it would be interesting if we could follow what happens with regard to this matter.

After their baby is born, most parents start to think about breast-feeding. The hon. Member for South Swindon has highlighted many of the key issues with regard to that, and the Minister has acknowledged that lack of breast-feeding is linked to poor health outcomes. We all know the benefits of breast-feeding, so I will not repeat them.

However, there are significant class and age differences that should give rise to great concern. We have heard that there are increasing numbers of young mothers, because of the rise in teenage pregnancy, and that they are far less likely than a mother in her 20s to breast-feed—or if they do, they are less likely to continue breast-feeding.

The differences in breast-feeding rates between the social classes are particularly alarming. Ninety per cent. of new mothers in social class 1 start breast-feeding, compared with 50 per cent. of new mothers in social class 5. Two weeks later, the rates fall to 83 and 36 per cent. respectively. Only slightly more than a third of babies who are born into the most deprived families are breast-fed at two weeks. Four months later, the rates fall to 56 and 13 per cent.

Children from poor and disadvantaged families have a tough start in life. We should tackle the resistance of their mothers to breast-feeding. I am unsure whether they do not breast-feed because they are resistant to it, or because they lack the education to be aware of its benefits. However, we must target those women, because if we manage to increase the proportion of them who breast-feed, that will have lifelong knock-on benefits for their babies.

Breast-feeding rates have not changed much in the past few years. Scotland has a breast-feeding strategy, and England would benefit from the introduction of a similar initiative. Does the Minister plan to do that?

Things are being done well in pockets of the country. My local hospital employs someone specifically to help mothers to breast-feed. She is not a midwife; she started training as a breast-feeding counsellor for the National Childbirth Trust. She helps mothers to start to breast-feed, and when they leave hospital, she gives them her telephone number so that she can continue to support them. That is a good system, but it is not the norm. It should be extended to other hospitals.

I agree with the hon. Member for South Swindon that we must tackle discrimination with regard to breast-feeding, although I am unsure what a Public Health Minister can do to address that. There are still attitudes in society that lead to people frowning on women who wish to breast-feed in public places, such as a restaurant—indeed, some hon. Members might wonder why a mother would wish to do that.

It might beggar belief, but I have breast-fed without anyone really noticing in a variety of public places, such as the top of a mountain, a bus queue, aboard a boat, and in a restaurant. It can be done discreetly. It is not necessary for a big scene to be made of it. Many women will not want to breast-feed in public, because it makes them feel uncomfortable. As the hon. Member for South Swindon said, the mother concerned is the best person to make a decision about where to breast-feed.

After a new mother leaves hospital and takes her baby home, midwife cover is provided for a few days. If the team midwifery approach is adopted, the situation is much easier for the mother. If she has a problem, she can talk about it more easily with the midwives, because she will have built up a relationship with them. We live in a society in which we all want to do well and to feel that we are a success, and we do not like to admit that we have problems.

When I took my baby home from hospital, I suddenly realised that my husband and I had sole responsibility for this little bundle, and I freely admit that that was the most frightening experience of my life. The early stage of motherhood is a very vulnerable time, and new mothers need all the help and support that they can get—not just half an hour a day, if that, from a pressed midwife, and subsequently from an overstretched health visitor.

I want to discuss health visiting, because we may be missing a few tricks. Since becoming a Member of Parliament, I have become painfully aware that some families repeat patterns from when they grew up. It sounds terrible, but some people do not really know—they have a rough idea—how to be parents. We all live in little boxes, families are often spread further apart, and role models are sometimes not available.

If health visitors worked with groups of women as friends to build up a network and educate in a low-level way, not saying, "Oh, I'm going to give you a talk on healthy diets today," many positive messages could be sent. For example, in the case of feeding and diet, we hear a lot about food poverty, but we also see people on benefits buying food that is not the most appropriate. Not everyone knows, and not everyone is taught at school, how to eat a healthy diet. We might believe that it is blindingly obvious, but it is not to everyone. The same applies to the benefits of exercise.

Some people do not even know how to play with their children. I laughed when I first heard about a friend who was involved in teaching parents how to play with their children, but for some people that is necessary, because they were never played with as children and have no role model. We need to do something positive for such people. Such families often hit the social services buffers. The family may in the past have resisted working with social services, resulting in a huge reaction against society and the Big Brother approach. We need to be more creative in tackling such problems early on.

I want briefly to touch on vaccination. I welcome the chance to make clear a matter that my intervention did not. If the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) had been listening to me, rather than wondering how he could indulge his penchant for attacking the Liberal Democrats, he would have realised that we were not saying anything terribly different.

As I said earlier, I agree that there is no statistical evidence that the MMR vaccine causes a problem, and I stand by that. However, I have recently been investigating autism—a huge subject—more closely, having become involved with a group of parents in my constituency, none of whom blames the MMR vaccine. Reading around the subject, I have become aware of what many people say about when the condition developed. I fully accept the argument advanced by the hon. Member for South Swindon that symptoms sometimes become apparent at the same time. People put two and two together and make not four but 22. They link events because of the chronology. However, when reading evidence or testimonies in which people say that their child went into reverse, questions arise. The incidence is minute and does not show up statistically. I wanted to establish whether it was acknowledged that such children should be closely examined. I believe that I had the answer from the Minister when she said that the fundamental problem is that we need more information about the causes of autism.

The Conservatives' recent announcement about the three single vaccines was highly irresponsible. There is no evidence that the three vaccines are as safe as MMR, and there is some evidence of risk. A theory that is not

[Sandra Gidley]

widely espoused is that giving three vaccinations presents three challenges to the immune system and may increase the probability of an adverse event.

The media have been irresponsible and it would be helpful if they could get the positive health messages across and spell out the benefits of immunisation rather than highlighting a story for a week and then leaving people high and dry. Child health problems also centre on poor housing conditions and poverty. While I welcome the good sure start programme, there needs to be more joined-up thinking on such issues. Joint working often offers particular problems. Getting health, social services and housing together is a nightmare, but getting them to agree which service will pay for something is an even worse nightmare. It would be helpful if we could have pools of money and schemes such as sure start that people can access rather than fighting and guarding their individual budgets closely.

The subject is wide ranging, but the fact that many of us have chosen to highlight the same issues means that particular attention should be paid to them. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

5 pm

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East): First, I congratulate you, Mr. Beard, on your appointment to the Chairman's panel. It is the first time that such an encounter with you has taken place and I am privileged to speak in the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) and the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) focused strongly on maternity. I have little knowledge of the subject, but their speeches were highly illuminating. I learned more about maternity this afternoon than I have done during most of my adult life.

I want to focus on child health, on which a large part of the Minister's speech concentrated. The hon. Member for Romsey referred to the value of nutrition in children's health. I want to link that aspect with the Government's wider programme and how they have been trying to tackle poverty. I shall also refer to issues that perhaps the Minister can take up. Being healthy does not necessarily mean the mere absence of sickness, which is, all too often, the measure of health in our society.

Everyone will agree that children have a need to be nurtured and healthy, not only when they are newly born, or learning to walk, talk, spell or ride their first bicycle, but throughout their formative years. The future of human society depends on children being able to achieve their optimum physical growth and psychological development. The phrase "healthy mind, healthy body" comes to mind. I want to encourage the adoption of positive values for children to help them grow up as healthy young people and, eventually, to be fit adults. I am not alone in such thinking. Never before have we had so much knowledge to assist families and society as a whole in their desire to raise children so that they can exploit their own potential.

In the past several decades, the relationship between health, physical growth, psychological development and parental care have become clearer. The Government have made an immense effort to tackle poverty. There are many explanations for poor child health. The Minister mentioned a few, but most experts agree that environmental factors such as poverty are the most damaging. Poverty is complex, multi-dimensional and manifests itself in many ways, such as lack of access to good-quality housing, poor health, high levels of unemployment, low rates of pay, high crime rates and poor educational performance. Given that children's experiences are fundamentally influenced by their family circumstances, it is essential that such problems be tackled as a high priority, especially where those experiences will lay the foundation for later life.

Each aspect of poverty is linked, and poverty breeds further poverty. Unemployment can lead to crime, and living in poor, overcrowded housing can result in poor health and have a detrimental effect on a child's education. One reason why I am proud to be a member of the Labour party and a Labour Member of Parliament is that the Labour party and Government have made the greatest progress on this issue. Indeed, they have tackled it head on.

Under Labour, child benefit has increased significantly since 1997, and the introduction of a children's tax credit that would provide a family with about £1,000 extra was announced. The Government have taken 1.2 million out of poverty, and that is to their great credit. Other measures have helped to tackle poverty: the national minimum wage, the working families tax credit and the legislation that gives workers paid holiday rights, which arose from the "Fairness at Work" White Paper. All those are powerful anti-poverty measures.

We are heading in the right direction but, as I have said, there are areas of concern, and I shall say a few words on food and poverty. Diet-related diseases, which are defined as health problems due to the composition of the diet, are a major factor in premature death and disability. Coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes and cancer—I could go on—are all directly linked to diet. We would like to think that we have a good record, but in fact it is a very poor record, certainly when compared with the record of other affluent countries.

My hon. Friend the Minister quoted many figures; I shall quote one or two. British women are five times more likely to die from coronary heart disease than their French counterparts, and 300 per cent. more British men die from coronary heart disease than our Gallic neighbours. The low fruit and vegetable consumption in the United Kingdom is highlighted as a causal factor in many illnesses. For some, that is a matter of choice, but children often have little choice in what they consume. They rely on their parents or local education authority to provide a balanced and healthy diet.

A recent article about food, but not as we know it, in my local evening newspaper highlighted the issue. In a survey, schoolchildren confused sweetcorn with potatoes, peas with beans and even melons with celery. That shows the confusion between different healthy foods.

Food poverty relates to the ability to afford, or to have regular access to, a range of foods from which to select a healthy and varied diet. The food justice campaign has been aimed at eradicating food poverty. It claims that an average of 5,000 people in every parliamentary constituency may be malnourished. That is a very large figure, but it is that campaign's estimate. An estimated four in every 10 people admitted to hospital are malnourished in some way.

Last December, the Child Poverty Action Group produced a report that stressed the importance of healthy eating to a child's development and general health. Entitled "Poverty Bites", it claimed that 2 million children lived in families who could not afford to eat healthily. The report backs up research conducted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation two or three years ago, which found that the number of people in the UK without access to a healthy diet topped 4 million. The Minister mentioned the Acheson report of 1998, which highlighted the problems of food poverty and access to healthy food. While the social exclusion unit has recognised the problem, it has been left to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) to take the issue forward in his ten-minute Bill, Food Poverty (Eradication).

What needs to be done? Consumers need more information to make real choices. They need to know where their food comes from, how it was produced and whether it has any nutritional value. That is particularly true of children's food, and the Government have a powerful role to involve schools in promoting a balanced diet and healthy eating. Nearly a third of pupils in Middlesbrough are eligible for free school meals. Often, school is the only place where a poorer student can get a decent balanced meal. It is not enough to offer a baked potato and some limp lettuce alongside the usual chips and burgers and expect children to go for the healthy option. Local educational authorities and councils must work together to assess the extent and nature of food poverty in their area. They can identify the needs of local children and set them on the road to a reasonably healthy future.

The Government and the Minister have highlighted many things. We have made an excellent start. I want to thank the Government for that. Tackling child poverty gives hope to many of the children in my constituency. Great credit is due to the Government. Tackling child poverty and the wider issues of health and fitness must remain fundamental objectives if we are to achieve our social objective. It is a moral issue and it is an economic necessity. I am glad that we are having this debate. It has been a responsible and mature debate, although it was polarised on the vaccination issue for a moment or two. I have tried to bring the spirit of Westminster Hall debates back to it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Nigel Beard (in the Chair): Order. There are just under 50 minutes left of this debate and four hon. Members wish to speak. If they can keep their remarks within 10 minutes, everyone will have a chance before the Minister replies to the debate.

5.13 pm

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): I am delighted that we are having this debate this afternoon on child health and maternity. As the Minister may know, child health is an issue in which I have taken a special interest over many years. I have initiated a number of Adjournment debates in this Chamber on that important subject. I was chairman of the Select Committee on Health for five years during which time we undertook a lengthy inquiry into children's health and produced a number of reports and recommendations. As a result of my involvement in those reports and my continuing quest to pursue Ministers with my concerns relating to children, I am now the chairman of a child health group which comprises representatives from many different organisations involved in child care, including the Royal College of Nursing and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health.

I listened carefully to the Minister's speech. I welcome many of the initiatives that the Government are promoting. However, while I acknowledge that the Government have a desire to improve child health, certain shortcomings and problems in the delivery of services need to be addressed. Many recommendations of the Health Select Committee's reports were focused on children in hospital. The Minister should know that surveys by the Royal College of Nursing paediatric nurse managers forum highlight the fact that children continue to be admitted to adult wards—as mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton). The increase in ambulatory and day care service provision has exacerbated the problem, as many units do not employ sufficient numbers of appropriately trained children's doctors and nurses.

Recent research in the UK shows that health care provision for adolescents remains inadequate. A study of teenagers in hospital demonstrated that only one in 10 stayed in a specific adolescent ward. I remind Members that adolescents who have to stay in adult wards often feel lonely, isolated, embarrassed and patronised. A survey of 18 hospitals in Wales showed that 7 per cent. of child patients admitted for in-patient care in 1998-99 went into adult wards, and 19 per cent. were treated as day patients in adult wards. The majority of the in-patient children were aged between 11 and 18, while day patients included children from the whole range of nought to 18. Almost half the children cared for in adult wards were day patients.

Action for Sick Children (Scotland) surveyed all the wards admitting children to Scottish hospitals in 2000. It found that 101 wards in 44 hospitals admitted patients aged between nought and 18. About 57 per cent. of the wards admitting children were designed as children's wards, while 43 per cent. were designated as mixed adult and children's wards. About 30 per cent. of those 44 mixed wards were medical, general and surgical; 23 per cent. ophthalmology and ENT; and the remainder split among 13 other specialties.

Will the Minister tell us what action is being taken to end the nursing of children on adult wards and ensure that specially trained staff care for all children? Children constitute a third of all attendees at accident and emergency departments, but the vast majority are not seen in an environment conducive to their needs or by staff appropriately trained and skilled in the care of children.

I welcome the Government's recent investment in accident and emergency services, often awarding funding to schemes intended to improve facilities for children and young people. The Minister will know, however, that a recent Audit Commission study showed that many dedicated children's areas cannot be used

[Mrs. Marion Roe]

because funding for appropriate staff is unavailable. Will the Minister make it clear how funding for such capital schemes is awarded, whether the cost implications for appropriate staffing are considered, and whether such schemes are monitored on the basis of outcomes?

Three other major concerns of the medical profession should be put to the Minister. Child health services are becoming unsustainable under working hours directives and clinical governance requirements. Does the Minister intend to make best use of nurses' talents by encouraging their extended role, which will mean significant investment in training, salaries and proper career pathways?

Commissioning tertiary specialist paediatric services is another problem. What arrangements will the Minister put in place, given that primary care trusts are unlikely to have the understanding or ability to promote those services? It is suspected that preference is likely to be given to adult services.

Unbalanced provision is another issue. Too many patients are going into intensive care neonatal services, which is generating disquiet. Clear direction is needed from the Department of Health regarding managed clinical networks to provide neonatal intensive care and special care for sick babies. What action are the Government are taking on that?

All sick children should be cared for in their own homes as far as possible. Children's community nursing teams, such as the Diana nurses in England and Wales, provide essential care and support in the home for children—and their families—who are disabled, chronically sick or terminally ill. However, fewer than one in 10 sick children has access to a 24-hour community service. With the establishment of primary care trusts, many children's community nursing services are becoming fragmented across adult-orientated organisations, which lack insight into the needs of sick children and their families. It is essential that changes to children's services should be instigated to meet the needs of children and their families rather than adults or organisational convenience.

For some time it has caused serious concern to those with an interest in child health that the majority of medicines used to treat children have not been researched for paediatric use. When such drugs are used on children, they are being used outside their licence, and adverse reactions cannot be recorded and monitored in the usual way. Each prescription is a small informal experiment. That state of affairs is surely unacceptable.

The Americans legislated in 1997 to provide incentives for investment in paediatric research, and with great effect. Within three years, 58 paediatric studies had taken place, and last year the United States Food and Drug Administration reported:

> "The paediatric provision has done more to generate clinical studies and useful prescribing information for the population than any other regulatory or legislative process to date".

In Europe, more than a year has passed since the Council of Ministers resolved to do something similar, but we are still waiting for a European Commission consultation that is supposed to be imminent. At the usual stately pace of Brussels, it could be several years before any real progress is made. I should like to know what the Minister is doing to give the matter the priority that it deserves so that children can be treated more safely sooner rather than later.

It is right that the remit of the Children's Commissioner for Wales was extended to include all services for children in all settings. I welcome plans for the creation of similar posts in Northern Ireland and Scotland. The appointment of Professor Aynsley-Green as national director for children's health care services is a positive step. However, his role focuses on health services, whereas it is the breadth of the remit of the Children's Commissioner, which crosses all Departments, that makes the position so important to children. Do the Government plan to have a Children's Commissioner in each country of the United Kingdom, to act as a powerful advocate for all children?

I turn to an issue with which I have been involved for many years. In 1985 my private Member's Bill on the prohibition of female circumcision in the UK became law. My quest to place the Bill on the statute book was intended not only to make people aware of the practice but to obtain Government funds to set up an education programme among the immigrant communities in which the abuse is prevalent.

I have raised the issue at many international conferences organised by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and have sought the assistance of international parliamentarians in stamping out the unacceptable genital mutilation of young girls. I am pleased to have recently been invited to participate in a three-member panel set up by the IPU to focus on the issue and devise ways in which we can assist in prohibiting female genital mutilation in all the countries in which it is practised.

The panel will be meeting in Marrakesh in March to take the taskforce forward. It would be a great help to my international parliamentary colleagues and me if the Minister could outline the actions that the Government are taking, first, to ensure that the education program for immigrant communities continues, and secondly, to identify, through social workers and the medical profession, when the abuse occurs. Also, can the Minister explain what action is being taken to prevent children from being sent abroad for this illegal procedure to take place, and whether, if girls are subjected to female genital mutilation in other countries, prosecutions can be brought under UK law on their return? It is estimated that as many as 15,000 girls may be at risk of female genital mutilation in the UK.

Child health must never be allowed to slip off the Government's priority agenda. I hope that my comments this afternoon will assist in focusing the Minister's mind on important issues relating to the subject, and I look forward to hearing her response to all the points that I have raised.

5.25 pm

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): I, too, congratulate you, Mr. Beard, on your elevation to the Chairman's Panel. I have long thought that the House did not give sufficient recognition to outer London constituencies such as ours. I am delighted by your appointment, which is, I hope, a small but significant step towards that recognition.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe). I cannot hope to compete with her expertise and knowledge of, and record on, the subject. I do not have any children, and, indeed, I hope to avoid personal experience of maternity services for a little while longer. My reason for attending the debate is entirely parochial. I wish to discuss the quality of the maternity services unit at Northwick Park hospital, which serves my constituents.

Before I address that, I reinforce the point that I made during an earlier intervention to my hon. Friend the Minister about the need for more funding and support packages for carers of those with autism and Asperger's syndrome, which is a form of autism. I say that because I have supported a constituent and friend, the excellent Raj Ray, through difficult pressures during a dispute with his local authority about accommodation, which related to his son. I pay tribute to the excellent Harrow carers centre, and the Harrow branch of the National Autistic Society. They are two bright spots in Harrow, providing services for the carers of people with autism and Asperger's syndrome.

I urge the Minister to pass back the request for a review of the revenue allocation process that applies to grants for children's services that are given to local authorities. In Harrow, the number of children who are taken into care has increased greatly, and the pressure on our adoption services has also grown. The present funding formula does not recognise those additional pressures.

I shall comment on the maternity services of North West London Hospitals NHS trust and, particularly, Northwick Park hospital. When I was first elected in 1997, there was considerable worry in my constituency about the quality of service that Northwick Park hospital offered. It had an appalling reputation. Operations were cancelled regularly, waiting lists were rising, the fabric of the hospital was often dreadful and the accident and emergency unit was under huge pressure. There seemed to be a financial crisis every year that usually kicked off in December and lasted until the end of March. The sense of secrecy that pervaded many discussions with the chief executive and the hospital board caused great frustration to many of my constituents. Indeed, the only planned capital investment during the previous six years was in the private ward.

Things have improved, but real challenges remain. There is a great need for investment in maternity care services at Northwick Park hospital. There was a sensible merger with the Central Middlesex hospital, and a benefit of that has been to widen the pool of expertise of the clinicians and midwives who are involved with maternity services. The merger delivered a new leadership team for Northwick Park hospital that has experience of running units and has succeeded in attracting investment for maternity services. Accident and emergency facilities have received a long overdue £2.2 million investment, and a new 21-bed unit opened in January that will help to ensure that there is sufficient bed capacity this winter to allow planned operations to continue.

However, additional Government resources are necessary to improve the fabric of the building and the environment for maternity services at Northwick Park hospital. Some would say that we should look to the budget of Brent and Harrow health authority. Although the 9.5 per cent. increase in that budget for the next financial year is extremely welcome and an excellent start, it is simply not enough to fund the investment in maternity services that is necessary.

The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) alluded to the extra investment for maternity services that the Government announced in October. Some would say that that should have funded the expansion and refurbishment of maternity services at Northwick Park hospital. The money that we secured—about £535,000—was extremely welcome and has been well used. It has provided vital medical equipment for monitoring and anaesthetics in the laboratory wards and the obstetrics theatres, and other basic equipment that was lacking. Nevertheless, the substantial investment necessary to improve the quality of maternity services at the main hospital serving my constituents has not yet been provided.

The circumstances surrounding maternity stand in stark relief to those surrounding adult intensive care at Northwick Park hospital, which received an investment of more than £1 million in January last year. Similar investment is necessary in neonatal intensive care facilities at Northwick Park hospital as part of a wider modernisation of maternity services and provision. I assure the Minister that investment in Northwick Park hospital is extremely worth while. The investment in adult intensive therapy unit services resulted in a substantial reduction in the number of transfers of patients in intensive care from Northwick Park hospital to other hospitals—down from more than 106 transfers before that investment to just a small handful now. That throws into stark relief the issues surrounding maternity services.

I warn my hon. Friend the Minister that I have raised the issue before in questions to Health Ministers, and I intend to continue to press the need for investment in the maternity unit until such time as she signs off the necessary investment. The fabric of the maternity services building is a massive problem for the mums, the families who visit and staff, who try to provide a service in a challenging environment. I even went to the trouble of persuading my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to visit the maternity services unit, and he was impressed by the need for investment. It would cost about £12 million—a small sum in the general scheme of things—and would help tackle issues surrounding the recruitment and retention of midwives in north-west London.

My hon. Friend the Minister will be delighted to hear that a bid has been submitted to the London regional office of the national health service. I experience violent mood swings about the performance of that office. Sometimes I believe that it does an excellent job, especially in listening so sensitively to the need for investment in adult intensive care provision. I was delighted that the then chief executive of that office, Nigel Crisp, was duly elevated.

I am deeply unconvinced by the performance of the London regional office when it comes to defending the Mount Vernon cancer unit from the predators in the eastern regional office. I hope that it will get its act together on that. It has been sympathetic in the past about Northwick Park and I hope that it will be deeply sympathetic about that hospital.

[Mr. Gareth R. Thomas]

There is a real issue about the quality of neonatal intensive care. It is currently graded a level 3 intensive care facility. If investment can be delivered by the Minister and the London regional office, it will be the fourth or fifth largest unit in London, handling some 5,000 births a year. It is inevitable that a percentage of those births will need neonatal intensive care. Surely there is a sensible case for investing in neonatal intensive care facilities where they are needed most, rather than just locating them close to teaching hospitals in central London.

Finally, the Minister touched on recruitment and retention of midwives. I welcome the news that she is in discussions with the Royal College of Nursing about that. We have a particular concern about recruitment in London and the need for residential accommodation. Northwick park hospital is looking at the issue. I urge her to be munificent, perhaps not now, but certainly within the next few weeks and to grant or to encourage her officials to grant the business case that has been submitted for investment in maternity services at Northwick Park.

5.36 pm

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): I pay tribute to midwives and in particular the Royal College of Midwives, which is celebrating its centenary. We had a function in the House only last week. The Amess family has much to thank midwives for, and I am especially grateful to Eve and Ladze. There is perhaps no more intimate experience than to be present at the birth of a child. It is a unique experience and a joyful one when there is a successful outcome. When it does not go the way that one would like, it is obviously traumatic. I certainly have much to thank those midwives for.

Having been there from the start of the births of all my five children, I think that I would know what to do if a message were to go up on the annunciator screen to say that someone needed assistance in delivering a baby. It would not just be boiling water and using towels. I am sure that no one would want me to assist, but I have an insight into what goes on. I would not swap places with my wife and other ladies for all the tea in China. I keep many animals and my fish and birds seem to produce their babies so much more easily. I pay tribute to them all.

In a speech to the annual conference of the Royal College of Midwives last year, the Secretary of State said:

> "Midwives are the best people to lead the drive to recruit more midwives. In some places that is already happening. By summer I can tell this conference today we will have midwives who will work with every region to champion the recruitment drive in all parts of the country."

Can the Minister tell us whether that is happening? He continued:

> "With your support and the investment we are making we can now set ambitious expansion plans for midwife numbers working in the NHS. I can say today that by the end of next year I expect to see an extra 500 midwives working in the NHS. Over the next five years or so I expect the total numbers to have risen to an extra 2,000 midwives, the largest increase for over a decade."

It would be useful if the Minister could tell us what sort of progress is being made in that regard. As she knows, the royal college is concerned that there should be an additional 5,000 midwives nationally to provide the levels of care required by women. It believes that women should have one-to-one care from their midwife: they should be cared for by the same midwife throughout the term of their childbirth continuum.

This year, the level of midwife vacancies has decreased only slightly, resulting in the situation being described as "very serious" instead of "critical". A recent Royal College of Midwives survey of issues affecting midwives shows that midwives are as concerned about the standards of care that they can give women as they are about the low levels of pay. Indeed, those low pay levels are perceived by midwives as reflecting the value placed on them by the health service. Has the Minister any ideas about how to address that problem?

I shall describe a number of the ideas that came into my mind as the Minister was speaking. She mentioned smoking. My wife was a chain-smoker who could not have cared less about smoking being antisocial until she became pregnant, and she has never touched a cigarette since. Indeed, she is now probably the worst sort of reformed smoker. I am not advocating that ladies should become pregnant to give up smoking; I am simply saying what happened in my wife's case.

I do not want to start a row about immunisation, but it is not good enough to talk about people jumping on the bandwagon. The Government know only too well—I am not looking to apportion blame here—that it is a difficult situation. Even if every Member of Parliament with children said that their children had had the MMR jab—my three youngest have had it; the two oldest, who are 17 and 16, had single jabs—that would not restore confidence. The Government face a considerable problem.

The Minister said that there was no evidence or proof in relation to the dangers of mobile phones. I do not accept that. Mobile phones damage children's health in a real way, and the entire country is obsessed with using them. Parents—I am guilty of this—give children mobile phones because they think that they can use them if they are ever under threat, but the situation has become ridiculous. Children over-use mobile phones; they come home from school texting one another. The situation is completely out of control.

Putting aside the threat of radiation, I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) about speech therapists. Before hon. Members start smiling, let me explain that from the age of five, I had to go to a speech therapist for three years. I was extremely grateful for the help that that wonderful lady gave me. There is no magic solution to the problem, but there is a huge shortage of speech therapists.

I also agree with my hon. Friend's point about mental health. That is a huge problem, as I know the Minister recognises. I am talking about the number of children who, for whatever reason, seem to be depressed and to have eating disorders. Some commit suicide. I do not have an easy answer, but that area certainly needs to be addressed.

The Minister knows that I was not best pleased when Southend hospital was given a one-star rating, and we could argue about the six points that were used to give it that rating. It is an excellent hospital, particularly with regard to the treatment of children and the maternity service. The Harbour unit, for instance, provides care in the children's ward at the hospital for up to four highly dependent and chronically disabled children. The unit was opened two or three years ago and has enabled the hospital to repatriate patients who had been cared for in London and elsewhere in specialist units.

I am fortunate enough to be the patron of a project called "Building Blocks", whereby some children's services will be linked with Kingsdown school for children with special needs. That is a good example of the local authority and the hospital working closely together. We have the wonderful Neptune children's unit and an excellent special care baby unit, and many other good things are happening in the hospital. I am sure that the Minister will not have time to reply to many, if any, of the points that I have made, but perhaps she will drop me a line on that.

5.44 pm

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): So much to say, so little time—I will be brief. Of the many points that could be made, I shall pick out only two. The first relates to maternity services, and I acknowledge my indebtedness to the Rosie maternity hospital, which is part of the Addenbrooks NHS trust, in my constituency. None of my children was born at the Rosie, as we lived elsewhere then, but it does a terrific job, with some 4,500 deliveries a year. Only 3,000 are from the Cambridge area, with others travelling up to 50 miles to attend the hospital. That shows the importance of enabling choice, and the changing childbirth system does precisely that.

When I discussed issues with staff at the Rosie maternity hospital, I found that the service was under intense pressure. The return-to-practice initiative of the past year had not delivered what it should because midwives felt that they did not want to return to a practice in which they felt stressed by excessive workload. The Rosie understood that problem during the past two years and the response, as at Addenbrooks, was to be highly proactive in work force planning and introducing a sense of work-life balance and career development for the staff in the trust. Awards were won on that basis.

One important insight is that it is not just about offering work-life balance for midwives with family responsibilities, because the net result was other full-time staff bitterly complaining that they were working round the needs of those staff, and thus working late, at weekends and to accommodate emergency pressures. The burdens of mentoring other staff all fell on those who did not have access to family-friendly policies. The right balance had to be found and work-life balance had to apply to everyone, not only those with family responsibilities.

Evidence-based management of care is crucial. The Rosie found that it was not always easy to remove hierarchies and previous patterns of care. By responding not only to the obstetrician's view of the appropriate level of care and intervention but to midwife's ideas, it was possible to reduce the pressure on beds. Mothers attending the Rosie for an extended period created some of the worst work load pressures.

Offering substantial education and development to staff is also important. I visited Papworth hospital last week and spoke about extending the role of education and development for non-medical staff in the NHS. An issue that arose was the difficulty, through the process of transferring commissioning to primary care trusts, of making education and development in acute hospital services a sufficient priority. Funding negotiations between the primary care trust and the acute service focus greatly on the delivery of specific outputs to the PCT's priorities, yet education and development of staff is crucial for a trust to develop as a business. In the past two years, it has delivered a great deal to the Rosie hospital.

I move on to children's acute hospital services. I spoke in the debate on the Bristol Royal infirmary inquiry report and was surprised that more was not said about the timetable and the Government's intentions on the reconfiguration of children's services. We must consider, almost from scratch, how to structure children's hospital services. The current primary, secondary and tertiary organisation is not necessarily the best structure, with regard to outcomes for children and child-centred care. Roles and relationships must be re-examined, as the Kennedy inquiry suggested, because a hospital such as Addenbrook's might not currently fit the criteria for a tertiary children's hospital, but it might be the sort of place where one would want to position a hub, in a hub-and-spoke model for children's hospital services.

5.50 pm

Yvette Cooper: I congratulate you, Mr. Beard, on your elevation to the Chairman's Panel, and on your chairmanship of the debate.

I will address as many as possible of the points that have been made, and I will write to hon. Members if I fail to cover the subject that they raised.

Many hon. Members raised points about maternity, such as the importance of women-centred care, and of providing choice. The hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) expressed concern that the national service framework might be too rigid, and that it might provide too many national standards. On the contrary, the purpose of the NSF is to increase the choices that are available to women. However, it also has the task of ensuring that those choices satisfy recognised national standards, so that women throughout the country can have confidence in the quality of the care that they receive.

Several hon. Members raised issues about the number of midwives. I agree that the national health service needs to recruit more of them. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas), and other hon. Members, asked about midwife recruitment in London and the south-east. During the past year, there has been an increase in the number of midwives in those regions, and there has also been an increase throughout the country, which has more than 18,000 whole-time equivalent midwives, compared with 17,660 in the previous year.

The number of midwives—both whole-time equivalent, and the head-count figure—is rising, but we must ensure that that trend continues. To achieve that, we have increased the number of midwives in training by 20 per cent. since 1997.

[Yvette Cooper]

Recruitment and retention must also be improved. A more attractive recruitment package has been introduced that includes free refresher training, a grant of £1,500 to midwives, help with child care, free travel and eligibility for housing packages. We are working with the Royal College of Midwives to improve recruitment and retention.

As 60 per cent. of returners work part time, the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) is correct that we must ensure that working pressures are not too great for midwives who return to the profession, and that there is the right kind of flexibility to support midwives in their family lives—and that should not apply only to midwives who have children.

With regard to our endeavour to improve recruitment and retention, the improving working lives package that is operating throughout the country is making an important contribution, but we need to make further progress.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) made important points about the need to improve maternity services, and I wish to highlight the issue of domestic violence. She is right that domestic violence sometimes starts, or increases, during pregnancy. With regard to identifying domestic violence, there are examples of excellent practice throughout the country, and important work has been done in partnership with the Royal College of Midwives to help midwives to identify and support women who are suffering from it. However, a consultant raised an interesting problem when she told me that her practice was experiencing tensions between the principle of involving fathers at every stage of pregnancy—to which she is committed—and finding opportunities to address domestic violence with the women on their own. This is not a simple issue, but good practice exists, and better ways to disseminate it throughout the NHS must be found.

Issues were raised about breast-feeding, and the importance of post-natal care. Again, shining examples of good practice can be cited. On Friday, I visited a general practice in my constituency where the staff have doubled the breast-feeding rate of their patients in five years. They emphasised that that had been achieved not by telling women what to do, but by giving them the information to make their own choices, and by giving them support when problems arose.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West made a strong case about maternity services at Northwick Park hospital. I cannot give him a detailed answer about the hospital, but he knows that we are providing additional investment for maternity services and increased investment for neonatal intensive care. We must go further, but I heard the points that he made.

My hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East (Dr. Kumar) made important points about food poverty and the importance of access to a healthy diet during childhood. He is right that that is critical for preventing coronary heart disease in later life. It is true that there are deep inequalities in that area because a person with a low-income background is three times more likely to suffer coronary heart disease than a person with a high-income background. We are making progress with the five-a-day community programmes, but I agree that more could be done.

The hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) raised important points about the problems that are faced by children in adult services. There is a general problem that acute services have historically been designed around adults, and children have been slotted in later on. Young people are in a difficult position. That problem is due to the way in which the NHS developed, and many such points were made in the Kennedy report to which the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire referred. We have brought forward the national service framework's acute module for children in order to address the points more rapidly. The NSF will report this year, and I want hon. Members who are interested to contribute points as part of the consultation on the national service framework. If hon. Members wish to pursue that, I shall arrange it.

I shall take a few minutes to address issues that surround the MMR vaccination. Throughout the debate of this week, I have tried to keep politics out of the issue because it is too important for that. Children's health is at stake. I did not raise political differences during my opening speech, and I have tried to refrain from a political discussion. Medical experts are lined up together, and I hope that political parties can also line up together. We had disputes about who said what and when two years ago, and hon. Members said that they tried to establish a bipartisan approach. Letters and minutes of meetings are on record about the subject. However, all that is too trivial in comparison to what is happening at the moment.

The Opposition have called for separate jabs to be available. Let me make it clear that medical advice indicates that the introduction of separate jabs on the NHS would push coverage down compared with the current process. There are several reasons for that. First, the vaccination process would require six jabs rather than two, which increases the chance that people would not complete the course. Secondly, there would have to be gaps between jabs and, indeed, Dr. Wakefield has recommended that there should be a year's gap between immunisations. If separate jabs are used, parents are effectively asked to choose the jab that their children should not receive and, therefore, the disease to which their children should be exposed at that time. That is not a real choice.

The controversy is having an impact on confidence. Evidence from Japan and the 1970s shows that confidence is wrecked completely when government shift policy in response to worries. That is why Japan had serious measles outbreaks during the 1970s, and it is why coverage of whooping cough also fell during the 1970s. That led to children going to hospital, and children dying.

Why do parents want separate jabs? There is no evidence to show that separate jabs are associated with a lower risk than the MMR vaccination. Indeed, the position is quite the reverse, and even Dr. Wakefield's research suggests that. People want single jabs because people such as Opposition Members keep calling for them. They can qualify their remarks as much as they like, but they know the way in which their remarks are interpreted. They were interpreted in that way before the election.

I have a quote from Conservative party central office from before the past election. It states:

> "If immunisation rates don't rise substantially when we are returned to government, we will make single dose vaccines available to provide parental choice while, at the same time, continuing to give advice based on evidence of the safety of MMR."

The Conservative party was calling for single jabs then. The public interpreted that, and that is what they expect. They know that Opposition politicians are calling for single jabs, and that undermines confidence in the MMR vaccination.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Six o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 28 January 2002

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Terrorism Act

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Solicitor-General, pursuant to her answer of 3 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 106W, how many and what prosecutions have been initiated under section 54 of the Terrorism Act 2000 in *(a)* Great Britain and *(b)* Northern Ireland; and how many of these charges in each jurisdiction concern (i) Northern Ireland conflict related offences and (ii) international terrorism. [29822]

The Solicitor-General: One prosecution has been initiated under section 54 of the Terrorism Act 2000 in England and Wales and that prosecution relates to international terrorism.

The Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland has informed me that he is not aware of any prosecutions being initiated in Northern Ireland under section 54 of the Terrorism Act 2000.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Solicitor-General, further to the Secretary of State for the Home Department's answer of 3 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 106W, on the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2000, *(a)* how many and *(b)* what prosecutions have been initiated under section 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17 and 18 of the Terrorism Act 2000 in (i) Great Britain and (ii) Northern Ireland; how many of these charges in each jurisdiction concern *(a)* Northern Ireland conflict related offences and *(b)* international terrorism. [29252]

The Solicitor-General: The Terrorism Act 2000 came into force on 19 February 2001.

Prosecutions for a total of 51 offences have been initiated in England and Wales under sections 11 to 18 of the Act, of which 15 offences relate to the affairs of Northern Ireland and 35 offences relate to international terrorism. Further details are given as follows:

Section 11

Five offences related to international terrorism.

One offence related to the affairs of Northern Ireland.

Section 12

One offence related to international terrorism.

Section 13

One offence related to international terrorism.

Section 14

This section does not include an offence.

Section 15

One offence related to international terrorism.

Nine offences related to the affairs of Northern Ireland. This figure is made up of three separate cases in which three defendants are charged with s.15 offences.

Conspiracy to commit an offence under s.15

Four offences related to international terrorism. This figure is made up of two separate cases in which two defendants are charged with conspiracy to commit an offence under s.15.

Section 16

16 offences related to international terrorism. This figure is made up of two separate cases in which eight defendants are charged with section 16 offences.

Conspiracy to commit an offence under section 16

Four offences related to international terrorism. This figure is made up of two separate cases in which two defendants are charged with conspiracy to commit an offence under s.16.

Section 17

One offence related to international terrorism.

Six prosecutions have been initiated for offences related to the affairs of Northern Ireland. This figure is made up of two separate cases in which three defendants are charged with section 17 offences.

Conspiracy to commit an offence under section 17

Two offences related to international terrorism. This figure is made up of one case in which two defendants are charged with conspiracy to commit section 17 offences.

The Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland is aware of only one prosecution being initiated in Northern Ireland under sections 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17 and 18 of the Terrorism Act 2000. That prosecution was under section 11(1) of the Act and was connected with the affairs of Northern Ireland.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Ministerial Transport

Bob Russell: To ask the President of the Council when he last used the railway service in connection with his official duties; what station he left from and what was the destination; and whether it is his intention to make greater use of the railways in future. [28104]

Mr. Robin Cook: By definition, my role as Leader of the House of Commons is largely confined to London. However, since 1 November I have travelled by rail on non-departmental business from London to York, Cheltenham and Brussels and from Edinburgh to Lockerbie.

I intend to visit the National Assembly for Wales shortly to discuss their procedures and will travel to Cardiff by rail.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Bodies

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will list those public bodies to which his Department appoints members and which are not listed in Public Bodies 2000; [17600]

(2) if he will list those public bodies which are the responsibility of his Department and which are not listed in Public Bodies 2000. [17601]

Dr. John Reid: The bodies which my Department has responsibility for and appoints members to, which are not listed in Public Bodies 2000 are as follows:

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel

Northern Ireland Policing Board[1]

Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland[2]

Other Bodies

Chief Electoral Officer for NI
Independent Assessor of Military Complaints Procedures
Independent Commissioner for Detained Terrorist Suspects
International Fund for Ireland[3]
Life Sentence Review Commissioners
Oversight Commissioner
Sentence Review Commissioners

[1] Replaced Police Authority for Northern Ireland on 4 November 2001

[2] Replaced Independent Commission for Police Complaints on 6 November 2000

[3] Board members of the Fund are appointed jointly by the British and Irish Governments.

Local Bodies

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list those local bodies which were set up under legislation which is the responsibility of his Department since May 1997. [17602]

Dr. John Reid: My Department has set up the following bodies since May 1997:

Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel
Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission
Policing Board for Northern Ireland[1]
Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland[2]
Life Sentence Review Commissioners
Oversight Commissioner
Sentence Review Commissioners

[1] Replaced Police Authority for Northern Ireland on 4 November 2001

[2] Replaced Independent Commission for Police Complaints on 6 November 2000

Dublin Bombing (1974)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what request he has received for assistance from the Irish Government's Independent Commission of Inquiry into the 1974 Dublin bombing; when the request was received; what his response was; and if he will make a statement. [20973]

Dr. John Reid: An initial request was received by my predecessor from Mr. Justice Barron on 21 November 2000 asking for assistance in his Independent Commission of Inquiry into the Dublin, Monaghan and Dundalk bombings of 1974. All relevant Government Departments and agencies have been engaged in a comprehensive trawl of their files to establish what material may still be in existence. This has required an extremely time consuming manual trawl of a huge number of files.

I met Mr. Justice Barron on 17 January to update him on the matter and I hope to be able to respond substantively to his request in the near future.

Electoral Arrangements

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will begin the review of the electoral and structural arrangements deriving from the Good Friday Agreement; and if he will make a statement. [28843]

Mr. Browne: The recently completed Strand One Review, which looked at Assembly electoral arrangements, concluded that this issue should be looked at again in the review provided for under paragraph 8 of the Validation, Implementation and Review section of the Belfast Agreement. As yet, no start date has been agreed but the Government intend to discuss this with the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Assembly parties.

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will next meet David Ford, leader of the Alliance party of Northern Ireland, to discuss matters relating to electoral arrangements for First Minister and Deputy First Minister of the Northern Ireland Assembly; and if he will make a statement. [28842]

Mr. Browne: No such meeting has been scheduled or, indeed, requested.

We have just completed a three month Review of Assembly voting procedures under the provisions contained in paragraph 36 of the Strand One section of the Belfast Agreement. This was a constructive process, which helped clarify the issues for all participants. Furthermore, it was agreed at the conclusion of the review that this subject should be looked at again during the review of Assembly arrangements provided for in paragraph 8 of the Validation Implementation and Review section of the agreement.

We have yet to decide when this review should begin—I shall need to discuss this with the Irish Government and with the Assembly parties. I expect to meet David Ford in his capacity as leader of the Alliance party as a part of this process.

Trial Records

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how long trial records are kept for those charged with terrorist acts; what difference there is between the records kept for those found *(a)* guilty and *(b)* not guilty; and what the time limits are for keeping records for trials of (i) terrorists in Northern Ireland and (ii) other criminal trials. [27659]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I have been asked to reply.

All records in relation to Crown court hearings in Northern Ireland are preserved permanently, as is the case for such records in England and Wales. Records in relation to magistrates courts in Northern Ireland are normally destroyed after 15 years, with the exception of records containing entries for a census year which are retained permanently. Retention schedules for records of magistrates courts in England and Wales are different.

There is no difference between the records kept for those found guilty and those found not guilty in criminal trials either terrorist or non-terrorist.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much aid to Afghanistan for reconstruction will be given *(a)* bilaterally and *(b)* through the European Union. [31088]

Clare Short: As I announced at the Conference on the Reconstruction of Afghanistan earlier this week in Tokyo, the UK has committed a further £200 million over the next five financial years for both reconstruction and humanitarian assistance.

The European Commission (EC) has pledged euro 200 million (£125 million) for 2002. It intends to propose to the European Union's budgetary authority to provide assistance at a comparable level in the subsequent four years, totalling approximately euro 1 billion (£600 million) over the period 2002–06. The UK share of EC contributions is 20 per cent.—which is charged to the DFID budget.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will report on the outcome of the Afghanistan Reconstruction Conference held in Tokyo on January 21 and 22, with particular reference to meeting the needs of Afghan women. [30413]

Clare Short: I refer my hon. Friend to the oral statement I made to the House this afternoon at columns 21–36.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what contributions the United Kingdom *(a)* has made and *(b)* has committed itself to make to the costs of creating and supporting the interim Government of Afghanistan (i) bilaterally and (ii) through agencies of the (A) United Nations and (B) European Union. [29696]

Clare Short: We have set aside £20 million in this financial year to support the Interim Administration and the United Nations-led transitional recovery and rehabilitation process, while continuing to respond to humanitarian needs. This further support follows on from the £40 million of emergency humanitarian relief assistance that we have already provided to UN agencies, the Red Cross and NGOs since September 2001.

Our support to date has included £1 million to the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to support peacemaking efforts and the establishment of the Afghan Interim Administration. We have also contributed $3 million (£2.075 million) to support the costs of the Interim Administration, including civil servants' salaries, through the UNDP-administered trust fund.

As I announced at the Conference on the Reconstruction of Afghanistan earlier this week in Tokyo, the UK has committed a further £200 million ($288 million) over the next five financial years for both reconstruction and humanitarian assistance.

This pledge is in addition to the significant sums that the UK contributes to the World Bank, European Union and Asian Development bank who will also be channelling funds into Afghanistan over coming years. The European Commission has pledged £125 million for 2002, of which the UK share, which is charged to DFID's budget, is 20 per cent.

Departmental Expenditure (Publications)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her estimate is of the expenditure of her Department on newspapers, magazines and periodicals in each of the last four years. [30095]

Clare Short: The Department's core, central expenditure on newspaper and periodicals (journals and magazines) is as follows.

£

	Newspapers	*Periodicals*
1997–98	4,786	57,639
1998–99	4,736	61,901
1999–2000	5,748	65,660
2000–01	2,540	97,824

The decline in expenditure on newspapers in 2000–01 reflects the decentralisation of non-core provision to Departments and country offices. The rise in expenditure on periodicals in the same year reflects the electronic provision of certain periodicals, which are now more easily available to a larger proportion of DFID's UK-based and overseas staff.

World Bank Loans

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent representations she has received on replacing World Bank loans to the world's poorest countries with grants. [29628]

Clare Short: The US Administration are advocating that the World Bank arm that provides assistance to low-income countries should cease to focus on 40-year highly concessional loans and instead provide at least 50 per cent. grant. This proposal is opposed by all other countries. It would severely deplete the resources available to IDA and undermine the Poverty Reduction Strategy Process, which has led to greatly improved effectiveness in development partnerships in recent years. I have not received any direct representations in support of this proposal, but the issue has been discussed in many forums. The Government of the United States of America have made representations at official level. The UK—along with many other countries that contribute resources to IDA—believes that we should protect and enhance IDA's existing role as the largest provider of concessional finance to the world's poorest countries and that grant should be provided by bi-lateral donors in a way which complements IDA lending.

Debt Reduction

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the role of debt reduction in achieving 2015 goals on poverty reduction. [29704]

Clare Short: In the 41 heavily indebted poor countries, the heavy burden of servicing debt reduces the resources available for tackling poverty and offsets the benefits of development assistance. There is in these countries a strong link between debt relief and poverty reduction. Following debt relief, the social expenditures of HIPC countries are projected to rise by an average of some $1.7 billion per year. On average, a quarter of this increased social expenditure will go towards health schemes directed at HIV/AIDS and diseases like malaria and tuberculosis, with 40 per cent. being directed towards education. HIPC countries will spend on average much more on such priority social investments than on debt service. This will directly benefit the poor in those countries.

However, while debt relief for ~~the~~ HIPC countries is a necessary condition for poverty reduction, it is not enough. Huge numbers of poor people live in countries which are not heavily indebted, particularly in south Asia. It is vital that their needs are not neglected as a result of our efforts to help the HIPC countries. In addition to debt relief, many other factors are important for reducing poverty. These include the Governments' own policies, the levels of development assistance they receive and their ability to attract foreign direct investment, to capture the benefits of trade and to create an environment where the domestic private sector can flourish. The UK is working to address all of these at the international level and through our partnerships with developing countries.

Volcanic Eruption, Democratic Republic of the Congo

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with the Foreign Office concerning the recent volcanic eruption in Goma; and what steps her Department is taking to ensure a co-ordinated approach with the Foreign Office on the provision of aid to those affected by the disaster. [30398]

Clare Short: My Department has been in regular consultation with our embassies in Kigali and Kinshasa. DFID and the FCO work closely together on issues affecting the region.

TREASURY

Working Families Tax Credit

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer from the inception of the working families tax credit to date, what the average number of working days for the processing of applications for working families tax credit from families in the Perth constituency has been; and what the UK average is. [30874]

Dawn Primarolo: The figures requested are not available for individual constituencies, or as an average for the period since working families tax credit began in 1999. For the 12 months ending 31 December 2001, the average number of days taken to process a working families tax credit application in Great Britain was 14.5.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many applications for working families tax credit from families in the Perth constituency in the last 12 months have not been dealt with within the average number of working days for the processing of applications from families in Perth constituency. [30875]

Dawn Primarolo: The figures requested are not available for individual constituencies.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what has been the average sum paid out by way of compensation to applicants for working families tax credit in the Perth constituency in the last year for which figures are available; [30873]

(2) how many applications from the Perth constituency have received compensatory payments from the Inland Revenue with respect to delays in the processing of their working families tax credit applications. [30876]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue Code of Practice allows for certain exceptional payments to be made to working families tax credit (WFTC) applicants to recognise the effects of unreasonable delays in paying their tax credit entitlement. Figures are not available for such payments broken down by individual constituency. However, available records show that, since WFTC began in October 1999 to date, no such payments have been made to any WFTC applicants in Perthshire.

VAT (Sports and Leisure)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to introduce further relief from value added tax for local authority sport and leisure facilities; and if he will make a statement. [30018]

Mr. Boateng: Decisions on taxation are considered on an annual basis as part of the Chancellor's overall Budget judgment.

Aggregates Tax

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has discussed with the Scotland Office the implementation of the aggregates tax in Scotland. [31009]

Mr. Boateng: The Government have received a large number of representations regarding the aggregates levy, and have held discussions regarding its implementation with a wide range of organisations both within and outside Government.

Budget Statement

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he intends to deliver his Budget Statement. [31612]

Mr. Gordon Brown: On Wednesday 17 April.

Unemployment Benefits

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people are claiming benefits relating to unemployment; and if he will make a statement. [28641]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter to Miss Anne McIntosh from Len Cook, dated 28 January 2002:

> As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question regarding the number of people claiming benefits relating to unemployment. (28641)
>
> The claimant count consists of all people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance or National Insurance credits at Employment Service local offices. They must declare that they are out of work, capable of, available for and actively seeking work during the week in which their claim is made.
>
> The latest available figure relates to December 2001, when the seasonally adjusted claimant count for the United Kingdom was 963,500.

Drug Smuggling

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent action he has taken to prevent and deter drug smuggling from Jamaica to the United Kingdom. [26529]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* In partnership with police and immigration, Customs closely target flights, including those from Jamaica, identified as having a high risk of drug trafficking. Customs also work closely with Jamaican colleagues to help identify and arrest couriers before they board their flight to the UK. Customs are in discussion with the Jamaican authorities and others to improve the overall effectiveness of action to tackle cocaine supply from Jamaica. The UK also supports interdiction activity in the Caribbean area to stop bulk consignments of cocaine reaching Jamaica for onward shipment to the UK.

Accidental Deaths (Children)

Bob Russell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many children died in accidents away from home, other than road deaths, in each of the last five years for which figures are available in the age groups *(a)* zero to seven, *(b)* eight to 13 and *(c)* 14 to 18 years; and if he will classify them in terms of (i) holiday or adventure related, (ii) work or work related and (iii) other. [29743]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter to Bob Russell from Len Cook, dated 28 January 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question concerning the number of children dying of accidents away from home, other than road deaths, in the last five years in the age groups (a) zero to seven, (b) eight to 13, and (c) 14 to 18 years, and if these can be classified into (i) holiday or adventure related, (ii) work or work related, and (iii) other. (29743)

The answer to parts (a) to (c) are given in the table below:

Number of deaths occurring away from the home caused by accidents other than road deaths[1], persons by age group, England and Wales, 1996–2000

Age group	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
0–7 years[2]	20	18	11	23	12
8–13 years	24	23	21	18	19
14–18 years	40	33	31	26	31

[1] International Classification of Diseases. Ninth Revision, codes E850-E869, E880-E928, E929.2-E929.9

[2] Excludes deaths under 28 days

Note:

Data are for occurrences of death per calendar year. Latest year's data are for 2000.

It is not possible to provide figures for whether these deaths were (i) holiday or adventure related,(ii) work or work related, or (iii) other.

Bob Russell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many children died in accidents in the home, other than fire, in each of the last five years for which figures are available in the age groups *(a)* zero to seven, *(b)* eight to 13 and *(c)* 14 to 18 years. [29742]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter to Bob Russell from Len Cook, dated 28 January 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question concerning the number of children dying of accidents in the home, other than fire related, in the last five years in the age groups (a) zero to seven, (b) eight to 13, and (c) 14 to 18 years. (29742)

The answer is given in the table below:

Number of deaths in the home[1] occurring from accidents other than fire[2], persons by age group, England and Wales, 1996–2000

	Age group		
	0–7 years[3]	8–13 years	14–18 years
1996	67	8	37
1997	50	16	50
1998	55	17	42
1999	75	18	37
2000	63	11	38

[1] Includes the category 'Residential institution'. Deaths are only coded for place of occurrence of accident for selected ICD9 codes where there was an inquest.

[2] International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision, (ICD9) codes E850-E869, E880-E888, E900-E928, E929.2-E929.9 (excluding E929.4).

[3] Excludes deaths under 28 days.

Note:

Data are for occurrences of death per calendar year. Latest year's data are for 2000

Tax Evasion

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* individuals and *(b)* businesses were investigated for tax evasion in the constituency of Buckingham in each year since 1997. [30064]

Dawn Primarolo: Inland Revenue records show the number of inquiries made into tax returns by its offices. However, the geographical ranges of Inland Revenue offices, particularly specialist offices, do not correspond to parliamentary constituencies.

So while there is a record of the number of inquiries undertaken by offices located within parliamentary constituencies, it will not follow that those inquiries relate to individuals and businesses resident or operating within those constituencies. Similarly, offices outside constituency boundaries will undertake inquiries into the returns of individuals and businesses within those boundaries.

Consequently, no meaningful figures are available of the number of inquiries into the returns of individuals and businesses within the constituency of Buckingham.

Public Works Loan Board

Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the Public Works Loan Board's interest rate on new loans is and what the rate has been in each of the last five years. [30351]

Ruth Kelly: The interest rate applied to a new PWLB loan is dependent on the maturity of the loan, the method of repayment the authority has chosen and the underlying gilt yield curve. It is also affected by the progress a local authority has made in applying its provisions set aside to meet credit liabilities.

The range of PWLB interest rates applicable at 22 January in each of the last five years was:

1998: $6\,^{1}/_{8}$ to $7\,^{9}/_{16}$ per cent.

1999: $4\,^{3}/_{8}$ to $5\,^{13}/_{16}$ per cent.

2000: $5\,^{1}/_{4}$ to $6\,^{3}/_{4}$ per cent.

2001: $4\,^{3}/_{4}$ to $5\,^{1}/_{2}$ per cent.

2002: $4\,^{1}/_{16}$ to $5\,^{1}/_{4}$ per cent.

Terrorism

Harry Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a list of organisations whose assets have been frozen under powers taken following 11 September with the reason for the action in each case; and if he will make a statement. [29445]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* The Government are committed to the fight against terrorism and since the events of 11 September 2001 have led by example in issuing asset freeze lists against individuals and organisations. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1373, issued on 28 September 2001, calls on states to freeze the funds and financial assets of persons or entities involved in terrorism.

The resolution is implemented in the UK by an Order in Council (SI 3365/2001) and where there are "reasonable grounds to suspect" that an organisation is involved in the financing of terrorism the Government will not hesitate to meet their international obligations by freezing their assets.

Listed are the 34 organisations subject to an assets freeze under the UN order:

1. Abu Nidal Organisation (ANO)
2. Afghan Support Committee (ASC)
3. Aum Shinrikyo
4. Babbar Khalsa
5. Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA)
6. Continuity Irish Republican Army (CIRA)
7. Gama'a al-Islamiyya (Islamic Group)
8. Hamas-Izz al-Din al-Quassem
9. Hizballah External Security Organisation
10. Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development
11. International Sikh Youth Federation
12. Kahane Chai (Kach)
13. Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Chairman Abdullah Ocalan
14. Lashkar e Tayyaba
15. Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)
16. Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF)
17. Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MEK or MKO)
18. National Liberation Army (ELN)
19. Orange Volunteers (OV)
20. Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)
21. Palestine Liberation Front (PLF)
22. Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)
23. Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command
24. Real IRA
25. Red Hand Defenders (RHD)
26. Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS)
27. Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)
28. Revoluntionary Nuclei (formerly ELA)
29. Revolutionary Organisation 17 November
30. Revolutionary People's Liberation Army/Front/Party (DHKP/C)
31. Shining Path
32. Ulster Defence Association/Ulster Freedom Fighters (UDA/UFF)
33. Ummah Tameer E-Nau (UTN)
34. United Self-Defense Forces/Group of Colombia (AUC).

Harry Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the freezing of assets of an organisation whose administration address is a house in Leyton. [29446]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* A charitable organisation in Leyton has had its assets frozen by the Charity Commission under the Charities Act 1993.

National Minimum Wage

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in Barnsley, East and Mexborough received the recent increase in the national minimum wage. [30525]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter to Jeff Ennis from Len Cook, dated 28 January 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question about the number of people in Barnsley East and Mexborough who have received the increase in the national minimum wage. (30525)

Estimates for Parliamentary Constituencies are not available.

Estimates for the United Kingdom and Government Office Regions are posted on the National Statistics website at: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/themes/labour_market/pay_and_earnings/measuring_low_pay.asp

Mr. Roy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in Motherwell and Wishaw received the recent increase in the national minimum wage. [30860]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Frank Roy, dated 28 January 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question about the number of people in Motherwell and Wishaw who have received the increase in the national minimum wage (NMW). (30860)

Estimates for Parliamentary Constituencies are not available.

Estimates for the United Kingdom and Government Office Regions are posted on the National Statistics website at: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/themes/labour_market/pay_and_earnings/measuring_low_pay.asp.

Ministerial Transport

Bob Russell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last used the railway service in connection with his official duties; what station he left from and what was the destination; and whether it is his intention to make greater use of the railways in future. [28092]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I use railway services for both official duties and in a private capacity.

I last used the railway service for official duties on 5 July 2001 to travel to Brighton for the Transport and General Workers Union Conference. All arrangements for official travel are made in line with the guidance set out in Chapter 7 of the "Ministerial Code", and the accompanying guidance document "Travel by Ministers", using the most efficient and cost effective mode of transport, and bearing in mind security considerations

I will continue to use the railway for official and private travel as appropriate.

Employment Statistics

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 797–98W, on employment in the Buckingham constituency, what the average figures for working age employment in the UK were in each year from 1997 to 2001. [30126]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Bercow, dated 28 January 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question on the proportion of working age people in employment in the United Kingdom. (30126)

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) provides estimates of the employment rate of working age people (ie men aged 16–64 and women aged 16–59). The annual estimates for the United Kingdom for each year from 1997/8 to 2000/1 are given in the table overleaf.

Working age[1] employment rates[2]: United Kingdom 1997–98 to 2000–01

Not seasonally adjusted

	Percentage
March 1997 to February 1998	72.8
March 1998 to February 1999	73.5
March 1999 to February 2000	73.8
March 2000 to February 2001	74.1

[1] Men aged 16–64 and women aged 16–59

[2] Total employed of working age as a percentage of all persons of working age

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey (annual LADB dataset)

DEFENCE

Afghanistan

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many C130Ks are being used in the deployment in Afghanistan; how many flying hours per week they are flying; and whether that can be increased. [26349]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* The number of C130Ks deployed to support operations in Afghanistan has varied with time, depending on operational requirements. As of 20 January, eight C130Ks were deployed. Flying hours vary depending on the operational requirement; between 13 and 19 January the deployed aircraft averaged 30 hours per week. There is no operational reason at present to increase the numbers of hours flown by each aircraft but, if it were necessary, the deployment of additional crews would allow us to do so.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements he has made to enable parcels to be sent to forces in Afghanistan. [30823]

Mr. Ingram: We consider delivery of mail to all overseas personnel, including parcels, to be a high priority. Accordingly, a BFPO number has been assigned to Afghanistan, and parcels can be sent at reduced rates. Mail is delivered as frequently as possible using the military aircraft deploying and sustaining the UK armed forces personnel in country, within the constraints of operational imperatives.

Fixed-wing Aircraft

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence further to his answer of 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 359W, on fixed wing aircraft, how many and what type of fixed wing aircraft there were in the Royal Air Force in each year from 1985 to 2000; and if he will make a statement. [22387]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* The best available set of centrally held figures denoting the size of the RAF's fixed wing aircraft fleet for the period from 1985 to 1991 inclusive, is the 'RAF Form STATS 1003'. I will place a copy of these figures in the Library of the House.

Ministry of Defence annually published figures for the years 1992–2000 are contained in either the Statement on Defence Estimates or the MOD Performance report, copies of which are in the Library of the House. Specific references are as follows:

1992: The Statement on the Defence Estimates—pages 90–92 inclusive

1993: The Statement on the Defence Estimates—pages 99–101 inclusive

1994: The Statement on the Defence Estimates—pages 102–104 inclusive

1995: The Statement on the Defence Estimates—pages 131–133 inclusive

1996: The Statement on the Defence Estimates—Annexe D D1-D5

1997: MOD Performance Report—pages 63–67 inclusive

1998: MOD Performance Report—pages 63–67

1999: MOD Performance Report—Annexe B B8-B13

2000: MOD Performance Report—Annexe B, pages 69–72.

Combatants (Minimum Age)

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the youngest age is at which someone can *(a)* join the armed forces and *(b)* take part in operations. [29466]

Mr. Ingram: The lowest age at which people are able to join the armed forces is 16 years. Applicants under the age of 18 years require the formal consent of their parents or guardians before they are permitted to join.

No service personnel under the age of 17 are deployed on operations. No personnel under the age of 18 carry out operational patrols in Northern Ireland, although 17-year-olds can be based in the Province. Under-18s are not deployed as aircrew or in submarines.

In line with United Nations (UN) policy, we do not deploy personnel under the age of 18 on UN peacekeeping operations.

We are currently finalising detailed administrative procedures and guidelines for the armed forces to give concrete form to the United Kingdom's commitment made on signing Optional Protocol II of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to take all feasible measures to ensure that personnel under the age of 18 do not take a direct part in hostilities.

Army Complement

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what *(a)* the official complement and *(b)* the actual numbers in post in the Army are, broken down by regiment and other section headings. [29468]

Mr. Ingram: The information is not centrally held in the format requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However details on the current United Kingdom Trained Adult Personnel (UKTAP) manning state by arm/service as at 1 December 2001 are in the table.

Current UKTAP manning state by arm/service at 1 December 2001 (including Gurkhas and full-time reserve service)

	Officers		*Soldiers*	
Arm/service	*Liability*	*Strength*	*Liability*	*Strength*
Staff	715	758	—	—
Household Cavalry/Royal Armoured Corps	861	815	5,011	4,915
Royal Artillery	1,062	1,020	7,439	6,947
Royal Engineers	1,139	1,107	7,662	7,417
Royal Signals	952	875	7,586	7,111
Infantry	2,766	2,786	23,971	22,675
Army Air Corps	459	411	1,309	1,319
Royal Army Chaplains Department	148	144	—	—
Royal Logistic Corps	1,653	1,583	15,022	13,152
Royal Army Medical Corps	882	661	2,040	1,869
Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers	875	817	9,856	8,360
Adjutant General Corps (Provost)	214	178	1,895	1,895
Adjutant General Corps (Staff Personnel Support)	488	441	4,345	4,036
Adjutant General Corps (Education and Training Corps)	335	315	—	—
Adjutant General Corps (Army Legal Service)	90	88	—	—
Royal Army Veterinary Corps	23	21	146	126
Small Arms Service Corps	31	30	112	122
Royal Army Dental Corps	149	127	271	240
Intelligence Corps	258	245	1,011	1,005
Army Physical Training Corps	50	50	354	362
General List	—	1	—	—
Queen Alexandra Royal Army Nursing Corps	343	284	610	404
Corps of Army Music	35	36	1,120	993
Long Service List	—	—	638	577
Unallocated	—	2	—	—
UKTAP total	13,528	12,795	90,398	83,525
Gurkhas	116	128	2,931	3,455
Full-time Reserve Service	—	339	—	562
Whole Army total	13,644	13,262	93,329	87,542
Whole Army trained strength				100,804

Notes:

1. The officer strength figures exclude 105 mobilised reservists.
2. The soldier strength figures exclude 646 mobilised reservists.
3. The liability figures are based on the Manpower Planning Targets (MPT) for 2001.
4. Gurkha liability does not include an addback against UKTAP undermanning of 409 or 22 non-established posts (two officers and 20 soldiers).

Pensions

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate has been made of the cost to the Armed Forces Pension Scheme of maintaining the early pension point; and if he will make a statement. [29494]

Mr. Ingram: Under the terms of the Armed Forces Pension Scheme, an Immediate Pension (IP) is paid to scheme members much earlier than most other schemes. This is to allow the services to retain the expertise of personnel who might otherwise leave during their thirties, while also recognising the needs of those to whom the services cannot offer further employment from around the age of 40.

In reviewing the Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS), we have considered a number of alternatives to the current IP point and their effect on recruitment and retention. It was concluded that any significant delay in the IP point would require costly alternative retention measures likely to outweigh any savings from such a delay. The confidence of the services in the efficacy of the early IP as a well-proven manning tool led to the conclusion that it would not be sensible to undertake a costing of alternative measures or therefore a net costing of the early IP. The provisional conclusions of the review, issued for public consultation in March of last year, therefore recommended only a small change should be made to the IP point, to provide a common point at age 40 (or after 18 years service, whichever is later) for officers and other ranks.

Mr. Pollard: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to assist ex-service men who were unable to join a pension scheme during their Army careers; and if he will make a statement. [28144]

Dr. Moonie: There are no plans to make retrospective pension provision for ex-service men who were unable to join a pension scheme during their service careers.

Prior to 1975, when the pension arrangements for the armed forces were brought into line with the Social Security Act 1973, there were no legal requirements for pensions to be preserved for those who left before meeting the qualifying period for payment of pension. Officers leaving the service without completing 16 years' service after age 21 and other ranks leaving without completing 22 years' service after age 18 were not entitled to a pension. Officers who left with between nine and 16 years of service and other ranks with between 12 and 22 years of service were, however, paid a gratuity in lieu of pension. Those who left with less service had no pension rights.

There was no distinction between service personnel and members of both public and private pension schemes with regard to the fact that there was no requirement until 1975 for preservation of pension benefits for those who left before the retirement age of the scheme. It has been the long-standing policy of successive Governments that individuals should be treated under the rules of the pension scheme applying at the time they retire. Improvements to benefits were therefore restricted to those currently in service and were not made retrospective.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* RAF and Royal Marine officers, *(b)* Navy officers and *(c)* Army officers have retired before receiving a full pension, after serving for over 10 years, in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [25836]

Mr. Ingram: The numbers of officers who have retired from the three services before completing the 34 years necessary for full pension, but having served for more than 10 years are as follows:

	1 November 1998 to 31 October 1999	*1 November 1999 to 31 October 2000*	*1 November 2000 to 31 October 2001*
Naval Service and Royal Marines	327	322	278
Army	433	445	461
RAF	450	420	524

Royal Marine figures are only held as part of the Royal Navy figures.

Gurkhas

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what impact the commitment of British troops in Afghanistan will have on his plans for recruiting more Gurkhas. [29976]

Mr. Ingram: None. I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 19 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1371W. There has been no change to the Gurkha recruitment plans outlined on that occasion.

Armed Forces (Marital Status)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of serving military personnel in *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the Royal Air Force and *(c)* the Royal Navy are (i) single, (ii) married, (iii) divorced and (iv) separated listed by age ranges (1) 16 to 20, (2) 20 to 24, (3) 30 to 34, (4) 35 to 39, (5) 40 to 44, (6) 45 to 49, (7) 50 to 59 and (8) 60 and over; what percentage of force strength this represents in each age range; and if he will make a statement. [27677]

Mr. Ingram: *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* The current strength of UK regular forces by marital status and age range is as follows:

Age	*Single*	*Percentage*	*Married*	*Percentage*	*Divorced/ Separated*	*Percentage*	*Total*
Naval Service							
24 and under	11,958	96.2	447	3.6	23	0.2	12,428
25–29	5,190	66.9	2,352	30.3	219	2.8	7,761
30–34	2,843	33.8	5,029	59.8	539	6.4	8,411
35–39	1,152	15.2	5,707	75.2	729	9.6	7,588
40–44	361	9.9	2,948	81.1	326	9.0	3,635
45 and over	149	6.2	2,120	88.2	135	5.6	2,404
Grand total	21,653	51.3	18,603	44.1	1,971	4.7	42,227

Age	*Single*	*Percentage*	*Married*	*Percentage*	*Divorced*	*Percentage*	*Widowed*	*Percentage*	*Total*
Army									
24 and under	40,029	89.4	4,663	10.4	65	0.1	3	0.0	44,760
25–29	10,933	49.8	10,475	47.7	553	2.5	5	0.0	21,966
30–34	3,409	17.4	15,050	76.8	1,127	5.8	17	0.1	19,603
35–39	1,040	7.0	12,725	86.0	1,038	7.0	17	0.1	14,820
40–44	219	4.5	4,379	89.5	293	6.0	14	0.3	4,905
45 and over	117	3.4	3,218	93.5	108	3.1	24	0.7	3,467
Grand total	55,747	50.9	50,510	46.1	3,184	2.9	80	0.1	109,521

Age	*Single*	*Percentage*	*Married*	*Percentage*	*Divorced*	*Percentage*	*Separated*	*Percentage*	*Widowed*	*Percentage*	*Total*
RAF											
24 and under	10,528	90.0	1,072	9.2	8	0.1	89	0.8	—	0.0	11,697
25–29	4,653	52.9	3,607	41.0	180	2.0	360	4.1	—	0.0	8,800
30–34	2,392	21.0	7,601	66.6	615	5.4	787	6.9	13	0.1	11,408
35–39	903	8.4	8,477	79.0	672	6.3	662	6.2	15	0.1	10,729
40–44	287	4.9	4,975	84.3	325	5.5	298	5.1	14	0.2	5,899
45 and over	124	2.7	4,154	89.4	201	4.3	137	2.9	30	0.6	4,646
Grand total	18,887	35.5	29,886	56.2	2,001	3.8	2,333	4.4	72	0.1	53,179

Source:
DASA (Tri-Service)

Separate divorced/separated figures are not available for the Naval service. Widowed figures are also not available for the Naval service. Separate figures are not available for the Army. These are included in the married figures. Figures are provided for the UK regular forces and show trained and untrained personnel including officers and other ranks. The figures exclude gurkhas, full time reserve service personnel, home service battalions of the Royal Irish Regiment and mobilised reservists.

Plastic Baton Rounds

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 760W, on plastic baton rounds, what reasons HM forces have given for requiring guidelines for use at variance with those governing law enforcement officers engaged in joint operations. [29728]

Mr. Ingram: The armed forces are deployed to Northern Ireland to provide military support to the Police Service of Northern Ireland, which has primacy for security matters in the Province. Soldiers carry out their role using the same practices and procedures that are applicable to the rest of the British Army wherever they may be deployed in the world. While these practices and procedures may be different to those of the police, they are of a commensurate standard.

As I have already stated in my answer of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 760W, differences between the guidelines for the police and the Army on the use of baton rounds stem entirely from the differences in their respective operational structures and practices. There are therefore no plans to bring the guidelines exactly into line with the regime governing the use of those weapons by the police.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 760W, on plastic baton rounds, how many plastic baton rounds have been fired in each overseas operational theatre since 1981; how many such firings have resulted in death and injury; and what compensation has been paid to victims of firings. [29727]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence's records show that there has been one occasion on which British forces have fired plastic baton rounds since 1981. On 1 February last year, 58 plastic baton rounds were fired during a public order incident at Mitrovica in Kosovo. We are not aware of any civilians being injured as a result of the firings or of any claims for compensation.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many plastic baton rounds have been procured since 1981; and at what cost. [29729]

Mr. Ingram: I am withholdings details of the number of plastic baton rounds procured in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. I am also withholding information on costs on the grounds of commercial confidentiality in accordance with Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Gulf War Veterans

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what criteria have to be met in order for British Gulf war veterans to be eligible for compensation from the UK Government. [29380]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* When claims for compensation are submitted they are considered on the basis of whether or not on the balance of probabilities the Ministry of Defence has a common law liability to pay compensation. Where there is a legal liability arising from negligence to pay compensation we do so. The amount of compensation awarded is assessed in accordance with an individual's symptoms, degree of disability, personal circumstances and the levels being awarded by the courts in similar cases.

The MOD has received about 2,000 notices of intention to claim from Gulf veterans and members of their families in respect of illness allegedly arising from the Gulf conflict, but no writs or claims of sufficient detail to be considered have been received.

The War Pensions Agency also makes provision for ex-service personnel suffering from injury or disease attributable to their service in the form of a war pension and associated benefits.

Tendering Process

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on encouraging the employment of local contractors for new build projects on the UK mainland. [30312]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* The Ministry of Defence is pursuing greater efficiency in the delivery of services essential to maintain and develop the Defence Estate. To fulfil this objective we aim to involve industry in a broader way through public-private partnerships, and in particular the Prime Contracting Initiative.

Prime Contracting should not be seen as a bar to local or smaller companies. A key feature is the development of supply chains with the capability to cover the full range of the activities required to deliver estate projects. It is envisaged that this will present significant opportunities for the involvement of local contractors.

The greater efficiencies and better value for money will also allow more work to be completed for the Department, resulting in increased opportunities for those involved in its delivery. Where companies do not wish to bid for contracts in their own right as Prime Contractors, they are fully encouraged to be part of the supply chain. Opportunities for Prime Contracts will be advertised in the Works Services Opportunities Bulletin. Sub-contracts will also be advertised.

The MOD fully supports the objectives laid out in the Office of Government Commerce publication "Tendering for Government contracts" which sets out the opportunities and benefits within the public sector for small and medium sized enterprises.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 336W, on special educational needs, how many married accompanied service personnel, not in receipt of boarding school allowance, are serving in areas *(a)* under SCE educational jurisdiction and *(b)* not under SCE educational jurisdiction. [27477]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Defence Intelligence and Security Centre Agency

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the conclusions and recommendations of Phase I of the Quinquennial Review of the Defence Intelligence and Security Centre Agency; how many and what submissions were made to Phase I by stakeholders and other interested parties; if he will place a copy of the Phase I report in the Library; what the period to be allowed for consultation over the Phase I report is; and what is the projected Schedule leading up to the publication of the final Review. [29248]

Mr. Ingram: Phase 1 of the Quinquennial Review of the Defence Intelligence and Security Centre is continuing.

On completion, once its recommendations have been agreed, I will announce the outcome and place a copy of the summary report in the Library of the House.

Departmental Expenditure (Publications)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of the expenditure of his Department on newspapers, magazines and periodicals in each of the last four years. [30088]

Dr. Moonie: Expenditure on commercial and HMSO publications, including newspapers and periodicals, by the Ministry of Defence in each of the last four years was as follows:

Financial year	*£ million*
1997–98	6,910,298.74
1998–99	8,204,787.64
1999–2000	7,499,237.00
2000–01	9,830,204.18

Atomic Weapons Establishment

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the purpose is of AWE's Billi-G project; what its cost is; and if he will make a statement. [29955]

Dr. Moonie: The Billi-G programme is one element in a suite of experiments by the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) using high-energy radiation to examine the behaviour of materials when subjected to explosive shock. It is important in predicting the performance of a nuclear warhead and hence in underwriting our nuclear deterrent in a nuclear test ban era.

The cost of the programme is included in the total AWE operating costs of £2.3 billion for the 10-year period beginning 1 April 2000. The specific costs of these experiments could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Trident

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has decided to extend the life of the Trident warhead beyond the expected service life; and what plans he has to extend the life of the submarine beyond the expected service life. [29954]

Mr. Ingram: No such decision has been made; as with other key military capabilities, we routinely undertake studies into options for achieving the optimum operational life and value for money.

Defence Aviation Repair Agency

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the estimated cost is of the inter-site transportation of components and material in the Defence Aviation Repair Agency in the last 12 months. [30106]

Mr. Ingram: The inter-site costs of transporting components and materials across the Defence Aviation Repair Agency are not recorded separately and the information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Anti-tank Missiles

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the MOD's balance of investment of anti tank missiles study will be completed; and if he will make a statement. [30290]

Mr. Ingram: The most recent studies of anti-tank guided weapons were concluded in summer 2001. These studies considered the procurement of such weapon systems for mechanised infantry and armoured infantry. The conclusions reached in these studies will be used to inform any future procurement options.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the effectiveness of the existing Milan system for medium range anti-tank missiles; and if he will make a statement. [30286]

Mr. Ingram: The MILAN system meets the requirements for which it was designed, and is successfully deployed in over 40 countries. The system has been in service since 1977, and replacements are developed in line with technological advances and changing capability requirements. MILAN, which is due to be phased out of service between 2005 and 2008, is to be replaced by the Light Forces' Anti-Tank Guided Weapon (LF ATGW) system.

Colchester Garrison

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 557W, on Colchester Garrison, when the temporary living accommodation for soldiers at Colchester Garrison will be ready for occupation; if he plans to allow the public to view the new buildings; and if there will be an official opening ceremony. [30550]

Dr. Moonie: The temporary 'portakabin' type single living accommodation for soldiers at Colchester Garrison is ready for occupation now, though it is yet to be utilised due to operational deployments. There are no plans to invite the public to view the new buildings or to hold an official opening ceremony.

Civilian Work Force

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will announce the results of his analysis of his Department's civilian work force; and what effect this will have on the age of retirement. [31121]

Dr. Moonie: The review of the Ministry of Defence's age of retirement policy for civilian staff has taken rather longer than expected because it has thrown up some complex issues, but it is now nearing completion and we expect to be able to announce the findings in the next few weeks.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures his Department has put in place to aid civilian recruitment where there is a shortage of people for the appropriate grades. [31136]

Dr. Moonie: Recruitment to the civil service is on the basis of merit and fair and open competition. In the Ministry of Defence, most recruitment is delegated to local budget holders. Various steps are taken to try to ensure the success of our recruitment efforts, particularly in relation to women, disabled people and members of ethnic minorities, who are currently under-represented in our work force. Depending on the circumstances, we can also make available flexible working arrangements and some financial incentives.

RAF Bases

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who owns the freehold of *(a)* RAF Brize Norton, and *(b)* RAF Lyneham. [30805]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence owns the freehold at both sites.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what plans he has to redevelop RAF Wroughton; [30806]

(2) if he will make a statement on the future of RAF Wroughton. [30808]

Dr. Moonie: All elements of the former RAF Wroughton are now in private ownership with the exception of the married quarter estates at Langton Park and Beranburh Field. These are still in Ministry of Defence ownership but are now surplus to operational requirements. They will shortly be sold in accordance with disposal policy. Defence Estates will not redevelop the sites.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what medical equipment there is in RAF Wroughton; and what plans he has to re-deploy it elsewhere. [30807]

Dr. Moonie: RAF Wroughton comprised the main airfield, married quarters estates and the Princess Alexandra hospital.

Prior to the disposal of the hospital site the medical equipment was sold, with the exception of the MRI and CT scanners which were obsolescent. They were therefore included as fittings within the hospital sale.

The Princess Alexandra hospital was sold to Dukeminster Ltd. on 14 January 2000.

Army Units (Germany)

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the establishment against actual strength of British Army units in Germany; and how many requests for transfer there are for each of these units. [29650]

Mr. Ingram: The establishment and actual staffing levels for major British Army units in Germany, as at 1 January 2002, are shown in the table. It is not possible to say how many requests for transfer there are for each unit in Germany as this information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

British Army units in Germany[1]	*Establishment*	*Actual strength*
HQ 1(UK) Armoured Division and TPS		
1 Div HQ	180	178
12 Regt RA	627	563
28 Engr Regt RE	880	804
1 ADSR	681	586
1CS Med Regt RAMC	517	443
Chaplain pool	28	32
1 Reg RMP	350	350
1GS Regt RLC	689	600
2 CS Regt RLC	886	696
RLC Mil Trg Wmg	8	8
4 Armoured Brigade		
4 Bde HQ and Sig Sqn	157	164
RDG	590	585
QRL	590	511
4 Regt RA	684	606
21 Engr RE	657	657
1IG	744	689
1DWR	741	719
1Bn REME	367	308
RL Band	35	31
7 Armoured Brigade		
7 Bde HQ and Sig Sqn	157	167
SCOTS DG	590	491
9/12L	453	440
2 RTR	599	568
3 RHA	554	457
32 Engr Regt RE	653	638
1 RRF	741	654
1BW	741	660
Cambrai Band	35	35
2 Bn REME	367	289

British Army units in Germany[1]	*Establishment*	*Actual strength*
20 Armoured Brigade		
20 Bde HQ and Sig Sqn	157	129
QHR	590	531
26 Regt RA	684	607
35 Engr Regt RE	656	622
1 RRW	741	703
2 RGJ	741	726
3 Bn REME	367	281
HQ UK Support Command (Germany)		
HQ UKSC(G)	122	119
1 Signal Brigade and Rhine Garrison	3,307	2,955

[1] As at 1 January 2002

Iraq

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what British aircraft, and how many, are patrolling the no fly zones in Iraq; and how many times they have been *(a)* locked on to by surface-to-air missile batteries, *(b)* attacked by surface-to-air missiles and *(c)* threatened by other means. [28896]

Mr. Ingram: The RAF currently deploys eight Tornado GR4, six Tornado F3, four Jaguar, two VC10 and one Tristar on operations in connection with enforcing the no fly zones.

Between 1 January 2000 and 31 December 2001, reports from coalition aircraft patrolling the no fly zones indicated that they were threatened or attacked on 918 occasions, broken down as follows: 64 radar threats; 55 attacks by surface-to-air missiles; and 799 other threats, primarily attacks by anti-aircraft guns.

PRIME MINISTER

Ian Stillman

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to make representations to the Indian Government with respect to the case of Ian Stillman; and if he will make a statement. [30865]

The Prime Minister: I am aware of the case of Mr. Stillman. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the British high commission in New Delhi have made many high-level representations to the Indian authorities about Mr. Stillman. The most recent of these was a meeting on 2 January 2002 between the British high commissioner in New Delhi and the Indian Home Minister. We shall continue to monitor Mr. Stillman's welfare while in jail and ensure that his special needs are catered for as far as possible.

Single European Currency

Tony Wright: To ask the Prime Minister if he plans to follow the precedent of the 1975 referendum on membership of the Common Market in respect of the Government's agreement to differ in a referendum on membership of the single European currency as binding. [30754]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 2 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 883W.

Energy Review

Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister on what date he received the final report of the Energy Review from his Performance and Innovation Unit; and on what date he intends to publish the report. [31059]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) on 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 816W.

Defence Sales (India)

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he had with Indian Ministers, on his recent visit, about the United Kingdom selling *(a)* armaments and *(b)* war planes to the Indian Government. [30852]

The Prime Minister: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) on 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 854W.

Lost/stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list those items valued at more than £50 which have been stolen or lost from his office in each of the last four years. [28002]

The Prime Minister: In respect of my office, none for the last four financial years.

Camp X-Ray

Harry Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister whether the assurances Her Majesty's Government have obtained from the Americans that those captured in Afghanistan are being humanely treated include assurances that those people are being treated in accordance with *(a)* the Geneva convention and *(b)* international norms; and if he will make a statement. [30133]

The Prime Minister: US officials have stated publicly that all detainees are being treated consistently with the principles of the Geneva convention.

As the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw) told the House on 21 January, British officials visited Guantanamo Bay between 17 and 20 January and were able to have lengthy discussions with the three British detainees who were all in good physical health and none of whom complained of ill treatment or had medical conditions requiring treatment.

I am satisfied on the basis of the public statements made by the US authorities, together with the report of the visiting British officials, that the detainees are being treated in line with international humanitarian norms.

New Year Honours List

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister how many persons in each county were *(a)* knighted or equivalent and *(b)* admitted to each rank of the orders of chivalry in the recent New Year's Honours List. [30022]

The Prime Minister: The information available is outlined in the table, which shows the number of awards made on my recommendation in each county in the New Year Honours List 2002.

Numbers of Honours recipients in each county

County	*GBE*	*CH*	*KCB*	*DBE*	*Kt*	*CB*	*CMG*	*CBE*	*OBE*	*MBE*
Aberdeenshire	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	4	2
Angus	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3
Antrim	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	3	10
Argyll and Bute	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	6
Armagh	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	3
Ayrshire and Arran	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	3
Banffshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Bedfordshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	3
Belfast	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	5	10
Berkshire	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	5	8
Berwickshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	1
Bristol	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	4
Buckinghamshire	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	1	2	8
Cambridgeshire	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	4	1	9
Carmarthenshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	4
Ceredigion	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Channel Islands	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	2	4
Cheshire	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	3	3	13
Cleveland	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	2
Clwyd	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Cornwall	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3
Cumbria	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	11
Denbighshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Derbyshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	6
Devon	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	13
Dorset	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	7
Down	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	6	10
Dumfries	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	6
Dunbartonshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Dundee	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—
Durham	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	6	4
East Lothian	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
East Riding of Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	3
East Sussex	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	3	12
Edinburgh	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	5	8	10
Essex	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	4	14
Fermanagh	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Fife	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	2	7
Flintshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Glasgow	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	3
Gloucestershire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	7
Greater Manchester	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	3	2	14
Gwent	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	2
Gwynedd	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	2
Hampshire	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	2	8	15
Herefordshire	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hertfordshire	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	6	8	9
Inverness-shire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	6
Isle of Man	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
Isle of Wight	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
Kent	—	—	—	—	2	2	—	3	10	19
Lanarkshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	4
Lancashire	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	5	13
Leicestershire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	4	5
Lincolnshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	5
London	—	—	2	—	—	4	1	17	35	41
Londonderry	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	3	6
Lothian	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	2
Merseyside	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	10
Mid Glamorgan	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	1	6
Middlesex	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	7	16
Mid Lothian	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Monmouthshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	5
Norfolk	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	8
North Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	1	2	5
Northamptonshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	4
Northumberland	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	2	1	5
Nottinghamshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	4	7
Orkney	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—

Numbers of Honours recipients in each county

County	*GBE*	*CH*	*KCB*	*DBE*	*Kt*	*CB*	*CMG*	*CBE*	*OBE*	*MBE*
Oxfordshire	—	—	—	1	2	—	—	2	4	6
Pembrokeshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Perth and Kinross	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	5
Powys	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Renfrewshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	5	3
Ross and Cromarty	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	4
Roxburgh, Ettrick and Lauderdale	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
Shetland Island	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
Shropshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	4
Somerset	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	4	9
South Glamorgan	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	5
South Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	7	10
Staffordshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	15
Stirling and Falkirk	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1
Suffolk	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	5
Surrey	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	11	11	19
Sutherland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Vale of Glamorgan	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
Torfaen	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Tweeddale	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1
Tyne and Wear	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	5
Tyrone	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3
Warwickshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	4
West Glamorgan	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	2	4
West Lothian	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	3
West Midlands	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	2	5	10
West Sussex	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	2	3	5
West Yorkshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	2	14
Western Isles	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Wiltshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	2	8
Worcestershire	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	1	1	3

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Afghanistan

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on *(a)* the number of UK citizens arrested in Afghanistan for alleged terrorist activity by (i) United Kingdom forces, (ii) United States forces and (iii) Afghan forces or paramilitaries, *(b)* their present whereabouts, *(c)* their identities and *(d)* their access to consular and legal representation. [26773]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are attempting to clarify the numbers and identify all who may be British nationals detained in Afghanistan. This may be a lengthy process because we have extremely limited consular facilities in Afghanistan.

No British nationals are being held by UK forces. There are three British nationals held by the United States forces in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The US armed forces have also confirmed that they are holding others who may be British nationals in locations in Afghanistan.

We are seeking to verify reports of the number of possible British nationals who may have been detained by Afghan or local forces. We are aware of one British national who was detained by the Northern Alliance and are seeking information on his current whereabouts.

In line with normal consular practice, we do not intend to release the identities of those detained.

We are seeking access to all alleged British detainees. British officials have visited the three detainees at Guantanamo Bay from 17 to 20 January and have confirmed that they are all in good physical health and have no complaints about ill treatment. We have told the US authorities that we expect them to ensure that the detainees are treated in accordance with international standards, including those applicable to trial.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British citizens have been detained by *(a)* United States, *(b)* United Front and *(c)* other local forces in Afghanistan; and where they are now being held. [27227]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are attempting to clarify the numbers and identify all who may be British nationals being detained in Afghanistan. This may be a lengthy process because we have extremely limited consular facilities in Afghanistan.

As I said in my statement on 21 January there are currently three British detainees at the Guantanamo Bay base.

We are seeking to verify reports of the number of possible British nationals who may have been detained by Afghan or local forces. We are aware of one British national who was detained by the Northern Alliance during the civil war, and are seeking information on his current whereabouts.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the UK is being consulted about the handling of prisoners in custody in Afghanistan. [27835]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have not been consulted about the handling of prisoners in Afghanistan. We believe that all detainees in Afghanistan, as elsewhere, should be treated humanely and in accordance with international standards. We are seeking access to all alleged British detainees.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information British troops in Afghanistan have gathered on the fate of the women of Kabul who were taken by the fleeing Taliban forces. [28236]

Mr. Bradshaw: British troops in Afghanistan are there as part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Their mission is to assist the Afghan Interim Administration in achieving security in Kabul and the surrounding areas. However, the British embassy in Kabul have been investigating these reports and have so far been unable to substantiate them.

We work closely with the UNHCR in Pakistan, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the UN Special Mission to Afghanistan on all matters of humanitarian concern, including the appalling treatment of women under the Taliban. We have also raised a range of women's issues with Dr. Sima Sumar, the Interim Administration's Vice Chair responsible for Women's Affairs.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 15 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 132W on Afghanistan, if he will make a statement on the problems the ICRC face in gaining access to detainees held at Bagram airport and those being held in a place of detention in Kabul. [30699]

Peter Hain: The ICRC obtained access to the detainees in Kabul on 13 January, although this information was not to hand at the time of the earlier answer.

On 22 January the ICRC obtained access to the detainees at Bagram airport.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the *(a)* centres at which prisoners from the conflict are being held in Afghanistan and *(b)* nationalities of those who are being detained; if he will specify how many are being held there; and if the ICRC is being allowed into every centre to see all prisoners. [30664]

Mr. Bradshaw: The UK is not holding any detainees. Information on the location and nationality of detainees is a matter for the US and Afghan authorities. We understand that ICRC is being allowed access to prisoners in Afghanistan.

Safiyatu Hussaini

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Nigerian Government in support of Safiyatu Hussaini in advance of her appeal hearing on 18 March following her sentence of death by stoning for the crime of adultery; and if he will make a statement. [28967]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are deeply concerned at the sentence of stoning given to Safiyatu Hussaini for adultery by a Sharia Court in Sokoto State, northern Nigeria, on 9 October 2001. We are following this case closely. The British high commission in Abuja takes every opportunity to raise the human rights implications of the extreme sentences laid down in the Sharia criminal code. We expect the Nigerian Government to meet their international human rights obligations. Nigeria ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1993. We also remind the Nigerians regularly of our opposition to the use of the death penalty.

The Sokoto Sharia Court of Appeal has issued a stay of execution until Ms Hussaini's appeal is heard.

Sierra Leone

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take steps to support reform of the judiciary, police force and detention facilities in Sierra Leone. [28768]

Mr. Bradshaw: A strong judiciary, police force and penal system is essential to establishing the rule of law, which will help to consolidate the fragile peace in Sierra Leone. The United Nations mission has deployed throughout the country and the Sierra Leone army, police and administration is in the process of extending the Government's authority.

Lasting stability depends on a strong and accessible legal system. The UK is working with the international community and the Government of Sierra Leone to improve the effectiveness of Sierra Leone's judicial system. This includes updating the legal code and training legal personnel.

The Government of Sierra Leone are committed to the development of a democratic police force. The UK is helping to deliver an effective and accountable force by training and restructuring the police, and support moves towards prison reform.

The UK has played a leading role in the successful efforts to bring peace to Sierra Leone. We remain committed to helping rebuild the country.

Western Hemisphere Institute for Security and Co-operation

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take steps to monitor the connections between the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security and Co-operation, the School of Americas and the committal of violent acts intended to influence the policy of other Governments. [28793]

Mr. MacShane: The United States Congress is responsible for scrutinising the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security and Co-operation (formally known as the School of Americas).

Empty Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his estimate is of the *(a)* annual cost and *(b)* total value of the empty properties owned by (i) his Department, (ii) his agencies and (iii) other public bodies for which he has had responsibility in each of the last four years. [30070]

Mr. MacShane: It is the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's policy to limit empty properties to one of four categories: (a) those that must be vacated while undergoing refurbishment or adaptation; (b) those that are surplus and in the process of disposal; (c) those we cannot occupy because of a break in diplomatic relations or a similar eventuality, but we expect to need in the future; and (d) short gaps between officers' overseas tours.

Because routine management of the estate is devolved to our overseas posts, it is not possible to identify these properties or their costs without disproportionate cost.

Gibraltar

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will postpone the Brussels talks with his Spanish counterpart until proceedings on the new constitutional proposal before Gibraltar's House of Assembly have been completed. [30634]

Peter Hain: *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) on 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 853–54W. We shall continue talks with Spain under the Brussels Process.

We understand that the Select Committee on Constitutional Reform of the Gibraltar House of Assembly has agreed draft proposals for constitutional reform, and look forward to receiving these in due course.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what mechanisms will be put in place to ensure a referendum in Gibraltar resulting from any bi-lateral agreement between Spain and the United Kingdom on the future status of Gibraltar is conducted in a free and fair manner. [30697]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) on 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 580W. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs said in this House on 14 January, the Government stand by the pledge that any agreement reached under the Brussels Process will be subject, in a free, secret ballot, to the wishes of the people of Gibraltar.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions are taking place with Spain to allow re-directed aircraft from Gibraltar to land in Spain. [30551]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* The Government resumed talks with Spain under the Brussels Process in July 2001: these talks continue. In accordance with the terms of the Brussels Communiqué, November 1984, the talks are aimed at overcoming all the differences between the UK and Spain over Gibraltar and at promoting co-operation on a mutually beneficial basis, including on aviation.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions have taken place with Spain on *(a)* direct sailings of cruise ships from Gibraltar to Spain, *(b)* direct flights from Spain to Gibraltar and *(c)* ferry links between Gibraltar and Algeciras. [30553]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* The Government resumed talks with Spain under the Brussels Process in July 2001: these talks continue. In accordance with the terms of the Brussels Communiqué, November 1984, the talks are aimed at overcoming all the differences between the UK and Spain over Gibraltar and at promoting co-operation on a mutually beneficial basis on economic, cultural, touristic, aviation, military and environment matters.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs under what statutory powers action can be taken against Spain in respect of *(a)* the open skies policy, *(b)* air safety and *(c)* direct sailings between Spain and Gibraltar. [30436]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* No such statutory powers exist.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions have taken place on including Gibraltar in the EU Open Skies Agreement. [30725]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones) on 1 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 811W. There have been no further discussions with Spain on this matter, except in so far as any agreement with Spain approved by the people of Gibraltar at the European Union would resolve this issue.

Spain

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what legal action he plans to take against Spain about *(a)* mobile telephone roaming and *(b)* border queues. [30723]

Peter Hain: The UK Government have no plans to take legal action against Spain. The EC Treaty confers primary responsibility for the enforcement of Community Law on the Commission.

UK Nationals (Cuba)

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if members of the UK delegation who visited the UK nationals being held by US forces in Cuba will be involved in the interrogation of those UK nationals. [30662]

Mr. Bradshaw: The UK team which visited Guantanamo Bay has interviewed those detainees held there who claim British nationality. The team comprised members qualified to ask questions about the identity, nationality and welfare of the detainees and also to ask questions relevant to international terrorism and UK national security.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if UK nationals held by US forces in Cuba were informed before they left Afghanistan that they were to be taken to Cuba and of the length of the journey. [30656]

Mr. Bradshaw: The report by officials did not cover this point, which is one for the US authorities.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if there were United Kingdom nationals among the wounded prisoners who arrived at the US base in Cuba in the week beginning 21 January. [30660]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have not been informed of any further transfers of British detainees. The US have assured us that they will keep us informed.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if members of the UK delegation who visited the UK nationals being held by US forces in Cuba discussed allegations of sensory deprivation with them. [30661]

Mr. Bradshaw: The British officials responsible for the interviews gave the detainees full opportunity to express concern about their treatment, including sensory deprivation. None complained of ill-treatment and they all appeared to be in good physical health.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will ensure that Parliament is kept informed on a regular basis of the conditions under which UK nationals are being held by US forces. [30654]

Mr. Bradshaw: I will be happy to bring any significant changes to the attention of Parliament.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the US Government about the tribunals by which the UK nationals who are being held by US forces at Guatanamo Bay will be tried. [30658]

Mr. Bradshaw: The US has yet to make public the procedures. We have asked for information and made clear our view that these should be consistent with international norms for trial.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the UK Government were notified that the first planeload of prisoners to the US base for prisoners in Cuba included UK nationals. [30653]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have had many discussions with the US authorities about detention of British nationals, including their possible transfer. Their transfer was confirmed to our Embassy in Washington on 11 January, the day the detainees arrived in Guantanamo.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will name the officials who were members of the UK Government delegation who visited the UK nationals held by US forces in Cuba. [30657]

Mr. Bradshaw: Under Exemptions 1a and 15 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, I am unable to publish the names of the officials.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if US personnel were present at the meetings held between the UK delegation and the UK nationals being held by US forces in Cuba. [30663]

Mr. Bradshaw: British officials visiting the detainees were accompanied by representatives of the US as the detaining power.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what charges have been laid against the UK nationals held by US forces in Cuba; whether their legal rights have been discussed with them; and whether they have been offered legal representation. [30655]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are not yet aware of any charges but are in regular contact with the US regarding next steps. If the detainees face prosecution, under international norms they are entitled to legal representation.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from foreign Governments on the conditions in which prisoners are being held by US forces at Guantanamo Bay. [30659]

Mr. Bradshaw: None.

Iran

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to name the new ambassador to Iran; and if he will make a statement. [30733]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 14 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 4W.

British Expatriates (Spain)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many UK citizens live permanently in Spain. [30726]

Peter Hain: According to official Spanish figures, the number of UK nationals permanently resident in Spain is in the region of 500,000.

Morocco

Mr. Terry Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions his Department has had with the Government of Morocco regarding the Spanish enclaves of *(a)* Ceuta and *(b)* Melilla. [30729]

Peter Hain: Ministers and officials have regular contacts with their Moroccan counterparts to discuss a wide range of bilateral and foreign policy issues. There have been no specific discussions regarding the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, as this is a bilateral matter between the Governments of Spain and Morocco.

Hamas

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made as to which Governments *(a)* provide support to Hamas terrorists and *(b)* allow Hamas to operate within their borders. [31129]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are aware that Hamas receives some funding from Iran. Hamas also receives funding from a wide variety of sources across the middle east including substantial funding from private foundations and individuals in the Gulf. Hamas activity covers a wide spectrum, from charitable social and educational support in the community to terrorism. We have no clear evidence of any Government allowing Hamas terrorists to operate within its borders. We take all evidence of external involvement in Hamas very seriously. Such involvement can only complicate the international community's efforts to help the Palestinians achieve viable statehood, and Israel and the region to enjoy lasting security.

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact on the middle east peace process of the intention of the Hamas terrorist group to wage an all-out war against Israel. [31131]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are gravely concerned by the violence in the middle east, including Hamas' declared intention to wage 'general war' against Israel. The Government's view on terrorism is clear: we have repeatedly condemned terrorism in all its forms. We have accordingly proscribed the terrorist wing of Hamas. We continue to urge President Arafat to make 100 per cent. effort to dismantle terrorist networks. We will continue to urge both parties to end the violence and resume substantive dialogue.

Greenpeace

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the case of the 17 Greenpeace activists and two journalists who were arrested near Vandenberg Airbase, California. [30221]

Mr. Bradshaw: Three British nationals were among 17 people arrested for entering a restricted area at Vandenberg Airbase, California, on 15 July 2001. Two of these British nationals have been sentenced to a period of probation of one year. The third British national is due to be sentenced on 15 April. We have offered all three detainees full consular assistance since their arrest and will continue to do so.

Brussels Process

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what agenda has been set for future discussions under the Brussels Process; and if he will make minutes of the meeting under the Brussels Process available to Parliament. [R] [30639]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to his question on 6 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 121W. We will continue to ensure that the House is kept fully informed of progress under the Brussels Process.

Al-Aqsa Brigades

Mr Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the links between the Palestinian Authority and the Al-Aqsa Brigades who have claimed responsbility for recent terrorist attacks. [R] [31130]

Mr. Bradshaw: We understand that the Al-Aqsa Brigades is the name used by members of Fatah when they carry out attacks on Israeli targets. Fatah is a political party The Palestinians after the Oslo accords. As such, there is no direct link between the Palestinian Authority and the actions of individual Fatah members. Fatah is President Arafat's political party but both he and more generally the Palestinian Authority have repeatedly condemned terrorism.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Pension Credit

13. **David Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he expects to introduce the pension credit. [28153]

Mr. McCartney: Pension credit will be introduced from October 2003, so that no pensioner will need to live on less than £100 per week (£154 a week for couples). For the first time, we will reward—not penalise—savings, ensuring those who have worked hard to save modest amounts will gain from having done so.

28. **Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what measures he will put in place to ensure the application procedures for the pension credit are transparent and easily understandable. [28168]

Mr. McCartney: Pension credit will be delivered, from 2003, by the Pension Service which will be launched in April this year. The aim of the Pension Service is to promote a modern service that is tailored to meet customers' needs. The Department is currently designing and developing the processes and customer products (forms, leaflets, etc) that will support the introduction of pension credit next year.

Plans for pension credit communications are being worked up at present and we intend to engage customer representative groups and partner organisations during the first half of 2002, in helping us to develop detailed marketing, communications and take-on plans. We will also test customer products, such as the claim form and leaflet, with these expert groups to ensure that they are easy to understand. They will of course, be approved by the Social Security Advisory Committee. We will ensure that everyone who is entitled to pension credit knows in good time what they need to do to apply for their pension credit entitlement.

Pension Schemes

15. **Michael Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the savings ratio with respect to pension schemes. [28155]

Mr. McCartney: Overall contributions to non-state pensions have increased year on year since 1997. It has risen from:

£50 billion in 1997
£60 billion in 1998
£65 billion in 1999
£69 billion in 2000.

Additionally, the introduction of stakeholder pensions has increased access to pension schemes and promoted greater pension saving generally. For example, the value of new pensions sales rose by 9 per cent. in the third quarter of 2001 to £2.8 billion.

National Insurance

16. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many uncancelled national insurance numbers there are in issue. [28156]

Malcolm Wicks: As I explained in a reply to the right hon. Member on 7 November last year, the national insurance numbers (NINOs) currently in issue are needed for a variety of purposes.

Since 1998 we have removed over 375,000 NINOs from the system. We are also marking suspected fraudulent NINOs when they are discovered. However our main focus is to tighten up the identification process to prevent false numbers being allocated in the first place.

New Deal

17. **Andrew Selous:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to make the new deal for young people more responsive to the needs of *(a)* young people and *(b)* employers. [28157]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We are continually seeking to develop the new deal for young people to ensure that it is responsive to the needs of employers and young people.

We have already introduced a number of measures to increase the flexibility of the programme for employers and young people. For example, since June 2001 we have:

introduced 'Recruit', a pilot initiative to help employers in deprived areas employ more people through the new deal's employment option;

broadened training within new deal to allow training that leads to a certificate recognised by employers in their occupational areas;

increased the permitted length of work experience placements for new dealers to eight weeks to enhance their employability; and

revised the entry conditions for the new deal employment option, so participants can enter the option from the day they enter the programme.

We are introducing tailored pathway pilots, the first of which began on 2 January. These pilots will enable young people to use the new deal options more flexibly and move into sustained employment. New deal clients will be able to access a mix of full-time training, work experience and employment through the new deal options.

From February, employers will be given more flexibility in the training they provide for new deal clients taken on under the employment option. Employers will be able to give new deal clients their own in-house training so that they have greater freedom to deliver training that best meets their needs.

19. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps are taken to safeguard the training needs of the long-term unemployed on new deal projects when the Department terminates training contracts. [28159]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The continuity of programmes for all new deal participants is of paramount importance, particularly where contracts expire or are terminated. Should termination or expiry occur, contracts contain clauses to minimise any disruption caused to participants, and to assist in the implementation of contingency plans allowing participants to complete their programme.

24. **Mr. Wyatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will extend the new deal to 14 to 18-year-olds; and if he will make a statement. [28164]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We currently have no plans to extend the new deal to 14 to 18-year-olds.

34. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have entered work through the new deal since May 1997. [28175]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Latest results show that over 600,000 people have entered work through the new deals.

Occupational Pensions

18. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to review the taper formula for occupational pensions. [28158]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We introduced changes to the treatment of occupational pensions in incapacity benefit last April. We believe it is right to take account of pensions which duplicate the purpose of incapacity benefit, which is to provide some replacement of earnings for people of working age. The 50 per cent. taper on pension income above £85 a week encourages and rewards personal provision.

We keep all our policies under review but have no plans to introduce further changes to the present arrangements.

Carers

22. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on his plans to reform benefits for carers. [28162]

Maria Eagle: On 17 December, we laid a draft regulatory reform order before Parliament which, if accepted, will give those aged over 65 the right to claim invalid care allowance for the first time.

The order would also provide for the extension of entitlement to invalid care allowance for up to eight weeks after the death of the person being cared for and a change in the name of the benefit to carer's allowance to reflect more closely the purpose of the benefit.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action he is taking to help carers. [28823]

Maria Eagle: In autumn 2000 the Government announced a package of measures to enhance the current social security provision for carers, worth more than £500 million over a three year period. Two of the measures were implemented in April last year. The invalid care allowance (ICA) earnings limit was increased from £50 to £72 per week and the carer premium paid through the income-related benefits was increased from £14.15 to £24.40.

On 17 December 2001, we laid a draft regulatory reform order before Parliament. If accepted, this will give those aged over 65 the right to claim invalid care allowance for the first time; will provide for the extension of entitlement to ICA for up to eight weeks after the death of the person being cared for; and will change the name of the benefit to carer's allowance.

Benefit Fraud

23. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on progress in tackling fraud in the benefit system. [28163]

Malcolm Wicks: We are getting to grips with social security fraud. We have set out our strategy for tightening up the system and ensuring that from the outset the right benefits are going to the right people.

We have introduced the Social Security Fraud Act 2001, which includes powers to improve fraud investigation and strengthen punishment for persistent offenders. We have increased the number of people sanctioned or prosecuted and we are working with local authorities to tackle housing benefit fraud and error.

Latest figures show that from our baseline period in 1998 to March 2001 we have reduced the level of fraud and error in income support and jobseeker's allowance by nearly 18 per cent. and we expect the good progress to continue.

25. **Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many prosecutions his Department has authorised, pursuant to the Targeting Fraud campaign. [28165]

Malcolm Wicks: It is not possible to estimate how many prosecutions have been authorised as a direct result of the Targeting Fraud campaign. However, more than 7,500 fraudsters have been successfully prosecuted since the campaign began.

Pensioners

26. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners holding annuities are making claims for a non-disability benefit paid by his Department. [28166]

Mr. McCartney: Approximately 200,000 pensioner benefit units who are claiming income support, housing benefit or council tax benefit are in receipt of income from pension annuities.

Unemployment

27. **Mr. Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what measures he plans to assist long-term unemployed people in deprived areas. [28167]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Our welfare to work initiatives are helping people into work in all parts of the country. The new deals have already helped well over 600,000 people into jobs.

We introduced employment zones specifically to help long-term unemployed people in deprived areas get and keep work. The performance of the 15 employment zones is encouraging. Early indications are that almost half of participants find work. We are currently evaluating the zones before deciding how to take the initiative further.

Action teams for jobs are helping jobless people in the most employment deprived areas in the country into work. By the end of their first year of operation (mid-October 2001), action teams had helped nearly 16,500 people into jobs. Earlier this month we increased the number of action teams from 53 to 63.

Winter Fuel Payment

29. **Mr. Stunell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people who became 60-years-old before 25 December 2001 were not entitled to the winter fuel payment. [28169]

Mr. McCartney: An estimated 150,000 people who reached age 60 before 25 December 2001 were not entitled to a payment for this winter, 2001–02. The reasons for this will have been either that they did not reach the age of 60 in or before the qualifying week, which was 17–23 September 2001, or that one of the scheme's exclusions applied in their case.

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people living in tenements in Scotland have received only half their winter fuel entitlement because of a computer error; what action is being taken to identify them; when he expects all such cases to be paid in full; and what steps he is taking to prevent the error recurring. [26402]

Mr. McCartney: In order to ensure that the correct level of winter fuel payment is paid, the addresses of eligible people are matched. However, the Department is aware that there have been problems regarding people living in tenements in Scotland and, to alleviate this, the Department clerically matches the addresses in areas where there are many tenement flats. Figures are not available for tenements, but from over 11 million payments issued before Christmas, a total of 2,089 cases have been identified to date across Great Britain and Northern Ireland where the half rate payment has been applied in error. Where an underpayment has come to light, corrective action has been promptly taken.

Universal Bank

30. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his oral answer of 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 578, on the Universal Bank, if he will make a statement on the progress of negotiations between the Post Office and its partners. [28170]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 634W.

Mining Communities

31. **Mr. Bryant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to enable more people in former mining communities to move off benefit and into work. [28171]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: People in former mining communities can benefit from the range of help available through their local Jobcentres. New deal programmes can help them gain new skills and advisers can help people find the job best suited to their circumstances.

Some former mining communities are also benefiting from becoming an employment zone or an area for one of the action teams for jobs. Both of these initiatives are focusing help on some of the most deprived areas of the country to provide people with the extra support they need to move from benefits into work.

Child Poverty

33. **Mr. Millband:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what progress has been made towards achieving the Government's objective of halving child poverty by 2010. [28173]

Malcolm Wicks: Details of the progress we are making in tackling child poverty can be found in our third annual report on poverty and social exclusion, "Opportunity for all—making progress" (CM 5260), published on 19 September 2001.

Disabled People

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to assist disabled people who wish to secure employment. [28154]

Maria Eagle: We have introduced a range of measures to help people with disabilities secure work where they are ready and able to do so.

Our new deal for disabled people pilots helped over 8,200 disabled people into work. Building on that success we have now introduced a national network of job brokers.

We are making work pay through the disabled person's tax credit and the national minimum wage.

Jobcentre Plus offers disabled people making new or repeat benefit claims work-focused meetings with a personal adviser so as to ensure they are aware of the help and opportunities available to them.

Pension Service

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he expects the new Pension Service to come into operation. [28160]

Mr. McCartney: The new Pension Service will offer an improved service for pensioners. It will be customer focused and will give pensioners a modern, personalised, efficient service designed to meet their needs. It will also provide information for future pensioners to help them make decisions about their future pension arrangements.

The Pension Service will bring together the backroom processing in 26 locations rather than over 400 at present. These processing centres will support a local service offering face-to-face contact for those who need it.

The local service will work in partnership with local agencies to undertake outreach activity such as visiting, private interviews in locations which suit them and drop-in services. We will build on the Better Government for Older People and Care Direct pilots and are striving to improve local access, not reduce it, and are keen to see a much more joined up approach towards services more generally for pensioners.

The Pension Service will roll out in a phased approach from February this year, with work continuing over the next few years.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much the CSA is owed in outstanding maintenance payments. [28161]

Malcolm Wicks: The amount owed to the Child Support Agency in outstanding maintenance payments as at 31 December 2001 is £584,562,023.

Disability Discrimination

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the number of cases brought under Parts II and III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [29485]

Maria Eagle: The Department monitors the numbers of complaints made to the employment tribunals and the courts under Parts II and III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA). It also carries out targeted research on how the provisions of Part II and III of the DDA are working. We will shortly publish a report by Incomes Data Services Ltd., "Monitoring the Disability Discrimination Act 1995—Phase 2", which provides a statistical analysis of complaints made to the employment tribunals and county courts and a commentary on the emerging case law.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to commission research into the effectiveness of the awards against employers and service providers for discrimination against people with disabilities, with specific reference to the impact on their future behaviour. [29486]

Maria Eagle: We are committed to keeping the operation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) under review, including through research into the effectiveness of its provisions.

We are currently developing proposals with the Disability Rights Commission for the next phase of the research project to monitor and analyse cases brought under the DDA.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to review the use of county and sheriff courts and their jurisdiction in cases under Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [29487]

Maria Eagle: We are committed to keeping the operation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 under review, including through research into cases brought under its provisions. Part III is not yet fully in force so it is too early to consider a review of specific provisions.

Disabled Households

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many families in the Midlothian constituency include a disabled person; how many of these families have income support as their main income; and what the average amount is per week that these households spend on *(a)* food, *(b)* fuel and *(c)* medicines. [27178]

Malcolm Wicks: Information is not available in the format requested.

Disability Living Allowance

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many applications for disability living allowance were received from applicants in Perth constituency for the period 31 May 2000 to 31 May 2001; how many of those applications were refused at first instance; how many of those applicants whose applications were refused appealed; and how many of such appeals were successful *(a)* in whole and *(b)* in part. [30871]

Maria Eagle: In the year ending 31 May 2001, approximately 200 first applications for disability living allowance in Perth were successful at the claim stage, and 100 were unsuccessful. Local information (on a constituency basis) about appeals is not available.

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make it his policy in respect of a claimant in receipt of a higher rate mobility component of disability living allowance who claims a core component to require medical information to be obtained from the claimant's doctor before a decision to refuse a claim is taken. [27220]

Maria Eagle: The mobility and care components of disability living allowance have separate qualifying criteria and entitlement to one component does not necessarily imply, or result in, entitlement to the other.

Disability living allowance is primarily a self-assessment benefit with no automatic requirement to obtain further evidence to support a claim. The obtaining of additional evidence on a claim inevitably increases the time taken to process it—sometimes substantially—and an approach will only be made to a claimant's doctor for further medical evidence when it is considered necessary and the doctor is deemed to be the most appropriate source for it.

Stakeholder Pensions

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many reports Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority has received of companies that failed to designate a stakeholder pension in time for the 8 October deadline; how many fines it has imposed as a result; and what the total value of fines imposed is. [24221]

Mr. McCartney: Opra has, up to 31 December 2001, received 220 reports of alleged failure of an employer to designate a stakeholder pension scheme for its work force. Seventy seven of those cases have been cleared, either because the employer has now designated a scheme or because the designation requirement does not apply.

On average it can take Opra up to three months to look into a reported failure to designate a stakeholder pension scheme. Initial reports are sometimes anonymous and work can be needed to track down accurate contact details for the employer. Opra will then write to the employer to establish the facts of the case and point out the employer's responsibilities. Opra will check by telephone that the letter has been received, and will give the employer around four weeks to respond. In some situations the employer may need time to meet with their advisers to clarify their circumstances—especially where there is a possibility that they may be exempt. On receiving a response from the employer, Opra may need to contact the employer again to clarify information provided in the response or to request further information.

The Government seek to work in co-operation with business on stakeholder pensions. Opra's overriding objective is to secure compliance with the law rather than to punish. At present, if the employer complies with the law before the investigation is completed, Opra will take no further action. Given this approach, and the normal timescales involved in following up reports, it is too early for any cases to have progressed to an Opra Board for consideration of a fine.

At the end of November 2001, 304,750 employers had already designated a stakeholder scheme for their work force.

Retirement Planning

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans his Department has to improve awareness of the need for retirement planning. [28022]

Mr. McCartney: The Government are committed to providing people with better information to improve awareness of the importance of retirement planning.

The Government's pension education strategy includes raising awareness of retirement planning through a dedicated publicity campaign; providing more information to people about their pension provision through combined pension forecasts; and testing new ways to get information out to the public, for example through interactive Digital Television.

The Department continues to liaise with the Financial Services Authority, employers, private pension providers and other organisations, on an on-going basis, to improve continuously the way we provide pensions information to consumers.

Cervical Spondylosis

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to designate cervical spondylosis as a registered industrial injury. [25399]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Cervical spondylosis is a common degenerative condition which cannot result solely from an industrial injury and cannot be easily attributable to employment. In view of the lack of medical or scientific evidence to the contrary, we have no plans to designate it as a prescribed industrial disease.

Jobcentre Plus

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the changes that individual benefit offices in the Jobcentre Plus areas have been asked to make to ensure they are accessible to incapacity benefit claimants, with specific reference to changes to *(a)* buildings, *(b)* furniture and *(c)* printed materials. [24219]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Jobcentre Plus is currently being delivered in 56 pathfinder offices. In the seven offices where providing entirely equal physical access to services has not been possible, alternative arrangements are in place to ensure that disabled people can still access these services. At Halifax, Darwen, Derby Normanton Road, and Wellington, there is restricted access to the first floor of these buildings, however all public services can be provided on the ground floor. At Pyle and Hoylake space restrictions mean there are some restrictions to staff movement. Only at Harlesden has public access been severely compromised by steps to the public entrance. Planning consent is being sought for a ramp. Alternative arrangements are in place to ensure service access for disabled people including home visits and assisted access at the office itself. The nearby office at Kilburn is fully accessible.

Internally, Jobcentre Plus offices and furniture have been designed to enable full and equal access for all Jobcentre Plus customers. Adviser workstations enable both customers and staff to view the information on the monitor screen. The shape of the worktop allows wheelchair users the same access as able-bodied customers. The newly introduced self-service job vacancy terminals, known as "Jobpoints", have been designed specifically to enable access by wheelchair users.

All Jobcentre Plus leaflets are available in alternative formats, including Braille and audiocassette. In addition to alternative formats for printed material, Jobcentre Plus offers textphone facilities and British Sign Language interpreters or other suitable communicators to help deaf or hard of hearing customers.

Job Vacancies

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what use is made of *(a)* Jobpoints and *(b)* Employer Direct for the advertisement of vacancies in Government Departments. [18041]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: All vacancies notified to the Employment Service through Employer Direct are shown on Jobpoints. Many Government jobs are advertised on Jobpoints and the internet job bank. Government Departments advertising their vacancies in this way include the Employment Service, Benefits Agency, Office for National Statistics and the Inland Revenue. Discussions are taking place with both the Cabinet Office and NHS Executive regarding advertising vacancies on the ES website.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many employees of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* agencies sponsored by his Department work in (i) London, (ii) areas benefiting from EU objective 1 status, (iii) areas with objective 2 status and (iv) other areas. [16113]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 19 November 2001]*: The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) currently covers 2,500 locations. The list of objective 2 status areas in England contains 1,700 areas. The information required for objective 2 status is therefore not easily available and could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

The figures available for London and objective 1 status areas are:

	Number of staff in DWP
London	17,334
Objective 1 areas	12,654
Other areas	109,678
Total	139,666

Retirement Statistics

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many men and women over the age of retirement are in employment; what allowances there are for men and women over the age of 60 looking to *(a)* remain in and *(b)* return to work; and what plans he has to raise the retirement ages of men and women. [29843]

Mr. McCartney: Employers are responsible for setting the retirement age of their employees. They often use the age at which the State pension becomes payable, or base the decision around their occupational pension scheme. State pension age will be equalised at 65 for both men and women from 6 April 2020. Women's state pension age will be increased gradually from 60 to 65 between the years 2010 and 2020.

The Department for Work and Pensions does encourage employers, through the Code of Practice on Age Diversity in Employment, and the Age Positive campaign, to value the contribution of older workers and to adopt flexible approaches to retirement which benefit both them and their employees.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Landfill Tax Credit Scheme

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which community projects based in the Buckingham constituency have benefited from the landfill tax credit scheme since its inception; and if he will indicate the amount of funding granted for each project. [30059]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

Information about the types of projects that have received funding under the landfill tax environmental bodies credit scheme is a matter for the regulator for the scheme, Entrust. I have therefore asked them to provide such data as they hold and will place a copy of their response in the Library.

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what interest liability the Railtrack administrator has incurred under the commercial loan agreement. [26304]

Mr. Spellar: The interest which is paid to the Secretary of State, accrued up until 15 January under the commercial loan agreement, is of the order of £14.2 million. It will be rolled up into the loan and paid at the same time that principal is repaid.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he estimates that increased operating costs that Railtrack has experienced post-Hatfield will have an impact on the financial projections in the SRA strategic plan. [28545]

Mr. Jamieson: We will assess any impact on the SRA financial projections once the administrator or railtrack's successor has obtained a clearer picture of its underlying cost base and its operational needs.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what powers he has to end the Railtrack administration through a refinancing package for the existing company. [30026]

Mr. Jamieson: The powers of the Secretary of State in respect of a railway administration are set out in the Railways Act 1993 and the Railway Administration Order Rules 2001. My right hon. Friend's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) on 23 October 2001, *Official Report,* columns 195–97W set out the basis for a proposal for a private sector company limited by guarantee as a successor to Railtrack. We have no plans to develop other proposals.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made on the impact of *(a)* Railtrack administration and *(b)* the move to two year franchise extensions on levels of new orders for rolling stock. [28552]

Mr. Jamieson: There are a number of mechanisms available to the SRA to secure investment under short franchise extensions, including rolling stock commitments under section 54 of the Railways Act 1993 where appropriate. I am not aware of any adverse effect on rolling stock orders caused by Railtrack going into administration.

Rail Electrification

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many miles of railway he expects to be electrified under the 10-year plan. [26465]

Mr. Jamieson: No specific targets have been set. Electrification in itself is not a priority aim of the SRA when considering investment in the railways. The authority are more interested in the benefits delivered for the passenger and freight customer than in the particular form of traction used.

Rail Safety

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of track has been inspected in each of the last five years for which records are available under Railtrack's preventative maintenance scheme; and what proportion will be inspected in the current 12-month period. [26068]

Mr. Jamieson: I understand that all track owned by Railtrack has been inspected in each of the last five years; and will be inspected in the current 12-month period. The frequencies and methods of inspection reflect the speed and annual tonnage of trains using the track and are set out in Railway Group Standard GC/RT 5021.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many children died in railway accidents *(a)* as passengers and *(b)* through trespass misadventure in each of the last five years for which figures are available in the age groups (i) zero to seven, (ii) eight to 13 and (iii) 14 to 18 years. [29744]

Mr. Jamieson: The number of fatalities to young people on the railway reported to the Health and Safety Executive's Railway Inspectorate (HMRI) over the last five years are shown in the following three tables. For statistical purposes HMRI classify children as between the ages of one to 15 years. Further information on railway fatalities to children can be found in the Chief Inspector of Railways annual reports on Railway Safety, copies of which are available in both House Libraries.

Table 1: Passenger fatalities

	Age		
1 April to 31 March	*0–7 years*	*8–13 years*	*14–18 years*
1996–97	0	0	1
1997–98	0	1	1
1998–99	0	0	4
1999–2000	0	0	0
2000–01	0	0	0

Table 2: Trespasser and suicide fatalities

	Age		
1 April to 31 March	*0–7 years*	*8–13 years*	*14–18 years*
1996–97	2	4	16
1997–98	1	4	18
1998–99	0	2	16
1999–2000	1	1	9
2000–01	1	4	19

Table 3: Other member of the public fatalities (eg Level Crossings)

	Age		
1 April to 31 March	*0–7 years*	*8–13 years*	*14–18 years*
1996–97	0	0	0
1997–98	0	0	1
1998–99	0	0	1
1999–2000	0	0	0
2000–01	0	0	0

Rail Subsidy

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total *(a)* direct and *(b)* indirect projected public subsidy to the railways (i) was in each of the past five years and (ii) will be in the next 10 years. [30254]

Mr. Jamieson: Total public support to the rail industry over each of the last five years is outlined in Table 4.1 of the Strategic Rail Authority's quarterly National Rail Trends bulletin. Government support via the franchised train operating companies is contained in the two 'Revenue support grant' columns contained in the table.

The reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) on 23 January 2002, *Official Report,* columns 871–72W, outlines the estimated profile of Government support for the next 10 years.

London Underground

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* redeployments, *(b)* retirements and *(c)* absence of London Underground staff on medical grounds there were (i) by underground line and (ii) in total in each of the last five years and in each of the last 12 months. [27711]

Mr. Jamieson: This is an operational matter for London Underground Ltd., who have provided the following information.

[1] London Underground are not able to provide this data disaggregated by each underground without incurring disproportionate cost.

Year	*Redeployments*	*Retirements*[2]	*Absence*[3] *(working days lost)*
1996–97	85	n/a	n/a
1997–98	84	n/a	n/a
1998–99	31	n/a	n/a
1999–2000	21	n/a	n/a
2000–01	6	n/a	n/a
Total (Five years)	227	n/a	n/a
Last 12 months[4]	120	115	140,494

n/a = Not available

[2] Data for retirements on medical grounds in each of the last five years would require disproportionate cost to collate. London Underground have said that their policy is not to retire employees on medical grounds, but instead, employees' contracts are terminated on medical grounds; employees then apply, if eligible, for their pension.

[3] London Underground have not been able to provide information on absence on the medical grounds over the last five years.

[4] January to December 2001

Note:

Detailed in-year operational information such as monthly data are a matter for London Underground; however a total for the last 12 months has been provided.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the level of absence and the reasons for absences on each London Underground line and in total for the last five years and each of the last 12 months. [27709]

Mr. Jamieson: This is an operational matter for London Underground Ltd., who have provided the following information.

Working days lost

Absence	*Last five years*[1]	*Last 12 months*[2]
Authorised	Not available	31,459
Unauthorised	Not available	3,155
Due to sickness	Not available	140,494
Total	458,819	175,108

[1] January 1996 to December 2000

[2] January to December 2001

Notes:

1. London Underground are not able to provide data disaggregated by each underground line without incurring disproportionate cost.
2. London Underground are unable to disaggregate the total for absence in the last five years into absence type.
3. Detailed in-year operational information such as monthly data are a matter for London Underground. However, a total for the last 12 months has been provided.

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the meetings he has had in the last 10 months with the Health and Safety Inspectorate to discuss safety on the London Underground. [28480]

Mr. Jamieson: There is no such body as the Health and Safety Inspectorate.

Departmental Sponsorship

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list all *(a)* funding resources and *(b)* initiatives sponsored by his Department for (i) the private sector, (ii) the voluntary sector and (iii) local authorities. [26848]

Ms Keeble: Details of the resources made available by Parliament to the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in 2001–02 and their allocation are set out in the Department's Winter Supplementary Estimate presented to Parliament in November 2001 (Cm 5294). The expenditure plans 2001–02 to 2003–04 for programmes within the Department's predecessor, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, were set out in that Department's Annual Report 2001 (Cm 5105) and for programmes previously in the Home Office in that Department's Annual Report 2001 (Cm 5106). An analysis is not readily available of the allocation of funds or specific initiatives between (i) the private sector, (ii) the voluntary sector and (iii) local authorities.

Housing Authorities

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the advantages are of stock transfer for housing authorities under the proposed local prudential capital expenditure regime. [28336]

Ms Keeble: The Department makes it clear that it is for local authorities to consider the relative advantages of the different financial and management options available for their housing stock.

Former Railway Routes

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will protect former railway routes for future railway use. [28735]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority retains land with a realistic prospect of rail or other transport use in the foreseeable future, or sells it to the rail industry, local authorities or others, for those purposes. Under a new licence condition that came into effect on 15 November 2001, Railtrack plc must now seek the Rail Regulator's specific consent in important cases of disposal of land that may be required for future railway use.

Rail Services (South-west)

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what assessment he has made of the impact the proposed investment in rail services in the south-west will have on journey times between *(a)* Penzance and Paddington and *(b)* Exeter and Waterloo; and if targets have been set for revised journey times; [28827]

(2) if he will make a statement on projected increases in train frequency between *(a)* Exeter and Waterloo and *(b)* Penzance and Paddington by 2005; [28828]

(3) what the projected total levels of investment are for the *(a)* Penzance to Paddington and *(b)* Exeter to Waterloo rail routes under the SRA strategic plan. [28829]

Mr. Jamieson: For both routes the main purpose of the proposed infrastructure investment is to improve the reliability of services. There may be marginal improvements in scheduled journey times as a consequence. No targets have been set for revised journey times.

There are seven Incremental Outputs Statement (IOS) infrastructure schemes planned for the Penzance to Paddington route with a current estimated value of over £25 million, and at least 13 stations on the route are due for improvements under the IOS stations programme. The frequency of services is unlikely to alter by 2005, although an IOS scheme currently under consideration could increase the level of service from Plymouth to Paddington to two trains per hour.

On the Waterloo-Exeter route, 14 stations are included in the IOS stations programme. The value of the IOS stations work will not be known until site visits assessing the level of improvements needed has been completed. The SRA is currently awaiting the outcome of the South West Area Regional Multi-Modal Study to see if any rail infrastructure improvements are recommended. There are no current plans to increase frequency on the Waterloo to Exeter line by 2005. South West Trains introduced a regular half-hourly service instead of the previous hourly service in May 2001.

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent representations he has received regarding investment in branch lines in Cornwall. [28830]

Mr. Jamieson: Representations have recently been received regarding investment in the Truro to Falmouth branch line.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 10 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 976W, on affordable housing, what representations he has received regarding the number of affordable housing units in rural areas. [30001]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* Over the past three months DTLR Ministers have replied to three letters and four parliamentary questions on the issue of rural affordable housing. Affordable housing provision is a key priority for this Government and in this correspondence we outlined the measures we are taking to increase provision in rural areas.

Over the same period, my noble Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning has discussed rural affordable housing in several meetings with the Countryside Agency, with whom we have a good working relationship.

Waverley Station, Edinburgh

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects detailed plans for the investment in Waverley station in Edinburgh will be brought forward. [29480]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority explained in their strategic plan that they and the Scottish Executive are in discussion with Railtrack about how best to take the project forward.

SRA Strategic Plan

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how much of the proposed expenditure announced in the SRA strategic plan will be spent in Scotland *(a)* in monetary terms and *(b)* as a proportion of the total spending; [29458]

(2) if he will provide a breakdown of total expenditure announced in the SRA strategic plan by nations and regions of the UK; [29457]

(3) how much of the proposed expenditure on new rail infrastructure announced in the SRA strategic plan will be spent in Scotland *(a)* in monetary terms and *(b)* as a proportion of the total spending; [29460]

(4) how much of the proposed expenditure on new trains announced in the SRA strategic plan will be spent in Scotland *(a)* in monetary terms and *(b)* as a proportion of the total spending. [29459]

Mr. Jamieson: The total public sector expenditure proposed in the Strategic Rail Authority's (SRA's) strategic plan is £33.5 billion. Many individual rail projects and improvements negotiated through franchise agreements, particularly the larger projects and improvements, will benefit more than one part of the country. The SRA has therefore not attempted to break down its planned expenditure on a regional basis.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many of the proposals announced on 14 January in the SRA strategic plan that relate to Scotland had been announced previously. [29461]

Mr. Jamieson: The plan sets out for the first time a prioritised list of schemes to be taken forward, and estimates the resources needed to deliver them.

Airport Rail Links

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the rail links to Glasgow and Edinburgh airports will be completed by 2010. [29456]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority's (SRA's) strategic plan sets out its short, medium and long-term priorities, including those for completion by 2010. Improved rail links to Glasgow and Edinburgh airports have been identified as schemes for further development. Detailed economic and engineering studies of options are being led by the Scottish Executive in partnership with Scottish Enterprise, BAA and the SRA.

Train Drivers

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many train drivers *(a)* in total and *(b)* subdivided by train operating company worked on Britain's railways for each (i) year and (ii) month since 1988. [29588]

Mr. Jamieson: This information is not held centrally. The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) is encouraging train operating companies to recruit sufficient drivers to meet their service obligations.

Road Fuel (Consumer Information)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans his Department has to give consumers information relating to the *(a)* fuel consumption and *(b)* carbon dioxide emissions of new cars in a form which (i) makes possible comparisons with cars of a similar size and (ii) is based on the colour-coded appliance energy label scheme. [29585]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department will shortly be consulting on future developments of the EU scheme under which information on fuel consumption and CO_2 emissions is required to be displayed on labels on new passenger cars offered for sale. The consultation will focus in particular on options for banded labelling. We expect that this will result in a pilot scheme of banded label and/or focus group studies of the preferred options. We will draw on our experience of this, and of ongoing research when negotiating in the EU on development of the labelling scheme.

Secure Stations Scheme

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the stations accredited as of 16 January, or the latest date for which information is available under the Secure Stations scheme. [29581]

Ms Keeble: The list set out records the name of each of the 132 stations accredited under the Secure Stations scheme as of 21 January 2002.

The percentage of stations accredited under the scheme is small in relation to the number of stations eligible to be accredited under the scheme. However, the accredited stations account for approximately one third of the total annual passenger throughput of overground rail journeys.

Barking (c2c Rail Ltd.)
Basildon (c2c Rail Ltd.)[1]
Benfleet (c2c Rail Ltd.)
Chafford Hundred (c2c Rail Ltd.)
Chalkwell (c2c Rail Ltd.)
Dagenham Dock (c2c Rail Ltd.)
East Tilbury (c2c Rail Ltd.)
Fenchurch Street (c2c Rail Ltd.)[1]
Grays (c2c Rail Ltd.)
Laindon (c2c Rail Ltd.)
Leigh-on-Sea (c2c Rail Ltd.)
Limehouse (c2c Rail Ltd.)
Ockendon (c2c Rail Ltd.)
Pitsea (c2c Rail Limited)
Purfleet (c2c Rail Ltd.)
Rainham (c2c Rail Ltd.)
Shoeburyness (c2c Rail Ltd.)
Southend Central (c2c Rail Ltd.)
Southend East (c2c Rail Ltd.)
Stanford-Le-Hope (c2c Rail Ltd.)
Thorpe Bay (c2c Rail Ltd.)
Tilbury Town (c2c Rail Ltd.)
Upminster (c2c Rail Ltd.)
West Horndon (c2c Rail Ltd.)
Westcliff (c2c Rail Ltd.)
Marylebone Rail (Chiltern)[1]
Stoke Mandevile (Chiltern)
Chipstead (Connex South Central Ltd.)
Dorking (Connex South Central Ltd.)
Eastbourne (Connex South Central Ltd.)
Horsham (Connex South Central Ltd.)
Oxted (Connex South Central Ltd.)
Tattenham Corner (Connex South Central Ltd.)
Worthing (Connex South Central Ltd.)
Belvedere (Connex South Eastern)
Charlton (Connex South Eastern)
Greenwich (Connex South Eastern)
Hither Green (Connex South Eastern)
Maidstone West (Connex South Eastern)
Orpington (Connex South Eastern)
Ashford International (Eurostar)[1]
Waterloo International (Eurostar) [reaccredited][1]
Gatwick (Gatwick Station Services)
Chelmsford (Great Eastern Railway Ltd.)
Berwick Upon Tweed (Great North Eastern Railway Ltd.)
Doncaster (Great North Eastern Railway Ltd.)
Dunbar (Great North Eastern Railway Ltd.)
Durham (Great North Eastern Railway Ltd.)
Newark Northgate (Great North Eastern Railway Ltd.)[1]
Retford (Great North Eastern Railway Ltd.)
Wakefield Westgate (Great North Eastern Railway Ltd.)
York (Great North Eastern Railway Ltd.)
Chippingham (Great Western Railway Ltd.)
St. Pancras (London and Continental Stations and Property Ltd.)
Charing Cross (LUL)
Edgware Road (Bakerloo) (LUL)
Elephant and Castle (LUL)
Kilburn Park (LUL)
Lambeth North (LUL)
Maida Vale (LUL)
Marylebone (LUL)
Oxford Circus (LUL)
Piccadilly Circus (LUL)
Regents Park (LUL)
Warwick Avenue (LUL)
Derby (Midland Main Line)[1]
Kettering (Midland Main Line)
Leicester (Midland Main Line)[1]
Market Harborough (Midland Main Line)[1]
Birmingham New Street (Railtrack)
Charing Cross (Railtrack)
Edinburgh Waverley (Railtrack Ltd.)
Euston (Railtrack)
Glasgow Central High Level[1]
Kings Cross rail (Railtrack)
Leeds City (Railtrack)
Liverpool Street (Railtrack)
London Bridge (Railtrack)
Manchester Piccadilly (Railtrack)[1]
Paddington (Railtrack)
Victoria Rail (Railtrack)[1]
Waterloo (Railtrack)
Kew Gardens (Silverlink Train Services)
Alton (South West Trains)
Andover (South West Trains)
Ascot (South West Trains)
Basingstoke (South West Trains)
Bracknell (South West Trains)
Eastleigh (South West Trains)
Fareham (South West Trains)
Farnborough (South West Trains)
Farnham (South West Trains)
Feltham (South West Trains)
Fratton (South West Trains)
Godalming (South West Trains)
Guildford (South West Trains)
Haslemere (South West Trains)
Havant (South West Trains)
Hounslow (South West Trains)
Kingston (South West Trains)[1]
Petersfield (South West Trains)
Portsmouth Harbour (South West Trains)
Putney (South West Trains)
Richmond (South West Trains)[1]

Salisbury (South West Trains)
Southampton Airport Parkway (South West Trains)
Southampton Central (South West Trains)
Surbiton (South West Trains)
Twickenham (South West Trains)
Wimbledon (South West Trains)
Winchester (South West Trains)
Windsor and Eton Riverside (South West Trains)
Woking (South West Trains)
Bourne End (Thames Trains Ltd.)
Windsor and Eton Central (Thames Trains Ltd.)
City Thameslink (Thameslink)
Haydons Road (Thameslink)
Morden South (Thameslink)
South Merton (Thameslink)
St. Helier (Thameslink)
Sutton Common (Thameslink)
Tooting (Thameslink)
West Sutton (Thameslink)
Wimbledon Chase (Thameslink)
Lancaster (Virgin Trains)
Oxenholme (Virgin Trains)
Barnstaple (Wales and West)
Exeter Central (Wales and West)
Gloucester (Wales and West)
Penzance (Wales and West)
Truro (Wales and West)
Weston-super-Mare (Wales and West).

[1] reaccredited

Millennium Dome

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions at what stage negotiations are with Meridian Delta over the sale of the Millennium Dome; when he expects negotiations to be completed; and if he will make a statement. [29587]

Ms Keeble: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, to my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Ian Stewart) on 18 December 2001, *Official Report,* columns 220–21W. Negotiations are on-going between English Partnerships and Meridian Delta Ltd.

Deep Vein Thrombosis

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what financial assistance the Government have given to the World Health Organisation's study into deep vein thrombosis; [29796]

(2) pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) of 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 336–37W, what target the World Health Organisation has set for the completion of their study into deep vein thrombosis; [29806]

(3) pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) of 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 336–37W, what representations he *(a)* has made and *(b)* plans to make to the World Health Organisation as part of their study into deep vein thrombosis. [29807]

Mr. Jamieson: Officials from the Department of Health and from my Department have made a number of visits to the World Health Organisation in Geneva to discuss the scope and organisation of its proposed study into deep vein thrombosis. A further visit is planned shortly. A decision on funding will be made when those discussions are completed. The WHO estimates that the study will take approximately two and a half years to complete. Assuming the World Health Organisation secures the necessary funding in the early part of this year, the study should be completed by the end of 2004.

Mobile Phone Masts

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many letters his Department has received from residents of the Buckingham constituency *(a)* in favour and *(b)* opposed to the erection of mobile phone masts in the last year. [30041]

Ms Keeble: The Department has received centrally five letters from members of the public in Buckinghamshire about the erection of mobile phone masts. All of these letters were either opposed to the erection of an individual mobile phone mast and/or requested clarification of our telecommunications planning policy.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many mobile phone masts there were in Buckingham constituency in each of the last five years. [30046]

Ms Keeble: The Department does not hold information about the number or locations of existing mobile phone masts.

However, the Radiocommunications Agency has made information available to the public via their website (www.radio.gov.uk). The database, called Sitefinder, gives details about all operational mobile phone base stations and their emissions. Sitefinder employs a "user-friendly" map-based facility indicating the location of cellular phone base stations. More information on a particular base station is available by simply clicking on the position indicator for the base station in question.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what powers he has to ensure that mobile telecommunication companies share masts. [31120]

Ms Keeble: The Government's policy is firmly to encourage mast and site sharing where that is the optimum environmental solution in a particular case. Indeed, conditions attached to individual operating licences by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry include a requirement to investigate mast sharing before seeking to put up any new mast.

Planning Policy Guidance Note 8, "Telecommunications", makes clear our expectation that developers should provide the local planning authority with clear evidence that they have considered the use of existing masts, buildings and other structures before seeking to erect any new mast, regardless of size. The authority may be justified in refusing prior approval or planning permissions if it considers the evidence regarding the consideration of alternative sites is not satisfactory.

English Nature

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he plans that English Nature should remain a statutory consultee on proposed regional spatial strategies, local development frameworks, action plans and planning applications; and if he will make a statement. [29898]

Ms Keeble: The consultation paper "Planning: Delivering a Fundamental Change" sets out the Government's proposals to overhaul the planning system. One option proposed is to clarify the status of statutory consultees and reduce their number. Decisions about which bodies might be in future be statutory consultees will be made in the light of consultation.

Tenancy Deposit Scheme

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if it is his policy to continue the Tenancy Deposit Scheme. [30035]

Ms Keeble: We hope shortly to reach a decision on the voluntary pilot tenancy deposit scheme and on such alternative options as there might be for safeguarding tenants' deposits from unjustified appropriation by landlords.

Overnight Parking (Residential Areas)

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to extend to smaller lorries and vans the ban on parking overnight in residential areas; and if he will make a statement. [29756]

Ms Keeble: Control of parking on local roads is a matter for local traffic authorities using their powers under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. They are in the best position to address problems taking account of particular local circumstances. Generally, goods vehicles with a gross plated weight of more than 3.5 tonnes or an unladen weight of more than 1525kg have operator licensing controls on them, which require them to be kept at an operating centre specified in the licence when not in use. The Government have no plans to ban the overnight parking on residential roads of smaller lorries and vans.

English Partnerships

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which organisations have made submissions to stage 1 of the English Partnerships review; and if he will place the submissions in the Library. [30025]

Ms Keeble: Submissions have been made by the New Town Special Interest Group, the Coalfield Communities Campaign, Telford and Wrekin council, National Housing Federation, Harlow council, The Woodland Trust, and the Government office for the west midlands. The regional development agencies submitted a joint response. Further correspondence has been received from a number of individuals and organisations.

Submissions will be placed in the Library at the conclusion of the review.

Campaign Medal

Mrs. Dean: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will review the eligibility of the merchant seamen who served while on convoy to Russia for a campaign medal; and if he will make a statement. [30118]

Mr. Jamieson: A 1946 Merchant Shipping Notice (M Notice) issued in 1946 gives information about the individual campaign medals which are issued to merchant seamen who served in the 1939–45 war and the qualifying conditions for their award. The M Notice specifically states that service covered by the 1939–45 Star includes voyages in the North sea, Baltic and Arctic ocean between Greenland and longitude 70.E. Similarly the Atlantic Star includes service convoys to the north of Russia; therefore the existing campaign stars cover the service in the Arctic Campaign.

There have been several requests over many years for a separate Arctic Convoy medal. However, this Government, in line with decision of previous post war Governments, continue to uphold the ruling given in 1946 by the Interdepartmental Committee on Honours, Decorations and Medals, that no further consideration would be given to awards for 1939–45 service.

Regional Planning

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what the total cost to his Department was of producing regional planning guidance for the English regions; [30200]

(2) what was *(a)* the total bill for salaries and expenses for board members, *(b)* the administrative operating costs and *(c)* the total annual budget in the latest year for which figures are available for each regional planning conference in England. [30202]

Ms Keeble: Details of the costs incurred by all regional planning bodies in producing draft regional planning guidance are not available to the Department. These bodies, which range from local authorities acting collectively to voluntary regional chambers, are neither appointed by nor report to the Department but are recognised by it for the purposes of preparing and monitoring regional planning guidance. The Department contributes some £6 million a year to the upper tier local authorities on an unhypothecated basis towards the costs of producing and monitoring regional planning guidance. In addition it has an annual budget of approximately £1 million a year for running the public examinations and research. The annual staff costs of the Department and Government offices for this work are approximately £800,000.

Train Operating Companies

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the projected requirements are for public subsidy to the train operating companies over the period of the 10 year plan. [30256]

Mr. Jamieson: The reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) on 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 871–72W, outlines the estimated profile of available Government resource (revenue) support. It is impossible to place precise figures on how much of this will be received by the train operating companies in advance of future commercial negotiations through the refranchising process.

National Rail Academy

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which organisation has responsibility for taking the lead in establishing the national rail academy. [30228]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority has the lead responsibility in establishing the national rail academy with the active involvement and support of the Rail Industry Training Council, the national training organisation for the rail industry.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his oral statement of 14 January 2002, Official Report, columns 30–5w, what progress has been made in establishing the national academy for the railways, with special reference to the training of engine drivers. [28817]

Mr. Jamieson: A cross-industry task force is being established to define the scope, aims, funding and modus operandi of a national rail academy. The training of drivers will figure in this work along with the other skills needs of the industry.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects the proposed national rail academy to commence operations. [30263]

Mr. Jamieson: A cross-industry task force is being established to define the scope, aims, projected modus operandi and the funding requirements of national rail academy. This will provide the basis for full consultation with the industry with a view to operations commencing as soon as is reasonably practical.

Low-cost Airlines

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has made to the German Government about access to the German marketplace for low-cost airlines. [30223]

Mr. Jamieson: None.

European Interoperability Directives

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many stations would require alteration works to enable Britain to comply fully with European interoperability directives. [30246]

Mr. Jamieson: Existing stations are only required to comply with the interoperability directives when work is being undertaken on them. No assessment can be made of the alterations required, such as platform lengths and heights, until the technical specifications for interoperability (TSIs) for the conventional rail network have been drafted. This process has only just begun and is not expected to be completed before 2004. The UK is involved in the TSI drafting process and will be seeking to ensure that they take account of the characteristics of the British network.

Ports

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which UK ports levy port charges; and what the level of the fees is in each case. [30333]

Mr. Jamieson: Payment of port charges is a condition of the public right to use any harbour for which there is a statutory harbour authority. The level of such charges has not required the approval of Government since the Harbours Act 1964 and central records of charges are not kept. However, the 1964 Act does require that charges in particular ports are advertised in the harbour by the harbour authority.

St. Kevin's Playing Fields

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will review Knowsley borough council's proposals for St. Kevin's playing fields in Kirkby following changes to the earlier proposals which he has considered. [30437]

Ms Keeble: Since the Secretary of State's decision on the planning application for the site has been issued he has no further jurisdiction in the matter.

Council Housing (Birmingham)

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information he has collated on the average *(a)* market value based on right to buy sales, *(b)* adjusted vacant possession value and *(c)* value for stock transfer purposes of council houses in Birmingham. [30390]

Ms Keeble: The values requested are not for comparable transactions. The price payable under the Right to Buy is the open market value of the house, less a significant discount based on the number of years the purchaser has been a local authority tenant. Tenants who buy their home through RTB are subsequently free to sell the house on the open market. The value of transferring stock is determined by what is known as tenanted market value. This reflects that the property is sold with sitting tenants and with an obligation for the properties to be retained for social housing tenants. Tenanted market value is based on the income from rents the landlord will receive, less an estimate for the cost of management and repairs for the next 30 years.

(a) The average market value before discount of council houses only (ie excluding flats) sold on a right to buy basis by Birmingham in 2000–01 was £38,094.

(b) The average vacant possession value of Birmingham's city council's dwellings (ie both houses and flats) as at April 2001 was estimated to be £28,978 at January prices.

(c) The average value of council dwellings (ie both houses and flats) in Birmingham for stock transfer purposes is estimated to be £3,032 per unit.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment has been made by the Government of the administrative requirements on voluntary and community organisations applying to the Neighbourhood Renewal Community Chests. [29919]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* The Neighbourhood Renewal Community Chest will provide funding to stimulate and support community activity in deprived areas. The Community Chest programme is administered through local voluntary sector organisations who are best placed to ensure that local groups are not prevented from applying because of administrative constraints. The Government want to rationalise and simplify access to funding for community and voluntary groups and are undertaking a number of initiatives aimed at achieving this. Where appropriate we will revise the Community Chest to reflect the outcome of these initiatives.

Planning

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what powers he has to intervene in planning proposals in cases where he has already made a determination on outline proposals but detailed later proposals are at variance with those already considered. [30963]

Ms Keeble: The Secretary of State's power to call in planning applications for his own decision extends to applications for the approval of reserved matters. However, his policy is to be very selective about exercising his call-in powers. He will, in general, take this step only if planning issues of more than local importance are involved. Each case is considered on its individual facts.

Road Traffic Offences

Mr. Joyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to amend the Road Traffic Offenders Act 1988. [30649]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* There are no immediate plans to amend the Road Traffic Offenders Act 1988.

Road Signage

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to issue new guidance on road signage to *(a)* the Highways Agency and *(b)* other highway authorities. [30756]

Mr. Jamieson: We are currently consulting on draft revised guidance on the provision of traffic signs to tourist attractions and facilities on trunk roads and local roads in England, which we expect to publish in the summer. We are also preparing updated and revised Traffic Signs Regulations for publication later this year, and will be issuing guidance for all highway authorities on the changes made to the 1994 regulations, as well as publishing revised chapters 4 and 5 of the Traffic Signs Manual on the design and use of warning signs and road markings.

Urban Stock Transfers

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his policy is on help towards debt breakage costs for urban stock transfers; and what plans he has to change it. [31343]

Ms Keeble: The Department requires local authorities to meet the debt breakage costs incurred on repayment of housing attributable debt subsequent to a housing stock transfer. At present there are no plans to change this policy.

Green Waste

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if it is the Government's policy to allow the re-use of green waste on farms without a requirement for planning permission. [30727]

Ms Keeble: The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 requires a planning application to be submitted for the importation of waste materials on to farms unless the waste is for use in certain specified engineering or building works. It is for local authorities in the first instance to determine whether planning permission is required.

Local Government Finance Report (England) 2002–03

Phil Hope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received on the local government finance settlement for 2002–03; and what conclusions he has reached. [31570]

Mr. Raynsford: I have today laid before the House the Local Government Finance Report (England) 2002–03. This report establishes the amounts of revenue support grant (RSG) and non-domestic rates (NDR) to be paid to local authorities in 2002–03, and the basis of their distribution. A draft of this report was issued for consultation on 4 December 2001, and updated information on grant allocations was published on 15 December and 28 December. The Department received a total of 386 written representations within the consultation deadlines from the Local Government Association and the Association of London Government, as well as from 334 local authorities, local authority groups and hon. Members.

Having considered the views of the local authority associations and others who have commented on my initial proposals, I have decided to make two main changes to my original proposals on grant distribution.

I have introduced an alternative baseline for 2001–02. This change, in effect, adjusts only for the transfers of service for which shire districts, police and fire authorities are responsible. In order to guarantee a minimum 2.3 per cent. increase, I have given these authorities whichever increase is greater—2.3 per cent. on the original baseline, or 2.3 per cent. on the alternative.

I have also made a change on the basis of the adjustment for the National Care Standards Commission transfer. We have concluded that it is correct to adjust only for the existing cost of local authority activity in this area. Otherwise, this change would have had adverse impacts for a number of authorities. After careful consideration, I have added extra money to the settlement to ensure that these authorities are reimbursed for the cost of this change.

No local authority loses out as a result of these changes as I have added some £27 million to the total of RSG and NNDR I announced on 4 December.

In addition, the final figures published today reflect the more accurate data that have become available since we published our proposals.

This year's settlement provides a good increase in money for local authorities. For the first time every local authority has been given a grant increase at least in line with inflation and in many cases much higher. This will allow councils to improve services while setting reasonable council tax increases. There should be no reason for big increases. The Government have increased money for local councils by 20 per cent. over the last four years.

This year, bills show clearly how much different tiers of authority are charging and by how much they have increased their part of the council tax. If any councils set substantial increases, their taxpayers and local electorate will have every reason to question their council's decision.

I shall be sending copies of this report and a guide to the settlement to all authorities, together with tables showing each authority's Standard Spending Assessment and its entitlement to RSG and NDR. Copies of the report, tables, and the guide are available in the Vote Office and the Libraries of the House.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Gender Pay Gap (Northern Region)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the ratio of female to male earnings in the northern region. [28142]

Alan Johnson: The gap between male and female earnings in the north-east Government office region has narrowed in recent years. According to the New Earnings Survey, conducted by the Office for National Statistics, average hourly pay for full-time employees, excluding overtime, in the north-east, was £8.99 for men and £7.26 for women in 1998, equivalent to a female to male ratio of 80.7 per cent. By 2001, the gender pay gap in the region had narrowed to 84.1 per cent. (£10.08 for men and £8.48 for women), a reduction which can be attributed at least in part to the introduction of the national minimum wage. In Great Britain as a whole the gender pay gap has narrowed from 80.0 per cent. to 81.6 per cent. over the same period.

Correspondence

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she expects to answer the letter of 28 December from the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead regarding tobacco smuggling and the Guildford Depository. [26300]

Ms Hewitt: The letter from the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead regarding tobacco smuggling and the Guilford Depository was answered on 20 January 2002.

Tanzania

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from the International Civil Aviation Organization on Tanzania's export control licences. [29626]

Nigel Griffiths: The Department of Trade and Industry's Export Control Organisation has received no representation from the International Civil Aviation Organization on Tanzania's export licences.

Postal Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of *(a)* first and *(b)* second class mail was delivered within the target time in the (i) UK, (ii) HP postcode area and (iii) MK postcode area in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [30058]

Ms Hewitt: This is an operational matter for Consignia, subject to the regulatory powers and duties of the Postal Services Commission in respect of service standards.

I am advised by Consignia that in the year 2000–01 the percentage of first class mail delivered the next working day in the UK was 89 per cent., in the MK postcode area was 85 per cent. and in the HP postcode area was 91 per cent. The percentage of second class mail delivered within three working days in the UK was 98 per cent., in the MK postcode area was 97 per cent. and in the HP post code area was 98 per cent.

Post Office Network

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 1034W, on sub-post offices, if she will list the funding allocated to each scheme. [30000]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* Further to the answer given to the hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 1034W, the funding allocated to the five initiatives is:

£13,200 to Capel-le-Ferne, Kent

£1,669 to Goadby Marwood, Leicestershire

£208 to Risby, Herefordshire

£10,200 to Kirk Ireton, Derbyshire

£3,862 to Coleby, Lincolnshire.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of Consignia's strategic plan to close post offices in rural communities; and if she will make a statement. [29993]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* Consignia has submitted no such strategic plan. A formal requirement was placed on Consignia in November 2000 to maintain the rural network and to prevent avoidable closures and this remains in place and will apply in the first instance until 2006. Transitional financial assistance to the rural network is currently under consideration.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* post offices and *(b)* sub-post offices there are at present in Britain; how many post offices and sub-post offices have closed since (i) 1 January 1997 and (ii) May 1997; and if she will make a statement. [30020]

Ms Hewitt: At the end of September 2001, the latest available figures indicated that the post office network comprised 17,687 outlets of which 17,092 were sub-post offices. As at the end of March 1997 there were 19,251 post offices of which 18,645 were sub-post offices. I understand from Post Office Ltd. that figures at 1 January 1997 and May 1997 are not available.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will publish the strategic plan for the future of the post office network recently submitted to her by Consignia; what proposals are made in this plan to change the size of the post office network; and if she will make a statement. [30019]

Ms Hewitt: Consignia has submitted no such strategic plan. The Government are committed to the maintenance of a nationwide network of post offices.

Business Links

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many businesses used business links in each year since 1995, broken down by region; and how many of these inquiries were the result of initial contact with the Small Business Service. [30547]

Nigel Griffiths: The table shows how many businesses used Business Links in each year since 1996–97; data for 1995–96 are not available. A business that receives advice twice within a quarter is counted only once but a business that receives assistance in separate quarters will be counted in each quarter.

Between April 2001 and September 2001, over 12,000 inquiries were referred to Business Links from initial contact with SBS service providers. Earlier data are not available.

Number of businesses using Business Link

	1995–96	1996–97[1]	1997–98[1]	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02[2]
England	[3]—	455,339	439,604	393,580	419,294	400,813	335,150
North East	[3]—	37,317	26,954	18,348	22,466	16,577	14,063
North West	[3]—	79,752	89,056	74,925	75,215	77,930	39,680
Yorkshire and Humber	[3]—	29,938	40,232	39,577	44,587	38,678	53,743
East Midlands	[3]—	32,445	25,398	26,635	30,111	24,997	20,845
West Midlands	[3]—	67,213	49,214	49,176	57,758	53,628	33,229
East of England	[3]—	71,512	72,346	45,599	47,525	45,072	54,074
London	[3]—	37,541	36,767	39,877	42,647	36,944	17,779
South East	[3]—	58,048	59,496	60,928	62,517	72,088	41,979
South West	[3]—	41,573	40,141	38,515	36,468	34,898	59,758

[1] Usage includes non-business assistance

[2] Quarter 4 data not included, quarter 3 data subject to validation procedures

[3] Not available

Source:

Business Link Management Information returns

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Don [illegible]ster: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was *(a)* the total bill for salaries and expenses for board members, *(b)* the administrative operating costs for each and *(c)* the total annual budget in the latest year for which figures are available for each of the regional development agencies in England. [30203]

Alan Johnson: The RDAs' net annual budget and administrative costs for the financial year 2001–02 are as follows:

£000s

Regional development agency	*Net budget (excluding receipts)*	*Administration budget*
One North East	161,653	12,853
North West Development Agency	281,089	14,956
Yorkshire Forward	245,437	9,989
East Midlands Development Agency	96,940	7,528
Advantage West Midlands	170,721	8,793
East of England Development Agency	62,113	5,836
South East of England Development Agency	108,859	7,143
South West of England Regional Development Agency	92,059	9,099
London Development Agency	298,139	9,470
Total	1,517,010	85,667

These are the latest figures available and are excluding receipts. The changes from the original budget reflects in-year additional funding for things such as the Business Recovery fund to help small businesses deal with the foot and mouth crisis and new programmes such as the regional centres of manufacturing excellence.

The RDA board members' salaries and expenses for the financial year 2000–01 are as follows:

£000s

Regional Development Agency	*Total Salaries for board members*	*Total Expenses for board members*
One North East	139	14
North West Development Agency	139	29
Yorkshire Forward	120	7
East Midlands Development Agency	148	19
Advantage West Midlands	138	15
East of England Development Agency	148	21
South East of England Development Agency	152	17
South West of England Regional Development Agency	146	34
Total	1130	156

Note:

All figures have been rounded to the nears £000.

London Development Agency board members are the responsibility of the Greater London Authority.

The total salaries for board members of each region vary for a number of reasons, such as: numbers of members, date of appointment, some members waive their fees and some members have additional responsibilities for which they are remunerated. The figures for board members' salaries are taken from the RDAs' annual accounts for 2000–01.

Fixed Term Work Directive

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her plans to implement the European directive on fixed term work. [29348]

Alan Johnson: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Dr. Naysmith) on 21 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 561W.

Government Payment Performance

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the average number of days from the date of invoice to date of payment taken by Government Departments and non-departmental agencies during 2001 to pay accounts payable. [30144]

Ms Hewitt: The Government take this issue very seriously and are working hard to improve their payment performance.

All Government Departments and agencies have been required to monitor their payment performance, and are required to pay all valid invoices within 30 days or other agreed credit period.

My Department collects the payment performance figures, which are published annually in July.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Wright) on 19 July 2001, *Official Report,* column 322W.

Regulations

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many new regulatory measures in relation to business the Government have introduced in the last year; and how many have ceased to have effect. [30145]

Ms Hewitt: The Department was responsible for 100 regulations introduced since 1 January 2001. Of these regulations 83 imposed negligible or no costs on business and eight have saved costs.

Records relating to repealed regulations are not held centrally. The information requested could be obtained and collated only at disproportionate cost.

Telecommunications

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her estimate is of the net change in employment levels in the telecommunications and telecommunications equipment industries in 2002. [30148]

Ms Hewitt: 2002 is likely to be a year of transition for both the telecommunications services and the telecommunications equipment industries following dramatic global restructuring in 2001. Given the pace of change in these sectors, it is not possible to predict the net impact on employment in 2002.

Broadband

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to ensure that by 2005 Britain will have the most competitive and extensive broadband network in the G7. [30150]

Ms Hewitt: We set out the Government strategy for broadband in the UK Online report on 3 December. This report can be found on the website of the e-envoy http://www.-envoy.gov.uk/ukonline/championsh/anrepmenu.htm.

Recruitment Agencies

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of recruitment agencies specialise in *(a)*. IT recruitment, *(b)* secretarial recruitment, *(c)* health care recruitment and *(d)* transport industries recruitment; and how many recruitment agencies are classified as SMEs. [30692]

Alan Johnson: I have no detailed breakdown of the private recruitment industry by particular specialist areas, since many agencies and employment businesses provide work-finding services for a number of occupations. However, we estimate that of around 20,000 establishments in the industry, about 10 per cent. specialise in IT recruitment and almost 5 per cent. are licensed nurses agencies. While this industry is made up predominantly of small firms, I have no details of the number of establishments which would be classified as SMEs.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the Recruitment and Employment Confederation has withdrawn [illegible] support for the proposals in the draft regulations on the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations 2001; and what plans she has to hold further discussions with the Confederation. [30684]

Alan Johnson: I have received no indication that the Recruitment and Employment Confederation has changed its position on the draft Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations. I currently have no plans for further meetings with the Confederation but my officials have regular meetings with its representatives.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many representations her Department has received on her proposals for quarantine periods in the legislative framework governing agency conduct; and if she will make a statement. [30674]

Alan Johnson: During the latest consultation exercise on the draft Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations, we received 80 representations containing comments on the proposed quarantine provisions.

The principles underlying our proposals on the quarantine periods to apply to the payment of transfer fees are in line with suggestions made by the Recruitment and Employment Confederation, the principal trade association in the private recruitment industry.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which individuals and organisations will be invited to respond to the further consultation on the draft Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations. [30678]

Alan Johnson: The further consultation on certain aspects of the draft Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations will cover all those consulted last time. These regulations will also be placed on the DTI website.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what studies her Department has conducted into the length of time an IT professional placed through a personal services agency must be in post to recoup an agency's initial costs. [30691]

Alan Johnson: The Department has undertaken no studies into the length of time an IT professional placed through a personal services agency must be in post in order to recoup the initial costs of the placement incurred by an employment business. Such information would be regarded as commercially confidential by the industry.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to exempt from the draft Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations those temporary staff who choose to operate through personal service companies; and if she will make a statement. [30682]

Alan Johnson: I have no plans to exempt work-seekers who choose to operate through personal service companies from the draft Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations.

When the existing Conduct Regulations were introduced in 1975, it was very unusual for workers to be incorporated, and those working through limited companies were, therefore, left outside the protection provided. However, in recent years, incorporation has become widespread in some sectors, notably IT, and I think we should ensure that these work-seekers are also covered by the protections provided in the proposed regulations.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to meet representatives of the Association of Technology Staffing Companies during the further consultation period for the draft Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations. [30677]

Alan Johnson: I have no current plans to meet representatives of the Association of Technology Staffing Companies during the further consultation on certain aspects of the draft Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will make a statement on the length of time it has taken to draft the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations 2001 and the costs involved; [30683]

(2) what her timetable is for the completion of the draft Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations; [30679]

(3) if she will make a statement on the reasons for the delay in laying the revision of the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations before the House. [30675]

Alan Johnson: The draft Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations comprise a large and detailed package, covering a wide range of issues. We have taken the time necessary to undertake extensive consultation exercises and discuss these issues with the recruitment industry. It is important to ensure that the new regulations are right for the industry, since they are likely to stay in place for some time.

I expect to issue the revised draft regulations shortly, following a short consultation exercise on certain aspects of these regulations.

I have no estimate of the costs involved in drafting these regulations.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recommendations the Better Regulation Task Force has made on revising the existing Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations; and if she will make a statement. [30676]

Alan Johnson: In 1999 the Better Regulation Task Force suggested alternative options for the transfer fee proposals in the draft Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations.

The task force welcomed the Government's review of the existing Conduct Regulations and endorsed our objectives. In particular, it supported our aims of improving the protections for vulnerable people and excluded groups, while avoiding placing unnecessary burdens on the private recruitment industry. The task force shares the Government's view that this industry has a vital role to play in the economy. After further discussions with the industry we decided to adopt a modified version of one of the task force's proposals.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with the Recruitment and Employment Federation on the temporary recruitment industry. [30711]

Alan Johnson: I have discussed a range of issues affecting the private recruitment industry with representatives of the Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC). At my last meeting with the REC on 9 October 2001, the subjects covered included the draft Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations and the proposed EU Directive on agency workers.

Icelandic Trawlermen (Compensation)

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claims for compensation have been paid to former Icelandic trawlermen, since her Department's decision on the post-79 issue; and how many remain to be paid. [29905]

Nigel Griffiths: Since 26 October 2000, when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced an additional £10 million being made available to former Icelandic trawlermen, 928 claims have been paid.

There are currently 284 claims where further information is required before entitlement to compensation can be assessed and a further 386 which are in the process of being paid.

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many payments have been made to former Icelandic trawlermen; and what the total amount of compensation claims paid is, broken down in each case by port. [29906]

Nigel Griffiths: The figures as of 23 January 2002 are as follows:

Current area of residence of claimant	*Number of payments*	*Amount of compensation (£)*
Hull	1,370	15.3m
Grimsby	497	3.8m
Fleetwood	256	2.5m
Blackpool	38	311k
Cleethorpes	134	1.1m
Newcastle	260	2.9m
West Yorkshire	162	1.5m
Aberdeen	117	671k
Others	362	3m
Total	3,196	31m

National Minimum Wage

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact of the national minimum wage in the *(a)* Cleethorpes and *(b)* Grimsby constituency. [29907]

Alan Johnson: Estimates for parliamentary constituencies are not available. Between spring 1998 and 2001, there has been a reduction of around 120,000 in the number of jobs paying less than the national minimum wage rates in Yorks and Humberside.

Faulty Goods

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to introduce legislation to require retailers and manufacturers to repair faulty goods within a given time scale; and if she will make a statement. [29935]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* When the Sale of Consumer Goods Directive (1999/44EC) is transposed into UK law later this year, it will give consumers a legal right to repair, carried out within a reasonable time, if goods do not conform to contract.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total sum is of *(a)* premiums received by the Export Credits Guarantee Department, and *(b)* claims paid out by the Export Credits Guarantee Department in the financial years of (i) 2000–01 and (ii) 2001–02. [27213]

Ms Hewitt: Using the published annual report and the provisional figures to December the figures are as follows:

£ million

Financial year	*2000–01*	*2001–02*[1]
Earned premium	109.5	57.5
Claims authorised	298.0	180.1

[1] Provisional to end December 2001

The claims figures relate mostly to business with Indonesia that has been rescheduled and which ECGD expects to recover in the fullness of time. These claims are in respect of business supported before the years indicated.

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 671W, on public appointments, if she will list the bodies with the names of those appointed. [27887]

Ms Hewitt: My answer of 10 December gave the number of appointments made between 7 June and 30 November as 167. Details of the bodies to which the appointments were made and the names of the appointees have been placed in the Libraries of the House, together with details of a further 11 who were appointed to the research councils in that period but whose numbers were inadvertently omitted from the original figure of 167. The total number of appointments in the period concerned was in fact 178.

Departmental Expenditure

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 18 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 508W, on departmental expenditure, if she will state the calculation by which she reached her answer; and if she will make a statement. [30291]

Ms Hewitt: For each loan refinanced, ECGD calculates the savings generated by the reduction in the guaranteed return paid to the lending banks and the savings generated by using HMG funding as compared to alternative fixed funding over the life of the loan. The figure of £75 million represents the sum of these savings for all cases refinanced in this way up to 31 March 2001.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her estimate is of the net cost of the climate change levy to the manufacturing sector. [30168]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

It is not possible to say what the precise effect of the climate change levy will be on any one particular sector.

Government Supplies

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the Government's policy is regarding credit checking its supplier companies and traders. [29903]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I have been asked to reply.

The Office of Government Commerce published new guidance on the financial appraisal of suppliers in October 2001. The guidance stresses that while credit ratings are useful indicators they should not be used as a substitute for a more detailed financial examination of prospective suppliers.

A copy of Supplier Financial Appraisal Guidance is available on the Office of Government Commerce website at: www.ogc.gov.uk/ogc/publications.nsf/pages/publications.html.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

Transfer of Functions

Mr. Rendel: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, if the additional costs relating to the transfer of the functions of the Local Government Commission for England to the Electoral Commission will be met in advance of the transfer date of 1 April 2002 provided for in the Local Government Commission for England (Transfer of Functions) Order 2001 (SI2001/3962). [31316]

Mr. Beith: In order to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of the transfer and to enable the transferring local government boundary review functions, together with the related functions transferring from the Secretary of State for Local Government, Transport and the Regions, to be carried out without interruption, urgent expenditure estimated at £127,000 will be met by repayable advances from the Contingencies Fund.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Council Tax (Police Costs)

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, by police authority, the police element of council tax per head for each year since 1995–96 and the percentage change *(a)* in each year and *(b)* for the whole period. [28667]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

A table showing the police authority council tax for each year since 1995–96 per head of population and the percentage change in each year, and for the whole period, has been placed in the House of Commons Library. The figures per head of population include council tax that is met by council tax benefit.

Police Grant

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how he plans to allocate police grant in 2002–03; and what the final funding allocations for police authorities will be for that year. [31248]

Mr. Denham: I have today laid before the House the Police Grant Report (England and Wales) 2002–03 (HC 533). The report sets out my determination for 2002–03 of the aggregate amount of grants that I propose to pay under section 46(2) of the Police Act 1996, and the amount to be paid to each police authority and to the Greater London Authority for the Metropolitan Police Authority.

Allocations of police grant: 2002–03

£

	Grant allocations	*Transitional grants*	*Total*
Avon and Somerset	91,025,174	0	91,025,174
Bedfordshire	34,313,252	0	34,313,252
Cambridgeshire	40,842,075	0	40,842,075
Cheshire	59,689,589	0	59,689,589
City of London	29,843,245	0	29,843,245
Cleveland	44,723,013	0	44,723,013
Cumbria	32,733,488	0	32,733,488
Derbyshire	56,470,734	0	56,470,734
Devon and Cornwall	94,722,350	0	94,722,350
Dorset	37,600,585	0	37,600,585
Durham	43,958,181	0	43,958,181
Dyfed-Powys	28,173,194	0	28,173,194
Essex	92,346,333	0	92,346,333
Gloucestershire	33,653,863	0	33,653,863
Greater Manchester	203,722,362	0	203,722,362
Gwent	37,640,172	0	37,640,172
Hampshire	108,365,042	0	108,365,042
Hertfordshire	61,640,063	300,000	61,940,063
Humberside	60,476,986	0	60,476,986
Kent	102,446,510	0	102,446,510
Lancashire	97,392,588	0	97,392,588
Leicestershire	55,659,650	0	55,659,650
Lincolnshire	34,305,310	0	34,305,310
Merseyside	126,336,316	0	126,336,316
Metropolitan police	1,015,895,687	0	1,015,895,687
Norfolk	46,284,453	0	46,284,453
North Wales	41,105,875	0	41,105,875
North Yorkshire	42,026,127	0	42,026,127
Northamptonshire	35,505,178	0	35,505,178
Northumbria	113,187,850	0	113,187,850
Nottinghamshire	67,683,907	0	67,683,907
South Wales	89,252,826	0	89,252,826
South Yorkshire	92,071,806	0	92,071,806
Staffordshire	60,965,947	0	60,965,947
Suffolk	37,702,731	0	37,702,731
Surrey	54,442,942	800,000	55,242,942
Sussex	91,312,691	0	91,312,691
Thames Valley	122,386,580	0	122,386,580
Warwickshire	28,078,851	0	28,078,851
West Mercia	61,765,548	0	61,765,548
West Midlands	206,139,660	0	206,139,660
West Yorkshire	155,924,778	0	155,924,778
Wiltshire	34,566,488	0	34,566,488
Totals			
England	3,808,207,933	1,100,000	3,809,307,933
Wales	196,172,067	0	196,172,067
England and Wales	4,004,380,000	1,100,000	4,005,480,000

MI5

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many MI5 files were extant at 31 December 2001; how many were categorised as *(a)* green, *(b)* amber and *(c)* red in each category; and how many were (i) held on microfiche and (ii) held as hard-copy in each category. [28639]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The Security Service held approximately 360,000 files at the end of December 2001, of which 210,000 are personal files and of those 40,000 were on microfiche.

There were 20,000 personal files categorised as green, the remainder being either amber or red.

I cannot give an immediate breakdown between these categories but I will write to the hon. Member shortly with this information and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Immigration Advisers

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* individuals and *(b)* organisations giving immigration advice for profit are (i) registered and (ii) in the process of registering with the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioners. [28776]

Angela Eagle: I understand that, as of 18 January 2002, the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) had registered 135 immigration advisers in business for profit. Of these, 87 are sole practitioners and 48 are organisations comprising two or more practitioners. The OISC has under consideration 11 registration applications from sole practitioners and nine from organisations.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* individuals and *(b)* organisations giving immigration advice for profit have been refused registration with the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner since 30 April 2001; and if he will publish a list of those individuals and organisations. [28777]

Angela Eagle: I understand that, as of 18 January 2002, the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) had refused to register 12 immigration advisers in business for profit of which eight are sole practitioners. Whether this information should be published is a matter for the OISC; I understand that there are no current plans to do so.

Probation Service

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff were employed by the National Probation Service by division and function *(a)* on the last date for which figures are available and *(b)* in April 2001. [28784]

Beverley Hughes: The information requested is given in the tables.

Information on staff in post by grade, gender and type of employment is collected at end June and end December each year. There is a separate collection of numbers of staff in post by grade, gender and ethnicity; this was annually from December 1995 to December 2000 but has now changed to a September and March basis starting September 2001.

The numbers of probation officers in post fell between December 2000 and June 2001 because of the transfer of Family Court Welfare Work, and associated staff, to the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (CAFCASS) at 1 April 2001.

The reduction in numbers of probation officers is a reflection of the loss of "Family Court Welfare Officers". The Probation Service is no better or worse off, in terms of having enough staff, than before the transfer took place.

The numbers exclude those in the National Probation Directorate (NPD). The numbers are purely those working in areas including Chief Officers who are appointed by the Home Office.

Table 1: Probation officers in post, by grade and type

Number

England and Wales	*31 December 2000*	*30 June 2001*
CPO	T54	42
DCPO	12	11
ACPO	213	209
Area Manager	49	51
Regional Training	48	39
Senior Probation Officers		
Family Court Welfare	60	—
Other field work	816	864
Seconded to prison	110	121
Hostels	71	82
Other	8	14
Senior Practitioner		
Field work	105	109
Seconded to prison	11	5
Hostels	9	8
Other	4	12
Main Grade		
Family Court Welfare	543	—
Other field work	4,258	4,060
Trainee	564	543
Seconded to prison	509	480
Hostels	74	67
Other	53	69
All probation officers[1]	7,571	6,785

[1] Whole-time equivalent. Individual figures may not round to the total because of the rounding of part-time hours.

Table 2: Staff other than probation officers in post, by grade and type

Number

England and Wales	*31 December 2000*	*30 June 2001*
Probation Services Officers	1,019	1,083
CS schemes	1,019	1,083
Seconded to prison	132	136
Other duties	869	916
General duties	849	1,076
Clerical and Secretarial	2,529	2,317
Research and Information Officers	106	141
Administrative officers	1,489	1,532
Sessional supervisors	421	444
Others	254	194
Hostels	791	778
All staff other than probation officers[1]	8,458	8,616

[1] Whole-time equivalent. Individual figures may not round to the total because of the rounding of part-time hours.

Either-way Criminal Offences

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the either-way criminal offences; and if he will make a statement. [29644]

Mr. Denham: There is no readily available list of triable either-way offences. Appendix Four of the annual Command Paper "Criminal statistics England and Wales" lists just over 370 triable either-way offence codes which are used for statistical purposes. Each code may cover more than one offence and these codes cover approximately 700 offences. Other triable either-way offences are grouped together under one ad hoc code. Copies of the Command Paper are available in the Library.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his plans to extend the interim regulations for the support of asylum seekers for another two years. [29834]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* Some asylum seekers fall to be supported by local authorities under the Asylum Support (Interim Provisions) Regulations 1999. These regulations came into force on 6 December 1999 and are due to end on 1 April 2002. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has decided that it would be appropriate to extend these regulations until 5 April 2004. This extension will enable Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) staff to complete the data matching exercise between its records and those held by local authorities. In addition during this time asylum seekers are to be issued with application registration cards. Once these two exercises have been completed we will have detailed information on the number of asylum seekers being supported by local authorities.

We can then discuss with the local authorities how best to transfer the cases to the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) system of support.

Skilled Migrant Programme

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his plans to attract skilled foreign workers to the UK; and if he will make a statement. [29835]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) on 13 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 1010W. Applications under the Highly Skilled Migrant Programme will be accepted by diplomatic posts overseas from 28 January. The work permit system additionally provides a fast, effective route for employers to recruit skilled people to fill vacancies where they are unable to recruit or train a resident worker. The forthcoming White Paper will further set out the Government's strategy for making sure the immigration system maximises the benefits to the United Kingdom of skilled foreign workers.

Police Personnel Data

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the quality of data in recent police personnel statistics publications. [29476]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate makes a careful assessment of the quality of any national statistics that it publishes and is carrying out a series of reviews under the National Statistics framework.

A Police Numbers Task Force was established last year specifically to address concerns over police personnel data. This group has now completed its work and its report was made available to police forces for consultation on 18 December 2001. A copy of this report is available on the Home Office website.

Ministerial Group on the Family

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times the Ministerial Group on the Family has met since *(a)* its formation, *(b)* the publication of Supporting Families and *(c)* 7 June 2001. [29931]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* The Ministerial Group on the Family, as with other ministerial groups, met when needed. Following the June 2001 general election the ministerial group was replaced by the Cabinet Committee on Domestic Affairs Sub-Committee on Active Communities and Family Issues, which is chaired by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and which co-ordinates Government policies on the family.

Family Visitor Appeals

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the net annual income is from family visitor appeals in the first year of its operation. [29400]

Angela Eagle: The net income from fees for family visitor appeals in the first year of the scheme was £104,000.

Police (Early Retirement)

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Government policy towards police officers taking early retirement while disciplinary charges are pending. [22782]

Mr. Denham: The Government believe that it is unacceptable for sickness or medical retirement to be used as a means of avoiding discipline. Regulations allow for disciplinary hearings to go ahead in the absence of the accused, although the power is not used very frequently. It will require strong support from the centre—which we will provide—and firm management action to use the existing power to proceed with hearings in all but the most exceptional cases. We will amend the central guidance and, if necessary, the statutory regulations to achieve this. Where medical retirement is at issue, the police authority should consider whether it would be right to exercise its discretion not to retire the officer where the public interest in completing the proceedings in a misconduct case outweighs the medical condition.

Violence Against Women

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps have been taken to include violence against women in his Department's recent policy initiatives on violent crime. [27860]

Mr. Denham: The Government have made it clear that they have committed to the reduction of all violent crime, including against women. Tackling violence against women is an integral element of our strategies to reduce violent crime.

Domestic violence is the largest single form of violent crime against women. We have taken a number of steps to address domestic violence including issuing a new Home Office circular to the police, issuing multi-agency guidance for addressing domestic violence, and issuing guidance for prosecuting cases of domestic violence to Crown prosecutors. We have provided over £10 million funding under the Crime Reduction Programme to the Violence Against Women initiative. This initiative is aimed to discover what is effective and cost effective in reducing domestic violence, rape and sexual assault by known perpetrators.

Ministers from across Government are working closely together to consider areas for priority action (to effectively address domestic violence and reduce incidents) such as intervention by health professionals and enhancing the interface between the criminal and civil jurisdictions.

Police Pensions

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the Police Federation on proposals to change the pension provisions for police officers. [30213]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* We are looking at ways of modernising police pensions to make them more flexible and affordable for future entrants and to reflect modern lifestyle patterns. Any proposals for change would of course be subject to discussion and negotiations with the Police Federation.

Police Terms and Conditions

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with the Association of Chief Police Officers on the terms and conditions for the employment of police officers; and when he expects the new pay and terms and conditions document will be agreed. [30211]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* Both the Secretary of State for the Home Department and the Association of Chief Police Officers are represented on the Official Side of the Police Negotiating Board (PNB) for the United Kingdom. On 27 December 2001, following negotiations, the Official Side reached agreement in principle with the Staff Side on a package of changes to police pay and conditions of service. The changes are set out in the Heads of Agreement. Both Sides are now consulting their members on the changes which have to be ratified by the end of February.

Young Offenders

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the level of youth crime in the London borough of Havering. [21012]

Mr. Denham: Information provided by the youth offending team in Havering shows that, in the year 2000, youth crime accounted for just under a quarter (24 per cent.) of all crime in the borough. The corresponding figure for 1999 was 31 per cent.

The number of young offenders arrested by the police in Havering during 2001, excluding those in respect of whom no action was taken, is set out in the table.

	Male	*Female*	*Total*
January to March	155	31	186
April to June	181	31	212
July to September	161	37	198
October to December[1]	140	28	168
Total	637	127	764

[1] Up to 5 December

Children (Supervision Orders)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children who are the subject of supervision orders issued by each local authority in England and Wales are resident in institutions in Scotland. [27733]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* The information required is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate costs.

Police Overtime

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact of his proposal to reduce police officers' enhanced overtime rates on the morale of frontline officers. [30113]

Mr. Denham: The Police Negotiating Board (PNB), on which both the Secretary of State and the Police Federation are represented, reached agreement in principle on 27 December 2001 on a package of changes to police pay and conditions of service. The changes are set out in the heads of agreement.

One of the proposed changes is to reduce the premium rates of pay, but not to plain time, for working overtime, on rostered rest day and on public holidays. The reductions would be phased in over two years, the first stage on 1 April 2003 and the second stage on 1 April 2004. The savings from reducing the premium rates of pay would be re-invested into the new pay framework.

The proposed reductions in premiums have to be seen in the context of all the other changes set out in the heads of agreement. Those changes include shortened pay scales for all federated ranks, a minimum increase of £402 on 1 April 2003 on each point of the pay scales, a new competence-related payment of £1,002 at the top of the scales.

There will also be a new special priority payments scheme to reward those officers working at the sharp end of public service, doing the most difficult and demanding tasks. Officers in qualifying posts will receive a payment of between £500 and £5,000 a year. The national criteria are that posts carry a significantly higher responsibility than the norm for the rank; or are particularly difficult to fill; or have specially arduous working conditions. All parties in PNB recognise that there are a number of specialist posts where long hours are a necessary and integral part of the officers' role rather than due to management failure.

In addition, chief constables will be able to award bonuses of between £50 and £500 for occasional work of an outstandingly demanding, unpleasant or important nature, such as hostage negotiation, or fingerprinting and searching badly decomposed bodies.

The Government believe that, taking all the elements of the package into account, the vast majority of officers will be better off.

Nuclear Security

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what reviews of the preparedness for terrorist attack against *(a)* chemical industry plants and *(b)* nuclear industry facilities have been conducted by the civil contingencies unit following the terrorist activities in the United States on 11 September 2001. [28537]

Mr. Blunkett: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry keeps security and safety precautions at nuclear sites under regular review. The United Kingdom's civil nuclear sites apply stringent security measures regulated by the security regulator, the Office for Civil Nuclear Security. She is also working closely with industry representatives and others to analyse the vulnerabilities of the chemical industries to terrorist attack and to identify and implement measures to maximise their resilience.

In addition, I chair the civil contingencies committee which, through its sub-committees, has co-ordinated reviews by the appropriate lead Government Departments and devolved Administrations into the contingency and other arrangements to protect the United Kingdom against the effects of a terrorist attack, particularly in the light of the terrorist attacks of 11 September.

Chief Constables

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the length of service as chief constable is of each chief constable in England. [28044]

Mr. Denham: The appointment of a chief constable is a matter for decision by the appropriate police authority, subject to the approval of the Secretary of State. In making an appointment, a police authority must adhere to Regulation 13A of the Police Regulations 1995, which provide that appointment as chief constable should be for a minimum period of four years and a maximum period of seven years.

The current position for each force in England is given in the table. In a small number of cases, the appointment pre-dates the introduction of the fixed term regulations on 1 April 1995, and exceeds the current maximum period.

Force	*Chief Constable*	*Appointment date*	*Term*
Avon and Somerset	S. C. Pilkington Esq QPM	February 1998	3 years 11 months
Bedfordshire Police	Paul Hancock Esq	April 2001	9 months
Cambridgeshire	D. G. Gunn Esq CBE QPM	September 1993	8 years 4 months
Cheshire Police	N. Burgess Esq QPM	October 1997	4 years 3 months
City of London Police	Perry Nove QPM	April 1998	3 years 9 months
Cleveland Police	B. D. Shaw Esq QPM	August 1995	6 years 5 months
Cumbria	Michael Baxter	December 2001	1 month
Derbyshire	D. Coleman Esq	July 2000	1 year 6 months
Devon and Cornwall	Sir John Evans QPM	September 1988	13 years 4 months
Dorset Police	Mrs. Jane Stichbury QPM	December 1998	3 years 1 month
Durham	G. E. Hedges QPM	August 1997	4 years 5 months
Essex Police	D. F. Stevens Esq QPM	March 1998	3 years 10 months
Gloucestershire	Timothy Brain Esq	March 2001	10 months
Gtr Manchester Police	D. Wilmot Esq QPM	April 1991	10 years 9 months
Hampshire	P. R. Kernaghan Esq QPM	May 1999	2 years 8 months
Hertfordshire	Paul Acres Esq QPM	February 2000	1 year 11 months
Humberside Police	D. Westwood Esq QPM	November 1998	3 years 2 months
Kent	Sir David Phillips QPM	November 1992	9 years 2 months
Lancashire	Mrs. P Clare QPM	May 1995	6 years 8 months
Leicestershire	D. J. Wyrko Esq QPM	April 1997	4 years 9 months
Lincolnshire Police	R. J. N. Childs Esq QPM	March 1998	3 years 10 months
Merseyside Police	N. Bettison Esq QPM	November 1998	3 years 2 months
Metropolitan Police	Sir John Stevens QPM	February 2000	1 year 11 months
Norfolk	K. R. Williams Esq QPM	May 1993	8 years 8 months
Northamptonshire Police	Mr. Chris Fox QPM	July 1996	5 years 6 months
Northumbria Police	J. C. Strachan Esq QPM	October 1997	4 years 3 months
North Yorkshire Police	D. R. Kenworthy Esq QPM	October 1997	4 years 3 months
Nottinghamshire Police	Stephen M. Green Esq. QPM	February 2000	1 year 11 months
South Yorkshire Police	M. I. I. Hedges Esq QPM	February 1998	3 years 11 months
Staffordshire Police	J. W. Giffard Esq QPM	October 1995	6 years 3 months
Suffolk	P. J. Scott-Lee Esq QPM	April 1998	3 years 9 months
Surrey Police	Denis O'Connor CBE, QPM	February 2000	1 year 11 months
Sussex Police	Ken Jones	January 2002	under 1 month
Thames Valley Police	Peter Neyroud	January 2002	under 1 month
Warwickshire Police	John Burbeck QPM	August 2000	1 year 5 months
West Mercia	P. Hampson Esq QPM	April 1999	2 years 9 months
West Midlands Police	Sir Edward Crew QPM	May 1996	5 years 8 months
West Yorkshire Police	Graham Moore Esq QPM	November 1997	4 years 2 months
Wiltshire	Miss E Neville QPM	October 1996	5 years 3 months

Crime Fighting Fund

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Crime Fighting Fund officers were projected to be allocated to Hampshire in 2001–02; how many officers were allocated; how many Crime Fighting Fund officers will be allocated for 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [22438]

Mr. Denham: Hampshire has been allocated a total of 243 Crime Fighting Fund (CFF) recruits over and above previous recruitment plans for the three years to March 2003. This total was initially divided between the three years of the CFF recruitment scheme as follows:

Year	*CFF allocation*
2000–01	82
2001–02	77
2002–03	84

As the force was unable to recruit all of its CFF allocation in 2000–01 it was allowed to carry over 63 recruits from 2000–01 to 2001–02, resulting in revised allocations as follows:

Year	*CFF allocation*
2000–01	19
2001–02	140
2002–03	84

The allocation for 2002–03 is provisional and subject to the force meeting the requirements of the CFF continuation criteria.

Domestic Violence (Buckingham)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents of domestic violence were investigated by the police in the Buckingham constituency in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001. [22633]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not held centrally. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Thames Valley police collect the information by Basic Command Unit areas, but none of these areas correspond exactly with the Buckingham constituency.

Security Costs

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what have been the costs of extra activities undertaken by his Department in connection with events following the 11 September terrorist attacks on the United States; and if these costs will be met from his Department's budget. [14077]

Mr. Blunkett: Some extra costs are being incurred, on departmental security measures. These costs will be met from the Home Office's budget and it is not possible to quantify them. As regards the cost of the measures announced in my Statement of 15 October 2001, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to a question from the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) on 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 914W.

Police Numbers (London)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish *(a)* the most recent figures, *(b)* the figures for May 1997 based on the old boundaries and *(c)* estimated figures for May 1997 based on the new boundaries, for the number of police officers within the city of London and Metropolitan police areas, broken down by London borough. [13844]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 9 November 2001]:* The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has provided police strength in the Metropolitan police at 31 October 2001 and 1 July 1997 broken down by borough. Information for May 1997 is not available.

Borough	*Strength 31 October 2001*[1]	*Strength 1 July 1997*[1]
Kensington and Chelsea	539.51	648.30
Westminster	1,540.96	1,712.91
Camden	681.72	698.35
Hammersmith and Fulham	506.14	559.65
Hackney	675.15	665.64
Tower Hamlets	527.95	573.09
Waltham Forest	449.81	490.62
Redbridge	387.32	555.00
Havering	322.72	325.59
Newham	577.41	599.88
Barking and Dagenham	285.82	299.05
Lambeth	863.58	946.10
Southwark	784.76	849.46
Islington	564.79	568.60
Lewisham	567.50	613.75
Bromley	422.60	473.84
Harrow	315.42	281.60
Brent	604.14	636.33
Greenwich	570.14	597.65
Bexley	322.09	280.65
Barnet	509.92	727.16
Richmond upon Thames	263.17	278.85
Hounslow	416.29	446.60
Kingston upon Thames	256.40	354.33
Merton	289.26	315.85
Wandsworth	545.92	622.94
Ealing	617.87	635.97
Hillingdon	369.70	403.10
Enfield	474.91	538.30
Haringey	542.59	546.60
Croydon	566.77	604.60
Sutton	252.74	406.10
Borough Total	16,624.07	18,254.46
Heathrow[2]	287.26	375.15
Spelthorne[3]		194.40
Recruits, non borough units and HQ staff	8,621.52	7,846.27
Total	25,532.85	26,670.28

[1] Figures are full-time equivalents

[2] These posts are paid for by Heathrow airport plc.

[3] Spelthorne was transferred to Surrey police in April 2000.

The Metropolitan police force area boundary was changed in April 2000. The Metropolitan Police Service are unable to provide estimated figures for officers in post in 1997 on the basis of the new boundaries.

There were 10,040 civilians in the Metropolitan police on 31 March 2001 and 13,493 on 31 March 1997.

The city of London police force was unaffected by the Metropolitan police force area boundary changes. The city of London Police had 859 police officers on 31 March

1997 and 705 on 2 November 2001. The force employed 347 civilian support staff in March 1997 and 223 in March 2001.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the advertising campaigns commissioned by his Department since May 1997, showing for each *(a)* its objectives, *(b)* its beginning and end dates, *(c)* the media used, *(d)* the criteria adopted to judge its effectiveness, *(e)* the extent to which effectiveness criteria were met, *(f)* any agency involvement and *(g)* its cost. [28240]

Mr. Blunkett: In relation to expenditure in 1999–2000 and 2000–01, I refer the hon. Member to my answer to the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) of 17 January, 2002, *Official Report*, column 465W. In relation to expenditure from 1996–97 to 1998–99 the figures are as follows:

	£ million
1996–97	5.23
1997–98	1.4
1998–99	1.8

Notes:

1. Figures include value added tax (VAT).

2. Figures for 1997–98 and 1998–99 reflect spending levels determined in 1996.

The Home Office uses advertising in various media to inform the public how they are affected by departmental legislation, and also to effect attitudinal and behavioural change in such areas as vehicle crime reduction, fire safety, voter registration and police recruitment. Each campaign is rigorously evaluated to ensure maximum effectiveness and value for money. Evaluation criteria are set according to the individual objectives of each campaign (for example increases in awareness and understanding of fire safety issues were measured, along with changes in public attitudes and subsequent shifts in fire statistics). The results of each evaluation exercise are used to inform future campaign development.

Historical data on the individual communication objectives, timings and evaluation criteria for each campaign can be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

CCTV

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will offer separate funding for local closed circuit television schemes apart from the Safer Communities Initiative. [21476]

Mr. Denham: Under the Crime Reduction Programme Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) Initiative a potential £170 million will be spent funding 686 CCTV schemes.

Although this initiative is now closed, other opportunities for funding of CCTV schemes may exist under the Communities against Drugs or the Small Retailers in Deprived Areas initiatives. Further funding for CCTV schemes may also be available under the Safer Communities Initiative (SCI).

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Jane Coker Case

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the total cost was for all Departments arising from the case of Jane Coker *v.* The Lord Chancellor considered by *(a)* the Industrial Tribunal, *(b)* the Employment Appeal Tribunal and *(c)* the Court of Appeal; and if, in each instance, she will identify the costs of Counsel and other lawyers, outside of the Government's service. [29527]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The total legal costs for all Departments arising from the case of Jane Coker and Martha Osamor *v.* The Lord Chancellor and the Lord Chancellor's Department were as follows:

(a) Costs up to and including the hearing before the Employment Tribunal—£84,349.96 (including VAT) of which £50,360.50 were Counsel's fees and £33,989.46 were Treasury Solicitor's costs;

(b) Costs in relation to the hearing before the Employment Appeal Tribunal—£54,540.44 (including VAT) of which £40,243.75 were Counsel's fees and £14,296.69 were Treasury Solicitors' costs;

(c) Costs in relation to the hearing before the Court of Appeal—£50,054.29 (including VAT) of which £38,639.87 were Counsel's fees and £11,414.42 were Treasury Solicitor's costs.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department for what reason there was no application for costs on her behalf in the case of Jane Coker. [29939]

Ms Rosie Winterton: No application was made for costs on behalf of the Lord Chancellor and the Lord Chancellor's Department in relation to the hearings before the Employment Tribunal and the Employment Appeal Tribunal as the general rule in relation to costs before those Tribunals is that each side bears its own costs.

No application was made for costs on behalf of the Lord Chancellor and the Lord Chancellor's Department in relation to the hearing before the Court of Appeal as the Lord Chancellor was by that stage aware that the case brought by Jane Coker and Martha Osamor was supported by the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality. The Lord Chancellor and the Lord Chancellor's Department did not consider it would be appropriate to seek a costs order in circumstances where publicly funded bodies with particular responsibility for promoting equal opportunities in relation to employment matters had taken the view that there was a public interest in having the legal issues raised in the proceedings resolved by the Court of Appeal.

Colchester Magistrates Court

Bob Russell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the new courthouse at Colchester will be opened. [29741]

Mr. Wills: It is anticipated that the new courthouse will be opened in Colchester during 2005.

Bob Russell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement about the upgrading of cells at Colchester magistrates court; what the cost involved is; and when he expects the work to be completed. [29740]

Mr. Wills: In the financial year 2001–02, £60,192 has been allocated to the Magistrates Courts Committee and local authority to address health and safety issues in Colchester magistrates court by removing all ligature points in the cells. This is not essentially an upgrade of the cell accommodation, but necessary work to ensure that defendants are unable to harm themselves or others. This work is expected to be completed in 2002–03, at a total cost of £63,715. The new courthouse in Colchester planned for 2005, to be constructed under the private finance initiative, should address any concerns raised over the quality of the custody accommodation.

Shared Residency Orders

Gillian Merron: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many families in the UK in each of the last three years have been granted shared residency orders in cases where parents have divorced or separated and terms governing the custody of children must be decided and approved by the courts; and what proportion of those orders dictate that custody should be split equally between parents. [29792]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In 2001 there were 22,970 residence orders granted in private law proceedings in the county and High Courts. The Lord Chancellor's Department statistics do not differentiate between those residence orders made in favour of one or both parents. The underlying philosophy of the Children Act 1989 is that parents share responsibility for the upbringing of their children, even after their own relationship has failed.

Census Website

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement about the initial performance of the 1901 Census website. [29899]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The 1901 Census website was successfully piloted and tested in advance of its launch on 2 January 2002. Based on benchmarking, the 1901 site was specified to allow for 1 million users, with provision to cope with peak equivalent demand of 1.2 million users, in any 24-hour period. Prior to the site being closed on 7 January 2002 to enable enhancements to be carried out, it was estimated by the PRO's business partner QinetiQ Ltd., who are responsible for the technical aspects of the service, that the maximum demand it experienced was approximately 1.2 million users per hour. This prevented many users accessing the service. A decision to close the website temporarily to general internet access was taken by the PRO and QinetiQ Ltd. in order to allow enhancements to be made. The general internet service will be restored incrementally, on completion of this work.

The online service is currently available at the Public Record Office at Kew, the Family Records Centre in Islington, and at a number of local public libraries and archives while the enhancements are being carried out. Meanwhile, the Public Record Office has fulfilled its statutory obligations by providing microform copies of the 1901 Census returns at the Public Record Office at Kew and at local record offices and public libraries across the country.

Waltham Forest Court

Harry Cohen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when it is proposed to notify the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead of the closure of Waltham Forest court; for what reason the media were notified before local hon. Members; what arrangements are proposed for Leyton and Leytonstone residents who have to attend a local magistrates court as defendants, victims or witnesses; and if he will make a statement. [30138]

Mr. Wills: The Greater London Magistrates' Courts Authority (GLMCA) issued their strategic plan on 13 December 2001. I understand that hon. Members, the press and trade unions were notified at this time by the GLMCA. No final decisions will be made on Waltham Forest magistrates court until the GLMCA has concluded statutory consultation and taken into account all representations made during this period. The GLMCA plan to commence the first stage of their consultation next month. I understand my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) will, in due course, have opportunity to comment directly to the GLMCA on the future of Waltham Forest magistrates court. The Government's policy is that decisions concerning listing practices, the number, location and future of magistrates courts are for magistrates courts committees to determine, in consultation with their local paying authority.

Electoral Documentation

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps her Department has taken to provide an audit trail when marked registers are sent from the returning officers to her Department; and if she will make a statement. [30103]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Representation of the People Act 1983 requires the Clerk of the Crown in Chancery to ensure that a record is kept of the electoral documentation received from returning officers in respect of both general and by-elections in England and Wales.

Details are recorded on receipt at our central warehouse.

Saville Inquiry

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what costs have been incurred by the Lord Chancellor's Department in connection with the Saville inquiry; and what her estimate is of the final cost. [29067]

Ms Rosie Winterton: No costs have been incurred by the Lord Chancellor's Department to date in connection with the Bloody Sunday inquiry and no future costs are expected to be incurred.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Civil Service

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many Civil Service staff are on loan from each of the devolved Administrations to UK Government Departments, broken down by UK Government

Departments; and what percentage of civil service staff the number on loan represents per the total number of civil servants for each devolved Administration. [29512]

Mr. Leslie: The information for the Scottish Executive is given in the table. The National Assembly for Wales has five staff currently on loan, all to the Cabinet Office; this is 0.1 per cent. of the total of 3,500 staff. Comparable figures for the Northern Ireland civil service are not available except at disproportionate cost.

Scottish Executive

Department	*Staff on loan at 21 January 2002*	*Percentage*
Cabinet Office	5	0.0
Department of Health (Food Standards Agency)	59	0.5
Department of Trade and Industry	1	0.0
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	6	0.1
Forestry Commission	2	0.0
HM Treasury	5	0.0
Home Office	367	3.2
Office of Fair Trading	1	0.0
Oftel	1	0.0
Prime Minister's Office	1	0.0
Scotland Office	109	1.0
Total staff on loan	557	4.9
Total staff in post	11,430	100.0

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the progress which has been made in delivering the strategy to increase the numbers of *(a)* women and *(b)* ethnic minorities in Whitehall's senior civil service grades. [27851]

Mr. Leslie: The latest figures for April 2001 show that:

24.2 per cent. of the senior civil service are women, up from 17.8 per cent. in 1998. The target for 2004–05 is 35 per cent.

20.2 per cent. of those in the top 600 posts are women, up from 12.7 per cent. in 1998. The target for 2004–05 is 25 per cent.

2.4 per cent. of staff at senior civil service level are from a minority ethnic background, up rom 1.6 per cent. in 1998. The target for 2004–05 is 3.2 per cent.

Progress is being made in other areas. For example the number of successful candidates from minority ethnic backgrounds in the fast stream scheme has doubled from 3.4 per cent. in 1998 to 6.8 per cent. in 2000.

Saville Inquiry

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what costs have been incurred by his Department to date in connection with the Saville inquiry; and what his estimate is of the final cost to his Department. [29590]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The Cabinet Office does not employ staff full-time on Bloody Sunday inquiry work. Expenditure to date on staff time is estimated at £45,000. It is not possible to estimate the final cost to the Cabinet Office because of the number of uncertainties.

Public Appointments

Llew Smith: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what account is taken of political affiliation in making appointments to non-departmental public bodies. [31060]

Mr. Leslie: While information on the political affiliation of candidates is not collected, the Commissioner for Public Appointments' Code of Practice requires information on political activity to be collected. In a small minority of cases there may be a need to create a political balance. This can usually be achieved by asking political parties to nominate candidates.

Arms Sales (BAE Systems)

Tony Baldry: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations he has received from BAE Systems concerning the sale of arms to *(a)* South Africa and *(b)* India. [28293]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I have not received any representations from BAE Systems concerning the sale of arms to either South Africa or India.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to visit India; and if he will raise the issue of BAE Systems bid to supply Hawk jets with his Indian counterpart. [28303]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I have no firm plans to visit India.

Ministerial Properties

Mr. Collins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the properties used by Ministers for *(a)* residential and *(b)* business purposes that are owned by Government organisations. [28280]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State *[pursuant to his reply, 21 January 2002, c. 599W]:* I regret that my answer was incorrect since there are some costs to the public purse in the Government's use of Chequers, Dorneywood and Chevening.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Industrial Action

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the latest figures for working days lost through industrial action within her Department and its agencies since June 2001. [27840]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* Between the launch of the Department and 14 January, a total of 16,201 working days has been lost due to strike action by departmental staff who are members of the Public and Commercial Services Union.

Environmental Impact Assessments

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the progress FTSE 350 companies had made by the end of 2001 towards reporting on their environmental impacts; and what assessment she has made of the progress that would have been made if there was a mandatory requirement for such reports. [29325]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* About 79 of the FTSE 350 report while a further 24 had plans to do so. A further 10 per cent. of other companies in the FTSE 350 mentioned environmental issues, but did not report substantively on environmental performance. These figures are now being reviewed to improve the estimates and to distinguish between companies that produce quantified performance data and those that do not, since some reports contain little or no quantified information.

A mandatory reporting requirement would have been expected to lead to environmental reporting by all the companies concerned.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many instances there were in each English region in each month since June 2000 of *(a)* HEES and *(b)* HEES Plus grant being topped-up by the recipient to pay for the full costs of the improvements; what was the average amount of the top-up; and what was the average administration cost to Eaga Partnerships and Eastern Warm Front to process each top-up. [19348]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* The Eaga Partnership Ltd. and TXU Warm Front Ltd. manage the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme, marketed as the Warm Front Team, under contract. The scheme provides packages of energy efficiency measures tailored to the circumstances of the householder and the property. Where the total cost of these cannot be met from the available grant, the scheme managers seek support from other programmes. If this is not possible, then the scheme manager advises the householder of the amount of money required to complete the work and asks them to contribute towards the excess cost if the full programme of recommended energy efficiency is to go ahead. Should they do so, the sum is paid directly to the installer concerned. If the client is unable to make the required contribution then those measures requiring additional funding are not installed.

The majority of requests for a client contribution occur at the £1,000 grant level, when it is not possible to repair a gas central heating boiler and a replacement is required. A decision on grant levels will be made shortly and will take into account the level of client contributions and advice from the scheme managers on the expected rates of labour and materials for the forthcoming year.

The table sets out the available information on the number of letters sent to HEES clients and the average contribution requested, month by month, since June 2000. Unfortunately, data are not available in the format requested by the hon. Member.

	Number of letters	*Average value of top-ups (£)*
2000		
June	10	690
July	10	320
August	20	210
September	90	520
October	200	300
November	290	360
December	180	420
2001		
January	350	330
February	370	540
March	400	390
April	350	430
May	540	450
June	980	540
July	1,250	830
August	1,260	640
September	1,190	510
October	1,490	370
November	1,100	400

The higher number of top-up requests over the last six months reflects the increasing number of householders receiving assistance through HEES. Currently, 98,000 householders are having work carried out on their properties. Since the launch of the scheme on 1 June 2000, 234,000 households have received assistance. Some 10,000 have been invited to make a contribution.

The cost incurred in seeking contributions is incorporated within the scheme managers' fees for administering the scheme. These fees are included in their contracts with my Department. It is not possible to identify their costs separately.

England Rural Development Programme

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list those companies which have received processing and marketing grants under the England Rural Development Programme. [26416]

Alun Michael: I am writing to the hon. Member today with a list of those companies that have received processing and marketing grants under the England Rural Development Programme. I am placing a copy of that letter in the Library of the House.

EU Environment Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the outcome was of the Environment Council held in Brussels on 29 October; what the Government's stance was on each issue discussed, including its voting record; and if she will make a statement. [11896]

Margaret Beckett: My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and I represented the UK at the Environment Council held in Luxembourg on 29 October. This was the first Environment Council of the Belgian presidency. Council reached political agreement on four common positions: the UK voted in favour of each. Four sets of Council conclusions were agreed. There were two orientation debates: one, in public, on a proposed regulation concerning traceability and labelling of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and products derived from them, and a second on the Commission's review of the Pesticides Authorisation Directive (91/414/EEC).

Political agreement was reached without discussion on a recommendation concerning implementation of Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) in Europe. This aims to encourage member states to carry out a stocktake of institutions and laws affecting their coastal zones, and to adopt national strategies to promote integrated management.

In reaching political agreement on a proposed amendment to Directive 97/68/EC on non-road mobile machinery emissions, the UK achieved its objective of ensuring deletion of an article permitting the use of economic incentives, noting that the directive did not have an appropriate legal base for such an article. The amended directive will introduce exhaust emission standards for small, off-road petrol engines and large diesel generators, and aims to align European provisions with existing US regulations.

Political agreement was also reached on an amendment to Directive 94/25/EC laying down limit values for exhaust and noise emissions from new recreational craft placed on the Community market. The Council agreed limit values at the levels proposed by the European Commission in COM(2000) 639 dated 12 October 2000. Particularly in relation to noise emissions, agreement was reached on less costly methods of demonstrating compliance. Overall the agreement represents a reasonable balance between achieving challenging environmental objectives while minimising the cost to small and medium-sized business and individuals.

Council reached political agreement on a proposed decision continuing for the period 2002–06 an annual funding programme for environmental NGOs active at a European level. The Commission's proposed total budget of EUR 32 million was agreed. The UK's main objective of ensuring that the selection and monitoring process was transparent and fair was met in the common position text.

Ministers agreed a common approach on a proposed directive to bring Community rules into line with the second pillar of the Aarhus Convention dealing with public consultation in environmental decision-making. The UK welcomed the proposal and asked that the Commission also take steps to present another proposal seeking to apply the provisions of the Aarhus Convention to the Community institutions, in order to enable the Community to ratify the Convention.

During a public orientation debate on a proposed regulation on traceability and labelling of GMOs, Council discussed the scope of the proposed system. While welcoming the intention of the proposal to improve safety and consumer choice in GM food and crops, the UK's current judgment was that the requirement to label and trace the source of products which contain no detectable GM material would be unworkable. The UK expressed concern about whether the information given to consumers would be reliable and whether developing countries would be able to provide the information expected from importers. The UK took the view that the Commission's proposals for allowing certain imports of crops containing GMOs that are not approved in the EU were unsatisfactory as they stood and that further urgent work was needed, particularly on agreeing an international system for identifying individual GMOs. Member states were still divided on when the EU decision-making process for GM products could be restarted. While recognising the importance of the proposal to rebuilding confidence in the decision-making process on GMOs in the EU, the UK called for case-by-case consideration of applications and said that it was not tenable to encourage an illicit moratorium.

Council conclusions adopted in preparation for the seventh Conference of the Parties (COP7) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, taking place in Marrakesh from 29 October to 9 November, called on all parties to respect the Bonn agreement, and underlined the need for progress in the relevant international forums in tackling emissions from aviation and shipping. The conclusions stressed the resolve of the Community and its member states to ratify the Kyoto Protocol in a timely manner, with a view to its entry into force by the World Summit on Sustainable Development next September. Environment Commissioner Wallstrom also presented a proposal to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, a draft directive on a CO2 emissions trading scheme and a Communication on the European Climate Change Programme.

Council conclusions were adopted on a Clean Air for Europe (CAFE) Programme stressing the priority attached to the problems of ozone, particulates and acidification. Council also adopted conclusions on a Communication on Conservation of Natural Resources, and conclusions on the Commission's general Communication on Biodiversity, highlighting the need to implement biodiversity action plans and halt biodiversity decline across the EU.

Council held a discussion to inform the adoption of six sustainable development indicators to be used in the Commission's synthesis report for the Barcelona Spring European Council. The Commission would publish its report on indicators on 31 October. An exchange of views was also held on the Commission's review of Directive 91/414/EEC on agricultural pesticides. The UK stressed the need to speed up the pace of the review of older compounds. The debate also considered the substitution principle and restrictions on those allowed to use certain categories of pesticides.

The Belgian presidency and Commission reported on a number of proposals, including the EU Chemicals Strategy, environmental liability and a recently adopted communication on dioxins, furans and PCBs. France briefly outlined measures taken by the French Government since a major explosion at an ammonium nitrate manufacturing plant in Toulouse in September. The inquiry into this accident will inform the planned revision of the Seveso II Directive, but the Commission will not delay adoption of its proposal.

Over lunch Ministers discussed preparations for the WTO Ministerial in Doha on 9–13 November and preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Rio+10) to be held in Johannesburg in September 2002.

Litter Fines

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what changes she plans to make to allow local authorities more easily to issue on-the-spot fines for litter. [30616]

Mr. Meacher: As part of the local public service agreements currently being agreed, certain local authorities are being allowed to retain the moneys received from the fixed penalty notices for litter and dog fouling offences. On return, the moneys must be reinvested back into the community on local environmental quality improvements. Should this be a success the Government plan to extend this scheme to all local authorities.

Also, from 1 April 2002 the fixed penalty notices for litter and dog fouling offences will be doubled from £25 to £50.

Waste Management

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what rules govern whether waste may be *(a)* composted and *(b)* directly applied on farms without (i) planning permission and (ii) Environment Agency approval. [30728]

Mr. Meacher: PPG 10 "Planning and Waste Management" advises that the large-scale commercial composting of green waste will generally require planning permission. The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 requires a planning application to be submitted for the importation of waste onto farms unless it is for use in certain specified engineering or building works. It is for local authorities to determine in the first instance whether planning permission is required in each case.

Both composting and landspreading of waste for agricultural benefit are classified as waste recovery operations under the waste framework directive. This means that anyone carrying out these operations must do so under the terms of either a waste management licence issued by the Environment Agency under Part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 or a licensing exemption registered with the agency. Licensing exemptions for composting and landspreading of waste are provided in the Waste Management Regulations 1994 regulation 17 and schedule 3 paragraphs 7 and 12.

Food Labelling (GMOs)

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will support the European proposal not to label foods that contain up to one per cent. of an unapproved GM variety in the forthcoming European negotiations on traceability and labelling. [29503]

Mr. Meacher: While recognising that zero presence of non-EU approved GMOs may be impractical, the Government have reservations about the approach proposed by the European Commission for addressing the issue. Other options need to be explored. The best means of overcoming the problem of non-approved GMOs is to clear the backlog of decisions required on outstanding applications for approval within the EU, subject to labelling and traceability conditions being required in each case.

Packaging Waste

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what monitoring is taking place for the application of revenues from packaging waste exports. [29726]

Mr. Meacher: The revenues from packaging waste exports come from two sources. The money received for the packaging waste from overseas reprocessors and the money received for the PERNs (Packaging Waste Export Notes) which are provided to compliance schemes and individual compliers to show that recycling of packaging waste has been undertaken on their behalf.

The Environment Agency collects information on the use of the PERN revenue. Accredited exporters and reprocessors are required to provide information on the amounts of PERN income spent on enhancing capacity, collection and end use markets.

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what controls are being applied to monitor the quality of packaging waste exports. [29725]

Mr. Meacher: Information about overseas exports of packaging waste and quantities of such waste shipped is held at the Environment Agency's National Waste Registration Unit (NWRU).

The NWRU receives applications from potential exporters of UK-sourced packaging waste and accredits those which have suitable information systems showing the places of packaging waste generation through to reprocessing facilities overseas. Information from accredited exporters about sources of packaging waste and destinations for export has to be provided to the NWRU.

Radioactive Waste

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if it is her policy to ensure that radioactive waste arising from the reprocessing of spent fuel for overseas customers under contracts signed since 1976 will be returned to countries of origin without any element of substitution. [15898]

Mr. Meacher: This is one of the issues on which we have invited public comments in our 12 September consultation paper "Managing radioactive waste safely". A copy is in the Library. Pages 25–26 of the paper say that British Nuclear Fuels plc wishes to substitute a small volume of high level waste in place of larger volumes of intermediate or low level waste returned to overseas customers, but that is dependent on how high or intermediate level waste should be managed in the UK in the long term—the main issue addressed in the consultation paper. No decision has been taken. The paper invites views on the link between "waste substitution" and the availability of a long-term management strategy. The consultation period closes on 12 March.

Nitrate Pollution

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of research results which have shown that nitrate does not cause eutrophication in rivers and estuaries; and if she will make a statement on the source of the research upon which her Department's policy is based. [29084]

Mr. Meacher: The Department's current proposals to reduce nitrate pollution from agriculture arise from the requirement to comply with the European Court of Justice judgment that implementation of the Nitrates Directive is currently incomplete in the UK.

The Department is aware of many sources of research relevant to eutrophication in rivers and estuaries. Two fundamental reports which have shaped both UK and world wide opinion are those published by the OECD: "Scientific Fundamentals of the Eutrophication of Lakes and Flowing Waters" published in 1968 and "Eutrophication of waters: Monitoring, assessment and Control" published in 1982. Other recent reports are the Environment Agency's publications: "An environmental strategy for the millennium and beyond" published in 1997 and "Aquatic eutrophication in England and Wales: a proposed management strategy" published in 1998.

The Department's assessment of this body of scientific information is that it supports the view that in the UK's freshwater systems, phosphorus is generally the key nutrient limiting the eutrophication process, although nitrates may also contribute to eutrophication. In marine waters, nitrate is generally the key limiting nutrient.

Farming and Food Report

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Government expects the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food to publish its report. [31571]

Margaret Beckett: The Policy Commission will publish its report to Government on 29 January. Copies of the report will be available from the Libraries of the House and from the Vote Office [PPO for Lords] at 10am that day. It will also be available in electronic form from the Policy Commission website, www.cabinet-office/gov.uk/farming.

Environment Agency

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will consult on revised statutory guidance to the Environment Agency. [31572]

Mr. Meacher: On Friday 25 January 2002 I published for consultation draft revised statutory guidance to the Environment Agency under section 4 of the Environment Act 1995. The guidance concerns the agency's activities in England. It states the statutory objectives which the agency should pursue over the next few years, identifies its roles in contributing to the achievement of sustainable development, and sets out the principles it should follow in deciding its priorities. The document has been developed following the first financial management and policy review of the agency, which my Department carried out last year. Copies of the consultation draft have been placed in the House Library. I would welcome responses from interested organisations and individuals, by 18 April 2002. Following public consultation, I will lay proposed statutory guidance before Parliament.

Home Energy Conservation Bill

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will propose amendments to the Home Energy Conservation Bill to give powers to the National Assembly for Wales for the provisions of the Bill to apply to Wales; and if she will make a statement. [29280]

Mr. Meacher: The Government have tabled amendments to this Bill giving powers to the National Assembly for Wales in respect of Wales. These are consistent with the wishes of the National Assembly for Wales. Similar amendments were also tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) and others.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Individual Learning Accounts

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many investigations there have been to date into fraud by individual learning account holders. [27160]

John Healey: There have been no investigations into individual learning account holders. The Department's Special Investigation Unit has had 86 learning providers referred to it: four learning providers did not require investigation and 82 learning providers are in the process of being investigated. Of these the SIU are discussing 42 with the police, a further 12 are being investigated by the police and another has been charged.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when access to the ILA website for providers of ILA courses will be restored. [29258]

John Healey: The Department is currently looking closely into the operation of the ILA Centre system. The system will not be reopened to providers until we are satisfied on the robustness of the control and security arrangements. We are working with Capita to assess the control and security arrangements that were in place in the ILA system and we have engaged Cap Gemini Ernst and Young Consultants to support that process.

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate her Department has made of the cost to its budget since 1 May 1997 of fraud; and if she will make a statement. [27290]

Estelle Morris: Cases of fraud and irregularity involving staff and direct contractors are reported annually to the Treasury for inclusion in the Treasury Fraud Report which is laid before Parliament. From 1 April 1997 to date the number of cases reported were as follows:

£

	Number	Estimated Cost
Internal	17	1,694
Direct contractors	44	16,405,635

The above figures do not include NDPBs or sub-contractors, eg training providers operating under contracts with Training and Enterprise Councils.

The number of training providers investigated by the Department from 1 April 1997 to date was 112 and the estimated cost of the fraud/irregularity was £15 million.

The above figures represent 0.14 per cent. of the relevant expenditure lines, and 0.05 per cent. of total departmental spend over the last four years.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her estimate is of the cost of theft and fraud to *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [27973]

Estelle Morris: An estimate of cost to the Department of cases involving potential fraud and irregularity for the last four financial years is as follows:

	£000
1997–98	3,816
1998–99	5,716
1999–2000	4,548
2000–01	17,327
Total	31,407

The figure for 2000–01 includes one specific direct contractor fraud valued at £7.9 million.

The figures represent 0.14 per cent. of the relevant expenditure lines, and 0.05 per cent. of total departmental spend over the last four years.

Details of fraud cases reported by the Employment Service are being included in DWP's response to this PQ. Information on NDPBs is not collected centrally.

Standard Spending Assessment (Cambridgeshire)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list for Cambridgeshire *(a)* the difference between the education department budget and that county's education service block SSA in each year from 1992–93 to 2002–03 and *(b)* that sum divided by the total number of full-time equivalent pupils financed by that education department. [27627]

Mr. Timms: The following table provides the latest available information:

	Difference between education budget and SSA (£ million)	*Difference per pupil (£)*
1993–94	7.1	70
1994–95	16.3	160
1995–96	17.5	170
1996–97	7.7	74
1997–98	14.4	138
1998–99	10.8	142
1999–2000	3.9	51
2000–01	4.1	53
2001–02	11.1	144

Notes:

1. Information is taken from data published in the 2001 and previous years Departmental Annual Reports. Budget figures up to 1999–2000 were taken from local authorities' latest Revenue Account returns submitted to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, and for 2000–01 and 2001–02, from LEAs s52 Budget statements.

2. The authority's budgeted spend was more than the SSA.

3. Cambridgeshire was re-organised in 1998–99. All pupil numbers but those for 2001–02 are financial year averages, based on January Annual Census returns. The figures for 2001–02 reflect the January 2001 returns. Figures for 1990–91 to 1998–99 include grant maintained schools. Figures for 1999–2000 to 2001–02 include ex-GM schools. The total figures include pre-primary, primary, secondary and special schools.

White Hart Lane School, Tottenham

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what grants she has made to the White Hart Lane school in Tottenham to teach pupils in languages other than English; and if she will make a statement. [28108]

Mr. Timms: None. We understand that the school is seeking sponsorship for this proposed pilot project from a range of sources, including the local Turkish business community.

Modern Apprenticeships

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the development of Modern Apprenticeships. [28150]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Modern Apprenticeships are an important component of the Government's strategy to boost participation and attainment in learning by young people and to meet the skills needs of employers. They provide high quality vocational pathways for young people to progress from GCSEs or A levels to their chosen profession.

On 29 November 2001, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Education and Skills announced the new generation of Modern Apprenticeships and endorsed the main recommendations in the report of Sir John Cassels' Advisory Committee on the development, promotion and delivery of Modern Apprenticeships. These included:

> an expansion in employer places so that more than a quarter of young people can enter Modern Apprenticeships before they are 22-years-old, by 2004–05;
>
> an entitlement to a Modern Apprenticeship place for all 16 and 17-year-olds with five or more GCSE passes, from September 2004;
>
> a national framework for apprenticeship which defines basic standards and strengthens the relationship between the employer and apprentice. Technical certificates will reflect the broader knowledge and understanding acquired through off-the-job learning; and
>
> a £16 million marketing campaign, over three years, to promote Modern Apprenticeships and boost take-up among employers and young people.

The Learning and Skills Council will spearhead the development and delivery of the new generation of Modern Apprenticeships working with a range of other partners, especially the Connexions Service and the new Sector Skills Councils.

Copies of the report of the Modern Apprenticeship Advisory Committee (September 2001) and the Government's Consultation Response (March 2001) have been placed in the Library in the House of Commons.

LEA Grants

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will provide additional 100 per cent. funded grants to local education authorities within the F40 Groups. [28373]

Mr. Timms: We have no plans to do so.

Special Education Needs

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make additional funds available to compensate for the costs of supplying services to special needs children in sparsely populated rural areas. [28433]

Mr. Timms: The overall settlement for 2002–03 is a good one: over £1.3 billion extra in Education Standard Spending Assessments; a further increase in Standards Fund grant of almost £160 million; and an increase in the direct grant for schools of 2.75 per cent. We believe that this settlement provides sufficient resources to cover the costs of supplying services to special needs children in sparsely populated rural areas.

However, we are currently working up a new funding system for introduction in 2003–04. As part of that work we are taking account of the costs associated with sparsely populated areas.

Specialist Schools

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools have been granted specialist status on the basis of their first application for such status *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each year since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [29201]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* Of the 685 specialist schools currently operational 315 (46 per cent.) have been granted specialist status on the basis of their first application. The number of schools granted specialist status on the basis of their first application in each year since 1997 is shown in the table.

Year	*Number of specialist school designations*	*Number of designations based on first application*	*Percentage of designations based on first application*
1996–97	74	35	47
1997–98	83	46	55
1998–99	80	46	58
1999–2000	140	103	74
2000–01	152	64	42

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* joint and *(b)* associated applications for specialist school status have been received since May 1997; and how many of these have been successful. [29203]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* There have been 48 joint applications for specialist school status since May 1997, of which 19 have been successful. A further 12 joint applications have been received under the current competition which are currently being assessed. Two applications we would identify as 'associated applications' are being considered in the October 2001 competition, the results of which will be announced in February.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many bids for specialist school status have been received from each local education authority area since May 1997; what proportion of such bids has been accepted in each case; if she will break down these figures for each year from 1997–98 to 2001–02; and if she will make a statement. [29213]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* The total number of bids for specialist school status received from each local education authority each year from 1997–98 to 2000–01 and the number of those applications which were successful is provided in the table. Information for 2001–02 is not yet available as the result of the October 2001 competition has not yet been announced.

Specialist school applications and designations, 5 years to 2001 by LEA

	Applications					Designations				
LEA	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Barking and Dagenham	1	—	—	—	2	1	—	—	—	1
Barnet.	2	—	1	1	1	—	—	1	—	—
Barnsley	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
Bath and NE Somerset	3	—	3	1	2	2	—	2	1	—
Bedfordshire	1	2	1	2	5	—	—	1	—	—
Birmingham	7	3	4	16	13	2	—	4	13	6
Blackburn with Darwen	1	—	2	—	2	1	—	2	—	—
Blackpool	1	—	1	2	—	1	—	1	—	—
Bolton	3	2	2	4	1	—	—	1	2	1
Bournemouth	1	1	—	2	1	—	—	—	2	1
Bracknell Forest	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bradford	6	2	1	2	4	1	—	1	2	4
Brent	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	1
Brighton and Hove	—	2	—	3	3	—	1	—	1	—
Bristol, City of	4	4	2	1	3	1	—	—	1	1
Bromley, LB of	—	1	—	2	2	—	—	—	—	1
Buckinghamshire	8	2	—	1	8	2	1	—	1	4
Calderdale	2	—	2	2	2	—	—	—	—	1
Cambridgeshire	5	2	4	—	3	1	—	4	—	3
Camden, LB of	3	—	1	1	—	2	—	1	1	—
Cheshire	11	6	1	3	4	1	1	1	1	1
Cornwall	7	6	1	3	4	3	3	—	1	3
Coventry	4	2	—	1	2	2	1	—	1	—
Croydon, LB of	1	2	—	2	3	—	1	—	—	—
Cumbria	6	5	—	3	3	1	2	—	1	3
Darlington	—	—	—	4	—	—	—	1	1	1
Derby, City of	—	—	—	1	2	—	—	—	1	1
Derbyshire	6	3	—	7	9	1	1	—	1	5
Devon	8	2	—	1	3	2	1	—	1	—
Doncaster	—	—	—	—	6	—	—	—	—	—
Dorset	—	—	2	4	2	—	—	2	2	2
Dudley	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Durham	1	5	4	5	10	1	4	4	2	1
Ealing, LB of	2	2	1	4	2	—	—	1	1	2
East Riding of Yorkshire	2	1	—	5	1	1	1	—	2	1
East Sussex	7	2	—	3	5	1	1	—	2	3
Enfield, LB of	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Essex	16	4	4	11	9	—	1	2	4	4
Gateshead	—	1	3	1	1	—	1	2	—	1
Gloucestershire	9	5	4	4	7	2	1	3	2	2
Greenwich, LB of	3	2	1	1	1	1	2	—	1	—
Hackney, LB of	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	2	—	1
Halton	—	—	—	1	2	—	—	—	1	1
Hammersmith and Fulham	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	1	—
Hampshire	4	2	—	7	5	—	—	—	4	1
Haringey, LB of	1	—	—	1	1	1	—	—	—	1
Harrow, LB of	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Hartlepool	—	1	—	1	—	—	1	—	1	—
Havering	2	—	—	—	6	1	—	—	—	1
Herefordshire	4	—	1	1	1	1	—	1	—	—
Hertfordshire	7	3	1	4	9	—	2	1	2	3
Hillingdon	4	1	2	—	1	1	1	1	—	—
Hounslow	1	1	—	—	1	1	1	—	—	—
Isle of Wight	1	1	—	1	1	—	—	—	1	1
Islington, LB of	—	—	1	3	1	—	—	—	2	—
Kent	12	6	6	7	8	2	—	2	1	3
Kingston-upon-Hull	—	—	1	—	2	—	—	1	—	1
Kingston upon Thames	2	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kirklees	1	3	2	—	1	1	1	1	—	—
Knowsley	2	2	—	1	1	—	1	—	1	1
Lambeth, LB of	—	1	—	2	1	—	1	—	1	—

Specialist school applications and designations, 5 years to 2001 by LEA

	Applications					Designations				
LEA	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Lancashire	12	3	2	6	6	1	1	1	2	2
Leeds	—	3	1	4	6	—	1	1	3	3
Leicester, City of	—	2	2	3	2	—	—	2	1	2
Leicestershire	7	2	2	—	5	3	2	2	—	1
Lewisham	1	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lincolnshire	—	—	2	9	13	—	—	1	4	7
Liverpool	5	4	—	3	7	2	1	—	2	3
Luton	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	1	—	—
Manchester	4	1	—	3	—	1	1	—	3	—
Medway	—	—	—	2	1	—	—	—	1	1
Middlesbrough	—	—	1	1	3	—	—	—	—	2
Milton Keynes	1	4	—	—	1	1	3	—	—	—
Newcastle upon Tyne	1	4	—	3	1	—	1	—	3	—
Newham	2	1	—	1	2	—	1	—	—	2
Norfolk	6	3	1	6	11	—	1	1	5	2
North East Lincolnshire	—	—	—	3	—	—	—	—	3	—
North Lincolnshire	1	1	—	1	1	—	1	—	1	1
North Somerset	1	3	3	2	3	—	1	1	2	1
North Tyneside	2	3	—	1	2	—	1	—	—	1
North Yorkshire	—	3	1	3	3	—	3	—	2	2
Northamptonshire	6	2	3	3	1	4	1	2	2	—
Northumberland	4	4	1	2	1	—	1	1	2	1
Nottinghamshire	5	4	1	2	9	—	2	—	—	1
Oldham	—	—	—	2	2	—	—	—	2	—
Oxfordshire	5	3	1	1	4	2	1	1	1	2
Peterborough	—	—	—	1	2	—	—	—	—	—
Plymouth	—	—	2	3	—	—	—	2	3	—
Poole	—	—	—	3	2	—	—	—	—	2
Portsmouth	1	2	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
Reading	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Redbridge, LB of	—	—	—	3	2	—	—	—	1	2
Redcar and Cleveland	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Richmond, LB of	—	—	—	2	1	—	—	—	—	—
Rochdale	3	2	—	—	1	1	1	—	—	1
Rotherham	—	1	—	1	4	—	1	—	—	2
Salford	—	—	1	2	1	—	—	1	1	—
Sefton	—	1	—	1	1	—	1	—	1	—
Sandwell	—	2	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	—
Sheffield	3	4	—	1	4	—	1	—	—	4
Shropshire	1	—	—	1	7	—	—	—	—	3
Slough	—	—	1	—	3	—	—	—	—	2
Solihull	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Somerset	2	4	3	5	3	1	2	1	2	1
South Gloucestershire	2	1	1	—	—	—	1	1	—	—
South Tyneside	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Southampton	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Southend on Sea	—	1	1	1	3	—	—	1	—	2
Southwark	1	1	1	2	2	—	—	—	—	2
St. Helens	—	—	1	3	2	—	—	—	2	1
Staffordshire	4	1	—	2	2	1	1	—	—	2
Stockport	9	3	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	—
Stockton on Tees	1	2	5	—	—	—	—	5	—	—
Stoke on Trent	—	—	—	1	4	—	—	—	1	2
Suffolk	3	4	2	5	6	1	2	1	2	4
Sunderland	3	2	2	1	1	1	—	2	—	1
Surrey	5	2	—	8	3	1	2	—	1	2
Sutton, LB of	1	1	—	1	2	1	1	—	—	—
Swindon	—	1	2	—	—	—	—	2	—	—
Tameside	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	—
Telford and Wrekin	1	3	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Thurrock	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
Torbay	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—
Tower Hamlets, LB of	2	4	—	1	3	—	—	—	1	1
Trafford	2	1	—	1	2	—	1	—	—	2
Wakefield	4	—	—	2	2	1	—	—	1	2
Walsall	3	1	1	—	1	—	—	1	—	1
Waltham Forest, LB of	1	—	—	2	1	1	—	—	1	1
Wandsworth, LB of	6	2	—	1	1	2	—	—	2	—
Warrington	—	1	—	2	—	—	1	—	1	—
Warwickshire	—	2	1	4	2	—	1	1	2	—
West Berkshire	14	10	—	1	1	1	1	—	1	1
West Sussex	7	7	—	1	3	3	3	—	1	—
Westminster	2	2	—	1	2	—	1	—	—	1
Weston Super Mare	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Widnes	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Wigan	2	2	2	3	4	1	1	1	1	—

Specialist school applications and designations, 5 years to 2001 by LEA

	Applications					Designations				
LEA	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Wiltshire	4	3	—	5	1	1	2	—	4	1
Windsor and Maidenhead	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Wirral	1	2	—	2	3	—	1	—	1	2
Wolverhampton	1	—	—	2	—	1	—	—	3	—
Wokingham	—	1	1	—	1	—	—	1	—	1
Worcestershire	—	1	—	3	—	—	—	3	1	—
York, city of	1	1	—	—	1	1	1	—	—	—
Total	332	219	118	285	354	73	83	81	130	152

Central Pupil Database

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) which organisations and individuals will have access to the personal details of pupils stored on the central pupil database; [29372]

(2) who will have responsibility for approving requests for access to information held on the central pupil database; [29373]

(3) if it is her policy to destroy files on the central pupil database which relate to pupils who leave the state education system. [29370]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The central pupil database will contain statistical profiles of pupils in England, built up over time from the "Pupil Level Annual Schools Census" (PLASC) returns which maintained schools will provide each January from January 2002, plus details of Key Stage assessment and examination results obtained separately from schools, marking agencies or examination boards. In order for these profiles to be accurate pupil names are needed to help ensure that all data relating to the same pupil are collated correctly.

Access to the personal details of pupils

The Department has no interest in the identity of individual pupils as such, and will be using the database solely for statistical purposes, with only technical staff directly engaged in the data collation process having access to pupil names.

Any disclosures of personal data (ie data including names or other details that would enable the recipient to determine the identity of individual pupils) will have to comply with the Data Protection Act 1998 and any other legislation relevant to the particular case. Subject to this proviso, organisations or individuals who may have access to personal data are as follows:

1. the pupil (or their parents or guardians) will be able to request a copy of their own record in order to confirm its accuracy;
2. in the case of a child in local authority care, the local authority social services department will, as the child's "corporate parent", be able to obtain a copy of that child's record;
3. schools and LEAs will be able to obtain information about their own pupils to which they have a statutory entitlement but may be missing (for example as a result of pupil mobility);
4. requests from research organisations will be considered by the Secretary of State if, for a specific research project, pupil names are needed in order to link information from the central database with other information obtained by the research organisation via a separate survey;
5. to minimise burdens on schools, for pupils approaching or above age 13, consideration is being given to the Connexions Service receiving from the central database (rather than from schools):
    (a) pupil names and any available contact details (information to which the Connexions Service has a statutory entitlement under section 117(1) of the Learning and Skills Act 2000);
    (b) other information held on the database if, and only if, the pupil or their parent (depending on the pupil's age) has not exercised their right under section 117(2) of the Learning and Skills Act to instruct that this information be withheld from the Connexions Service;

(6) where there are legal proceedings to trace a child (for example in an abduction case) the court can require the Department to provide it with any information it has about the whereabouts of that child.

Approval of requests for access to personal data

No disclosures of personal data beyond those listed above are anticipated at this time. Should future developments indicate that further disclosures may be appropriate, these will be considered by the Secretary of State on their merits, subject to the overriding requirement to comply with the Data Protection Act and any other relevant legislation.

With respect to (4) above, requests from research organisations, the precise arrangements for considering whether or not to approve such requests have yet to be decided. However the factors likely to be taken into account are:

the bona fides of the research and the organisation undertaking it;

a demonstrable need for information including pupil names (in many cases anonymised information may be sufficient);

a willingness by the research organisation to take all reasonable steps to inform schools of the research and involve them in it;

satisfactory assurances from the research organisation with regard to storing the information securely, using it only for the approved research purpose, disposing of it when that research has been completed, and not passing it on to any other person or organisation.

In cases of doubt on any of these points, the Department would expect to err on the side of caution.

Policy with respect to pupils leaving the state education system

The Department does not intend to delete the records of pupils who leave the maintained schools sector, either at age 16 or 18, or before then. Information for these pupils remains of statistical and research value—for example to analyse young people's progression from school into further education and training, higher education and the labour market. The Department will be using information on past pupils for statistical and research purposes only, and any disclosures will be for those purposes only. On this basis section 33 of the Data Protection Act allows personal data to be retained indefinitely.

Higher Education

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which constituencies have no higher education establishments within their boundaries. [29387]

Margaret Hodge: The available information, showing the number of HE institutions in each constituency in the UK, is contained in tables, copies of which have been placed in the Library. The tables only take into account the location of the main site of the institution; some institutions have more than one campus, which may be situated in a different constituency.

Administration

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the administrative cost was of those functions of her Department concerned with schools in each year since 1997; and how much that sum represented per pupil. [29660]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* Since 1997, the Government's agenda for raising standards in schools has led to the introduction of many new policies, programmes and strategies. For example, the national literacy and numeracy strategies, working towards improved results at Key Stages 2 and 3, excellence in cities, along with modernising the teaching profession have all led to an increase in administrative spending on schools functions within the Department to ensure their effective delivery and continued success. However, this has mostly been achieved by redeploying resources from other functions in DfES. In real terms the Department's overall administrative costs were broadly the same in 2000–01 as they were in 1997–98.

Administrative costs for schools related functions, along with the sums that these represent per pupil, each year since 1997 were as follows:

	£ million	*£ per pupil*
1997–98	23.4	2.85
1998–99	27.0	3.28
1999–2000	31.0	3.73
2000–01	34.5	4.14

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the administrative cost was of those functions of her Department concerned with *(a)* further and *(b)* higher education in each year since 1997; and how much those sums represented per full-term equivalent student. [29661]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* The figures are given in the table for the years in question:

	Financial year			
	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
DFES further education administration costs (£000s)	1,717	1,471	2,578	1,763
DFES administrative cost per full time equivalent FE students (£s)	1.69	1.48	2.63	1.69
DfES higher education administrative costs (£000s)	6,162	8,358	5,501	6,358
DfES administrative cost per full time equivalent HE student (£s)	6.05	8.17	5.28	5.98

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the administrative cost was of those functions of her Department concerned with early years in each year since 1997; and how much that sum represented per child under five in the population. [29663]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* The estimated administrative costs of my Department concerned with early years and the sums that these represent per child under five in the population in each of the years in question were:

Year	*Administrative costs (£000)*	*Sum per child under five (£)*
1997–98	612	0.20
1998–99	1,018	0.33
1999–2000	1,149	0.38
2000–01	1,623	0.54

The increase in funding for these functions reflects this Government's manifesto commitment to expand the early years sector, helping create new provision and to extend support for existing provision. This has mostly been achieved by redeploying resources from other functions in DfES. In real terms the Department's overall administrative costs were broadly the same in 2000–01 as they were in 1997–98.

Adult Education

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the administrative cost was of those functions of her Department concerned with adult education and basic skills in each year since 1997; and how much that sum represented per adult in the population. [29662]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* The figures are set out in the table for the period 1998–99 to 2000–01. Figures prior to 1998–99 could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. 'Adult Education' is interpreted as the local education authority secured adult education sector.

Financial year	*DfES admin cost (£000)*	*Cost per adult*[1] *(£)*
1998–99	207	0.01
1999–2000	351	0.01
2000–01	351	0.01

[1] The administrative cost for each complete financial year divided by the adult (age 19+) resident population for England (from the Office for National Statistics) taken at the mid point of the calendar year which forms the first nine months of each financial year.

Student Profiles

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the social class breakdown was in 2001 of students who *(a)* applied for and *(b)* were successful in obtaining places on degree courses at British universities in (i) law, (ii) medicine, (iii) engineering, (iv) nursing, (v) B Ed teaching, (vi) accountancy, (vii) veterinary studies and (viii) psychology; and what the percentage change in (A) applicants and (B) successful places has been since 1995, broken down by social class. [29690]

Margaret Hodge: Information for the years 1995 and 2001, and the percentage change, is shown in the tables. A change in the UCAS application system contributed to the decrease in applications between 1995 and 2001: in 1995 each applicant could make up to eight applications; but in 2001 each applicant could only make up to six applications.

The Government are committed to raising the participation rates for people from less affluent family backgrounds, and have introduced Excellence Challenge, including the AimHigher campaign, which is targeted at raising attainment and aspirations among young people who traditionally would not consider going to university.

Applicants[1] and accepted applicants through UCAS to full-time and sandwich first-degree courses in the United Kingdom by social class and subject

	Social class							
Year of entry	*Professional*	*Intermediate*	*Skilled manual*	*Skilled non-manual*	*Partly skilled*	*Unskilled*	*Not known*	*Grand total*
1995								
Applicants[1]								
Pre-clinical medicine	3,489	3,665	879	845	554	125	490	10,047
Nursing	594	1,948	1,066	560	526	136	560	5,390
Psychology	3,726	11,205	4,806	3,444	2,303	658	2,991	29,133
Veterinary science	348	647	136	124	62	7	57	1,381
Engineering[2]	4,254	9,544	4,907	2,809	2,242	467	2,580	26,803
Law	2,919	7,598	3,062	2,259	1,462	480	2,039	19,819
Accountancy	1,171	3,978	2,216	1,510	1,064	328	1,192	11,459
Education[3]	4,199	16,010	9,306	5,338	3,811	1,002	3,840	43,506
Accepted Applicants								
Pre-clinical medicine	1,720	1,571	280	341	167	29	127	4,235
Nursing	225	596	290	171	126	31	146	1,585
Psychology	1,015	2,671	1,055	782	502	136	673	6,834
Veterinary science	145	248	27	42	10	2	8	482
Engineering[2]	2,430	5,034	2,411	1,432	1,115	240	1,399	14,061
Law	1,541	3,570	1,272	965	592	166	793	8,899
Accountancy	424	1,381	731	538	354	108	390	3,926
Education[3]	1,285	4,605	2,442	1,513	952	214	1,014	12,025
2001								
Applicants[1]								
Pre-clinical medicine	2,805	3,017	690	716	351	74	1,003	8,656
Nursing	538	2,878	1,221	1,086	1,222	177	1,560	8,682
Psychology	2,969	10,327	4,176	3,409	2,143	537	3,179	26,740
Veterinary science	394	698	161	151	71	11	131	1,617
Engineering[2]	3,418	8,277	4,081	2,393	1,624	378	3,403	23,574
Law	2,686	7,693	3,246	2,584	1,416	476	2,961	21,062
Accountancy	1,000	3,587	1,943	1,429	850	271	1,479	10,559
Education[3]	1,222	5,912	3,397	2,438	1,875	352	2,071	17,267
Accepted Applicants								
Pre-clinical medicine	2,053	2,037	406	439	204	36	500	5,675
Nursing	246	1,349	472	431	515	58	622	3,693
Psychology	1,166	3,981	1,404	1,305	732	164	1,209	9,961
Veterinary science	175	290	43	48	26	1	53	636
Engineering[2]	2,058	4,493	2,047	1,216	841	190	1,749	12,594
Law	1,731	4,658	1,781	1,501	747	256	1,686	12,360
Accountancy	411	1,413	743	649	355	103	626	4,300
Education[3]	530	2,422	1,320	1,009	777	115	792	6,965

Percentage change for applicants[1] and accepted applicants from 1995 to 2001

	Social class							
Year of entry	*Professional*	*Intermediate*	*Skilled manual*	*Skilled non-manual*	*Partly skilled*	*Unskilled*	*Not known*	*Grand total*
2001								
Applicants[1]								
Pre-clinical medicine	–20	–18	–22	–15	–37	–41	105	–14
Nursing	–9	48	15	94	132	30	179	61
Psychology	–20	–8	–13	–1	–7	–18	6	–8
Veterinary science	13	8	18	22	15	57	130	17
Engineering[2]	–20	–13	–17	–15	–28	–19	32	–12

Percentage change for applicants[1] and accepted applicants from 1995 to 2001

	Social class							
Year of entry	*Professional*	*Intermediate*	*Skilled manual*	*Skilled non-manual*	*Partly skilled*	*Unskilled*	*Not known*	*Grand total*
Law	–8	1	6	14	–3	–1	45	6
Accountancy	–15	–10	–12	–5	–20	–17	24	–8
Education[3]	–71	–63	–63	–54	–51	–65	–46	–60
Accepted Applicants								
Pre-clinical medicine	19	30	45	29	22	24	294	34
Nursing	9	126	63	152	309	87	326	133
Psychology	15	49	33	67	46	21	80	46
Veterinary science	21	17	59	14	160	–50	563	32
Engineering[2]	–15	–11	–15	–15	–25	–21	25	–10
Law	12	30	40	56	26	54	113	39
Accountancy	–3	2	2	21	0	–5	61	10
Education[3]	–59	–47	–46	–33	–18	–46	–22	–42

[1] In 1995 each student could make up to eight applications; in 2001 each student could make up to 6 applications. In the tables, applicants are counted once under each subject to which they applied.

[2] Includes general, civil, mechanical, aeronautical, electrical, electronic, production/manufacturing and chemical engineering courses.

[3] Includes courses within the Education Group that lead to Qualified Teacher Status. In 1995, the Education group included all sports science, leisure studies and recreation management courses. Since 1997, these courses have been re-coded into other subject lines.

Special Measures

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list *(a)* the name and corresponding local education authority of each school placed under special measures since May 1997 and *(b)* the duration for which they were under special measures. [29731]

Mr. Timms: I shall place in the Library a list of the names of schools which have been judged to require special measures since May 1997, together with their local education authority and the length of time they were in special measures. The list also includes a number of schools which were closed while in special measures.

Financial Resources and Initiatives (Dorset)

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the financial resources and initiatives sponsored by her Department in the last 12 months for Dorset which are additional to the Government SSA grants. [29894]

Mr. Timms: The table shows the Department's allocated grants to Dorset local education authority in 2000–01 and 2001–02.

£

	2000–01	*2001–02*
Standards Fund (revenue)	7,369,622	9,104,494
Teachers Pay Reform Grant	2,069,823	2,699,397
Nursery Education Grant (3-year-olds)	395,024	1,513,512
Nursery Education Grant (4-year-olds)	1,332,672	—
Early Years Training and Recruitment	52,300	231,024
Early Years Special Education Needs Co-ordinators	—	33,691
Childcare Grant	373,700	1,670,361
School Standards Grant	2,354,000	4,866,000
School Budget Support Grant	343,176	—
Education Budget Support Grant	—	100,000
Transitional Funding and Transitional Grant Insurance (former GM Schools)	36,837	4,742
Capital Grant	11,018,000	9,061,000

Note:

Amounts are in cash terms. 2001–02 figures may be subject to change.

Information on other support for projects in Dorset, provided outside the local government finance system, is not readily available.

Direct Grants

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the direct grants for schools in north Lincolnshire and north-east Lincolnshire in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [29908]

Mr. Timms: The tables show School Standards Grant payable for each school in north Lincolnshire and north-east Lincolnshire in 2000–01 and 2001–02.

School standards grant—north Lincolnshire LEA

£

School number	*School name*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
1103	Millbrook Holme PRU	3,000	7,000
1105	Young Parents Unit	3,000	0
2001	Westcliffe Primary School	9,000	24,000
2100	Alkborough Primary School	3,000	7,000
2101	Althorpe and Keadby Primary School	9,000	24,000
2105	Bottesford Junior School	9,000	24,000
2106	Brigg Primary School	9,000	30,000
2107	Broughton Infant School	6,000	13,500
2108	Burton-upon-Stather Primary School	9,000	24,000
2115	Crowle Primary School	9,000	24,000
2116	East Halton Primary School	3,000	7,000
2118	Goxhill Primary School	9,000	24,000
2120	Hibaldstow Primary School	6,000	13,500
2121	Kirton Lindsey Primary School	9,000	24,000
2122	Luddington and Garthorpe Primary School	3,000	7,000
2123	Messingham Primary School	9,000	24,000
2125	Killingholme Primary School	6,000	13,500
2126	Scawby Primary School	9,000	24,000
2129	Brumby Junior School	9,000	30,000
2130	Bushfield Road Infant School	6,000	13,500
2133	Frodingham Infant School	9,000	24,000
2134	Henderson Avenue Primary School	9,000	48,000
2136	Lincoln Gardens Junior School	9,000	24,000
2137	Lincoln Gardens Infant School	9,000	24,000
2138	South Ferriby Primary School	3,000	7,000
2140	Winteringham Primary School	3,000	7,000
2141	Worlaby Primary School	3,000	7,000
2143	Priory Lane Infant School	6,000	13,500
2146	Priory Lane Junior School	9,000	24,000
2147	Grange Lane Infant School	9,000	24,000
2148	Grange Lane Junior School	9,000	24,000
2149	Riddings Infant School	9,000	13,500
2150	Rochdale Road Junior School	9,000	24,000

School standards grant—north Lincolnshire LEA

£

School number	*School name*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
2152	Riddings Junior School	9,000	2,400
2155	Enderby Road Infant School	6,000	7,000
2159	Leys Farm Junior School	6,000	13,500
2168	Parkwood Infant School	6,000	13,500
2169	Parkwood Junior School	9,000	24,000
2171	Sunway Infant School	6,000	13,500
2172	Berkeley Infant School	9,000	24,000
2173	Bottesford Infant School	6,000	24,000
2174	Berkeley Junior School	9,000	24,000
2180	Winterton Junior School	9,000	24,000
2567	Holme Valley Primary School	6,000	13,500
2568	Bowmandale Primary School	9,000	24,000
2880	Broughton Junior School	9,000	24,000
2890	Epworth Primary School	9,000	24,000
2907	Crosby Primary School	9,000	30,000
2940	Castledyke Primary School	9,000	24,000
3055	St. Barnabas CofE Primary School, Barnetby	6,000	13,500
3056	John Harrison CofE Primary School	6,000	13,500
3057	Barton St. Peter's CofE Primary School	9,000	24,000
3058	Belton All Saints CofE Primary School	9,000	24,000
3063	Gunness and Burringham CofE Primary School	3,000	7,000
3064	Haxey CofE Primary School	6,000	13,500
3067	Kirmington CofE Primary School	3,000	7,000
30'1	Scunthorpe CofE Primary School	9,000	24,000
3073	West Butterwick CofE Primary School	3,000	7,000
3074	Westwoodside CofE Primary School	6,000	13,500
3075	Winterton CofE Infant School	6,000	24,000
3076	Wrawby St. Mary's CofE Primary School	6,000	13,500
3077	Wroot Travis Charity Church of England Primary School	3,000	7,000
3078	New Holland Church of England and Methodist Primary School	3,000	7,000
3079	Ulceby St. Nicholas Church of England Primary School	6,000	13,500
3320	St. Martin's CofE Primary School	6,000	7,000
3322	Wootton St. Andrew's CofE Primary School	3,000	7,000
3323	St. Mary's Catholic Primary School	6,000	13,500
3324	Saint Norbert's Catholic Primary School	3,000	7,000
3325	St. Bernadette's Catholic Primary School	9,000	24,000
3326	Saint Augustine Webster Catholic Primary School	9,000	30,000
3330	Eastoft Church of England Primary School	3,000	7,000
4074	Huntcliff School	40,000	70,000
4075	Brumby School	40,000	70,000
4076	Foxhills Comprehensive School	40,000	70,000
4077	Thomas Sumpter School	40,000	70,000
4081	South Leys School	30,000	58,000
4082	North Axholme School	30,000	58,000
4083	South Axholme Community School	40,700	70,000
4087	Frederick Gough School	40,000	70,000
4088	High Ridge School	30,000	58,000
4090	Winterton Comprehensive School	40,000	70,000
4091	Vale of Ancholme School	30,000	58,000
4491	Baysgarth School	40,000	70,000
4501	Sir John Nelthorpe School	40,000	70,000
4700	St. Bede's Catholic School	40,000	70,000
7019	St. Hugh's School	15,000	28,000
7020	St. Luke's School	15,000	20,000

School standards grant: north-east Lincolnshire LEA

£

School number	*School name*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
1006	Nunsthorpe Nursery School	3,000	7,000
1007	Great Coates Nursery School	3,000	7,000
1012	Scartho Nursery School	3,000	7,000
1101	Phoenix House	3,000	7,000
1104	Young Mothers Unit	3,000	7,000
2000	Allerton Primary School	9,000	24,000
2001	Yarborough Primary School	9,000	24,000
2002	Woodlands Primary School	9,000	24,000
2003	Nunsthorpe Community School	0	24,000
2109	William Barcroft Junior School	9,000	24,000
2112	Elliston Infants' School	9,000	24,000
2113	Queen Mary Infant School	9,000	24,000
2114	Reynolds Junior School	9,000	24,000
2124	New Waltham Primary School	9,000	24,000
2142	Thrunscoe Infants' School	6,000	13,500
2144	Pelham Infants' School	6,000	13,500
2145	Enfield (New Waltham) Primary School	6,000	13,500
2151	The Leas Junior School	9,000	24,000
2153	Thrunscoe Junior School	6,000	13,500
2154	Healing Primary School	9,000	24,000
2175	Signhills Infants' School	9,000	24,000
2176	Signhills Junior School	9,000	24,000
2178	Eastfield Junior School	6,000	13,500
2179	Eastfield Infants' School	6,000	13,500
2181	The Leas Infants' School	9,000	24,000
2182	Middlethorpe Primary School	9,000	24,000
2183	Reynolds Infants' School	9,000	24,000
2184	Elliston Junior School	9,000	24,000
2877	Coomb Briggs Primary School	9,000	24,000
2892	Weelsby Primary School	9,000	24,000
2895	Edward Heneage Primary School	9,000	24,000
2896	Fairfield Primary School	9,000	24,000
2897	Great Coates Primary School	9,000	24,000
2898	Springfield Primary School	9,000	24,000
2899	Western Primary School	9,000	24,000
2900	Willows Primary School	9,000	24,000
2919	Grange Infant and Nursery School	9,000	24,000
2920	Grange Junior School	9,000	24,000
2921	Macaulay Infants' School	9,000	24,000
2922	Macaulay Junior School	9,000	24,000
2923	South Parade Infant School	9,000	24,000
2924	South Parade Junior School	9,000	24,000
2925	Strand Infants' School	9,000	13,500
2926	Strand Junior School	9,000	13,500
2927	Nunsthorpe Infants' School	9,000	0
2928	Nunsthorpe Junior School	9,000	0
2929	Scartho Infants' School	6,000	13,500
2930	Scartho Junior School	9,000	24,000
2931	Welholme Infants' School	9,000	24,000
2932	Welholme Junior School	9,000	24,000
2933	Wybers Wood Infant School	6,000	13,500
2934	Wybers Wood Junior School	9,000	24,000
2935	Old Clee Infants' School	9,000	24,000
2936	Old Clee Junior School	9,000	30,000
2937	Little Coates Primary School	9,000	13,500
2938	Laceby Acres Primary School	9,000	24,000
2939	Humberston Cloverfields Primary School	9,000	24,000
2943	Bursar Primary School	9,000	24,000
3059	St. Peter's CofE Primary School	9,000	24,000
3060	East Ravendale CofE Primary School	6,000	13,500
3065	The Humberston CofE Primary School	9,000	24,000
3066	Immingham St. Andrew's CofE Junior School	6,000	13,500
3068	Stanford Junior and Infant School	9,000	24,000
3072	Stallingborough CofE Primary School	3,000	7,000
3300	Lisle Marsden CofE Aided Primary School	0	30,000
3512	Lisle Marsden CofE (VA) Infant School	9,000	0
3513	Lisle Marsden CofE (VA) Junior School	9,000	0
3514	St. Joseph's RC Primary School	6,000	13,500
3515	St. Mary's RC Primary School	9,000	7,000
4008	Havelock School	40,000	70,000
4009	Hereford Technology School	40,000	70,000
4011	Whitgift School	40,000	70,000
4013	The Western Technology School	40,000	70,000
4038	Wintringham School	40,000	58,000
4073	The Immingham School	40,000	70,000
4078	Toll Bar School	50,000	82,000
4084	Healing Comprehensive School	40,000	70,000
4086	The Lindsey School and Community Arts College	50,000	82,000
4092	Humberston Comprehensive School	40,000	70,000
4503	Matthew Humberstone Church of England School	50,000	82,000
4627	St. Mary's Catholic School	30,000	58,000
7011	Humberston Park School	15,000	20,000
7033	Cambridge Park School	15,000	28,000

Standards Funds

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the Standards Funds received by schools in north Lincolnshire and north-east Lincolnshire for the years *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [29909]

Mr. Timms: The table shows allocations for the Standards Fund for north Lincolnshire and north-east Lincolnshire local education authorities in 2000–01 and 2001–02. The figures include both Government and local authority contributions. The amount actually paid to schools depends on local expenditure decisions by schools and the local authority.

Standards Fund allocations

	£
North Lincolnshire council: 2000–01	
Administrative Support for Small Schools	263,315
Beacon Schools	35,300
Best Practice Research Scholarships	2,998
Class Size Initiative	1,214,276
Devolved Formula Capital for Schools	1,155,991
Early Years Training and Development	42,186
Education and Health Partnerships	42,401
Ethnic Minority Pupils and Traveller Achievement	281,121
Key Stage 3 Numeracy: Secondary Schools Conference	10,196
Literacy and Numeracy: Summer Schools and Key Stage 3	110,000
National Grid for Learning	815,218
New National Curriculum	65,100
Performance Management Training	149,694
Primary Literacy and Numeracy Strategies	525,243
Protecting Local Authority Music Services	190,000
Qualifications	37,481
School Improvement	941,482
School Laboratories for the 21st Century	127,660
School Leadership	110,213
School Security	76,870
Secondary School Learning Support Units	51,723
Seed Capital Challenge	130,270
Small School Support Fund	84,663
Social Inclusion, Drugs and Youth	403,017
Special Educational Needs	213,338
Specialist Schools	280,418
Study Support	50,710
Summer Schools for Gifted and Talented Pupils	27,000
Support for Parent Governor Representatives	1,200
Supported Early Retirement Scheme for Heads	34,702
Teacher Incentives	13,375
Teaching Assistants	432,314
Transforming Key Stage 3	708,500
Working Environment Fund	67,852
Year 6 Literacy and Numeracy Booster Classes	143,180
Total	8,839,007
North Lincolnshire council: 2001–02	
Advanced Skills Teachers	99,500
Beacon Schools	64,700
Children in Public Care	21,908
Class Size Initiative	788,758
Devolved Capital	1,481,065
Drugs, Alcohol and Tobacco	57,310
Early Years Training and Development	37,365
Education Health Partnerships	29,718
Ethnic Minority Achievement	281,121
Induction of Newly Qualified Teachers	153,788
Information Management Strategy	104,787
Key Stage 3 Strategy	633,140
Learning Support Units	111,916
Literacy and Numeracy Summer Schools	140,000
Local Education Authority Music Services	190,000
National Curriculum	64,814
National Grid for Learning	876,804
NDS Condition Funding	757,823
Performance Management	89,173
Primary Literacy and Numeracy Strategies	568,392
Qualifications	13,069
School Achievement Awards	181,520
School Improvement	742,000
School Laboratories	144,809
School Leadership	150,731
School Security	76,844
Seed Capital Challenge	141,185
Sick Children	6,259
Small Schools Fund	336,606
Social Inclusion: Pupil Support	437,100
Special Educational Needs	228,472
Specialist Schools	301,427
Study Support	186,354
Summer Schools for Gifted and Talented Children	18,000
Supported Early Retirement Scheme for Heads	40,000
Teaching Assistants	650,329
Year 6 Booster Classes	156,544
Year 9 Booster Classes	4,500
Total	10,367,831
North-East Lincolnshire council: 2000–01	
Administrative Support for Small Schools	136,924
Advanced Skills Teachers	105,000
Beacon Schools	10,000
Best Practice Research Scholarships	25,415
Class Size Initiative	1,207,193
Developing and Extending Maintained Nursery School Services	37,009
Devolved Formula Capital for Schools	1,208,164
Early Excellence Centres	212,128
Early Years Training and Development	41,796
Education and Health partnerships	29,043
Ethnic Minority Pupils and Traveller Achievement	43,476
Key Stage 3 Numeracy: Secondary Schools Conference	9,558
Literacy and Numeracy: Summer Schools and Key Stage 3	110,000
Local Authority Music Services	309,000
Maintained Nursery Capital	15,317
National Grid for Learning	767,268
New National Curriculum	66,800
Nursery Capital: Wrap-around Care	60,295
Performance Management Training	138,166
Pilot Education Maintenance Allowance	480,103
Playing for Success	100,000
Primary Literacy and Numeracy Strategies	546,906
Qualifications	39,460
School Improvement	1,112,357
School Laboratories for the 21st Century	132,684
School Leadership	106,413
School Security	79,479
Secondary School Learning Support Units	67,572
Seed Capital Challenge	138,120
Small School Support Fund	47,758
Social Inclusion, Drugs and Youth	614,430
Special Educational Needs	299,809
Specialist Schools	375,380
Study Support	95,343
Summer Schools for Gifted and Talented Pupils	18,000
Support for Parent Governor Representatives	1,200
Teaching Assistants	495,318
Teenage Pregnancies	68,400
Working Environment Fund	66,606
Year 6 Literacy and Numeracy Booster Classes	155,129
Total	9,573,019
North-East Lincolnshire council: 2001–02	
Adult:Pupil Ratios in Reception Classes	173,396
Advanced Skills Teachers	110,000
Beacon Schools	122,000
Children in Public Care	27,881
Class Size Initiative	699,104
Devolved Capital	979,884
Drugs, Alcohol and Tobacco	48,490
Early Excellence Centres	470,531
Early Years Training and Development	34,609
Education Health Partnerships	28,609

Standards Fund allocations

	£
Ethnic Minority Achievement	43,476
Fresh Start	393,800
Induction of Newly Qualified Teachers	262,600
Information Management Strategy	106,607
Key Stage 3: National Implementation	248,283
Learning Support Units	131,666
Literacy and Numeracy Summer Schools	70,000
Local Education Authority Music Services	309,000
Maintained Nursery School Service	37,546
National Curriculum	65,813
National Grid for Learning	847,023
NDS Condition Funding	1,351,460
Performance Management	95,561
Playing for Success	100,000
Primary Literacy and Numeracy Strategies	590,585
Qualifications	11,202
School Achievement Awards	255,850
School Improvement	897,000
School Laboratories	132,684
School Leadership	80,859
School Security	78,179
Seed Capital Challenge	150,835
Sick Children	7,966
Small Schools Fund	160,289
Social Inclusion	764,800
Special Educational Needs	290,761
Specialist Schools	297,606
Study Support	204,534
Summer Schools for Gifted and Talented Children	18,000
Supported Early Retirement Scheme for Heads	40,000
Teacher Recruitment Measures (Golden Hellos)	30,762
Teaching Assistants	758,026
Teenage Pregnancies	68,400
Year 6 Booster Classes	163,577
Year 9 Booster Classes	54,000
Total	11,813,254

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the answer of 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 587–89W, on Standard Funds, if she will list the amounts contributed by the Government to the Standard Funds in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [30560]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* The table shows allocations for the Standards Fund for Hampshire local education authority in 2000–01 and 2001–02 and the Government's contribution.

Standards Fund allocations for Hampshire county council

£

	Total allocation	DfES contribution
2000–01		
Administrative Support for Small Schools	608,000	304,000
Advanced Skills Teachers	136,500	68,250
Beacon Schools	341,450	341,450
Best Practice Research Scholarships	75,675	75,675
Class Size Initiative	4,245,393	4,245,393
Developing and Extending Maintained Nursery School Services	24,945	24,945
Devolved Formula Capital for Schools	7,605,169	7,605,169
Early Excellence Centres	98,228	98,228
Early Years Training and Development	303,077	151,539
Education and Health Partnerships	97,995	97,995
Ethnic Minority Pupils and Traveller Achievement	397,838	230,746
Key Stage 3 Numeracy: Secondary Schools Conference	61,812	30,906
Literacy and Numeracy: Summer Schools and Key Stage 3	176,000	88,000
Local Education Authority Music Services	1,085,380	882,190
Maintained Nursery Capital	11,613	11,613
National Grid for Learning	3,858,095	1,929,048
New Models for LEA Services	45,000	45,000
New National Curriculum	431,400	215,700
Performance Management Training	907,454	725,963
Primary Literacy and Numeracy Strategies	2,792,848	1,790,773
Qualifications	197,363	98,682
School Improvement	7,239,927	3,619,964
School Laboratories for the 21st Century	550,813	550,813
School Leadership	449,904	349,952
School Security	510,545	382,909
Secondary School Learning Support Units	239,741	239,741
Seed Capital Challenge	593,728	593,728
Small School Support Fund	440,681	220,341
Social Inclusion, Drugs and Youth	1,776,297	888,149
Special Educational Needs	741,547	370,774
Specialist Schools	756,016	756,016
Study Support	160,640	80,320
Summer Schools for Gifted and Talented Pupils	63,000	63,000
Support for Parent Governor Representatives	1,200	1,200
Supported Early Retirement Scheme for Heads	180,399	90,200
Teacher Incentives	82,555	82,555
Teaching Assistants	2,806,098	2,525,488
Working Environment Fund	485,925	485,925
Year 6 Literacy and Numeracy Booster Classes	873,277	873,277
Total	41,453,528	31,235,617

Standards Fund allocations for Hampshire county council

£

	Total allocation	*DfES contribution*
2001–02		
Advanced Skills Teachers	697,500	369,675
Beacon Schools	643,150	643,150
Child Protection Co-ordinators	39,600	39,600
Children in Public Care	136,330	72,255
Children of Asylum Seekers	1,000	1,000
Class Size Initiative	5,520,194	5,520,194
Devolved Formula Capital for Schools	11,928,266	11,928,266
Drugs, Alcohol and Tobacco	275,510	186,628
Early Excellence Centres	89,030	89,030
Early Professional Development	950,400	950,400
Early Years Training and Development	350,537	185,785
Education Health Partnerships	86,634	86,634
Ethnic Minority Achievement	250,513	132,772
Gifted and Talented Children	72,000	72,000
Induction of Newly Qualified Teachers	1,478,967	783,853
Information Management Strategy	691,163	691,163
Learning Support Units	640,155	640,155
Literacy and Numeracy Summer Schools	420,000	222,600
Local Education Authority Music Services	882,200	882,200
Maintained Nursery School Service	53,663	53,663
National Curriculum	427,613	226,635
National Grid for Learning	5,595,910	2,965,832
NDS Condition Funding	7,824,772	7,824,772
New Models for Local Education Authority Services	100,000	100,000
Performance Management	624,554	624,554
Primary Literacy and Numeracy Strategies	3,279,526	2,315,979
Qualifications	66,279	35,128
Recruitment and Retention Fund	1,652,000	1,652,000
School Achievement Awards	1,254,260	1,254,260
School Improvement	4,528,000	2,402,190
School Laboratories	1,101,626	1,101,626
School Leadership	721,262	612,672
School Security	506,853	268,632
Seed Capital Challenge	687,914	687,914
Sick Children	38,951	38,951
Small Schools Fund	1,739,130	921,739
Social Inclusion: Pupil Support	1,768,300	937,199
Special Educational Needs	1,421,726	753,515
Specialist Schools	854,715	854,715
Study Support	1,302,976	690,577
Supported Early Retirement Scheme for Heads	240,000	127,200
Teaching Assistants	4,184,795	2,217,941
Transforming Key Stage 3	918,789	486,958
Traveller Children Achievement	177,231	93,932
Year 6 Literacy and Numeracy Booster Classes	975,740	975,740
Year 9 Booster Classes	319,500	319,500
Total	67,519,234	54,041,184

Class Sizes

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average *(a)* class size and *(b)* pupil:teacher ratio in (i) primary schools and (ii) secondary schools in (A) Yeovil constituency, (B) Somerset and (C) England was in each year from 1980 to 2001; and if he will make a statement. [30017]

Mr. Timms: The available information is shown in the following tables:

Pupil:teacher ratio in primary and secondary schools—Position in January each year

	Yeovil constituency		*Somerset LEA*		*England*	
	Primary	*Secondary*	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*Primary*	*Secondary*
2001	23.3	18.7	22.9	18.5	22.9	17.1
2000	23.9	19.5	23.7	18.6	23.3	17.2
1999	24.3	19.3	24.3	18.4	23.5	17.0
1998	24.1	18.3	23.9	18.1	23.7	16.9
1997	23.6	17.7	23.5	18.0	23.4	16.7
1996	[1]—	[1]—	23.2	18.0	23.2	16.6
1995	[1]—	[1]—	22.6	17.0	22.9	16.5
1994	[1]—	[1]—	22.6	16.6	22.7	16.4

Pupil:teacher ratio in primary and secondary schools—Position in January each year

	Yeovil constituency		*Somerset LEA*		*England*	
	Primary	*Secondary*	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*Primary*	*Secondary*
1993	[1]—	[1]—	22.5	16.3	22.4	16.1
1992	[1]—	[1]—	22.3	16.0	22.2	15.8
1991	[1]—	[1]—	22.1	15.7	22.2	15.5
1990	[1]—	[1]—	22.2	15.5	22.0	15.3
1989	[1]—	[1]—	22.8	15.8	22.0	15.3
1988	[1]—	[1]—	23.1	16.3	22.0	15.4
1987	[1]—	[1]—	22.9	16.7	21.9	15.6
1986	[1]—	[1]—	23.9	17.4	22.1	15.9
1985	[1]—	[1]—	24.2	17.6	22.2	16.1
1984	[1]—	[1]—	23.8	17.6	22.1	16.2
1983	[1]—	[1]—	24.6	18.3	22.3	16.5
1982	[1]—	[1]—	24.7	18.5	22.5	16.6
1981	[1]—	[1]—	24.7	18.3	22.6	16.6
1980	[1]—	[1]—	24.7	18.4	22.7	16.6

[1] Not available

Source:

Annual Schools' Census

Average class size in primary and secondary schools[1]—Position in January each year

	Yeovil constituency		*Somerset LEA*		*England*	
	Primary	*Secondary*	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*Primary*	*Secondary*
2001	27.0	24.1	26.9	23.9	26.7	22.0
2000	27.7	24.8	27.6	23.6	27.1	22.0
1999	27.8	24.1	28.0	23.9	27.5	21.9
1998	27.6	24.2	27.8	23.9	27.7	21.7
1997	27.0	23.2	27.6	23.2	27.5	21.7
1996	[2]—	[2]—	27.3	23.2	27.3	21.7
1995	[2]—	[2]—	27.0	22.5	27.1	21.5
1994	[2]—	[2]—	26.9	22.1	26.9	21.4
1993	[2]—	[2]—	27.0	22.5	26.6	20.9
1992	[2]—	[2]—	26.8	21.4	26.4	20.6
1991	[2]—	[2]—	26.5	21.4	26.3	20.3
1990	[2]—	[2]—	26.3	20.7	25.9	20.0
1989	[2]—	[2]—	26.3	21.0	25.4	19.9
1988	[2]—	[2]—	26.8	20.7	25.4	19.9
1987	[2]—	[2]—	26.4	21.4	25.4	21.7
1986	[2]—	[2]—	27.1	21.9	25.5	20.3
1985	[2]—	[2]—	27.2	22.2	24.9	20.4
1984	[2]—	[2]—	26.6	22.0	24.7	20.4
1983	[2]—	[2]—	27.1	22.2	24.8	20.6
1982	[2]—	[2]—	27.3	22.8	25.1	20.7
1981	[2]—	[2]—	27.2	22.5	25.2	20.8
1980	[2]—	[2]—	27.5	22.6	25.4	20.9

[1] One teacher classes

[2] Not available

Note:

Data at parliamentary constituency level are not available prior to 1997

Source:

Annual Schools' Census

Mrs. Dean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average pupil:teacher ratios for *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools were for each of the shire counties in the last year for which figures are available. [30141]

Mr. Timms: The figures for pupil:teacher ratios in primary and secondary schools in shire counties are shown in the table.

Maintained primary and secondary schools pupil:teacher ratios by type of school in each shire county in England

	Pupil:teacher ratios	
January 2001	*Primary*	*Secondary*
Bedfordshire	22.9	18.8
Buckinghamshire	22.8	18.3
Cambridgeshire	24.1	18.7
Cheshire	22.9	16.9
Cornwall	22.9	18.0
Cumbria	22.0	16.8
Derbyshire	24.2	17.5
Devon	23.1	17.7
Dorset	22.7	18.5
Durham	22.2	17.2
East Sussex	22.7	17.1
Essex	22.9	17.5
Gloucestershire	22.3	17.2
Hampshire	23.0	17.6
Hertfordshire	23.0	16.7

Maintained primary and secondary schools pupil:teacher ratios by type of school in each shire county in England

	Pupil:teacher ratios	
January 2001	*Primary*	*Secondary*
Kent	23.4	17.4
Lancashire	23.6	16.9
Leicestershire	23.2	17.8
Lincolnshire	23.9	17.2
Norfolk	22.1	16.9
North Yorkshire	22.5	16.6
Northamptonshire	22.9	17.4
Northumberland	22.8	18.6
Nottinghamshire	24.0	17.6
Oxfordshire	22.3	17.8
Shropshire	22.8	17.3
Somerset	22.9	18.5
Staffordshire	23.7	17.6
Suffolk	22.0	17.1
Surrey	22.8	17.6
Warwickshire	23.0	17.2
West Sussex	22.5	17.0
Wiltshire	22.8	17.5
Worcestershire	22.9	18.3
England	22.9	17.1

Source:

Annual Schools' Census

Pupil Referral and Learning Support Units

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 713W, on pupil referral and learning support units, how many people are employed in the Home Tuition and Hospital Teaching Service. [30102]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Buckinghamshire local education authority (LEA) have a combined hospital and home teaching service which employs one full-time hospital teacher, a part-time learning support assistant and supply teachers depending on demand. Home teachers are employed on a sessional basis as and when required. These staff are managed by, but not part of, the PRU service.

Early Learning Places

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 415W, how many new free part-time early learning places will be made available in the Buckingham constituency. [30124]

Margaret Hodge: On 2 January 2002, Baroness Ashton announced details of £275 million of funding available in 2002–03 for the provision of free, part-time, early education places for 3-year-olds. Buckingham local education authority has been allocated £3.8 million of this funding to provide 3,100 free, part-time, early education places.

Pupil Achievement

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of pupils achieved Level 5 or above at Key Stage 3 *(a)* in England and *(b)* from schools based in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1997. [30048]

Mr. Timms: The percentage of pupils achieving Level 5 or above at Key Stage 3 *(a)* in England and *(b)* from schools based in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1997 are as follows:

Percentage

	Buckingham	*England*
English		
2001[1]	79	64
2000	72	64
1999	75	64
1998	78	65
1997	72	57
Mathematics		
2001[1]	75	66
2000	78	65
1999	73	62
1998	73	59
1997	72	60
Science		
2001[1]	76	66
2000	68	59
1999	69	55
1998	70	56
1997	71	60

[1] Provisional

Source:

National Curriculum Results

2001 SFR40/2001—National Curriculum Assessments of 7, 11 and 14-year-olds 2001

1997–2000 Statistical Bulletins

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of pupils achieved Level 2 or above at Key Stage 1 *(a)* in England and *(b)* from schools based in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1997. [30049]

Mr. Timms: The percentage of pupils achieving Level 2 or above at Key Stage 1 *(a)* in England and *(b)* from schools based in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1997 are as follows:

Percentage

	Buckingham	*England*
Reading		
2001[1]	90	84
2000	93	83
1999	91	82
1998	87	80
1997	89	80
Writing		
2001[1]	92	86
2000	93	84
1999	93	83
1998	88	81
1997	90	80
Spelling		
2001[1]	83	75
2000	83	72
1999	80	71
1998	73	66
1997	70	62
Mathematics		
2001[1]	96	91
2000	96	90
1999	93	87

		Percentage
	Buckingham	*England*
1998	89	84
1997	92	84

[1] Provisional

Source:

National Curriculum Results

2001 SFR40/2001—National Curriculum Assessments of 7, 11 and 14-year-olds 2001

1997–2000 Statistical Bulletins

Departmental Expenditure (Publications)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her estimate is of the expenditure of her Department on newspapers, magazines and periodicals in each of the last four years. [30090]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The following figures cover the purchase of books as well as newspapers, magazines and periodicals. It is not possible to separate these costs further without disproportionate expense.

Financial year	*£000*
1997–98	209
1998–99	173
1999–2000	274
2000–01	269

Assaults on Teachers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 402W, how many assaults there were on teachers in each LEA in each year since 1997. [30125]

Mr. Timms: The Department does not collect this information from local education authorities.

Education Spending (Portsmouth)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the Portsmouth local education authority spending on education *(a)* above SSA per pupil for the primary and secondary sectors, *(b)* in total for 1990–91 to 2001–02 and *(c)* projected for the financial year 2002–03, adjusted for inflation at current values; and if she will make a statement. [30279]

Mr. Timms: Portsmouth local education authority did not exist as an LEA until 1997–98. The information for Portsmouth LEA is as follows:

			Real terms figures[1]
	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
NCE per pupil			
Pre-pri/Primary	2,180	2,290	2,460
Secondary	2,820	2,860	3,030
Total	2,410	2,500	2,680
SSA per pupil			
Pre-pri/Primary	2,110	2,340	2,460
Secondary	3,070	3,120	3,120
Total	2,460	2,630	2,710

[1] Rounded to the nearest £10

Notes:

1. Figures for 1997–98 and 1998–99 include grant maintained schools. Figures for 1999–2000 include ex-GM schools
2. All figures are in real terms at 2000–01 prices, and rounded to the nearest £10.
3. Portsmouth came into being as a result of an LEA reorganisation in 1997–98. It did not exist as a separate LEA but was part of Hampshire LEA prior to 1997–98.
4. Expenditure is given by Net Current Expenditure (NCE) after recharges.
5. Expenditure data for 1990–2000 is taken from section 52 outturn statements completed by local education authorities and returned to the DfES. Data for all previous years is taken from DTLR's Revenue Outturn returns.
6. SSA figures implicitly cover funding for special schools, and there is no split available for special schools. The NCE figures provided here are for pre-primary and secondary only. Hence the two sets of figures are not comparable.
7. Pupil numbers used in calculating per pupil figures are financial year averages, based on January Annual School Census returns.

Information for 2000–01 and 2001–02 is not yet available and as a result it is not possible to arrive at a projection for 2002–03.

Teachers (Returners' Bonus)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much money has been allocated for returners' bonuses for people returning to the teaching profession. [30280]

Mr. Timms: The allocation for the current financial year is £4.034 million.

Standard Spending Assessment (Swindon)

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what Swindon's SSA per pupil for (i) post-16 and (ii) four-year-olds was for 1997–98 to 2002–03; and what the average figures for England were for those years. [30292]

Mr. Timms: The post-16 SSA and four-year-old SSA cannot be expressed meaningfully as a per pupil amount because education for those groups is not compulsory and a large part of the SSA for these sub-blocks is determined on factors other than pupil numbers.

Student Financing

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will compensate students and former students who started their degrees in the years 1998 to 2002, if the review of student financing results in a significantly decreased debt burden for students starting their courses after 2003. [30368]

Margaret Hodge: No decision has been taken on the outcome of the student funding review. It is not usual practice, however, for the Government to apply any policy changes retrospectively.

School Transport

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the study of post-16 school transport arrangements was completed; what indications it gave as to the number of education authorities which charge for transport to school for 16 to 19-year-olds; and what action she has taken as a result of the study. [30392]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The fieldwork for the study into post-16 transport support was completed in November 2001. We are awaiting the consultants' report. Their initial findings suggest that most LEAs charge for transport for students aged 16 and over, although free transport remains available to some, e.g. students assessed as disabled. Charges for transport vary between LEAs.

In order to make improvements to transport support for students aged 16 to 19, we have introduced a clause in the current Education Bill to revise section 509 of the 1996 Education Act and clarify the duty on LEAs so that they work with the local LSCs, colleges and others, in developing and delivering policies for support.

We are also making £9 million available to LEAs in 2002–03 to help them to develop and test the best approaches to transport support. Information about these developments will reach LEAs in February 2002.

Deregulation

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what deregulatory measures have been taken by the DFEE and the DFES in each of the last five years. [30441]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* The information required is not held centrally, and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The Government will very shortly be publishing their Regulatory Reform Action Plan, which includes some deregulatory measures as well as proposals for better regulation and reform.

Coalfield Areas

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to extend education maintenance allowances to each English coalfield area. [30526]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We have no such plans at present. We will be taking decisions on any future extension of the scheme on the basis of the rigorous evaluation, which is currently being conducted.

Golden Jubilee

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans there are to give school children a commemorative mug to mark the Queen's Golden Jubilee. [30753]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We have no plans to give school children a commemorative Jubilee mug. However, as I have commented in previous answers to such questions, the Department is involved in a range of projects to mark Her Majesty's Golden Jubilee. Last October, we announced jointly with Buckingham Palace a national poetry competition and in December, my colleague the Secretary of State for Education and Skills announced that the National Training Awards 2002 would include a special Jubilee category to mark exceptionally effective contributions to the community by individuals and organisations.

My Department will shortly be posting information for schools and others about its various Jubilee activities on its website.

School Closures

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools have closed since 1997. [31063]

Mr. Timms: Schools that closed in England during the period 1 January 1997 to 31 December 2001 were as follows:

(a) Primary—924

(b) Secondary—197.

The figures include schools that have closed owing to the amalgamation or merger of two or more schools, and schools that have closed in local education authorities that have moved from a three-tier system to a two-tier system.

School Pupils (Extended Holidays)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what *(a)* legislation and *(b)* guidance requires a head teacher to take off a school's roll pupils taking extended holidays outside the United Kingdom; and what time limits apply to a head teacher keeping open a place for such pupils. [31092]

Mr. Timms: The Education (Pupil Registration) Regulations 1995 outline the circumstances under which a head teacher shall remove a pupil from the school roll. "Social Inclusion: Pupil Support" circular number 10/99 Annexe A provides guidance on holidays during term time.

Examination Boards

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent communications she has had from *(a)* the Edexcel examination board and *(b)* the QCA about (i) that board's history A-level (syllabus code 9267) marking in 2001, (ii) that board's handling of parents' and examinees' complaints about examination marking and administration and (iii) that board's handling of schools' complaints about examination marking and administration. [31093]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no communications from Edexcel or QCA about History A-level (syllabus code 9267) marking in 2001. The QCA is responsible for maintaining all awarding bodies' performance in the delivery of examinations. The authority will be publishing its audit of Edexcel's performance in the delivery of general qualifications in 2001 in the near future.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many complaints and appeals were lodged with the Edexcel examinations board relating to the A-level history (syllabus code 9267) examination in each of the last five years. [31095]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I am advised that the number of complaints and appeals lodged with Edexcel relating to the A-level history (syllabus code 9267) in each of the last five years was as follows.

Year	Number
Complaints	
1997	5
1998	2
1999	8
2000	9
2001	6
Appeals	
Stage 1 inquiries	
1997	[1]—
1998	6
1999	8
2000	3
2001	6
Stage 2 appeals hearings	
1997	0
1998	[2]1
1999	0
2000	[2]1
2001	[3]1

[1] No information.

[2] Not upheld

[3] Pending

Source:

These figures have been provided by the Edexcel Foundation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what performance targets she sets and performance standards she expects of examination boards; when they were last reviewed; and what monitoring procedures are in place. [31096]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Government introduced statutory arrangements in 1997 to regulate external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Details of how the regulatory authorities ensure quality and consistent standards are contained in the document: "Arrangements for the statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland" (published 2000).

Awarding body procedures are governed by codes of practice, issued by the regulatory authorities. General codes of practice are supplemented by codes for each qualification type. All are reviewed regularly.

To support further improvements in awarding body performance, the regulatory authorities plan to publish specific performance targets, building on proposals in the Curriculum 2000 review report.

The regulatory authorities' regular monitoring of awarding bodies includes: audits of their management and systems of quality assurance and control; detailed scrutinies of individual subjects and the way these are managed; and an extensive programme to monitor compliance with the codes of practice.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average time taken by each examination board to handle appeals and requests for re-marking was in the last 12 months. [31097]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority has set targets for the awarding bodies to meet all requests for remarking and appeals and QCA monitors annually the awarding bodies' performance against the targets. The data for 2001 are not available at this stage, as the remarking and appeals process is not yet complete.

FE Colleges

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the implications for FE colleges of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [31117]

John Healey: The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 exempted educational institutions from its provisions. The DDA was amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 to include all FE sector colleges within its provisions.

The Government intend to implement the new duties in three stages:

> From 1 September 2002 it will be unlawful for FE colleges to discriminate against disabled students by treating them less favourably than others. In addition, FE colleges will have a duty to provide reasonable adjustments to provision where disabled students might otherwise be substantially disadvantaged.
>
> From 1 September 2003 FE colleges will have a duty to make adjustments involving the provision of auxiliary aids and services.
>
> From 1 September 2005 FE colleges will have a duty to make adjustments to physical features of premises where these put disabled students at a substantial disadvantage.

Colleges will be supported in implementing the new duties by additional funding, guidance and support made available through the Disability Rights Commission, the Learning and Skills Council, and the Department for Education and Skills. £66 million has been allocated over the years 2002–04.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to change the proportion of own resources further education colleges have to find for large capital projects. [31118]

John Healey: Funding for large further education capital projects is provided by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and it is a matter for the LSC what percentage of the cost of a project has to be found by the college itself.

The percentage varies according to the circumstances and type of application which the college makes to the LSC and in some instances colleges are not required to use any of their own resources.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will review the levels of auditing and evaluation to which FE is subject to. [31119]

John Healey: The Department is committed to reducing the burdens faced by the FE sector. In consultation with the Department for Education and Skills, the Learning and Skills Council is reviewing the audit burden on FE colleges and the LSC is drawing up measures to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy. John Harwood, Chief Executive of the Learning and Skills Council, recently announced the setting up of a task force headed by Sir George Sweeney, Principal of Knowsley college, to carry out a national inquiry into bureaucracy in colleges. However, while looking to reduce the burden on FE sector, it is vital to ensure that the interests of learners and of taxpayers in the FE budget, worth more than £4 billion, are protected and that proper and effective systems audit and control are in place. In addition, the Department is currently working to reduce the number of funding lines for FE sector for next year, including a radical simplification of the Standards Fund. This will enable the LSC to simplify its own approach to funding colleges.

Holocaust Memorial Day

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on how schools are marking Holocaust Memorial Day. [31154]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Home Office is the Government Department with responsibility for Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) 2002. It is working with a number of Government Departments and organisations on the preparations for the day. The Department for Education and Skills is a strong supporter of the day.

This Department produced an education pack for all schools to support last year's Holocaust Memorial Day. Nearly 40,000 packs were sent out. New resources for schools to commemorate the day in 2002 have been developed which compliment last year's education pack. This year's resources—in the form of 12 flashcards—reflect the theme of Britain and the Holocaust. The cards highlight case studies of individuals affected by the Holocaust. Schools will be using this material in assemblies, in the classroom, and through exhibitions for their schools and their communities.

The resources have been produced by an education working group of experts on the Holocaust, racism, and education, from bodies such as the Wiener Library, the Imperial War Museum, the Holocaust Education Trust and the London Jewish Culture Centre. I am grateful for their continued support and dedication to this work.

HEALTH

Performance Ratings

Mr. Kevan Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on NHS trusts given a zero star rating in the 2000–01 NHS performance ratings. [31568]

Mr. Milburn: I shall be making an announcement shortly.

Hospital Waiting Lists (Essex)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list each month since March 1997 when in-patient waiting lists in the mid Essex hospital trust area have been lower than in March 1997. [29777]

Mr. Hutton: The number of patients waiting at mid Essex hospital services NHS trust increased from 5,835 in March 1996 to 8,391 at the quarter ending March 1997. The waiting list has been higher than this each quarter or month since that period. At the end of November 2001, (the most recent data available) the number of patients on the waiting list was 8,787. This is 396 greater than March 1997 but 3,047 lower than the highest peak in the waiting list at June 1998.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects in-patient waiting lists in the mid Essex hospital trust area to fall below the level of March 1997. [29778]

Mr. Hutton: Mid Essex hospital services national health service trust achieved its waiting list targets for 2000–01 and is well on target to achieve its targets for the end of March 2002.

The trust has been following Government guidelines to reduce the length of wait of those on the waiting list and has robust delivery plans in place to treat patients waiting over 15 months by the end of March 2002.

Long-term Care

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the number of pensioners in resident nursing homes receiving expense allowances of £16.05 or less in *(a)* Great Britain and *(b)* south Gloucestershire. [30722]

Jacqui Smith: These data are not held centrally but, with a small number of exceptions, all council-supported residents in care homes are entitled to the personal expenses allowance.

On 31 March 2001, 65,482 people were supported by councils in nursing homes in England, and 379 people were supported in nursing homes by South Gloucestershire council. The figures for Scotland and Wales are the responsibility of the devolved Administrations.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in *(a)* residential and *(b)* nursing home care (i) were self-funders, (ii) paid a proportion of the cost toward their care and (iii) had all their costs paid for by the state in each of the last five years. [24640]

Jacqui Smith [holding answer 8 January 2002]: The number of people who are resident in residential care homes and paying for their own care is not collected centrally. A survey conducted in June 2001 estimated that around 42,700 residents in general and mental nursing homes were paying wholly for their own care.

Information is not available separately for those who paid a proportion of the cost toward their care and those who had all their costs paid for by the state. Information on the numbers of people in residential and nursing care homes who had all or part of their costs paid for by councils with social services responsibilities is given in the following table.

Residents in residential and nursing care homes supported by councils with social services responsibilities[1], *England, as at 31 March (rounded numbers)*

Year	*Supported residents in residential care homes*	*Supported residents in nursing homes*
1997	170,300	66,100
1998	176,500	72,900
1999	181,200	73,500
2000	185,200	73,900
2001	183,500	71,800

[1] A supported resident is a resident whose fees are paid in part or in full by a council with social services responsibility

Source:

Department of Health return SR1

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on changes in bed numbers in the care home sector in Worcestershire since 1997. [26406]

Jacqui Smith: The information is in the following table:

The number of places in residential care homes and the number of registered nursing beds in the Hereford and Worcester[1] area between 1997 and 2001

At 31 March	Number of places	Number of registered beds[2]
1997[3]	5,552	3,383
1998	5,413	3,654
1999	5,543	3,980
2000	5,392	3,526
2001	5,080	3,365

[1] Registered beds in general and mental nursing homes, hospitals and clinics. Information is presented on nursing beds for the two health authorities of Herefordshire and Worcestershire (equating to the former local authority district of Hereford and Worcester).

[2] Information is presented for the former local authority district of Hereford and Worcester to ensure details of residential places given in the table are on consistent boundaries. (At 1 April 1998 the unitary authority of Herefordshire and the shire county area of Worcestershire were created).

[3] Information for registered nursing beds for 1997 relates to the period 1 October 1996 to 31 March 1997.

Source:

Department of Health annual returns

We are aware of concerns about capacity problems in the care home sector. On 9 October we published "Building Capacity and Partnership in Care". This sets out clear policy objectives to improve the planning and commissioning of services in partnership with the independent sector, in a way which will see standards rise within a better range of services. This will benefit service users and allow better discharge planning.

I am advised that Worcestershire county council's allocation of £713,000 from the Government's "Cash for Change" initiative will be used to fund additional residential and nursing home placements, a home care discharge scheme and one off payments to support independent sector homes cost pressures.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 379W, on residential nursing home beds, how many residential and nursing home beds were available, broken down by *(a)* constituency, *(b)* health authority and *(c)* region in (i) 1997 and (ii) the most recent year for which figures are available. [30273]

Jacqui Smith: Information on residential and nursing homes is not available at constituency level. Information on residential care homes is collected at local authority level, while information on nursing care homes is collected at health authority level. The number of residential care beds cannot be shown at health authority level due to inconsistent geographical boundaries. My reply of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 656–58W, gives the number of residential care home beds for each local authority and the number of nursing care home beds for each health authority at 31 March 1997 and 31 March 2001. Information on the total number of residential and nursing care home beds at 31 March 1997 and 31 March 2001 by national health service region is shown in the table.

Number of residential and nursing care home beds in England by NHS region

At 31 March — *Rounded numbers*

NHS regions	(i) 1997	(ii) 2001
Residential care home beds		
England	338,100	341,200
Northern and Yorkshire	42,900	45,300
Trent	33,700	37,200
West Midlands	33,000	32,100
North-west	47,700	49,800
Eastern	32,900	35,400
London	30,100	29,300
South-east	70,100	67,300
South-west	47,600	44,800
Nursing care home beds		
England	197,500	186,800
Northern and Yorkshire	28,600	27,000
Trent	23,600	20,100
West Midlands	19,600	20,000
North-west	35,500	31,500
Eastern	16,900	14,800
London	15,400	18,100
South-east	31,700	31,400
South-west	26,200	24,100

Source:

Department of Health's annual returns

Correspondence

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 18 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 545W, on correspondence, when he transferred the letter referred to to the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. [30801]

Jacqui Smith: On 17 January.

Meat Hygiene Service

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the numbers of meat hygiene service staff available in abattoirs in the south-west. [20153]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* The number of meat hygiene service (MHS) staff employed in licensed premises and therefore qualified to work in abattoirs in the south-west (defined as covering the counties of Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire), as at the end of December 2001, was as follows:

Grade	Number
Official Veterinary Surgeon (employed)	1
Senior Poultry/Meat Hygiene Inspector	14
Poultry/Meat Hygiene Inspector	132
Meat Technician	40
Cleansing and Disinfection Supervisor (FMD Controls)	11
Total	198

The MHS also contracts the services of 89 full-time equivalent official veterinary surgeons within the south-west. In addition, four veterinary surgeons along with a varying number of Meat and Livestock Commission staff currently fill MHS vacancies in over-thirty-months scheme plants.

CJD

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the relevant data available to his Department which have not been made available to the CJD Incidents Panel. [15299]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 15 November 2001]:* The chairman of the CJD Incidents Panel requested in writing a copy of "the report on standards of decontamination in England and Wales". He has also requested the results of the subsequent comprehensive survey of decontamination standards.

A preliminary survey of some hospitals and other health premises carried out last year informed the Department that there was considerable variation of decontamination standards in the national health service. It demonstrated the need to invest in sterile services and for a comprehensive look at standards. As a result, a full survey started in October 2000 and a £200 million investment programme was announced in January 2001 to improve decontamination within the NHS over the next two years. A report on the findings of the surveys, including the snapshot survey, was published on 11 December 2001.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if it was his intention, when commissioning the study by Dr. David Hurrell on hospital sterilisation procedures, to publish its findings; [15296]

(2) for what reason the CJD Incidents Panel did not receive a copy of the interim and final report from Dr. Hurrell; [15297]

(3) if he will publish the study by Dr. David Hurrell on hospital sterilisation procedures that reported to him in June 2000. [15294]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 15 November 2001]:* The survey was a snapshot of a small number of hospitals and other health premises and was not commissioned with a view to publication. It was prepared for specific purposes, one of which was to set in train further work—including deciding whether a full survey was needed. It told us that there was considerable variation of decontamination in the national health service and it demonstrated the need to invest in sterile services. Hence the announcement of the start of the full survey in October 2000 and the commitment to a £200 million investment programme in January 2001. We have published the results of this full national survey today.

Mr. Hurrell was technical co-ordinator for the snapshot survey, acted as lead assessor for some of the visits and helped to analyse the information collected. Although he contributed to the production of the interim and final reports, he did not write either of them.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will publish the letter of the 28 September from the Head of NHS estates to Dr. Hurrell; [15295]

(2) if he will publish correspondence between the Chief Executive of NHS estates and Dr. David Hurrell concerning CJD in hospitals. [15379]

Yvette Cooper: The correspondence—between an official in national health service estates and an external consultant—was sent during an early phase of the systematic work we have undertaken to raise the standard of decontamination across the NHS. A full set of the papers describing the programme of work that extended over many months was made public on 11 December. These show that no hospital is assessed as being below standard. The text of the letter dated 26 September 2000 from Kate Priestley, chief executive of NHS estates to David Hurrell is set out:

> "Dear Colleague
>
> *Re: Confidentiality requirements—Decontamination review*
>
> You will be aware of the strict confidentiality approach, which has been continuously applied during the original national survey work and the subsequent report drafting process regarding surgical instrument decontamination and sterilisation.
>
> In light of the somewhat negative outcome recorded by the visiting assessors at the majority of clinical centres there is a need to ensure, at the express request of Ministers, that the final version and earlier draft reports remain strictly confidential.
>
> Excellent progress in terms of planning for the implementation of the conclusions and recommendations of the report is being made. However, this position and the benefits derived from it, in healthcare terms, may be compromised if the findings of the report were to enter the public domain in an inappropriate or unauthorised fashion.
>
> In light of the above we are reinforcing the need for confidentiality and ask that all members of the team return all report drafts as these are no longer needed. In the case of electronic copies would you please undertake to destroy these and to check that no relevant files remain on your system. Please ensure that this request is complied with promptly and confirm the destruction of electronic files by letter to the co-ordinator, Darryn Kerr.
>
> Thanking you for your co-operation in this and many other aspects of the work."

Schizophrenia

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people living in the community with schizophrenia are on long-term medication. [13850]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not available centrally. In 2000, 219,000 prescription items were dispensed in the community in England for antipsychotic depot injections.

Social Services Websites

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost was of preparing and producing the new Social Work and Social Care website. [24441]

Jacqui Smith: The cost of preparing and producing the Social Work and Social Care website including site maintenance until October 2002, is £49,358. The website has attracted over 11,000 visitors to the site since its inception on 19 October 2001.

Strategic Health Authorities

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how he will ensure that chief executives designate of the new strategic health authorities involve local communities and primary care trusts in the development of franchise plans. [26599]

Mr. Hutton: In developing three year franchise plans chief executives of strategic health authorities will be required to reflect the plans and targets of local primary care trusts, and to demonstrate how the health authority will ensure local community involvement.

Plans will be based on a specification issued by the Department. All strategic health authorities will be required to meet the specification.

Hearing Aid Services Project

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health from what date the Hillingdon/Harrow health trust will be included in the modernising NHS Hearing Aid Services Project. [26939]

Jacqui Smith: I announced on 24 December 2001 that a further £20 million would be made available in 2002–03 so that a further 30 national health service sites can join the modernising hearing aids project during that year. Decisions on which sites will become involved in the project next year will be made shortly.

Ashworth Hospital

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many incidents of assault by members of staff at Ashworth hospital on *(a)* patients of Ashworth hospital, *(b)* visitors to Ashworth hospital and *(c)* members of the public were reported each of the last three years. [27201]

Jacqui Smith: Recorded allegations of assault on patients, visitors and members of the public, by members of staff at Ashworth hospital, for each of the last three years are as listed:

On patients

1999—10

2000—14

2001—10

On visitors

1999—none

2000—none

2001—one

On members of the public

1999—none

2000—none

2001—none.

Ashworth hospital treats all allegations very seriously. An investigation was undertaken into each of these allegations, but none were substantiated.

Private Finance Initiative

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the proportion of PFI contracts made by his Department where an amount in excess of 90 per cent. of the capital value of the asset is recouped by the lessor out of the capital element of lease payments over the lifetime of the contract concerned; and if he will make a statement. [27699]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not calculate or collect data on this basis.

The balance sheet treatment of private finance initiative schemes is determined by guidance developed by Her Majesty's Treasury (Technical Note 1) and the Accounting Standards Board (FRS5), which was issued in 1998. Neither of these refer to or rely on the numeric test referred to in the question.

A small number of early national health service PFI schemes (total approximately £250 million) have been classed as on balance sheet. These schemes reached financial closure before 1998. Although they were classed as off-balance sheet under the tests in force at the time, they were reassessed following the issue of the 1998 guidance and re-classified as being on balance sheet. The test in force prior to 1998 relied on estimates of the variability of shareholders' return, not estimates of payments recouped by lessors.

General Practitioners (Essex)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioner vacancies there are in *(a)* Tendring primary care trust and *(b)* Colchester PCT. [28499]

Mr. Hutton: There are five general practitioner vacancies within Tendring primary care trust. Three vacancies are in the process of being advertised and the fourth vacancy will be advertised after 1 April 2002. The remaining vacancy is the subject of discussions which are currently taking place between Tendring PCT and the surgery.

There are two general practitioner vacancies in Colchester primary care trust both of which are in the process of being recruited to.

In all cases interim cover is being provided by locum or salaried general practitioners.

Age Discrimination

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to address barriers to effective implementation of Government policy on age discrimination; [28837]

(2) if he will implement the recommendations in the King's Fund report on anti-age discrimination policies; [28836]

(3) what recent assessment he has made of the extent of ageism in the health and social services. [28835]

Jacqui Smith: The National Service Framework for Older People, published in March 2001, sets the elimination of age discrimination in accessing national health service or social care as a priority. To help achieve this, it provides a programme of actions and milestones to be achieved over the next 10 years. Much work has already been undertaken that will underpin the development of this programme. This includes:

> Older people and their representative organisations have been included within the national service framework's national and local implementation structure, giving them a voice in prioritising and planning.
>
> Detailed guidance on the development of a single assessment process across health and social care, that focuses on identifying and meeting the needs of each individual, was issued for consultation on 16 August 2001, and the final version will be published shortly.
>
> Audits of age-related policy in the NHS, as required by the NSF October 2001 milestone have been undertaken. Detailed information on the audits has been provided by over three-quarters of the NHS organisations involved. An initial analysis of returns on the audits undertaken in the NHS shows that age discrimination is not endemic in the health service's written policies, but rather reflects the varying local development of

policy and practice. The audit provides for the development of local plans to review and tackle any age-discriminatory written policies found by April 2002 and will inform the development of a national approach to benchmark a range of services or treatments important in the care of older people.

Detailed guidance on Fair Access to Care Services, covering a full review of adult social care eligibility criteria, was issued for consultation on 20 July 2001, and the final version will be published shortly.

The detail and recommendations of the King's Fund report, "Old habits Die Hard—Tackling age discrimination in health and social care" is a welcomed addition to our knowledge of age discrimination in health and social care.

Children's Rights Director

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Health further to his answer of 1 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 575W, on the Children's Rights Director, what the terms of reference are of the position of Children's Rights Director; what responsibility the director will have for liaison with persons or bodies carrying out similar or equivalent functions within the devolved institutions; what responsibility the director will have for assisting in the preparation of the UK report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child; who will have the lead role in its preparation; and what progress has been made in the appointment of a director. [29245]

Jacqui Smith: Roger Morgan has been appointed as Children's Rights Director at the National Care Standards Commission. Draft regulations setting out the proposed functions of the Children's Rights Director were published for consultation on 17 January 2002. The Children and Young People's Unit have the lead role in the preparation of the United Kingdom report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Carers

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further action he is taking to help carers. [28822]

Jacqui Smith: We are increasing the carers grant to £85 million in 2002–03 and to £100 million in 2003–04 to ensure that more carers are able to receive breaks. We are developing guidance on voucher schemes for short term breaks in consultation with external stakeholders so that the remaining provisions of the Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000 can be commenced in April this year. We are also revising the hospital discharge workbook, which will help national health service staff to support carers.

Neurological Conditions

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made with preparing the National Service Framework for neurological conditions; and if he will make a statement. [29110]

Jacqui Smith: Good progress has been made on preparatory work for the National Service Framework (NSF). The Department has held a number of meetings with a range of voluntary and professional groups, patients and users to hear their views and received many written submissions. A scoping event was held on 12 November at which some of the key generic issues the NSF should address were identified.

Pulmonary Illnesses

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many pulmonary rehabilitation centres there are in England and Wales; [29355]

(2) what his policy is on the provision of pulmonary rehabilitation centres within the NHS. [29358]

Jacqui Smith: Information on local service configuration in England, such as the number of pulmonary rehabilitation services, is not collected centrally. We are aware that provision of pulmonary rehabilitation is a service increasingly offered by local departments of respiratory medicine.

It is a decision for health authorities, in partnership with primary care groups/trusts and other local stakeholders, to assess the health needs of their populations, including those needing pulmonary rehabilitation, and to commission services to meet those needs.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on the training of specialist respiratory nurses and physiotherapists. [29353]

Mr. Hutton: Maintaining and extending the skills, potential and careers of national health service staff taking into account service developments and patient need in health and social care is a fundamental part of the NHS Plan and the Framework for Lifelong Learning for the NHS, "Working Together—Learning Together". Copies of these are available in the House of Commons Library.

Training in many specialist areas takes place after registration and there are courses available for respiratory training for both qualified nurses and physiotherapists. Decisions on post-registration training are taken by individual practitioners and local NHS organisations in the light of local needs, and these will be better informed by National Service Framework and NHS Plan priorities.

Statistics

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to allow continuous statistical comparisons to be made between *(a)* existing health authorities, *(b)* new primary care trusts and *(c)* strategic health authorities. [29709]

Mr. Hutton: Information needs—including the continuity of data—in the light of the current reorganisation are currently being considered. Routine statistics published at the level of individual national health service bodies will reflect the new organisational structures, but mapping to older units will be available where practicable and on request.

From later this year primary care trusts will be taking on the majority of functions of existing health authorities and will be the focal point locally for improving the health of the community, securing high quality services and integrating health and social care locally. Data at this level will therefore be the main priority.

Cancer

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the age standardised mortality rates for all cancers for men and women in each health authority in England were in each year since 1995. [29708]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is shown in the table.

Trends in mortality from all malignant neoplasms (ICD9 140–208): Indirectly standardised ratios (SMR)—1989 to 1999 annually, all ages[1]

			Males										
			1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
O00	England	SMR	105	105	104	103	100	98	96	95	92	91	88
QDD	Bradford	SMR	107	107	117	112	98	102	100	87	95	101	93
QDE	County Durham	SMR	116	121	112	113	117	111	107	113	110	105	103
QDF	East Riding	SMR	116	118	106	101	105	108	101	106	95	100	98
QDG	Gateshead and South Tyneside	SMR	149	137	132	131	131	126	123	129	112	119	111
QDH	Leeds	SMR	115	112	106	102	104	101	96	101	94	93	102
QDJ	Newcastle and North Tyneside	SMR	129	131	130	127	128	121	113	122	109	116	112
QDK	North Cumbria	SMR	113	109	106	104	99	105	101	108	85	95	87
QDM	Northumberland	SMR	106	102	101	109	103	98	104	106	105	104	94
QDN	Sunderland	SMR	132	129	132	129	116	124	114	119	110	120	106
QDP	Tees	SMR	126	138	118	128	124	125	122	111	116	114	104
QDQ	Wakefield	SMR	115	110	118	114	107	109	107	105	100	100	90
QDR	North Yorkshire	SMR	94	96	92	92	94	89	85	82	84	81	78
QDT	Calderdale and Kirklees	SMR	108	103	110	107	101	96	94	94	95	98	92
QCG	Barnsley	SMR	110	112	111	115	114	109	106	106	96	104	99
QCH	North Derbyshire	SMR	103	103	105	106	106	102	105	96	86	90	87
QCJ	South Derbyshire	SMR	110	99	109	103	100	98	91	90	95	91	86
QCK	Doncaster	SMR	102	114	103	109	119	102	113	111	103	99	101
QCL	Leicestershire	SMR	104	97	93	90	90	88	83	86	82	80	81
QCM	Lincolnshire	SMR	102	100	99	97	100	93	91	94	85	88	85
QCN	North Nottinghamshire	SMR	109	109	102	111	108	98	102	97	96	102	92
QCP	Nottingham	SMR	111	99	101	102	107	102	99	97	100	94	92
QCQ	Rotherham	SMR	126	102	116	114	100	112	106	90	99	95	103
QCR	Sheffield	SMR	117	113	113	115	116	107	103	105	110	101	94
QDL	South Humber	SMR	106	117	120	104	91	99	112	103	104	102	100
QD9	Birmingham	SMR	113	117	112	111	109	106	100	98	95	99	92
QEA	Coventry	SMR	117	117	109	111	94	96	95	93	88	91	94
QEC	Dudley	SMR	108	112	107	105	107	104	102	90	93	100	94
QED	Herefordshire	SMR	113	88	96	97	97	85	88	83	92	78	79
QEE	Sandwell	SMR	124	119	118	129	110	117	110	110	106	116	104
QEF	Shropshire	SMR	93	106	97	101	102	93	94	98	89	94	87
QEG	Solihull	SMR	106	100	98	94	96	89	95	80	87	93	74
QEH	North Staffordshire	SMR	113	120	124	114	109	111	108	114	104	101	97
QEJ	South Staffordshire	SMR	110	109	106	104	102	96	100	96	90	94	83
QEK	Walsall	SMR	118	118	115	107	109	105	109	94	100	97	104
QEL	Warwickshire	SMR	97	97	100	101	99	94	97	91	88	84	85
QEM	Wolverhampton	SMR	111	105	114	114	120	117	96	99	103	104	100
QEN	Worcestershire	SMR	90	95	101	96	87	91	89	88	87	85	77
QC1	South Lancashire	SMR	101	97	108	99	100	88	98	95	97	79	93
QC2	Liverpool	SMR	132	129	135	133	132	130	126	134	124	113	117
QC3	Manchester	SMR	142	129	136	129	123	130	122	117	122	125	115
QC4	Morecambe Bay	SMR	118	103	102	110	103	93	95	94	92	84	87
QC5	St. Helens and Knowsley	SMR	126	124	125	118	119	122	125	117	115	111	109
QC6	Salford and Trafford	SMR	119	123	122	122	113	115	104	113	107	102	99
QC7	Sefton	SMR	119	106	120	108	118	110	111	103	98	95	98
QC8	Stockport	SMR	121	105	107	113	103	89	92	94	90	92	87
QC9	West Pennine	SMR	119	123	119	114	108	118	111	110	108	109	97
QCT	Bury and Rochdale	SMR	111	106	116	108	107	100	108	97	96	101	102
QCV	North Cheshire	SMR	115	116	124	114	113	112	107	115	106	110	101
QCW	South Cheshire	SMR	102	106	101	100	99	93	93	93	89	91	84
QCX	East Lancashire	SMR	106	101	110	108	106	99	98	97	101	99	96
QCY	North West Lancashire	SMR	100	106	98	101	104	102	102	94	90	93	95
QDA	Wigan and Bolton	SMR	111	115	115	104	103	104	105	100	97	98	104
QDC	Wirral	SMR	109	122	118	120	102	102	115	104	95	100	98
QA6	Bedfordshire	SMR	101	101	95	99	93	95	89	92	90	82	86
QAX	North Essex	SMR	90	103	93	90	95	95	90	89	82	86	83
QAY	South Essex	SMR	101	101	100	111	101	96	99	97	91	90	90
QCF	Suffolk	SMR	100	91	97	92	88	90	87	87	83	78	78
QEP	East and North Hertfordshire	SMR	96	99	97	99	97	88	87	82	86	88	83
QEQ	West Hertfordshire	SMR	96	106	93	88	92	90	78	85	84	78	80
QER	Cambridgeshire	SMR	101	95	94	92	92	92	83	88	83	83	73
QET	Norfolk	SMR	95	98	90	95	88	88	90	89	80	83	82
QA2	Hillingdon	SMR	105	106	110	106	95	90	88	90	89	85	83
QA3	Kensington, Chelsea and Westminister	SMR	103	102	105	102	98	93	93	86	77	81	65
QA4	Enfield and Haringey	SMR	106	106	101	97	94	95	90	92	87	85	88
QA5	Redbridge and Waltham Forest	SMR	101	100	93	100	85	96	93	85	87	93	82
QAA	Bexley and Greenwich	SMR	106	113	105	111	102	102	99	101	103	99	93

Trends in mortality from all malignant neoplasms (ICD9 140–208): Indirectly standardised ratios (SMR)—1989 to 1999 annually, all ages[1]

			Males										
			1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
QAC	Bromley	SMR	99	99	95	104	91	91	98	91	79	84	82
QAD	Croydon	SMR	94	89	99	91	89	88	96	89	84	91	90
QAG	Kingston and Richmond	SMR	87	93	89	95	87	94	97	87	88	82	72
QAH	Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	SMR	119	118	117	118	111	112	106	104	100	98	96
QAJ	Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	SMR	110	110	110	103	109	95	95	92	96	96	88
QAP	Barking and Havering	SMR	119	106	120	118	109	107	104	104	101	103	99
QAQ	Barnet	SMR	91	90	97	82	83	90	76	80	71	80	67
QAR	Brent and Harrow	SMR	91	91	97	90	87	84	84	79	84	81	74
QAT	Camden and Islington	SMR	113	119	122	120	111	102	94	99	87	93	92
QAV	Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	SMR	105	104	104	100	92	93	90	97	81	92	79
QAW	East London and the City	SMR	123	122	129	127	118	114	112	103	105	104	101
QA7	Berkshire	SMR	103	95	97	95	93	92	88	90	84	83	80
QA8	Buckinghamshire	SMR	105	96	101	101	91	92	85	85	76	83	87
QAE	East Kent	SMR	104	100	99	106	102	101	99	100	100	92	85
QAF	West Kent	SMR	99	104	106	100	97	101	101	95	88	90	89
QAK	East Surrey	SMR	95	83	85	88	94	89	83	82	80	84	76
QAL	West Surrey	SMR	97	98	94	97	86	90	86	85	84	79	77
QAM	East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	SMR	91	97	98	99	94	88	92	87	87	83	82
QAN	West Sussex	SMR	94	95	93	94	91	88	90	86	80	82	83
QCC	Northamptonshire	SMR	108	104	108	97	98	96	103	95	95	93	89
QCE	Oxfordshire	SMR	91	91	94	96	95	86	87	84	80	83	82
QD1	North and Mid Hampshire	SMR	92	92	99	97	93	93	86	85	87	85	74
QD2	Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	SMR	109	111	102	101	92	102	95	93	95	94	86
QD3	Southampton and South West Hampshire	SMR	107	100	105	101	90	94	96	92	83	87	83
QD4	Isle of Wight	SMR	101	99	102	105	100	90	86	88	81	94	75
QD5	Somerset	SMR	87	93	88	92	85	93	89	90	87	83	82
QD6	South and West Devon	SMR	99	100	93	99	96	98	87	90	92	88	91
QD7	Wiltshire	SMR	98	98	96	98	95	88	87	82	82	80	80
QD8	Avon	SMR	99	96	100	94	89	90	90	87	88	86	81
QDV	Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	SMR	90	94	92	94	96	95	91	90	84	81	86
QDW	Dorset	SMR	86	89	94	91	86	83	91	84	87	82	79
QDX	North and East Devon	SMR	92	89	96	97	83	83	86	84	80	85	82
QDY	Gloucestershire	SMR	100	93	83	99	87	87	91	85	82	82	83

			Females										
			1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
O00	England	SMR	105	103	103	103	100	99	98	98	96	95	94
QDD	Bradford	SMR	108	111	109	101	97	105	101	99	92	102	96
QDE	County Durham	SMR	113	112	115	105	107	105	105	116	98	105	100
QDF	East Riding	SMR	113	104	108	105	104	103	104	105	98	107	93
QDG	Gateshead and South Tyneside	SMR	119	109	109	116	124	114	109	110	120	114	114
QDH	Leeds	SMR	111	106	107	105	102	105	107	95	97	100	99
QDJ	Newcastle and North Tyneside	SMR	128	114	126	118	120	116	120	113	124	105	102
QDK	North Cumbria	SMR	114	109	112	102	100	96	91	101	100	103	98
QDM	Northumberland	SMR	111	103	106	101	102	99	104	114	92	103	101
QDN	Sunderland	SMR	116	127	119	118	123	112	114	105	105	123	110
QDP	Tees	SMR	120	117	119	121	118	111	110	110	108	108	103
QDQ	Wakefield	SMR	107	119	120	113	99	108	107	101	106	100	107
QDR	North Yorkshire	SMR	101	96	95	91	92	90	89	97	87	86	91
QDT	Calderdale and Kirklees	SMR	107	103	99	99	102	100	99	99	90	93	92
QCG	Barnsley	SMR	104	101	108	103	104	118	109	108	93	119	104
QCH	North Derbyshire	SMR	98	104	108	109	102	102	101	108	97	99	88
QCJ	South Derbyshire	SMR	100	103	109	106	97	100	99	93	91	88	90
QCK	Doncaster	SMR	120	112	110	110	114	102	106	112	104	105	106
QCL	Leicestershire	SMR	101	97	94	92	96	97	94	94	90	85	87
QCM	Lincolnshire	SMR	108	96	102	105	96	95	92	90	91	88	91
QCN	North Nottinghamshire	SMR	108	98	99	110	103	98	101	97	100	96	86
QCP	Nottingham	SMR	103	106	104	109	99	99	100	98	95	97	94
QCQ	Rotherham	SMR	103	103	96	103	106	115	108	111	106	104	86
QCR	Sheffield	SMR	105	105	108	98	100	106	107	109	110	98	100
QDL	South Humber	SMR	103	109	111	108	98	101	96	106	103	102	95
QD9	Birmingham	SMR	110	101	109	105	98	96	98	102	95	94	94
QEA	Coventry	SMR	106	100	103	115	100	98	102	97	103	91	94
QEC	Dudley	SMR	102	106	105	95	96	101	98	91	103	89	94
QED	Herefordshire	SMR	107	99	103	100	95	102	88	94	85	95	86
QEE	Sandwell	SMR	111	101	102	107	109	116	106	107	101	98	98
QEF	Shropshire	SMR	102	96	102	100	93	93	97	95	93	93	94
QEG	Solihull	SMR	101	104	106	96	98	97	101	103	89	80	88
QEH	North Staffordshire	SMR	107	112	115	113	111	114	111	95	100	105	104

			Females										
			1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
QEJ	South Staffordshire	SMR	107	104	102	102	96	103	99	98	90	97	97
QEK	Walsall	SMR	110	112	105	115	98	107	92	88	97	94	87
QEL	Warwickshire	SMR	94	99	95	111	99	96	92	109	94	94	85
QEM	Wolverhampton	SMR	102	100	114	104	93	100	102	99	100	96	96
QEN	Worcestershire	SMR	100	103	90	100	92	96	94	95	91	83	84
QC1	South Lancashire	SMR	105	90	96	103	105	99	92	100	94	86	96
QC2	Liverpool	SMR	121	134	125	131	122	122	132	129	128	126	125
QC3	Manchester	SMR	123	119	115	119	117	116	120	114	117	112	126
QC4	Morecambe Bay	SMR	101	106	104	106	99	96	100	92	90	95	98
QC5	St. Helens and Knowsley	SMR	116	115	115	107	123	115	116	108	115	112	108
QC6	Salford and Trafford	SMR	120	111	121	111	110	108	112	109	108	102	104
QC7	Sefton	SMR	108	96	101	110	110	97	94	112	106	94	112
QC8	Stockport	SMR	104	104	103	104	98	104	96	93	101	95	90
QC9	West Pennine	SMR	116	122	109	109	113	109	100	109	100	110	106
QCT	Bury and Rochdale	SMR	108	123	114	107	103	108	110	116	112	101	104
QCV	North Cheshire	SMR	124	118	119	111	109	106	106	114	102	113	108
QCW	South Cheshire	SMR	106	100	103	110	92	98	89	95	96	93	94
QCX	East Lancashire	SMR	104	105	97	111	102	107	100	104	102	102	95
QCY	North West Lancashire	SMR	108	105	107	95	96	97	96	99	97	93	95
QDA	Wigan and Bolton	SMR	109	106	111	108	106	104	97	103	95	97	105
QDC	Wirral	SMR	103	110	110	109	106	110	104	106	106	108	101
QA6	Bedfordshire	SMR	107	116	108	100	91	96	88	92	96	90	86
QAX	North Essex	SMR	103	106	98	97	97	94	97	92	93	95	88
QAY	South Essex	SMR	103	108	107	103	101	97	106	101	94	92	94
QCF	Suffolk	SMR	102	100	97	100	92	97	94	90	92	88	83
QEP	East and North Hertfordshire	SMR	101	107	100	95	99	92	101	91	89	103	94
QEQ	West Hertfordshire	SMR	110	100	98	98	92	96	100	91	95	94	90
QER	Cambridgeshire	SMR	98	101	93	97	91	96	89	89	93	90	92
QET	Norfolk	SMR	97	98	94	93	95	92	95	88	89	92	91
QA2	Hillingdon	SMR	106	92	102	105	94	98	96	102	100	99	91
QA3	Kensington, Chelsea and Westminister	SMR	106	107	99	103	100	101	94	86	102	83	79
QA4	Enfield and Haringey	SMR	101	89	100	100	92	92	93	89	86	87	93
QA5	Redbridge and Waltham Forest	SMR	102	101	100	90	89	98	89	91	84	86	93
QAA	Bexley and Greenwich	SMR	110	114	114	100	104	105	94	97	104	102	99
QAC	Bromley	SMR	95	102	95	97	96	86	97	101	99	95	89
QAD	Croydon	SMR	93	101	100	94	99	93	93	105	102	95	86
QAG	Kingston and Richmond	SMR	88	102	101	95	93	98	91	94	86	95	92
QAH	Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	SMR	114	110	108	110	108	103	98	99	107	100	92
QAJ	Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	SMR	101	112	102	103	103	102	90	96	96	103	93
QAP	Barking and Havering	SMR	120	105	111	111	114	107	110	113	95	103	101
QAQ	Barnet	SMR	104	101	96	101	86	86	89	90	96	96	86
QAR	Brent and Harrow	SMR	92	93	95	93	96	100	92	97	96	88	78
QAT	Camden and Islington	SMR	114	107	104	112	103	104	109	96	94	101	93
QAV	Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	SMR	104	102	112	105	101	95	100	97	94	90	95
QAW	East London and the City	SMR	124	113	112	114	123	109	113	102	104	99	100
QA7	Berkshire	SMR	99	105	103	103	97	95	92	96	88	92	87
QA8	Buckinghamshire	SMR	102	101	95	106	94	99	97	95	92	99	95
QAE	East Kent	SMR	106	108	105	102	100	104	96	97	94	92	90
QAF	West Kent	SMR	109	95	102	105	104	102	98	98	102	90	100
QAK	East Surrey	SMR	100	99	97	97	98	85	83	81	81	85	83
QAL	West Surrey	SMR	99	93	90	98	95	92	89	96	92	88	88
QAM	East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	SMR	98	94	94	99	96	100	96	88	95	92	92
QAN	West Sussex	SMR	101	95	96	98	94	89	94	92	86	87	89
QCC	Northamptonshire	SMR	107	108	110	102	99	106	99	99	94	101	98
QCE	Oxfordshire	SMR	100	95	100	96	96	96	93	94	95	94	88
QD1	North and Mid Hampshire	SMR	101	92	98	103	92	95	88	92	95	93	93
QD2	Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	SMR	100	102	94	104	95	93	91	100	101	97	91
QD3	Southampton and South West Hampshire	SMR	102	96	97	93	92	92	95	93	86	88	90
QD4	Isle of Wight	SMR	105	96	98	85	97	88	88	89	86	88	91
QD5	Somerset	SMR	108	95	95	93	91	92	90	94	85	87	92
QD6	South and West Devon	SMR	103	99	100	102	97	100	98	94	90	91	87
QD7	Wiltshire	SMR	99	104	95	94	100	92	93	96	95	89	92
QD8	Avon	SMR	101	96	96	103	95	88	93	90	94	89	86
QDV	Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	SMR	98	95	105	103	97	92	95	100	97	91	90
QDW	Dorset	SMR	100	93	96	94	92	85	93	83	92	88	87
QDX	North and East Devon	SMR	99	97	96	107	97	87	87	87	92	89	90
QDY	Gloucestershire	SMR	99	100	97	90	92	95	95	88	88	84	88

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[1] Standard rates are age-specific mortality rates in 1993

Source:

National Statistics

Electromagnetic Fields

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the letter from the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member of Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), of 20 December 2001 (ref POH (3)5653/13), what discussions he has had with the NRPB on action to be taken on electromagnetic fields from anti-theft security tagging systems and possible dangers from potential exposures from surveillance equipment. [26560]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The use of electronic article surveillance devices has become widespread in use, particularly in shops and stores.

Publicity has recently been given to a theoretical study of models of people exposed to the magnetic fields from simulated electronic article surveillance devices.

I am advised by the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) that it is theoretically possible, under quite specific conditions, for exposures to approach or potentially exceed the guidelines recommended by the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) for members of the public, including children. Limited measurements made by NRPB to date have, in practice, indicated compliance with the guidelines.

It is important for manufacturers to ensure that, in conditions of use, exposure to magnetic fields from their equipment complies with guidelines. The Department will continue to work closely with other relevant Government Departments and NRPB to ensure that the best available advice is sought on these matters.

MMR Inoculations

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many letters he has received on MMR inoculations from residents of the Buckingham constituency. [30056]

Yvette Cooper: Because of a postal address not always being given, the information requested is not available.

NHS Trusts (Foundation Status Applications)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether NHS trusts seeking foundation status will be permitted to hire the services of management consultants, accountants, valuers and other professions to further their plans. [29655]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* National health service trusts already hire the services of management consultants and other professionals. Where necessary trusts seeking foundation status will be able to hire the services of management consultants, accountants, valuers and other professions to further their plans subject to existing standards of probity, value for money and tendering set out in good corporate governance in the NHS.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many civil servants he expects will be deployed on assessing applications by NHS trusts for foundation status. [29658]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* No estimates have been made of the number of civil servants that will be deployed on assessing applications by national health service trusts for foundation status. Applications will, in the first instance, be reviewed by the chief executives of the new health authorities and, in the light of this, advice will be given to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Social Workers

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 18 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 530W, on social workers, how many social services staff were agency and temporary staff in each year since 1991. [30274]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not available centrally.

Health Funding

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 376W, on health care funding, how much funding for health care per patient there was in all English parliamentary constituencies in the last five years. [30275]

Mr. Hutton: Health authorities receive allocations to commission health care for their population. Health authorities for the parliamentary constituencies, and their allocations per weighted head of population and per unweighted head of population between 1997–98 and 2001–02 are shown in the tables that have been deposited in the Library.

It is more meaningful to show health authority allocations per head of population using weighted populations. This is because funding takes into account the relative needs of populations using a weighted capitation formula.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the additional expenditure incurred by general practitioners who have registered significant numbers of asylum seekers as patients. [27550]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* The costs to the national health service incurred by general practitioners in providing services to asylum seekers are not separately identifiable within the financial frameworks for either general or personal medical services.

Physiotherapists

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is taking to ensure that numbers of physiotherapists working in the NHS rises from 15,600 to 24,800 between 2000 and 2009; and if he will make a statement. [30191]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* Our plan to increase the number of physiotherapists working in the national health service by 59 per cent., from 15,600 in 2000 to 24,800 in 2009, was announced in the follow-up document to the NHS Plan, "Investment and reform for NHS staff—taking forward the NHS Plan", (published 15 February 2001).

We will meet this target by a number of measures, including increasing training commissions, a return to practice campaign, promoting flexible, supportive and family friendly policies, and international recruitment.

For basic grade physiotherapists who have done three years training, their starting salary has increased in cash terms by 36 per cent. since May 1997. This includes the 2002 increase which will be payable from 1 April.

For graduates who have done four years training, the increase to their starting pay is 32 per cent. in cash terms since May 1997.

Overseas Treatment

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimates he has made of the cost of treating patients sent abroad for treatment until the end of March 2002; [29717]

(2) if he will publish the estimated costs of the treatment of patients who were sent on 18 January to receive treatment *(a)* at La Louvière hospital in France and *(b)* in a private sector hospital in England. [29716]

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the total cost to each health authority involved of the package of care for *(a)* cataract and *(b)* joint replacement operations per patient treated in (i) the UK under the NHS, (ii) Lille and paid for by the NHS and (iii) private hospitals and paid for by the NHS. [29674]

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the total cost of treating NHS patients who were sent for treatment in French hospitals on 18 January broken down by *(a)* treatment costs paid to French hospitals, *(b)* other treatment costs, *(c)* travel costs, *(d)* non-clinical care costs and *(e)* other costs; if he will estimate the difference between the total costs of this form of treatment and the standard NHS costs of treatment; and if he will make a statement. [30021]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 23 and 24 January 2002]:* The precise costs of the national health service funded operations purchased in Lille are commercially confidential. The same approach is taken in relation to NHS funded operations in the private sector in the United Kingdom, where we anonymise data before releasing it. Clearly this would be impossible in the present case.

Direct comparisons of the costs of overseas treatment and NHS costs are not straightforward; for example, prices agreed so far for hip and knee replacements include intensive rehabilitation which would not be included in standard NHS reference costs. In general the prices agreed so far for treatment overseas are in excess of NHS average reference costs but comparable to those in the UK private sector. However, we would expect better prices if and when we commit to larger volumes of patients travelling overseas to individual hospitals.

£1.1 million to fund treatment costs has been made available to the three test bed sites in south-east England who are developing processes for sending patients overseas. Depending on the case mix, this should fund 200 to 300 procedures.

The primary care group will have to take account for how it spends its share of the public money that it receives as well as how it secures the highest possible standards of care and good value for money.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 29 January 2002

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Departmental Recruitment

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will publish summary information on DTI recruitment for the 15 months from 1 January 2000 to 31 March 2001 and the use of permitted exceptions to the principles of fair competition and selection on merit. [31933]

Ms Hewitt: It is DTI policy that recruitment is carried out on the basis of fair and open competition and selection on merit, subject to the exceptions permitted by the Civil Service Commissioners. My Department has systems in place, which ensure that the principles of fair and open competition are understood and followed in accordance with the provisions of the Civil Service Commissioners' recruitment code. These systems are subject to internal check and to external check by the Commissioners' approved auditors.

The following table and narratives describe DTI recruitment other than to the senior civil service, the DTI's executive agencies and the Government office network for which there are separate arrangements for publishing recruitment data.

					Gender		*Ethnic background*			
Range	*Permanent*	*FTA*	*Stand by*	*Other*	*Male*	*Female*	*White*	*Ethnic minority*	*Not stated*	*Disability*
11	11	9	—	—	16	4	7	2	11	—
10	18	17	1	—	24	12	10	3	22	1
9	12	2	—	1	11	4	2	0	13	—
8	21	1	—	—	11	11	7	1	14	1
7	14	2	—	—	15	1	6	1	9	—
6	8	2	—	—	6	4	7	1	2	—
5	47	2	—	5	29	25	16	7	31	2
4	15	6	—	11	13	19	11	5	16	—
3	9	10	—	23	24	18	8	1	33	—
2	13	8	—	11	17	15	8	2	21	1
1	30	—	—	1	17	14	5	7	19	3
Faststream	23	—	—	—	9	14	13	1	9	—
Total	221	59	1	52	192	141	100	31	200	8

The number of occasions on which the permitted exceptions to fair and open competition and selection on merit have been used at each level (except for appointments of up to 12 months) are categorised as follows. Details of the exceptions are underneath the relevant category.

(a) Extensions of appointments of up to 12 months up to a maximum of 24 months: None

(b) Recurrent short-term appointments: None

(c) Re-appointment of former civil servants:

5 Range 11s

1 Range 8s

1 Range 4s

2 Range 3s

3 Range 2s

(d) Extensions of short-term appointments beyond the initial publicised period, including conversion to permanency: 1 Range 10

(e) Appointments under government programmes to assist the long term unemployed: 18 candidates under the New Deal Scheme

(f) Secondments:

1 Range 11

5 Range 10s

4 Range 9s

2 Range 8s

(g) Transfer of staff with their work (not under TUPE):

1 Range 11

3 Range 10s

1 Range 10 fixed term appointment

4 Range 5s

4 Range 7s

4 Range 9s

2 Range 9s fixed term appointment

7 Range 1s

(h) Transfer of staff from other public services without work (unless from a public body staffed exclusively by civil servants): None

(i) Appointments of surplus acceptable candidates to shortage posts: None

(j) Disabled candidates appointed under modified selection arrangements: None

(k) Any use of the exceptions reserved for the Commissioners (i.e. appointments on the basis of the proven distinction of the individual and appointments not in order of merit): None.

Energy and Industry Council

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the outcome of the Energy and Industry Council of 4 and 5 December 2001. [31932]

Mr. Wilson: The Council considered several matters of interest to the United Kingdom.

An exchange of views on the internal market in electricity and gas and on the Commission's Green Paper "Towards a European Strategy for the Security of Energy Supply" formed the centrepiece of this Energy Council.

The key point to emerge from the discussion on the internal market in electricity and gas was that several member states are resisting a fully liberalised regime for gas, arguing that integrated companies should not be split and that prices for accessing pipelines should be negotiated rather than published. The UK maintained that legal unbundling of transmission system operators from the supply side was essential and that third party access to the system should be governed by "ex-ante" rules approved by the regulator and based on published prices. There was a large measure of agreement to this from other member states so far as electricity was concerned. In discussion of the draft directive's handling of public service obligations (PSOs), most member states, including the UK, were in favour of the definition of PSOs being left to subsidiarity though some argued for a more prescriptive approach.

Member states generally endorsed the proposal by ETSO (European Transmission System Operators Association) for a temporary solution to the problem of cross-border trade in electricity, but most warned that this should be seen only as an interim solution for one year. The UK expressed concern at the lack of a clear road map to reach a definitive solution, arguing that there should be a clear definition of responsibilities between ETSO, member states and the Commission.

In a brief presentation on its benchmarking study, the Commission noted that it showed a wide difference in market opening, prices and customer choice among the markets in different member states and that the study's main conclusion—that markets which had opened the most had the lowest prices and the best protection for PSOs—showed the need to move towards full market opening as soon as possible.

The views expressed on these issues will be fed into a report with the hope that the Spanish presidency will be in a position to announce significant progress at the next European Summit in Barcelona.

The Commission hoped that a final position on its Green Paper on Security of Energy Supply would be reached at the next Energy Council (6 June 2002), noting also that while there had been agreement on many points, some, such as nuclear energy and harmonising tax measures, were controversial.

The UK and other member states praised the overall analysis in the Green Paper, supporting the focus on improving demand side management. At the same time, they expressed themselves satisfied with existing arrangements for the management of emergency oil stocks, with the focus firmly on the International Energy Agency as the appropriate forum. Member states agreed on the importance of consumer/producer country dialogue; several emphasised that such dialogue should not be confined to any individual or group of supplier countries.

The UK emphasised the major contribution to security of supply that a liberalised and integrated energy market in the EU would play.

All reserves were lifted on the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and the Council on the Energy Performance of Buildings, although the Commission asked for a declaration registering its dissatisfaction with the length of the implementation timetable. A presidency compromise text has therefore been agreed as a general approach. This was a good outcome for the UK as we secured flexibility that allows for other measures to be used, such as the provision of advice, to reduce the energy consumption and limit the carbon dioxide emissions of boilers.

In their account of COP7 (7th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change), the presidency and Commission noted that the EU had been a major player in ensuring that agreement was reached. The presidency concluded that the EU should now work towards a multilateral process for achieving the convention objectives, including targets beyond 2012 and looking at greater involvement of developing countries. The Commission noted that the overall aim of its draft emissions trading directive was to have an EU system in place in 2005 ahead of an international system scheduled to be in place by 2008. The proposed approach would take account of the overall costs of reducing emissions, with the aim of ensuring that an emission trading system should not disrupt energy markets and that market distortions be kept to a minimum. While welcoming these developments, the UK argued for a more voluntary, flexible EU approach, to allow for national circumstances, than that currently proposed, and in favour of doing more to encourage business to gain experience in emissions trading. The Commission also provided information on the European climate change programme.

On state aid to the coal industry after expiry of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) treaty, only two member states supported the security of supply justification for continued aid. The UK and others opposed this justification but were nevertheless prepared to accept some further aid to the coal industry for social, regional or economic reasons, given appropriate limiting conditions. In particular, aid should be digressive and time limited. The Spanish presidency will take the dossier forward in the new year.

Finally, there was a brief progress report on the Energy Charter treaty and a short Commission presentation on the proposed directive on Biofuels.

Industry Council

The Industry Council held a debate and adopted conclusions on competitiveness and enterprise policy in the EU. The key themes were better regulation, the economic impact of September 11, research and development, and quantitative targets. The UK asked for the Commission to produce a better regulation action plan for Barcelona.

The Council adopted conclusions on the financing of SMEs. These recognise progress made in addressing problems for SMEs in obtaining finance, but also that more can be done. A number of initiatives have been identified, such as actions promoting entrepreneurship, and to encourage contacts between SMEs, bankers and other finance providers in order to improve their mutual understanding.

The presidency introduced their progress report on modernising competition policy. A debate followed. All member states agreed the council should work towards adoption of the proposed regulation by end 2002. Most of the discussion focused on the issue of the relationship between national competition rules and EU law (Article 3). The Commission believes Article 3 is vital to ensure equal treatment across the Community and it would also simplify the Community legal structure. All member states supported the objectives of Article 3. The UK pointed to the need for consistency and sensible case allocation in the network, but noted some concerns on the regulated sectors, actions to address market failures, mergers, and criminal penalties, on which further discussion would be necessary. All member states agreed on the broad principles for co-operation between national competition authorities in a decentralised regime. The presidency concluded that work would continue.

Council conclusions were adopted on state aid which look forward to further work by the Commission and member states to reform the state aids regime. The Commission presented the Ninth Survey of State Aid in the EU, drawing Ministers' attention to the state aid scoreboard and register that had been set up during the year to increase transparency.

The presidency noted continuing discussions on the transfer of ECSC assets. Further technical legal work was necessary. The Commission briefly presented its latest report on the Monitoring of Aid to the Steel Industry. The Commission was still considering the state aid rules to apply following expiry of the ECSC treaty. Strict rules would continue as member states and the Industry wanted.

The Council again discussed the Commission's proposals for a temporary defensive aid mechanism for shipbuilding, to be introduced in parallel with WTO action against Korea. The UK argued that the way to tackle the problem was through WTO action. The Commission's approach linking WTO action to aid had led to deadlock, from which only Korea benefited. Subsidies had not worked in the past and were further likely to weaken the WTO case. The Council was divided about the proposal, and the presidency concluded that no qualified majority existed for the subsidy proposal. The Spanish presidency would need to pick up the dossier.

The Commission made a short statement on sustainable development, encouraging the Council to work on its environmental integration strategy and ideally complete it in time for Barcelona.

Sunday Working

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many shop workers have taken a case to an employment tribunal because of discrimination against them for refusing to work on a Sunday; and how many were successful. [30944]

Alan Johnson: Since 1994 when shop workers were given new rights involving Sunday working a total of 157 applications have been made to an employment tribunal of which 14 were successful.

Employment Agencies

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she expects to issue revised conduct regulations for employment agencies. [30162]

Alan Johnson: I expect to issue revised Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations in the near future, following a further short consultation on certain aspects.

Regional Assistance (North-west)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total amount of regional assistance grant to industry for each parliamentary constituency in the north-west of England was for each year since 1992; and if she will make a statement. [30969]

Alan Johnson: The total amount of regional assistance grant to industry is set out in the following tables. The figures are based on the 1981 ward boundaries and represent offers of Regional Selective Assistance made by the Department of Trade and Industry.

Constituency	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Ashton Under Lyne	306,000	145,500	25,000	0
Barrow and Furness	—	77,800	1,770,500	814,800
Birkenhead	205,000	164,500	217,000	920,000
Blackburn	322,500	755,500	461,500	2,046,000
Bolton, North-east	840,000	179,000	261,000	226,500
Bolton, South-east	0	0	894,600	945,800
Bolton, South-west	162,000	450,000	0	0
Bolton, West	444,000	231,000	1,077,500	380,000
Bootle	252,300	1,023,000	593,000	685,000
Bury, North	194,000	199,500	838,000	382,000
Bury, South	106,000	619,100	245,000	74,000
Carlisle	—	—	—	—
Chorley	90,000	23,000	0	99,000
City of Chester	18,000	7,277,000	180,000	170,000
Copeland	0	250,000	983,000	51,500
Crosby	70,000	0	75,000	90,000
Davyhulme	151,000	52,000	285,500	129,000
Denton and Reddish	27,685	97,650	0	0
Eccles	200,000	105,300	0	0
Eddisbury	50,000	855,000	175,000	43,000
Ellesmere Port and Neston	110,000	1,630,000	897,000	1,002,000
Halton	2,872,000	1,754,000	745,000	452,000
Heywood and Middleton	128,000	199,500	109,000	365,000
Hyndburn	487,000	2,191,500	9,500	0

Constituency	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Knowsley, North	4,658,000	1,496,000	1,667,000	880,000
Knowsley, South	1,030,000	1,197,000	761,000	484,000
Lancaster	—	—	—	—
Leigh	1,462,000	1,235,500	221,850	2,303,000
Littleborough and Saddleworth	938,000	268,900	470,000	444,000
Liverpool, Broadgreen	892,000	189,000	1,834,000	130,000
Liverpool, Garston	1,035,000	1,932,000	883,000	1,161,000
Liverpool, Mossley Hill	1,826,000	24,000	40,000	50,000
Liverpool, Riverside	1,325,000	571,670	666,000	2,642,500
Liverpool, Walton	80,000	126,890	485,000	410,000
Liverpool, West Derby	0	229,500	90,000	0
Makerfield	106,500	113,000	431,740	592,800
Manchester, Blackley	107,000	50,500	0	0
Manchester, Central	469,500	648,500	49,500	0
Manchester, Gorton	64,500	346,000	0	0
Morecambe and Lunesdale	—	—	—	—
Oldham, Central and Royton	73,000	330,000	949,000	363,000
Oldham, West	138,000	775,900	379,000	774,000
Penrith and the Border	1,587,500	160,000	95,000	17,000
Rochdale	517,500	483,500	358,600	621,500
Rossendale and Darwen	336,000	438,000	49,500	596,500
Salford East	624,900	183,000	100,000	0
Southport	70,000	1,132,000	834,000	130,000
St. Helens, North	225,000	550,500	1,578,200	1,960,000
St. Helens, South	90,000	1,770,000	2,667,000	2,675,000
Stalybridge and Hyde	167,500	620,000	101,000	0
Stretford	1,512,000	230,000	220,500	2,673,200
Wallasey	63,000	2,011,000	635,000	965,000
Warrington, South	60,000	225,000	264,000	35,000
West Lancashire	3,190,500	1,809,000	1,387,500	1,948,000
Westmoreland and Lonsdale	0	0	55,000	0
Wigan	1,311,000	2,414,500	638,000	852,000
Wirral, South	560,000	779,300	1,565,000	420,000
Wirral, West	55,000	1,612,000	98,000	197,000
Workington	1,106,500	2,788,500	384,000	275,000
Worsley	2,310,000	109,500	144,000	319,000
Total	35,026,385	45,130,010	29,943,490	32,794,100

Constituency	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
Ashton Under Lyne	40,000	0	0	0
Barrow and Furness	1,285,000	612,000	306,700	244,000
Birkenhead	611,000	175,000	514,000	414,000
Blackburn	1,971,800	871,600	621,000	726,000
Bolton, North-east	581,800	96,000	350,000	75,000
Bolton, South-east	453,000	195,500	376,000	285,000
Bolton, South-west	0	0	0	0
Bolton, West	165,600	1,248,000	149,000	390,000
Bootle	292,000	497,000	1,751,000	379,000
Bury, North	189,500	153,500	82,500	115,000
Bury, South	156,000	20,000	108,000	457,000
Carlisle	—	—	—	—
Chorley	60,000	25,000	20,000	33,000
City of Chester	766,500	590,000	0	1,900,000
Copeland	0	0	84,500	368,000
Crosby	183,000	200,000	62,500	860,000
Davyhulme	650,000	687,000	3,044,000	0
Denton and Reddish	0	0	0	0
Eccles	0	0	0	0
Eddisbury	125,000	0	126,500	155,000
Ellesmere Port and Neston	557,000	13,247,000	348,000	1,040,000
Halton	320,000	688,000	335,000	1,769,000
Heywood and Middleton	465,000	134,000	90,000	99,000
Hyndburn	25,000	60,000	0	0
Knowsley, North	5,011,000	2,906,000	3,950,000	2,603,000
Knowsley, South	99,000	0	40,845,000	1,240,000
Lancaster	—	—	—	—
Leigh	212,950	869,000	1,257,000	1,623,000
Littleborough and Saddleworth	899,250	509,000	706,000	309,000
Liverpool, Broadgreen	1,239,000	287,000	7,000	5,000
Liverpool, Garston	780,000	386,000	4,257,000	7,308,000

Constituency	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
Liverpool, Mossley Hill	130,000	15,000	0	0
Liverpool, Riverside	1,124,000	945,000	1,170,000	880,000
Liverpool, Walton	10,000	310,000	0	130,000
Liverpool, West Derby	0	62,000	12,000	60,000
Makerfield	172,000	106,000	124,000	5,408,000
Manchester, Blackley	0	0	0	0
Manchester, Central	0	0	0	0
Manchester, Gorton	0	0	0	0
Morecambe and Lunesdale	—	—	—	—
Oldham, Central and Royton	259,000	252,000	665,000	1,124,000
Oldham, West	90,000	326,000	601,000	45,000
Penrith and the Border	0	120,000	0	0
Rochdale	588,000	237,000	188,500	794,000
Rossendale and Darwen	195,000	217,000	291,000	567,000
Salford East	0	0	0	0
Southport	55,000	50,000	34,000	208,000
St. Helens, North	459,000	1,965,000	553,000	304,000
St. Helens, South	760,000	1,636,000	1,992,000	1,062,500
Stalybridge and Hyde	0	0	0	0
Stretford	270,000	50,000	8,000	240,000
Wallasey	585,000	333,000	78,000	655,000
Warrington, South	210,000	1,950,000	40,000	1,800,000
West Lancashire	2,043,000	823,000	880,000	1,309,000
Westmoreland and Lonsdale	0	0	0	0
Wigan	2,103,000	576,500	549,000	1,398,000
Wirral, South	90,000	1,853,000	2,048,000	470,000
Wirral, West	25,000	70,000	30,000	95,000
Workington	320,000	787,000	2,034,000	855,000
Worsley	109,000	30,000	10,000	175,000
Total	26,735,400	37,170,100	70,698,200	39,976,500

Constituency	*2000*	*2001*	*Total*
Ashton Under Lyne	85,000	—	601,500
Barrow and Furness	98,000	410,000	5,618,800
Birkenhead	1,000,000	100,000	4,320,500
Blackburn	180,000	107,000	8,062,900
Bolton North-east	0	—	2,609,300
Bolton South-east	0	—	3,149,900
Bolton South-west	0	—	612,000
Bolton West	0	675,000	4,760,100
Bootle	90,000	500,000	6,062,300
Bury North	0	—	2,154,000
Bury South	0	—	1,785,100
Carlisle	—	70,000	70,000
Chorley	0	—	350,000
City of Chester	0	—	10,901,500
Copeland	240,000	—	1,977,000
Crosby	0	110,000	1,650,500
Davyhulme	240,000	—	5,238,500
Denton and Reddish	0	—	125,335
Eccles	0	—	305,300
Eddisbury	0	—	1,529,500
Ellesmere Port and Neston	180,000	—	19,011,000
Halton	604,000	1,215,000	10,754,000
Heywood and Middleton	0	—	1,589,500
Hyndburn	0	80,000	2,853,000
Knowsley North	5,530,000	760,000	29,461,000
Knowsley South	93,000	800,000	46,549,000
Lancaster	—	80,000	80,000
Leigh	0	200,000	9,384,300
Littleborough and Saddleworth	460,000	150,000	5,154,150
Liverpool Broadgreen	0	245,000	4,828,000
Liverpool Garston	50,000	1,955,000	19,747,000
Liverpool Mossley Hill	0	—	2,085,000
Liverpool Riverside	3,435,000	—	12,759,170
Liverpool Walton	0	180,000	1,731,890
Liverpool West Derby	0	—	453,500
Makerfield	0	200,000	7,254,040
Manchester Blackley	0	—	157,500
Manchester Central	2,100,000	1,850,000	5,117,500
Manchester Gorton	0	—	410,500
Morecambe and Lunesdale	—	145,000	145,000
Oldham Central and Royton	95,000	—	4,110,000
Oldham West	750,000	940,000	4,818,900
Penrith and the Border	0	—	1,979,500
Rochdale	520,000	230,000	4,538,600
Rossendale and Darwen	0	—	2,690,000
Salford East	0	1,340,000	2,247,900
Southport	190,000	200,000	2,903,000
St. Helens North	250,000	345,000	8,189,700
St. Helens South	600,000	—	13,252,500
Stalybridge and Hyde	—	—	888,500
Stretford	—	—	5,203,700
Wallasey	—	1,950,000	7,275,000
Warrington South	290,000	—	4,874,000
West Lancashire	238,000	690,000	14,318,000
Westmoreland and Lonsdale	—	—	55,000
Wigan	315,000	450,000	10,607,000
Wirral South	1,996,000	3,485,000	13,266,300
Wirral West	0	—	2,182,000
Workington	95,000	500,000	9,145,000
Worsley	0	—	3,206,500
Total	19,724,000	19,962,000	357,160,185

Temporary Employment

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what studies her Department has conducted into the number of temporary employees who *(a)* prefer to remain in temporary employment and *(b)* are unable to find permanent employment. [30680]

Alan Johnson: This Department has conducted no recent study on this issue. However, the Labour Force Survey (LFS), which is an Office for National Statistics data set covering the UK, examines whether such individuals are temporary employees by choice or because they cannot find a permanent job. The LFS defines temporary employees as including individuals engaged on: employment business assignments, seasonal work, fixed term contracts and casual work. The autumn 2001 survey estimated that:

(*a*) 500,000 temporary employees (30.2 per cent. of the total) preferred to remain in temporary employment, and

(*b*) 416,000 (25.1 per cent) were unable to find permanent employment.

Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 3 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 52W, if she will define the unnecessary restrictions on organisations in the recruitment industry, including the IT sector which are due to be removed by the draft Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations. [30695]

Alan Johnson: The Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations will remove the following restrictions:

(i) Preventing employment agencies offering, directly or indirectly, any financial benefit or benefit in kind to induce a work-seeker to use their services;

(ii) Preventing employment agencies offering their services to a worker in employment, where the agent had previously received a fee for introducing him to that employment;

(iii) Preventing employment businesses approaching a worker in employment, to induce the worker to agree to be supplied to a hirer;

(iv) The requirement for employment agencies and employment businesses to inform the Secretary of State in writing of their terms of business;

(v) The requirement for employment agencies and employment businesses to keep records on their premises.

Small Business Service Offices

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many small business service offices are situated in the coalfield communities. [29298]

Nigel Griffiths: The Small Business Service has an office in each of the nine English regions. The SBS contracts via regional teams with 45 Business Link Operators to provide business support services throughout England. All of the coalfield communities are served by this local network irrespective of the specific location of the office.

Redundancies

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many redundancies were notified, broken down by *(a)* constituency, *(b)* region and *(c)* country in each year since 1997. [30297]

Alan Johnson: The following table shows the numbers of planned redundancies notified for each year from 1997 to 2001. Companies are required to notify only where they plan to make 20 or more people redundant. I regret there are no similar statistics for individual constituencies.

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Redundancy notifications in England					
Avon	3,854	4,117	5,182	4,378	4,253
Bedfordshire	2,934	2,227	2,743	7,977	4,385
Berkshire	3,107	5,027	5,814	6,350	11,082
Buckinghamshire	4,506	4,061	4,318	4,823	5,280
Cambridgeshire	2,636	3,362	3,903	3,536	5,123
Cheshire	5,255	7,251	9,003	5,581	9,910
Cleveland	5,025	5,120	3,848	4,259	2,924
Cornwall	1,335	580	923	962	1,731
County Durham	2,660	3,856	2,214	3,065	3,604
Cumbria	2,671	1,967	3,886	5,411	4,561
Derbyshire	5,822	4,332	4,484	6,489	7,291
Devon	2,027	3,979	2,436	3,459	9,008
Dorset	1,201	2,353	1,252	2,495	3,408
East Sussex	363	1,945	1,164	423	1,486
Essex	4,823	8,152	7,550	9,184	9,467
Gloucestershire	2,347	3,987	2,294	2,966	4,756
Greater London	18,776	24,049	27,601	27,323	60,325
Greater Manchester	7,250	9,292	9,657	8,340	11,950
Hampshire	5,659	7,757	8,625	9,379	15,985
Hereford and Worcester	2,676	3,279	2,429	3,007	2,816
Hertfordshire	3,743	4,004	5,205	4,395	14,308
Humberside	3,373	2,558	1,255	3,524	1,434
Isle of Wight	252	386	313	578	1,090
Kent	5,979	6,863	7,107	21,848	7,812
Lancashire	11,008	11,340	15,901	15,244	17,974
Leicestershire	4,951	6,384	5,254	7,634	6,643
Lincolnshire	1,844	5,918	3,625	5,226	5,723
Merseyside	7,274	7,626	7,970	6,998	9,553
Middlesex	4,504	4,920	9,598	7,239	8,887
Norfolk	2,668	2,409	3,326	3,617	3,476
Northamptonshire	3,390	2,511	4,252	4,317	5,453
Northumberland	690	924	2,293	1,446	1,252
Nottinghamshire	4,755	5,812	8,721	9,133	7,681
Oxfordshire	2,120	2,107	4,139	4,761	5,453
Shropshire	1,706	1,634	2,979	3,606	3,028
Somerset	985	2,679	2,849	2,821	5,463
Staffordshire	4,165	6,710	5,916	7,592	9,767

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Suffolk	2,868	1,903	2,415	2,469	3,261
Surrey	3,936	5,242	12,292	6,566	8,908
Sussex	2,454	3,508	2,952	4,018	1,242
Tyne and Wear	14,533	10,756	8,002	7,846	9,575
Warwickshire	1,506	4,492	8,155	7,887	5,402
West Midlands	10,019	12,040	19,024	22,399	20,444
West Sussex	902	1,824	3,068	793	6,159
Wiltshire	2,248	5,097	3,012	3,343	6,558
Yorkshire	22,005	23,338	26,764	25,065	47,075
Total	208,805	249,678	285,711	309,772	402,966
Redundancy notifications in Scotland					
Borders	2,305	2,060	887	542	899
Central	2,001	837	1,087	353	1,503
Dumfries and Galloway	318	1,786	1,200	2,532	619
Fife	1,464	2,805	4,011	1,709	4,148
Grampian	3,156	4,024	3,759	3,864	1,497
Highland	80	259	2,816	824	708
Highland and Island	433	223	1,937	189	275
Lanark	349	1,021	3,714	2,809	9,052
Lothian	5,322	5,516	6,623	5,800	9,301
Strathclyde	9,261	9,952	7,828	6,034	11,168
Tayside	940	638	788	594	1,516
Western Isles	0	0	0	0	82
Total	25,629	29,121	34,650	25,250	40,768
Redundancy notifications in Wales					
Clwyd	763	2,583	946	1,611	790
Dyfed	814	317	199	264	475
Gwent	1,991	2,396	3,663	4,833	4,723
Gwynedd	258	839	352	787	714
Mid Glamorgan	680	2,100	1,119	1,396	1,211
Powys	194	594	1,513	392	1,038
South Glamorgan	3,358	1,996	2,265	3,138	3,797
Wales	413	622	1,610	2,159	5,380
West Glamorgan	809	1,764	1,267	585	185
Total	9,280	13,211	12,934	15,165	18,313

Postal Services

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will place in the Library a copy of the Consignia/UBS Warburg strategic plan for postal services. [30105]

Ms Hewitt: Any Consignia strategic plan would be commercially confidential and therefore under Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information could not be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Construction Industry

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she has taken to replace the construction industry retention system as regards central Government, agency and local authority contracts. [29802]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I have been asked to reply.

I am aware of the concerns raised in the industry with regard to retentions, but it would be premature to seek to change the current arrangements.

The construction industry has yet to achieve 'zero-defects' or 'right first time' culture and continues to have difficulty ensuring quality. Contractors, subcontractors and specialists in the industry, as well as government, have a role to play in ensuring that quality is a priority issue.

The Achieving Excellence in Construction initiative, led by the Office of Government Commerce, is placing greater emphasis on team working and value for money procurement strategies and is encouraging central Government construction clients to use partnering and long-term commercial agreements with suppliers to reduce the need for retentions in the future.

The Local Government Task Force, which was formed to promote Sir John Egan's Construction Task Force report 'Rethinking Construction' in local government, is also encouraging authorities to work with suppliers to reduce the need for retentions.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Home Zones

10. **Mrs. Helen Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement about the role of home zones in creating safer communities. [28444]

Ms Keeble: Home zones can help to create safer communities by increasing the neighbourly use of the street, with adults talking and children playing. I am delighted that we were able to announce grants totalling £30 million towards 61 new home zone schemes in England earlier this month.

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the effect on the level of road accidents, broken down by type of *(a)* accident, *(b)* injury and *(c)* victim, of the operation of home zones. [30325]

Mr. Jamieson: Home zones are not road safety schemes as such, but if they are carefully designed, they can make a contribution to overall road safety objectives. My Department is currently monitoring nine pilot home zones in England and Wales. A review of accidents is one of the elements included in the study. Data on personal injury accidents are being collected from the local authorities and interview surveys of a sample of residents in each pilot home zone include questions about road accidents. 'After' data will be collected once the schemes are completed. We would expect on-going monitoring of accidents in any home zone to be carried out by the local authority.

Railtrack

11. **Mr. Prisk:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what he estimates to be the costs to date of external consultants advising on the administration of Railtrack and its implications for the railway and Ernst and Young. [28445]

Mr. Spellar: Ernst and Young, as Special Railway Administrators, are officers of the High Court and, as such, are not employed as external consultants by my Department. Consequently, fees are a matter for the creditors of Railtrack plc. From 7 October to the end of December 2001, the estimated cost of external consultants working for my Department on the administration of Railtrack and on the process of exiting administration is in the region of £3.1 million.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether his officials are working as part of the team developing a company limited by guarantee to bid for Railtrack. [30236]

Mr. Jamieson: No.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether all bidders for Railtrack plc, including the company limited by guarantee, will be subject to the same submission process. [30232]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a matter for the administrator.

Local Bus Services

12. **Dr. Kumar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on Government investment in local bus services. [28446]

Mr. Byers: Since introducing the new system of local transport plans, in 1999, we have accepted or provisionally accepted for funding 30 bus-based major local transport schemes each with a minimum gross cost of £5 million. We are also making £198 million available to local authorities to support bus services in rural areas, as well as £46 million under the urban bus challenge scheme. The bus industry is also investing heavily, having spent some £977 million on new buses over the last three years.

Transport Review

13. **Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact his 10-year transport review will have on carbon dioxide levels. [28447]

Mr. Spellar: The 10-Year Transport Plan, published in July 2000, sets out the impact of the plan on carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions. The policies and measures contained in the plan are forecast to reduce CO_2 emissions by 1.6 million tonnes of carbon by 2010.

Council Tax

14. **Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the latest estimate is of the percentage increase in council tax planned for 2002–03. [28448]

Mr. Raynsford: Decisions on council tax are for local authorities to take, after consulting with their local electorate and taxpayers.

Only when councils have set their own level of council tax in March will the full national picture about actual levels of council tax be known.

17. **Dr. Palmer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will introduce council tax bands *(a)* lower than the current minimum and *(b)* higher than the current maximum. [28452]

Mr. Raynsford: In the Local Government White Paper, we said that we intend to start work on a revaluation of all dwellings in 2005. Ahead of revaluation, we will listen to the views of taxpayers and local government about council tax bands.

We shall introduce legislation to make clear that additional council tax bands can be created without new primary legislation.

Railway Carriages

15. **Mr. Hendrick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures he is taking to improve the quality of railway carriages. [28449]

Mr. Spellar: Since privatisation over 3,200 new vehicles, one third of the current fleet, have been ordered worth approximately £3 billion. During its re-franchising programme the Strategic Rail Authority will seek additional commitments from bidders either for additional new rolling stock or for refurbishment of existing stock.

Travellers

16. **Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the Bellwin scheme to reimburse councils for emergency expenditure applies to the cost of cleaning sites used by travellers following unauthorised occupation of public parks and open spaces. [28451]

Mr. Raynsford: A Bellwin scheme of emergency financial assistance may be activated to help a local authority with uninsurable clear-up costs following a disaster or emergency that involves destruction of, or danger to, life or property. My Department gives full consideration to any proposals for the activation of a scheme. To date there have been no claims for costs of cleaning sites used by travellers following unauthorised occupation of public parks and open spaces.

Housebuilding Targets

18. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received from local authorities regarding regional and national housebuilding targets. [28454]

37. **Mr. Baron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent representations he has received from local authorities concerning regional and national housebuilding targets. [28474]

Ms Keeble: We have received representations from local authorities on a number of matters relating to planning for housing. But this Government do not set national or regional housebuilding targets. We have a national land recycling target and each region proposes its own recycling target to be established through regional planning guidance. Regional planning guidance also establishes annual rates of housing provision to be kept under regular review.

Planning Green Paper

19. **Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received concerning the Planning Green Paper from community organisations. [28455]

Ms Keeble: The consultation period runs until 18 March. The Department has so far received less than 50 representations and no analysis of the responses has yet been undertaken.

Roads (Speeding)

20. **Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures he is taking to reduce accidents due to speeding on roads. [28456]

Mr. Spellar: The measures being taken by the Government to reduce speed related road accidents are contained in the Road Safety Strategy, "Tomorrows Roads Safer for Everyone"—published in March 2000.

Rural Housing

21. **Mr. Breed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to tackle shortages of affordable housing in rural areas. [28457]

Ms Keeble: As we said in the Rural White Paper, we expect to deliver around 9,000 new affordable homes annually in rural areas by 2003–04. This is possible in large partly because of a near doubling in the Housing Corporation's budget from 2000–01 levels to over £1.2 billion by 2003–04.

We are consulting on proposals to replace the present system of negotiated planning obligations with a tariff-based approach. We expect this to secure more affordable housing generally, including in rural areas.

Local Government Finance

22. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the local government finance settlement for the metropolitan authorities. [28458]

Mr. Raynsford: The final local government finance settlement for 2002–03 was made available to the House and published yesterday.

The settlement gives a 4.8 per cent. increase in general grant for metropolitan authorities.

Bus Services

23. **Jim Dobbin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures he is taking to improve the quality of bus services. [28459]

Mr. Spellar: We have introduced powers under the Transport Act 2000 to enable local authorities to implement enforceable Quality Partnerships and Quality Contract schemes. The Act also empowers authorities to require operators to participate in joint ticketing schemes, and enables them to step in to provide proper passenger information, at the operators' expense, if existing arrangements are inadequate.

Rail Safety

24. **John Barrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on progress towards the implementation of recommendations made by Lord Cullen on rail safety. [28460]

Mr. Spellar: The Government have asked the Health and Safety Commission, the regulator for railway safety, to ensure that action is taken on all the recommendations made by Lord Cullen.

The HSC published an action plan in November 2001 on how each of the recommendations in part 1 of Lord Cullen's report would be taken forward. The HSC hope to publish before Easter a detailed progress report on the implementation of these recommendations in the six-month period to 20 December 2001.

The HSC are currently consulting the industry about implementing the recommendations in part 2 of Lord Cullen's report. They hope to issue a progress report by Easter for the period to 8 March 2002.

The HSC's first action plan on the recommendations from the joint inquiry into train protection systems was published in September 2001.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on gauge corner cracking; and what international representations Railtrack has received about its solutions to this problem. [30308]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* Railtrack has received international representations from a variety of sources.

Local Government

25. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proposals he has to give local government greater independence from central Government; and if he will make a statement. [28461]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government set out their radical new vision for local government in the recently published White Paper, Strong Local Leadership-Quality Public Services. It contains a wide range of proposals to give local councils greater freedom to innovate and respond to local needs and aspirations of their communities. This Government believe in real local government which is truly in touch with the people it serves.

M6 Corridor

26. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the multi-modal study on the M6 corridor will be published. [28462]

Mr. Spellar: The final report of the West Midlands to North-west Conurbations Multi-Modal Study will be published for general release towards the end of March.

Railways (Wales)

27. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the projected level of investment is in the railway system in Wales as included in the Strategic Rail Authority's 10 year plan; and if he will make a statement. [28463]

Mr. Spellar: Each individual rail project and improvements negotiated through franchise agreements will usually benefit more than one part of Britain. The SRA has therefore not attempted to break down its planned expenditure on a regional basis.

Northern Distributor Scheme

28. **Mr. Wyatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what funding will be made available for the northern distributor scheme in Sittingbourne; and if he will make a statement. [28464]

Mr. Spellar: The Sittingbourne northern distributor road proposal is a local road scheme for which developer funding is being sought. Kent county council, the highway authority concerned, have not identified this scheme in their local transport plan as one which requires public money, consequently no public funds have been made available for this scheme via the local transport plan settlement process.

Newhaven-Dieppe Ferry

29. **Norman Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the strategic importance of the Newhaven-Dieppe ferry connection for UK transport links. [28465]

Mr. Spellar: There are several important cross-channel ferry connections, of which the link between Newhaven and Dieppe is one. It is a matter of commercial judgment for shipping companies as to what services they choose to provide.

Maritime Transport Policy

30. **Mr. Hepburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the Government's maritime transport policy. [28466]

Mr. Spellar: We have introduced the tonnage tax. Together with reforms at the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, this has helped bring about a significant increase in UK ship registration. We have improved funding for the Support for Maritime Training (SMarT) scheme. We are committed to safe and environmentally friendly shipping.

Local Transport

31. **Laura Moffatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on progress with the first schemes funded under the 10-Year Transport Plan to encourage local transport improvements. [28468]

Mr. Spellar: Progress in introducing local transport improvements is contained in authorities' Local Transport Plan annual progress reports. The first such reports, covering the achievements made in 2000–01 indicate that authorities are starting to lay the foundations for a modern, integrated, local transport system. We expect the next reports, covering the first year in which the increased funding from the 10-Year Plan was available, to show further evidence of progress with local transport schemes.

Railway Stations

32. **Mrs. Ann Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures he has taken to improve facilities at railway stations in the last 12 months. [28469]

Mr. Spellar: Train operating companies carry out works to improve station facilities at railway stations for their own commercial reasons as part of their plans to improve the service for passengers and attract greater patronage. Such improvements may also be required by the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) under a train operating company's franchise agreement, or as a passenger benefit negotiated by the authority where there has been a breach of a franchise agreement, or a change of control. An additional source of funding is provided by the SRA's Rail Passenger Partnership scheme. Up to the end of 2001, a total of £45 million had been awarded to 38 projects, including improvements to railway station facilities.

Rail Overcrowding

33. **Sandra Gidley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress he has made towards tackling overcrowding on the rail network. [28470]

Mr. Spellar: The Strategic Rail Authority's Strategic Plan sets out in detail the various policies and projects which are being taken forward across the network to deliver the rail targets, which include reducing overcrowding, in the Government's 10-Year Plan.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the 10 rail routes that suffer from the worst passenger congestion. [30249]

Mr. Jamieson: The information is not held in the format requested.

Rail Strategic Plan

34. **Mr. John Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what responses he has received from the rail industry to the strategic plan for the railways. [28471]

Mr. Spellar: The plan has been warmly welcomed by the rail industry.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions from which previous budget the additional £4.5 billion of rail investment referred to in the SRA Strategic Plan has been drawn. [28547]

Mr. Byers: The additional provision comes from a £2.3 billion transfer of funds from the previously unallocated budget within the Transport 10-Year Plan and, in relation to the 2 April 2001 agreement between the Government and Railtrack, from funds which are additional to those in the Transport 10-Year Plan. This means that the total Transport 10-Year Plan public expenditure and private investment envelope has been increased from £179.7 billion to £181.9 billion.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether the SRA has sought his Department's consent to reduce the passenger growth target in the strategic plan to 30 per cent. [30251]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government's 10-Year Plan target for rail passenger growth is not altered by the SRA strategic plan. The strategic plan sets out how the SRA intends to deliver the target.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will give a schedule, broken down by financial year, of the projected allocation of the private sector contribution to the SRA strategic plan; and if he will indicate the purpose to which that contribution is expected to be put in each of those years. [30258]

Mr. Jamieson: The SRA strategic plan envisages private sector investment of a very similar level to that envisaged in the 10-Year Plan. An indicative profile of this investment was outlined in Table A3 of the 10-Year Plan. Private investment will work in partnership with £33.5 billion of public investment and support to deliver the Government's 10-Year Plan objectives for rail.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assumption has been made about the rate of return required by private sector investors in framing the financial models that underlie *(a)* the Government's 10-Year Plan and *(b)* the SRA strategic plan. [30255]

Mr. Jamieson: The rates of return required by the private sector investors will vary with the nature of particular investments and the risks that are borne. Assumptions used in the 10-Year Plan and the SRA strategic plan modelling will not be published as they could have an adverse effect on commercial negotiations for particular mechanisms to deliver private investment.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what the projected annual allocations of the public sector contribution to the SRA Strategic Plan are, broken down by spending type; [30259]

(2) if he will give a schedule, broken down by financial year, of the allocation of the £33.5 billion public sector contribution to the SRA Strategic Plan. [30260]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) on 23 January, 2002, *Official Report,* columns 871–72W.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he last met the Chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority to discuss the 10-year strategic plan. [28642]

Mr. Spellar: The Secretary of State meets the key players in the rail industry on a regular basis.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what is the total amount of public and private sector investment in the railways over the next 10 years assumed in *(a)* the transport 10-year plan assessed, and *(b)* the strategic plan published by the SRA. [30734]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* Tables A2 and A3 of the 10-Year Plan for Transport set out the estimated amount and profile of private and public investment in rail.

The SRA strategic plan anticipates a very similar level of private investment to that estimated in the 10-Year Plan. The enhanced level of public investment funding included in the strategic plan was outlined in a written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) on 23 January 2002, *Official Report,* columns 871–72W.

London Underground

35. **Mr. Peter Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent representations he has received on his plans to involve the private sector in the London Underground. [28472]

Mr. Spellar: The Deputy Prime Minister announced the Government's plans for involving the private sector in the modernisation of London Underground in March 1998. Since then the Government have received representations from a wide range of individuals and organisations.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) which London Underground lines will be provided with full fleets of new trains by June *(a)* 2006 and *(b)* 2010; [30534]

(2) if he will list the stations that are to be refurbished by June 2006, indicating what improvements are required at each station by the PPP contracts, broken down by local authority in the London Underground area; [30531]

(3) if he will list the service improvements that are to be delivered by the public-private partnership for London Underground by June 2006; [30533]

(4) if he will publish targets for reductions in *(a)* signal failures and *(b)* train breakdowns set for the public-private partnership by June 2006 that would affect the users of London Underground services. [30532]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) on 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 622W.

Rail Freight

36. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action he is taking to improve rail freight services through the channel tunnel. [28473]

Mr. Spellar: There have been many contacts between the British and French Governments since November. The Prime Minister, the Secretary of State and the Home Secretary have all written to their French counterparts to ask that all necessary measures are put in place as soon as possible, to enable full rail freight services to resume.

Rail Investment

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the total level of investment and public support to be made in the railways over the next 10 years. [31445]

Mr. Byers: We estimate that the total level of public and private investment and public support in the railways over the 10 years to 31 March 2011 will be £64.9 billion.

The Government have committed to provide £33.5 billion of funding to the rail industry over this period, consisting of both public investment and revenue support (including direct revenue support for private investment). This represents an increase of £4.5 billion from the £29 billion total in the July 2000 10-Year Plan for Transport. Government funding will work in partnership with an estimated private investment of £34.3 billion to help deliver our 10-Year Plan objectives for rail.

As was made clear at the time of the 10-Year Plan, the £60.4 billion total investment and public support for rail, both public and private, is net of an adjustment to exclude direct revenue support for private investment. Table A2 in the 10-Year Plan makes it clear that this is necessary to avoid double counting. The revised total of £64.9 billion, consisting of the original 10-Year Plan total plus the additional £4.5 billion of Government funding announced since then, is net of the same adjustment.

Devolution (Concordats)

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress his Department is making in reviewing its concordats with the devolved Administrations. [31569]

Mr. Raynsford: My Department has reached agreement with the Scottish Executive on a revision of the concordat made between it and the former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions in November 1999, to reflect Machinery of Government changes and other necessary updates. In addition, a new concordat has been agreed between my Department and the Northern Ireland Department of the Environment. Both concordats provide the framework to guide the working relationship between the parties, to promote good communications at all levels and to foster constructive co-operation.

Copies of both concordats are being placed in the Library. They are also being made available on my Department's website.

Public Relations Consultant

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much was spent by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* bodies for which it is responsible on external public relations consultants in each of the last four years. [27395]

Dr. Whitehead: My Department and its agencies have spent the following amounts on public relations consultants over the last four years in support of publicity campaigns such as 'are you doing your bit?' which encouraged people to take simple actions to protect the environment:

£

	Department	*Agencies*
1998–99	0	5,000
1999–2000	683,600	4,300
2000–01	748,900	84,500
2001–02[1]	352,900	13,500

[1] Estimate

Expenditure on PR consultants by non-departmental public bodies could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Fraud

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate his Department has made of the cost to its budget since 1 May 1997 of fraud; and if he will make a statement. [27298]

Dr. Whitehead: Losses due to fraud, which includes theft, are as follows.

£

	Department	Agencies	NDPBs	Total
1997–98	13,616	15,690	69,690	98,996
1998–99	19,850	13,980	115,970	149,800
1999–2000	22,850	30,291	78,236	131,377
2000–01	43,290	47,780	201,385	292,455
2001–02[1]	4,505	49,210	48,160	101,875
Total	104,111	156,951	513,441	774,503

[1] To date

Assets have been valued at cost, net book value or replacement cost depending on the circumstances of the individual case. Recoveries from perpetrators or others, eg insurance claims, have been netted off. Some incidents are still under investigation and final values may change.

Vehicle Registration Plates

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make it his policy that Northern Ireland is included in the national flags and symbols allowed to be displayed on the vehicle registration plates. [27660]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* The decision to amend the Road Vehicles (Display of Registration Marks) Regulations 2001 to allow for the display national flags and symbols on number plates in England, Scotland and Wales was taken in response to a broad consensus for change.

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the cost of theft and fraud to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [27980]

Dr. Whitehead: Losses due to theft and fraud are as follows:

£

	Department	Agencies	NDPBs	Total
1998–99	19,850	13,980	115,970	149,800
1999–2000	22,850	30,291	78,236	131,377
2000–01	43,290	47,780	201,385	292,455
2001–02 (to date)	4,505	49,210	48,160	101,875
Total	90,495	141,261	443,751	675,507

Assets have been valued at cost, net book value or replacement cost depending on the circumstances of the individual case. Recoveries from perpetrators or others, e.g. insurance claims, have been netted off. Some incidents are still under investigation and final values may change.

Lost/stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list those items valued at more than £50 which have been stolen or lost from his Department in each of the last four years. [27989]

Dr. Whitehead: The details are as follows:

	Department		Agencies		NDPBs	
Item	Number	Value (£)	Number	Value (£)	Number	Value (£)
1998–99						
Computer	1	800	1	425	85	114,150
Laptop computer	1	1,800	8	8,000	7	14,205
Computer components	1	150	—	—	2	145
Other computer equipment	2	16,850	6	1,380	—	—
Telephones	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mobile telephones	—	—	8	1,405	3	1,325
Pagers	—	—	17	1,455	4	410
Audio visual equipment	—	—	15	4,710	4	2,955
Office equipment	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other equipment	1	250	—	—	—	—
Vehicles and trailers	—	—	—	—	—	—
Protective clothing	—	—	—	—	6	660
1999–2000						
Computer	1	800	6	8,850	23	38,675
Laptop computer	1	1,250	3	6,800	7	14,801
Computer components	3	300	1	75	—	—
Other computer equipment	1	1,500	2	1,750	6	15,045
Telephones	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mobile telephones	—	—	1	75	2	315
Pagers	—	—	27	1,815	—	—
Audio visual equipment	1	5,000	7	2,698	4	775
Office equipment	—	—	6	4,800	1	85
Other equipment	—	—	6	3,475	2	3,060
Vehicles and trailers	—	—	1	905	—	—
Protective clothing	—	—	1	135	—	—
2000–01						
Computer	11	19,570	2	2,595	21	50,270
Laptop computer	10	15,535	9	23,130	13	26,260
Computer components	—	—	1	300	22	14,835
Other computer equipment	2	450	4	5,340	55	71,775
Telephones	—	—	—	—	—	—

	Department		*Agencies*		*NDPBs*	
Item	*Number*	*Value (£)*	*Number*	*Value (£)*	*Number*	*Value (£)*
Mobile telephones	—	—	8	1,095	10	1,920
Pagers	—	—	7	450	1	65
Audio visual equipment	2	5,750	24	13,920	4	3,760
Office equipment	—	—	2	1,600	—	—
Other equipment	—	—	3	710	—	—
Vehicles and trailers	—	—	—	—	1	2,350
Protective clothing	—	—	—	—	2	155
2001–02						
Computer	—	—	19	12,510	2	5,275
Laptop computer	3	3,855	6	13,200	18	45,185
Computer components	—	—	—	—	1	1,000
Other computer equipment	—	—	3	3,180	—	—
Telephones	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mobile telephones	—	—	6	700	2	250
Pagers	—	—	14	860	—	—
Audio visual equipment	—	—	15	10,900	5	360
Office equipment	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other equipment	—	—	2	560	—	—
Vehicles and trailers	—	—	—	—	—	—
Protective clothing	—	—	—	—	—	—

Assets have been valued at cost, net book value or replacement cost depending on the circumstances of the individual case. Recoveries from perpetrators or others, eg insurance claims, have been netted off. Some incidents are still under investigation and final values may change.

Ministerial Transport

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he last used the railway service in connection with his official duties; what station he left from and what was the destination; and whether it is his intention to make greater use of the railways in future. [28097]

Mr. Byers: I last used the railway on Monday 28 January travelling from Newcastle to London King's Cross.

Arrangements for official travel are made in line with guidance set out in Chapter 7 of the Ministerial Code and the accompanying guidance document travel by Ministers, using the most efficient and cost effective mode of transport, and bearing in mind security considerations.

I last used the train for official travel on Friday 16 November from London St. Pancras to Derby.

EU High Speed Interoperability Directive

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the full cost of implementing the EU High Speed Interoperability Directive; and whether these costs are provided for in the £33.5 billion strategic plan allocation. [28554]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Under Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) on 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 192, and to the SRA strategic plan.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many rail bridges would have to be raised to enable Britain to comply fully with European interoperability directives. [30247]

Mr. Jamieson: None. The directives provide for derogations for projects whereby the existing loading gauge, track gauge and space between the tracks can be retained. Therefore, existing rail bridges built to the current loading gauge would not have to be raised. These derogations can be given by the member states; they do not require approval from the European Commission.

Forth Rail Bridge

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures are proposed to extend the capacity of the Forth Rail Bridge, as set out in the Strategic Rail Authority report. [29481]

Mr. Jamieson: The measures proposed include the introduction of new signalling on and around the bridge and work on other lines to divert freight trains from the route.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what equipment has been stolen from his Department since 1 May 1997; and what the approximate value of each item was. [26829]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 22 January 2002]*: The details are as follows.

	Department		Agencies		NDPBs	
Item	*Number*	*Value (£)*	*Number*	*Value (£)*	*Number*	*Value (£)*
1997–98						
Computer	5	8,200	2	6,100	10	10,000
Laptop	—	—	3	3,605	9	22,500
Computer components	9	3,400	—	—	—	—
Other computer equipment	2	200	6	2,880	36	28,980
Telephones	—	—	3	135	—	—
Pagers	—	—	—	—	—	—
Audio visual equipment	1	400	—	—	4	400
Office equipment	2	450	5	1,775	2	320
Other equipment	1	50	—	—	—	—
Vehicles and trailers	—	—	—	—	1	3,365
1998–99						
Computer	1	800	1	425	59	87,150
Laptop	1	1,800	8	8,000	6	11,705
Computer components	1	150	—	—	1	65
Other computer equipment	2	16,850	2	1,380	—	—
Mobile telephones	—	—	4	650	3	1,325
Pagers	—	—	1	65	—	—
Audio visual equipment	—	—	7	2,260	4	2,955
Office equipment	1	250	—	—	—	—
Protective clothing	—	—	—	—	6	660
1999–2000						
Computer	1	800	6	8,850	21	35,990
Laptop	1	1,250	3	6,800	7	14,801
Computer components	3	300	1	75	—	—
Other computer equipment	1	1,500	2	1,750	3	14,340
Mobile telephones	—	—	2	125	4	855
Pagers	—	—	2	115	—	—
Audio visual equipment	1	5,000	5	2,228	4	775
Office equipment	—	—	6	4,800	1	85
Other equipment	—	—	5	1,618	5	1,110
Vehicles and trailers	—	—	1	905	—	—
2000–01						
Computer	11	19,570	2	2,595	14	40,395
Laptop	10	15,535	9	23,130	14	26,285
Computer components	—	—	1	300	—	—
Other computer equipment	2	450	4	5,340	75	86,120
Mobile telephones	—	—	4	245	10	1,920
Pagers	—	—	1	60	—	—
Audio visual equipment	2	5,750	11	11,650	3	3,685
Office equipment	—	—	2	1,600	—	—
Other equipment	—	—	1	205	—	—
Vehicles and trailers	—	—	—	—	1	2,350
Protective clothing	—	—	—	—	2	155
2001–02						
Computer	—	—	19	21,510	2	5,275
Laptop	3	3,855	6	13,200	16	42,375
Other computer equipment	—	—	3	3,180	—	—
Mobile telephones	1	50	8	190	1	150
Audio visual equipment	—	—	13	10,570	5	360
Other equipment	—	—	2	560	—	—

Voluntary Organisations

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many grants have been paid to voluntary organisations based in the Buckingham constituency from the *(a)* road safety small grants budget, *(b)* Special Grants Programme and *(c)* Tenant Empowerment Grant Programme, indicating the (i) level of funding and (ii) date awarded in each case. [30050]

Ms Keeble: My Department has made no awards to voluntary organisations based in the Buckingham constituency from the road safety small grants budget and the Tenant Empowerment Grant Programme. Awards to be made under the Special Grants Programme for 2002–03 are due to be announced shortly.

Workplace Deaths

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many deaths at work there were in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* Buckinghamshire in each year since 1997. [30053]

Dr. Whitehead: The number of deaths of employees and self-employed people reported to the Health and Safety Executive and local authorities between 1997–98 and 2000–01 were as follows.

	Employee	*Self-employed*
(a) Great Britain		
1997–98	212	62
1998–99	188	65
1999–2000	162	58
2000–01[1]	213	78

[1] Provisional figures

	Employee	*Self-employed*
(b) Buckinghamshire		
1997–98	2	1
1998–99	1	—
1999–2000	3	3
2000–01[1]	4	1

[1] Provisional figures

Note:

Table *(a)* The figures for Buckinghamshire exclude the mining or railway industries, whose data are only available on a national basis.

Health and Safety Prosecutions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful prosecutions for health and safety cases there were (i) in the United Kingdom and (ii) in Buckinghamshire in each year since 1997; and what the average fine per offence imposed was in each year. [30054]

Dr. Whitehead: The number of successful and unsuccessful prosecutions by the Health and Safety Executive and local authorities for separate health and safety offences were as follows:

HSE

	Successful	*Unsuccessful*	*Average fine (£)*
(i) Great Britain			
1997–98	1,284	343	4,694
1998–99	1,512	247	4,861
1999–2000	1,616	486	6,820
2000–01[1]	1,493	584	6,250
(ii) Buckinghamshire			
1997–98	11	—	3,455
1998–99	7	—	5,450
1999–2000	8	3	1,875
2000–01[1]	17	15	5,824

[1] Provisional figures

Note:

'Unsuccessful' prosecutions includes a number of charges adjourned by the court.

Local authorities

	Successful	*Unsuccessful*	*Average fine (£)*
(i) Great Britain			
1996–97	323	41	1,463
1997–98	440	66	2,224
1998–99	337	87	4,098
1999–2000	322	90	4,595
(ii) Buckinghamshire			
1996–97	—	—	—
1997–98	—	—	—
1998–99	5	—	1,500
1999–2000	1	—	1,000

Note:

Local authority data for 2000–01 will not be available until April 2002.

Departmental Expenditure (Publications)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the expenditure of his Department on newspapers, magazines and periodicals in each of the last four years. [30100]

Dr. Whitehead: The expenditure on centrally procured newspapers, magazines and periodicals in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions for each of the last four years to the nearest £10,000 is as follows:

	£000
1997–98	280
1998–99	310
1999–2000	270
2000–01	310

Titles covered by these spending figures include daily newspapers, weekly magazines, trade and technical journal and official publications including *Hansard*. The figures relate solely to central procurement in the central Department and exclude spend managed in the line as well as expenditure on the part of [illegible] Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies. Compiling the corresponding data for non-centrally procured material would involve disproportionate cost.

Transport Infrastructure

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to change the financing of transport infrastructure investment to alter the balance between payment by funders and passengers once it is used and payment up-front. [29794]

Mr. Jamieson: In financing transport infrastructure projects we continually examine and keep under review alternative options, to ensure that we are providing taxpayers with value for money, within public expenditure constraints. These matters will be an important part of our review of our 10-Year Plan for Transport, which is being carried out in parallel with work on Spending Review 2002.

Departmental Sponsorship

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the financial resources and initiatives sponsored by his Department in the last 12 months for Dorset which are additional to the Government SSA grants. [29895]

Dr. Whitehead: For the financial year 2001–02 local authorities in the county of Dorset were provided with the following grants and borrowing approvals:

Housing

£

Authority	*Major repairs allowance (MRA)*	*Annual capital guidelines (ACG)*	*Disability facilities grant (DFG)*
Christchurch	0	291,000	126,000
East Dorset	0	509,000	194,000
North Dorset	0	593,000	98,000
Purbeck	826,000	466,000	97,000
West Dorset	0	866,000	199,000
Weymouth and Portland	0	380,000	122,000

Transport

Local Transport allocation to Dorset county council was £8.435 million comprising £2.628 million for integrated transport and £5.807 for maintenance.

Dorset Rural Bus Subsidy Grant allocation for 2001–02 was £739,801 and we also awarded the county £462,000 grant under the Rural Bus Challenge bidding round for a scheme spanning the financial years 2001–02 to 2003–04.

Travel Plan Co-ordinators were allocated £30,000 per year, starting June 2001 going though to March 2004.

Regional Development Agency

The South West of England Regional Development Agency planned spending for Dorset in 2001–02 totals £1,773,260. This includes some spending in Poole and Bournemouth on its Business Recovery Fund and Skills Development Fund which has not been separated out.

Local Authority Policies

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what effort he has made to encourage local authorities to be more *(a)* family friendly and *(b)* sensitive to caring responsibilities in order to attract and retain women representatives; and if he will make a statement. [29970]

Dr. Whitehead: It is for local authorities rather than central Government to establish their own terms and conditions for councillors. We would hope that in doing so they will take into account the need to be family friendly and to attract and retain female councillors, as well as members from all sections of society.

The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) Regulations 2001 allow local authorities to pay allowances to members for expenses of arranging for the care of their children or other dependants while carrying out their council duties.

House Fires

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people died in house fires in each of the last five years for which figures are available in the age groups *(a)* 0 to 18, *(b)* 19 to 40, *(c)* 41 to 65 and *(d)* over 65 years. [29752]

Dr. Whitehead: The table shows the number of people who have died in dwelling[1] fires attended by local authority fire brigades in the United Kingdom from 1996 to 2000[2].

[1] Dwellings are defined as buildings occupied by households, excluding hotels, hostels and residential institutions. They include caravans, houseboats and other non-building structures used solely as a permanent dwelling.

[2] 2000 data are estimated, and are subject to revision as later information from inquests and death certificates confirming cause of death is received.

	Age group			
	Under 18	*19–40*	*41–65*	*Over 65*
1996	76	99	180	206
1997	68	113	145	234
1998	74	124	133	181
1999	45	90	136	183
2000[2]	40	87	140	172

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people died in fires in houses of multiple occupation in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [29753]

Dr. Whitehead: The table shows the number of people who have died in fires in multiple occupancy dwellings[1] attended by local authority fire brigades in the United Kingdom from 1996 to 2000.

[1] Dwellings are defined as buildings occupied by households, excluding hotels, hostels and residential institutions. They also include caravans, houseboats and other non-building structures used solely as a permanent dwelling.

	Number of deaths
1996	209
1997	201
1998	204
1999	171
2000[1]	153

[1] 2000 data are estimated, and are subject to revision as later information from inquests and death certificates confirming cause of death is received.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action he is taking to reduce the number of fires in houses of multiple occupation. [29754]

Dr. Whitehead: The Housing (Fire Safety in Houses in Multiple Occupation) Order 1997 requires that local authorities ensure that adequate means of escape and other fire precaution equipment are provided in all houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) of at least three storeys. Local authorities are encouraged to use their discretionary powers to enforce adequate means of escape and other precautions in other types of HMOs. A local authority will not register an HMO under a control scheme applying to its district unless it is satisfied that adequate means of escape from fire and other precautions have been provided.

The Home Energy Conservation Bill currently before Parliament would provide for a mandatory control scheme for HMOs of certain categories. When parliamentary time allows, all HMOs will be covered by the new housing condition regime, the Housing Health and Safety Ratings System (HHSRS). This risk assessment based system will give greater flexibility to local authorities in dealing with the potential risk of fires in individual HMOs and in enforcing remedies, than under the existing system.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* deaths and *(b)* injuries were caused by fire in domestic homes by constituency in each of the past five years. [30630]

Dr. Whitehead: The table shows the number of deaths and injuries in dwelling fires for each local authority brigade area in the United Kingdom from 1996 to 2000. Data are not available centrally below brigade area level; therefore separate figures cannot be supplied for each constituency.

Deaths and injuries in dwelling[1] fires by brigade area, United Kingdom, 1996–2000

	1996		*1997*		*1998*		*1999*		*2000[2]*	
Brigade area	*Deaths*	*Injuries*	*Deaths*	*Injuries*	*Deaths*	*Injuries*	*Deaths*	*Injuries*	*Deaths*	*Injuries*
Avon	3	167	4	174	4	178	8	189	4	177
Bedfordshire	6	49	3	53	4	71	1	52	5	66
Berkshire	12	99	5	107	7	96	3	126	5	95
Buckinghamshire	4	90	7	81	2	85	4	112	7	112
Cambridgeshire	9	120	4	125	2	135	3	113	3	108
Cheshire	8	218	11	170	7	212	8	189	6	215
Cleveland	5	141	10	176	2	189	3	131	1	136
Cornwall	1	86	6	74	3	76	3	66	4	99
Cumbria	3	75	4	95	5	97	3	88	3	76
Derbyshire	5	184	7	156	8	152	7	132	9	145
Devon	6	211	4	279	6	266	4	232	7	279
Dorset	8	60	5	58	1	83	8	74	1	110
Durham	3	118	9	129	4	121	9	103	6	99
East Sussex	7	191	7	182	8	157	5	158	3	136
Essex	13	200	14	211	6	234	6	267	10	292
Gloucestershire	5	91	4	76	2	78	1	76	2	73
Hampshire	15	239	5	208	8	283	9	198	9	209
Hereford and Worcester	1	123	6	130	4	128	3	106	3	83
Hertfordshire	10	136	10	144	7	129	4	154	6	156
Humberside	8	261	7	217	10	229	5	264	7	204
Isle of Wight	1	29	1	18	1	22	0	15	0	22
Kent	12	239	7	268	5	278	5	244	9	234
Lancashire	19	487	22	538	15	439	15	490	17	497
Leicestershire	10	123	4	147	9	125	3	93	4	117
Lincolnshire	4	100	2	84	7	77	3	101	4	78
Norfolk	2	129	5	144	1	154	5	172	8	137
North Yorkshire	7	131	7	126	8	148	4	112	2	129
Northamptonshire	3	115	8	144	8	131	5	146	3	141
Northumberland	0	53	3	44	1	51	2	45	1	62
Nottinghamshire	11	241	16	324	10	257	8	295	3	287
Oxfordshire	10	125	4	76	8	121	5	155	1	135
Shropshire	1	72	3	61	0	61	1	60	8	73
Somerset	5	56	4	46	1	77	0	50	1	51
Staffordshire	7	218	10	233	8	305	7	241	8	211
Suffolk	0	108	6	87	6	76	1	103	4	64
Surrey	4	170	5	104	6	140	3	102	6	171
Warwickshire	1	51	2	57	4	36	2	57	6	59
West Sussex	2	125	5	121	4	123	7	138	3	153
Wiltshire	7	76	4	81	0	100	1	79	0	77
Greater Manchester	24	1,378	29	1,676	24	1,761	29	1,630	22	1,496
Merseyside	19	791	10	856	21	860	8	884	21	816
South Yorkshire	11	268	6	262	12	268	11	230	10	259
Tyne and Wear	12	370	5	428	16	361	5	324	5	347
West Midlands	19	744	16	767	19	776	22	737	26	633
West Yorkshire	35	678	24	707	23	652	20	622	22	611
Greater London	70	1,540	92	1,528	66	1,540	65	1,426	45	1,466
North Wales	7	197	5	184	10	187	5	197	3	159
Mid and West Wales	8	133	9	197	5	189	5	239	14	261
South Wales	18	334	16	394	15	369	11	380	8	359
Northern Ireland	7	503	26	488	24	443	27	431	13	417
Strathclyde	56	902	42	1,011	48	993	40	951	39	1,050
Highlands and Islands	7	43	5	55	8	65	1	64	3	47
Grampian	9	143	7	147	5	173	4	161	5	201
Tayside	4	132	3	98	5	132	5	168	5	160

Deaths and injuries in dwelling[1] fires by brigade area, United Kingdom, 1996–2000

Brigade area	*1996*		*1997*		*1998*		*1999*		*2000*[2]	
	Deaths	*Injuries*	*Deaths*	*Injuries*	*Deaths*	*Injuries*	*Deaths*	*Injuries*	*Deaths*	*Injuries*
Lothian and Borders	6	312	8	351	2	317	14	453	12	350
Fife	8	114	2	110	4	92	10	92	3	88
Central	6	67	4	59	2	60	3	86	0	71
Dumfries	0	33	3	30	2	21	4	21	0	32

[1] Dwellings are defined as buildings occupied by households, excluding hotels, hostels and residential institutions. They also include caravans, houseboats and other non-building structures used solely as a permanent dwelling.

[2] 2000 data are estimated, and are subject to revision as later information from inquests and death certificates confirming cause of death is received.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* deaths and *(b)* injuries were caused by fires in council-owned domestic homes by local authority in each of the past five years. [30631]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested is not available centrally.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what initiatives are being pursued to promote the use of sprinkler systems in domestic houses; and if he will make a statement. [30632]

Dr. Whitehead: The Government are committed to reducing the number of accidental dwelling fire deaths. To underpin this commitment we have set a target to reduce preventable dwelling fire deaths by 20 per cent. by 31 March 2004. We aim to achieve this reduction through greater efforts in educating householders, by means of publicity campaigns, about what measures they can take to make their home safer from fire.

It has been our policy for some time that smoke alarms have a vital role to play in saving lives as they provide the vital early warning of fire and therefore help people to escape. Since 1987, when the cost of smoke alarms became affordable at around £5, we have conducted, and will continue to run high profile national and regional television campaigns promoting smoke alarms, which have proved very successful.

The Government nevertheless recognise that in some cases more direct protection from fire may be appropriate and therefore provides guidance on a range of other fire protection measures, such as domestic sprinklers. The issue of domestic sprinklers is included in the 'Toolbox' of education and publicity material developed by the National Community Fire Safety Centre for use by fire brigades and others. We also plan to produce later this year a publicity leaflet to inform the general public about domestic sprinklers.

Head of Media

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he received a recommendation for his Department's new head of media; and if he will make a statement on subsequent actions. [30624]

Dr. Whitehead: It is not our practice to disclose details of internal advice, in line with Section 2 of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Train Operating Companies

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much money has been *(a)* provided in subsidies and *(b)* received in paybacks from each train operating company in each financial year since April 1995. [30348]

Mr. Jamieson: The annual reports of the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) and, prior to 1999, the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising (OPRAF) provide detailed breakdowns of subsidy and performance regime payments by individual train operating companies.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much money received in paybacks from train operating companies in each financial year since April 1995 has been spent on the railways as *(a)* public resource expenditure, *(b)* public investment and *(c)* public expenditure supporting private investment. [30347]

Mr. Jamieson: Income from receipts to the Strategic Rail Authority, and formerly to the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising, cannot be attributed to any specific expenditure by those bodies.

National Rail Summit

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the targets set at the annual national rail summit in each year since 1998; and what progress has been made towards the targets. [30349]

Mr. Jamieson: National Rail Summits were held in 1999 and 2000. No targets were set at either summit, although the rail industry offered a number of commitments in 1999. A summary of progress against the 1999 commitments was included in the press notices for the 2000 summit.

Motorways

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many miles of motorway have been opened in each of the past 10 years. [30225]

Mr. Jamieson: Estimates of the change in the total length of the GB motorway network are given in the table.

(miles)

	Net change in length of motorway network
1992	19.5
1993	4.0
1994	17.6
1995	13.2
1996	23.0
1997	42.3
1998	28.5
1999	37.3
2000	10.7
2001	6.1

Note:

A change in road classification can reduce motorway length.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of Britain's motorway network is visible from CCTV and other monitoring cameras. [30235]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State is responsible for motorways in England.

Approximately a third of this motorway network is visible from CCTV and other monitoring cameras.

Rail Subsidy

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the public subsidy to the railways per passenger mile in each year since 1997. [30248]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to tables 1.1 and 4.1 of the Strategic Rail Authority's quarterly National Rail Trends bulletin for the historic series on rail passenger kilometres and Government support to the rail industry.

Standard Spending Assessment (Reigate and Banstead)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will provide written confirmation to the borough of Reigate and Banstead about the revision of its SSA allocation for 2002–03. [30245]

Dr. Whitehead: The Government's final proposals for distributing formula grant to local authorities for 2002–03 was laid before the House on Monday 28 January and the information on allocations has been made available to local authorities. The House will have a chance to debate the Government's proposals on Wednesday 30 January.

Automatic Train Protection Systems

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the total cost of introducing automatic train protection systems on the rail network. [30253]

Mr. Jamieson: A steering group jointly chaired by the Strategic Rail Authority and Railway Safety is presently evaluating the options for the extension of automatic train protection and their costs.

GNER Franchise

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the renewal process for the GNER franchise, post-the two year extension, will begin. [30242]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority will ensure that appropriate arrangements are put in place in good time before the new agreement expires in April 2005.

Departmental Relocations

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment his Department makes of the impact on the local economy when considering proposals for the relocation of Government Department buildings and buildings used by Government-sponsored agencies. [30438]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department is carrying out a programme of reviews of its future accommodation needs in each region for its own staff, its agencies and the Government offices for the regions. It is the Department's policy to provide any new accommodation by co-locating such bodies.

The objectives of a co-location project are to: reduce running costs; increase operational flexibility; increase disposability of accommodation; improve the working environment; promote sustainable development; deliver high quality design; and facilitate joined-up Government. A matrix of detailed criteria, used to evaluate options for co-location, includes the requirement for the new building to attain an "Excellent" BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method) rating, to be located in the centre of a town or city with good links to an integrated public transport system and to involve the redevelopment of a brownfield site, if available.

Each co-location project includes the Government office in the region and they are able to bring into account more detailed issues relating local impact.

Road Traffic Accidents

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* fatal, *(b)* severe non-fatal and *(c)* other non-fatal injuries have been sustained in road traffic accidents by (i) drivers, (ii) passengers, (iii) cyclists and (iv) pedestrians in each of the last 10 years. [30327]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested is shown in the tables.

(i) Driver and rider[1] casualties in Great Britain

	Fatal	*Serious*	*Slight*
1991	1,894	23,310	122,048
1992	1,815	21,936	124,169
1993	1,622	20,504	125,833
1994	1,609	20,935	131,168
1995	1,613	20,618	129,550
1996	1,670	20,427	137,823
1997	1,748	20,489	144,700
1998	1,712	19,519	147,002

(i) Driver and rider[1] casualties in Great Britain

	Fatal	Serious	Slight
1999	1,709	19,058	146,149
2000	1,772	19,127	150,224

[1] Excludes pedal cycle riders. Includes drivers and riders of all other types of motor and non-motor vehicles.

(ii) Passenger[1] casualties in Great Britain

	Fatal	Serious	Slight
1991	936	10,833	73,500
1992	863	10,684	74,905
1993	765	9,483	75,713
1994	745	9,970	77,398
1995	757	9,902	76,219
1996	728	9,871	79,025
1997	695	9,033	80,901
1998	645	8,586	79,939
1999	672	8,105	78,889
2000	653	7,744	78,118

[1] Excludes passengers on pedal cycles.

(iii) Pedal cyclist casualties in Great Britain

	Fatal	Serious	Slight
1991	242	3,947	20,628
1992	204	3,788	20,777
1993	186	3,611	20,290
1994	172	3,829	20,838
1995	213	3,754	20,978
1996	203	3,586	20,795
1997	183	3,409	21,044
1998	158	3,154	19,611
1999	172	3,004	19,664
2000	127	2,643	17,842

(iv) Pedestrian casualties in Great Britain

	Fatal	Serious	Slight
1991	1,496	13,528	39,006
1992	1,347	12,848	37,417
1993	1,241	11,422	35,465
1994	1,124	11,806	35,765
1995	1,038	11,259	34,786
1996	997	10,615	34,838
1997	973	10,053	34,575
1998	906	9,575	34,405
1999	879	8,955	33,063
2000	857	8,641	32,535

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many road traffic accidents there were last year involving children in *(a)* 30 mph zones and *(b)* 40 mph zones. [30775]

Mr. Jamieson: In Great Britain in 2000 there were 27,731 injury road accidents on roads with a 30 mph speed limit which involved a child casualty. There were 2,151 such accidents on roads with a 40 mph speed limit. These figures include accidents involving children aged under 16 and travelling as any category of road user, including pedestrians, cyclists and passengers.

Ordnance Survey Trading Fund

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make it his policy to set up an independent regulator to ensure fair competition in the Ordnance Survey Trading Fund's competitive tendering. [30299]

Ms Keeble: No. As a Government Department and Executive Agency Ordnance Survey is already bound by the European Commission Public Procurement Regulations for all contracts over the agreed threshold. In addition, all tenders are subject to UK Government regulations on competitive tendering.

Construction Industry (Scotland)

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many accidents resulting in *(a)* fatalities, *(b)* serious injury and *(c)* minor injury have taken place in the construction industry in Scotland during (i) 2001, (ii) 2000 and (iii) 1999, broken down by geographical area. [30328]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Local Authority Best Value Regime

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will publish the three-month reassessment of Best Value. [29904]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May).

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the review of Best Value will be completed; and for what reason the original deadline of 31 December 2001 was not met. [30215]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* I announced on 1 October 2001 a review of the Best Value regime for local authorities aimed at improving the quality of services. A review group, under the chairmanship of the Minister for Local Government, was set up to take this work forward. I asked the group to report by the end of 2001. In December 2001 the chair of the review group indicated that it had made good progress in a number of areas, but that it would like more time to consider carefully some significant proposals which had been put forward in mid December by members. I agreed to this and hope that the group can complete its work in the near future.

Speed Cameras

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many fixed-site speed cameras operate in the Metropolitan police area. [31021]

(2) how many safety cameras operating at traffic lights to detect red light running there are in the Metropolitan police area. [31023]

Mr. Jamieson: This information is not held centrally.

Bus Contracts

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many quality bus contracts have been approved and where. [30760]

Ms Keeble: Powers under the Transport Act 2000 relating to quality bus contracts were brought into force in October last year. No local authorities have yet brought forward proposals for quality contract schemes.

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list each Health and Safety Executive office building by *(a)* location and *(b)* number of people employed. [30962]

Dr. Whitehead: HSE properties and staffing are as follows:

Building	*Location*	*HSE staff*
Rose Court	London	574
St. Hugh's House	Bootle	172
St. Anne's House	Bootle	127
St. Peter's House	Bootle	258
Magdalen House	Bootle	326
Daniel House	Bootle	320
Merton House	Bootle	92
Cherry Lane Warehouse	Bootle	0
Belford House	Edinburgh	119
Pegasus House	Glasgow	82
Lord Cullen House	Aberdeen	107
Longman Road	Inverness	5
Sovereign House	Sheffield	78
Marshalls Mill	Leeds	112
Arden House	Newcastle upon Tyne	78
Grove House	Manchester	155
Marshall House	Preston	50
Victoria Place	Carlisle	11
Belgrave House	Northampton	64
Stoneleigh	Warwickshire	8
McLaren Building	Birmingham	122
Pearson Building	Nottingham	83
Intercity House	Bristol	61
Ballard House	Plymouth	18
Darkgate Buildings	Carmarthen	11
Marches House	Newcastle under Lyme	50
Haswell House	Worcester	23
Crown Buildings	Wrexham	17
Government Buildings	Llanishen	92
East Grinstead House	East Grinstead	71
International house	Ashford	21
St. Dunstan's House	London	128
Priestley House	Basingstoke	84
Stinsford Road	Poole	6
Baddow Road	Chelmsford	60
Kiln House	Norwich	27
Thorpe Road	Norwich	32
Cardiff Road	Luton	95
Broad Lane (HSL)	Sheffield	[1]291
Harpur Hill (HSL)	Buxton	[2]137

[1] Including 258 HSL staff

[2] All HSL staff

Notes:

1. The HSE staffing figures refer to the HSE permanent staff employed on 1 January 2002.
2. The figures do not include any contractors' staff or agency staff employed in the buildings.

Liverpool-Kirkby Tram Scheme

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the viability of Merseytravel's proposals for a tram scheme between Liverpool and Kirkby; and if he will make a statement. [30961]

Ms Keeble: My officials are currently considering the appraisal submitted by Merseytravel for a light rail line between Liverpool and Kirkby. I hope to make an announcement shortly.

Drivers (Smoking)

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his policy is on action to deter or prevent people from smoking while driving a vehicle. [30741]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department has no evidence to indicate that smoking while driving is a significant cause of road traffic accidents. However, the police do have powers to deal with those who fail to maintain control of their vehicles at all times or who drive carelessly or dangerously. Failure to exercise proper control, and careless driving, carry maximum fines of £2,5000. The maximum penalties for dangerous driving are up to two years imprisonment, disqualification and an unlimited fine.

We will continue to educate drivers about the importance of remaining alert while driving. Rule 126 of the Highway Code deals with safe and responsible driving and highlights the need to concentrate and avoid distractions.

Bus Lanes

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what consultations he has had with organisations representing *(a)* pedestrians, *(b)* cyclists and *(c)* public transport operators regarding the use of bus lanes by motor cyclists. [31002]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department has had no specific consultation about the use of bus lanes by motor cyclists but is aware of a range of concerns about this use, especially among cyclists' organisations. The Department's advice does not promote motorcycling in bus lanes but we are carrying out research to see whether this should be changed. We would expect to consult organisations representing various road user groups if, following trials, any changes are proposed.

Road Building Programme

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the effect on the number of *(a)* fatal and *(b)* non-fatal accidents of the UK road building programme, for each year up to and including 2010; and if he will make a statement. [31004]

Mr. Jamieson: In England, the 10-Year Plan for transport provides the resources to enable central Government, the Highways Agency and local authorities, through their Local Transport Plans, to take action on road safety to support the Government's strategy for achieving its UK road safety targets. These targets are to reduce by 2010 the number of killed or seriously injured in road accidents by 40 per cent., and children by 50 per cent., compared with the average for 1994–98. Road building is expected to make a significant contribution towards achieving these targets. However, in England, local and central Government road building plans are not yet fully defined. In particular, on the strategic road network, the choice of specific schemes will depend on the outcome of the multi-modal studies currently being carried out. The road building programmes for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are devolved matters.

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the change in traffic as a result of the UK road building programme for each year up to and including 2010. [31005]

Mr. Jamieson: In England, the 10-Year Plan for transport includes significant investment in the strategic and local road network to tackle the problems of congestion, pollution, and safety. On the strategic road network in England, the choice of specific schemes will depend on the outcome of the multi-modal studies currently being carried out. But the increased level of investment in trunk roads in England is expected to result in 0.4 per cent. more traffic on all roads and 0.9 per cent. on inter-urban trunk roads in 2010. The 10-Year Plan as a whole is expected to reduce traffic growth in England between 2000 and 2010 from 22 per cent. to 17 per cent. on all roads and from 29 per cent. to 26 per cent. on inter-urban trunk roads. Responsibility for these matters has been devolved in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Executive Committee respectively.

Aircraft Noise

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions further to his answers of 5 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 243W, and 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 194W, on aircraft noise and night flights, when he will publish the Government's response to his Department's consultation on the control of noise from civil aircraft; and if he will make a statement. [31066]

Mr. Jamieson: Many of the proposals set out in our consultation paper "Control of noise from civil aircraft" (July 2000) concerned enabling powers relating to noise policy issues that will be dealt with in the air transport White Paper. There are also relevant provisions in the recently proposed EC Directive on "the establishment of rules and procedures with regard to the introduction of noise related operating restrictions at Community airports". Having examined the responses to the consultation paper in this context, we have decided that it would be more appropriate to announce conclusions on the enabling powers in the White Paper itself.

Responses to the consultation are available for inspection at the Department's offices. We shall shortly publish a summary.

Merchant Ships

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to ensure that crews on ships *(a)* registered in the UK and *(b)* sailing in UK waters comply with international safety standards. [30748]

Mr. Jamieson: International safety standards for seafarers are enshrined in the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping 1978, as revised in 1995, known as STCW 95. Those standards are implemented in the UK through the Merchant Shipping (Training and Certification) Regulations 1997 and the Merchant Shipping (Safe Manning, Hours of Work and Watchkeeping) Regulations 1997.

All Parties to the STCW 95 Convention have until 1 February 2002 to comply with the requirements of the Convention. The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) and the Merchant Navy Training Board (MNTB) have worked closely to ensure that all maritime training courses properly reflect STCW 95.

To comply with the revised international standards, and to revalidate their certificates under STCW 95, seafarers have to undertake further short courses in, for example, Advanced Fire Fighting and Proficiency in Survival Craft and Fast Rescue Boats.

Seafarers holding foreign Certificates of Competency will only be able to sail on UK registered ships if the country issuing the certificate has been assessed by the MCA to be of STCW 95 standard with training equivalent to that of the UK. The certificates of seafarers on foreign registered ships calling at UK ports are checked as part of the inspections carried out under the Port State Control regime.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to improve the recruitment rate of merchant ships' officers. [30749]

Mr. Jamieson: Recruitment is a matter for the individual shipping companies themselves. There are Government measures, however, to assist and encourage the training and employment of British seafarers. We provide financial support for seafarer training through the Support for Maritime Training (SMarT) scheme. Following a review of SMarT in autumn/winter 2000 and the receipt of EU state aid clearance, additional courses will be included in the scheme and levels of funding will be increased. We introduced the tonnage tax option as part of the Finance Act 2000, a key feature of which is a minimum training obligation. This feature is unique to the UK, and requires each shipping company opting for the tonnage tax to recruit and train one officer trainee each year for every 15 officer posts in its fleet and also give consideration to employment and training opportunities for ratings.

Train Reliability

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the reliability of each train operating company over the last six months. [31122]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* Performance figures and commentary are published in the Strategic Rail Authority's six monthly "On Track" publication, copies of which are placed in the Library of the House. The latest edition, published in December 2001, covers the six months from 1 April to 13 October 2001.

Railway Capacity

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 871W, what is the *(a)* current and *(b)* expected capacity of the (i) London to Southampton and London to Portsmouth and (ii) Bristol to Portsmouth railway lines; by when the expected capacity will be achieved; and if he will ensure that new franchise arrangements for Island Line provide for effective connections with the London to Portsmouth line, even when its services run late. [31089]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* There is no simple measure of capacity on the network. The part of the network used by the South West Trains franchise is congested in a few particular areas, especially where lines converge in the approaches to London. Under the proposed new franchise agreement Stagecoach plan a revision of the timetable to permit an increase in the number of trains into Waterloo from September 2003. Some new trains have already been introduced by SWT, providing additional capacity, and a further tranche are due to enter service at the end of 2002. In the longer term work to lengthen platforms will allow longer trains to operate on the Southampton and Portsmouth routes.

The SRA are developing a franchise proposition for the replacement of the Island Line franchise. The authority are well aware of the importance of connections between trains, ferries and buses.

Combined Fire Authorities

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will take steps to separate precepting for combined fire authorities. [31282]

Dr. Whitehead: We announced at paragraph 6.53 of Part II of the Local Government White Paper "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services", published on 11 December, proposals to take the legislative steps necessary to make combined fire authorities in England major precepting authorities. A copy of the White Paper is in the Library and is also available on the DTLR website: http://www.local-regions.dtlr.gov.uk/sll/index.htm.

Rail Services (Romford)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on rail services to Romford since June 2001. [29448]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) does not monitor performance by route group. However, the SRA's public performance measure indicates that 85.6 per cent. of First Great Eastern services, which include services to and from Romford, arrived at their destination within five minutes of timetable between July and October 2001. As part of the SRA's franchise replacement process it is intended that the First Great Eastern franchise will form part of a new Greater Anglia franchise from 2004. This will provide an opportunity for the Strategic Rail Authority to secure improvements in performance and quality of service for passengers.

Air Transport Industry (Insurance Costs)

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of the level of insurance costs imposed on the air transport industry following the events of 11 September. [31285]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government are aware that following the events of 11 September there has been a significant increase in the cost of insurance for the air transport industry. This is primarily a commercial matter, and we would expect the increased premia to be passed on to users of air transport services in the normal way.

In the case of third-party war and terrorism risks there was a market failure, with the insurance industry withdrawing cover above minimum levels in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks. In response the Government intervened to guarantee levels of cover for airlines up to the amounts held prior to 11 September, with similar arrangements for airports and ground service providers. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury has recently announced that this scheme, as subsequently amended, will be carried over till 20 March 2002.

Liquefied Petroleum Gas

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the numbers of *(a)* private and *(b)* commercial vehicles running on LPG fuel in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001, *(f)* 2002 and *(g)* 2003. [31278]

Mr. Jamieson: DVLA statistics do not provide a breakdown by fuel type, only vehicles that are dedicated gas or petrol/gas combinations. The following table shows the number of vehicles that are dedicated gas or petrol/gas combination, by tax class as they do not distinguish between private and commercial usage. DVLA statistics also do not distinguish between Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) and Natural Gas vehicles. However, cars and light commercial vehicles tend to use LPG, while heavier vehicles use natural gas:

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Private and Light Goods	6,689	10,121	14,421	21,098	23,533
Buses	31	53	97	121	140
Goods vehicles	75	93	141	171	227
Special vehicles	1,327	1,281	1,310	1,394	1,413
Other vehicles	965	986	1,041	1,184	1,381
Total	9,087	12,534	17,010	23,968	26,694

But this understates the number of vehicles because not all conversions to alternative fuelling are notified to DVLA.

There are currently estimated to be around 50,000 LPG vehicles in the UK. Motorists are converting to LPG at an increasing rate, with the number expected to increase by about 25,000 per year over the next two years, prompted by the Government grants available, and the fact that low-cost LPG fuel is now available in all areas of the country.

Community Transport Schemes

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he plans to announce the funding arrangements that will apply to community transport schemes in south Gloucestershire for April 2002. [31258]

Ms Keeble: South Gloucestershire council is able to bid for Government funding to support community transport schemes under either the urban or rural bus challenge competitions. In addition, funding allocated to it from the rural bus subsidy grant scheme may be used for continuing support of a project initially supported by a rural bus challenge award.

The results of the latest round of the Rural Bus Challenge, including an award of £578,827 to the authority for the continuation of the Vale Link and Yate and Sobbury community transport schemes in south Gloucestershire, were announced on 25 January.

We will be introducing shortly arrangements under which for the first time a wide range of community transport services will become eligible for the receipt of fuel duty rebate.

Highways Agency

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the Highways Agency Business Plan for 2002–03 will be published; and what targets he has set. [31848]

Mr. Jamieson: The Highways Agency's Business Plan, which contains the targets set for 2002–03, will be published tomorrow. A copy will be placed in the House Library.

These targets are:

In order to deliver best value for money, maintain the network so that the proportion requiring maintenance within the next year is held between 7 per cent. and 8 per cent.

98 per cent. of lanes available at all times.

90 per cent. of routine maintenance done outside of peak hours.

complete the remaining congestion Early Action schemes in the programme.

Achieve at least 48 of 51 major scheme milestones.

Reduce the number of people killed and seriously injured on trunk roads in 2002–03 by at least 555 to 4,436 (compared with the 1994–98 average of 4,991).

Reduce the slight casualty rate to no more than 21.41 slight casualties per hundred million vehicle kilometres (compared with the 1994–98 average of 22.14).

Complete the remaining safety Early Action schemes in the programme.

Introduce a national HA Traffic Control Centre.

Achieve an average score of no less than 7.5 on the agency's Road User Satisfaction survey (on a scale of 1–10 with one being extremely poor and 10 being extremely good).

Install automatic hold up warning systems on at least 200 km of motorway length.

Achieve an average of at least 95 per cent. across four environmental sub-indicators.

Percentage of residential properties owned that are vacant not to exceed 15 per cent. of the residential portfolio.

Percentage of vacant habitable properties empty for more than six months at the end of the year not to exceed 3 per cent. of the residential portfolio.

Town and Country Planning

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many notifications the Environment Agency has received from *(a)* Buckinghamshire county council and *(b)* Aylesbury Vale district council under the requirements of the Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995. [30060]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

In the period from 1 January to 31 December 2001 the Environment Agency has been consulted under the Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995 21 times by Buckinghamshire county council, and 87 times by Aylesbury Vale district council.

PRIME MINISTER

Data Privacy and Sharing

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Prime Minister when he intends to publish the PIU report on data privacy and sharing. [31503]

The Prime Minister: The Performance and Innovation Unit's report on privacy and data sharing will be published in due course.

Crime Reduction

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) of 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 539, if he will publish the text of the letter to which he referred and state whether it had been *(a)* drafted, *(b)* signed and *(c)* sent at the time of his answer. [31267]

The Prime Minister: The letter from my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley), the Minister of State, Home Office, to which I referred on 9 January, had been written, signed personally by the Minister and a copy sent to the newspaper concerned at the time of my answer. A copy of the letter is being placed in the Library.

Whittington Hospital

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Green) of 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 880, if he will *(a)* give the name and title of the author or authors of the letter to which he refers, *(b)* publish the text and *(c)* state what assistance in the drafting of the letter was (i) offered by and (ii) received from Government officials, including special advisers and NHS press officers. [31266]

The Prime Minister: The letter referred to is the property of the Whittington hospital NHS trust. I note that the letter sent by the trust to the *Evening Standard* was published on 24 January.

No Government officials, including special advisers, gave any assistance in the drafting of this letter. NHS press officers are employed, and report to, the trusts themselves.

Saville Inquiry

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) of 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 289, if the cost he quoted of the inquiry included *(a)* the cost to the Ministry of Defence, *(b)* the anticipated future costs to the Northern Ireland Office, *(c)* the cost of Lord Saville's salary and *(d)* the cost of legal aid; and if he will make a statement of the total cost (i) to date and (ii) which is anticipated. [31268]

The Prime Minister: The figure of £52 million in my previous answer was the expenditure by the inquiry to 7 January 2002. That cost is met by the Northern Ireland Office. For the anticipated future cost, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) on 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 40W.

For details of the cost to the Ministry of Defence, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Minister of State for the armed forces to the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) on 14 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 2–3W. Other Departments have incurred some costs as a result of a relatively small amount of staff time being deployed on these issues.

Lord Saville continues to receive his salary as a Law Lord, which is met from the Consolidated Fund.

No expenditure has fallen to the budget of the Legal Aid scheme in Northern Ireland as a result of the Bloody Sunday inquiry.

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on plans for celebrating the 50th anniversary of Her Majesty the Queen's Accession to the Throne. [31611]

The Prime Minister: I welcome this opportunity, on behalf of the whole nation, to offer the warmest congratulations to the Queen on the 50th anniversary of her Accession, and to express gratitude for half a century of devoted service to the people of the United Kingdom.

I announced on 23 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 294W, that Her Majesty will attend a National Thanksgiving Service in St. Paul's Cathedral on Tuesday 4 June 2002. That day will be a bank holiday in place of the spring bank holiday, which would otherwise fall on 27 May. Monday 3 June will be an additional bank holiday for the Golden Jubilee.

On 22 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 7W, I announced the main features of the Queen's United Kingdom programme of Golden Jubilee visits and on 3 August my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport announced in a news release the main celebrations planned in central London over the Golden Jubilee weekend of 1 to 4 June 2002.

I am pleased to be able to announce the programme of visits and other events throughout the United Kingdom from May to August this year, which will be undertaken by Her Majesty and His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh, to mark the Golden Jubilee.

As I announced on 22 June 2001, the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will be travelling as widely as possible around the United Kingdom during this year, including visits to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, although they will not be able to visit all cities and counties. However, their itinerary will enable them to meet as many people as possible throughout the country.

The programme is as follows:

29 April—the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will attend a Dinner at No. 10 Downing street

30 April—the Queen, accompanied by the Duke of Edinburgh, will attend a Session of the Joint Houses of Parliament in Westminster Hall at which Her Majesty will address both Houses

South West of England (Cornwall, Devon, Somerset and Bath)

1 May—Falmouth; Trelissick; Truro; Exeter

2 May—Taunton; Wells; Bath

North East of England (Tyne and Wear and County Durham)

7 May—Sunderland; Gateshead; Newcastle

8 May—Durham; Darlington; Stockton (the Duke of Edinburgh)

9 May—East London

South East of England (Buckinghamshire and Berkshire)

10 May—Aylesbury; Marlow; Bisham Abbey

16–17 May—the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will attend the Royal Windsor Horse Show

18 May—the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will take the Salute at "All the Queen's Horses", Royal Windsor Horse Show

20 May—the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will attend the Chelsea Flower Show

21 May—the Queen, accompanied by the Duke of Edinburgh, will open the new Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace

22 May—the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will attend an Arts Reception at the Royal Academy, London

Scotland

23 May—the Queen, accompanied by the Duke of Edinburgh, will attend a Scottish Service of Thanksgiving at Glasgow Cathedral

24 May—Falkirk; Edinburgh (including a Reception in the Palace of Holyroodhouse)

25 May—the Queen, accompanied by the Duke of Edinburgh, will open the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Edinburgh; the Queen will also host a Garden Party at the Palace of Holyroodhouse

26 May—the Queen, accompanied by the Duke of Edinburgh, will attend the General Assembly Service, St. Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh

27 May—Isle of Skye; Isle of Lewis; Wick

28 May—Aberdeen (including a visit to the Scottish Parliament, sitting at King's College Conference Centre, Aberdeen University); Dundee

29 May—Lauder Melrose

Jubilee Weekend

1 June—the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will host the Queen's Concert (Classical Concert) in the Gardens at Buckingham Palace

2 June—the Queen, accompanied by the Duke of Edinburgh, will attend a Jubilee Church Service, St. George's Chapel, Windsor Castle

3 June—Windsor and Slough

3 June—the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will host the Queen's Concert (Pop Concert) in the Gardens at Buckingham Palace, after which Her Majesty will light a National Beacon in the Mall and view a fireworks display

4 June—the Queen, accompanied by the Duke of Edinburgh, will attend a National Service of Thanksgiving at St. Paul's Cathedral, after a Ceremonial Procession from Buckingham Palace

4 June—the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will attend a lunch hosted by the Lord Mayor and the Corporation of London at Guildhall in the City of London

4 June—the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will attend the Golden Jubilee Festival in the Mall

4 June—the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will make a Balcony Appearance at Buckingham Palace and watch a Royal Air Force Fly Past

6 June—North London, followed by a Garden Party at Lambeth Palace

South East of England (West Sussex)

7 June—South of England Show, Ardingly

10 June—the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will give a Reception for Representatives of Different Faiths at Buckingham Palace

Wales

11 June—Anglesey; Colwyn Bay

the Queen, accompanied by the Duke of Edinburgh, will attend a Welsh Service of Thanksgiving at Bangor Cathedral

12 June—Dolau; Llanelli; Margam Park

13 June—Bridgend; Rhondda Valley; Newport; Cardiff (including a visit to the National Assembly for Wales)

15 June—the Queen, accompanied by the Duke of Edinburgh, will take the Salute at Her Majesty's Birthday Parade, Horseguards

17 June—the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will attend the Service of the Order of the Garter at St. George's Chapel, Windsor

17 June—the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will give a Dinner for European Sovereigns, Windsor Castle

18–22 June—the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will attend Royal Ascot

25 June—West London

26 June—the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will give a Dinner for Representatives of the Armed Forces, Windsor Castle

27 June—the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will visit the Armed Forces, Portsmouth and visit Portsmouth

West Midlands (West Midlands, Staffordshire and Warwickshire)

2 July—Solihull; Birmingham

3 July—Burton upon Trent; Stoneleigh

4 July—South London

5 July—the Queen, accompanied by the Duke of Edinburgh, will attend a Parade in the Gardens of Buckingham Palace for all Her Majesty's Body Guards and the In-Pensioners of the Royal Hospital Chelsea

9 July—the Queen, accompanied by the Duke of Edinburgh, will present Medals to the winners of the Queen's Golden Jubilee Poetry Competition for Schools, at Buckingham Palace

9 July—the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will give a Garden Party in the Gardens of Buckingham Palace, when guests will include those born on Accession Day

Yorkshire (West Yorkshire and the East Riding of Yorkshire)

11 July—Leeds; Wakefield (the Duke of Edinburgh); Bradford (the Duke of Edinburgh); Harewood House (Festival)

12 July—Beverley

16 July—the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will give a Garden Party in the Gardens of Buckingham Palace, when guests will include young people born since the 1977 Silver Jubilee

East Anglia (Suffolk and Norfolk)

17 July—Ipswich; Stowmarket; Bury St. Edmund's

18 July—Great Yarmouth (the Duke of Edinburgh); Norwich

18 July—the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will give a Garden Party for Norfolk at Sandringham House

23 July—the Queen, accompanied by the Duke of Edinburgh, will open the new Greater London Authority building

23 July—the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will attend a Gala at Covent Garden

North West of England (Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside and opening the Commonwealth Games in Manchester)

24 July—Macclesfield; Greater Manchester

25 July—Liverpool; open Commonwealth Games, Greater Manchester

26 July—Visit Commonwealth Games venues, Greater Manchester

30 July—the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will give a Garden Party in the Gardens of Buckingham Palace, when guests will include representatives of charities of which Her Majesty and His Royal Highness are Patron

East Midlands (Lincolnshire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire)

31 July—Scunthorpe; Nottingham

1 August—Leicester; Derby

4 August—Close Commonwealth Games in Manchester

North West of England (Lancashire and Cumbria)

5 August—Preston; Carlisle

5 August—the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will attend the Edinburgh Tattoo, Edinburgh Castle

7 August—the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh will give a Garden Party at Balmoral Castle.

These details, together with further information about other confirmed Golden Jubilee celebrations and events can be found on the searchable calendar of events being launched today on the official Golden Jubilee website at http://www.goldenjubilee.gov.uk/. The British Monarchy website at http://www.royal/gov.uk/ also has details of the Queen's programme and other royal engagements. These will be updated throughout the year as confirmation of events is received.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Portcullis House

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what the policy of the Committee is towards the supply of clocks for hon. Members' rooms and those of their staff in Portcullis House; and what advice has been received from the architect of the building. [29452]

Derek Conway: Clocks are not provided for hon. Members' rooms or those of their staff in Portcullis House as there are several displays of the time in every office. As far as I am aware, advice was not sought from the architect.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee how many clocks have been purchased for installation in hon. Members' rooms and those of their staff in Portcullis House; and at what cost. [29450]

Derek Conway: I refer the right hon. and learned Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (John Austin) on 24 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 1002W.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what contractual limits have been placed by the architect on the use of Portcullis House by hon. Members and their staff. [29449]

Derek Conway: No contractual limits have been placed on the use of Portcullis House by the architect; its use is a matter for the authorities of the House.

The House has, however, awarded a five-year commission with Michael Hopkins and Partners to provide advice on design issues when major changes are under consideration and, when appropriate, to carry out design work. In this way the House will best be able to retain the design integrity of this landmark building while making any adaptations necessary to meet long-term needs.

Offices

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee if hon. Members and their staff are entitled to configure their offices in accordance with their personal preferences. [29451]

Derek Conway: Any requests for reconfiguration of offices are considered on their merits. As a general rule, rearrangement of the loose furniture or provision of additional furniture from the standard range would usually be carried out where this presented no risks to health and safety and was available at a sustainable cost. More fundamental work, such as alterations to the fitted furniture, location of doors or arrangement of services, where this would be solely to meet the preference of the current occupant, would not be carried out.

If the right hon. and learned Member has any specific concerns, I would invite him to discuss them with the Serjeant at Arms.

Golden Jubilee

John Mann: To ask the President of the Council what plans there are for a parliamentary celebration of the Queen's Golden Jubilee. [29295]

Mr. Robin Cook: I am pleased to announce that, subject to approval by each House, it is proposed that Addresses be presented to Her Majesty on the morning of 30 April by both Houses of Parliament to celebrate her Golden Jubilee, in Westminster Hall. Further details will be announced in due course.

Mr. John Stonborough

David Winnick: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, how much Mr. John Stonborough will be paid. [30877]

Mr. Kirkwood *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* Mr. Stonborough is a contractor, not a salaried employee. The House does not publish commercially-sensitive contractual details.

David Winnick: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what role Mr. John Stonborough will play in the press presentation of the next Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. [30878]

Mr. Kirkwood *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* Mr. Stonborough is available to advise the House of Commons Commission on all aspects of its media relations, including the appointment of a Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. His advice is given in confidence.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Sport

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Education about the encouragement of competitive sport in schools. [31174]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has regular meetings with her counterpart at the Department for Education and Skills and numerous topics are discussed, including competitive sport in schools. The School Sport Co-ordinators network, in particular, will be working with schools and clubs on competition structures that will increase opportunities for children to engage in competitive sport.

Horserace Betting Levy Scheme

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement about the determination of the 41st horserace betting levy scheme. [31818]

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) whether it is her policy that the new funding scheme for the horse racing levy will be based on the sale of pictures and data to bookmakers; [30863]

(2) when a decision is expected on a new levy scheme for the horse racing industry. [30864]

Tessa Jowell: As the Horserace Betting Levy Board was unable to accept the Bookmakers' Committee's recommendations for the 41st levy scheme the matter, under statute, was referred to me to determine.

In considering the next scheme I have taken into account submission from the Chairman and independent members of the Levy Board, the Bookmakers' Committee, and the British Horseracing Board. In the interests of fairness and openness, these bodies were also given the opportunity to comment on each others' submissions.

I have also taken account of independent advice from Organisation Consulting Partnership on those submissions. A copy of their report is being placed in the Library and is being sent to those who provided submissions.

The criteria which customarily apply to the setting of levy schemes include the needs of horseracing and the capacity of bookmakers to pay. I can confirm that I have sought to reflect these considerations in reaching a view about how much bookmakers should be required to contribute in order to enable the Levy Board to give effect to the improvement of horseracing and its other statutory purposes.

The exercise of my responsibility to determine the 41st scheme has been made difficult by uncertainties currently facing the betting and racing industries. These include the effect of the introduction of a gross profits tax on betting, and the potential income for racing from its proposed sale of picture and data rights to bookmakers.

As to the former, it is difficult to judge the extent to which changes in bookmakers' turnover on horseracing betting will be reflected in their gross profits on that business. Although all recent levy schemes have been based on turnover it appears to me that, in current circumstances, it is not necessarily the fairest or most reliable indication of bookmakers' ability to pay the levy.

In all the circumstances, I am therefore minded to determine the 41st scheme on the basis of off-course bookmakers paying an average of 9 per cent. of their gross profits on horseracing betting. (As on-course bookmakers will not be directly affected by the tax changes I am minded to continue the flat fee arrangements of the 40th levy scheme). My officials will be working with the Levy Board so that the details of the scheme can be confirmed and promulgated in time for it to take effect from 1 April.

As to the sale of picture and data rights, it must be a cause of considerable disappointment that a full measure of agreement on the commercial terms which should apply has not yet been reached. Against this background of uncertainty and outstanding legal disputes I do not feel able to accept the Bookmakers' Committee argument that the 41st scheme should require only a nominal contribution from bookmakers from 1 May 2002. I have, however, taken account of the commitment from the British Horseracing Board that any payments in respect of licences to use pictures or data which are purchased by that date will be offset against levy payments which the bookmakers concerned are liable to make thereafter.

As a result of these uncertainties it is hard to forecast how much the 41st scheme, determined in this way, will yield; but, on the basis of forecasts previously provided by the betting industry, it would be in a range from £90 million to £105 million in 2002–03. A lower yield would reflect a lower level of profits. The scheme should enable both the betting and racing industries as well as punters themselves to share in the benefits flowing from the new tax regime; and enable the Levy Board to meet its own liabilities.

We would like to encourage the betting and racing industries to develop a modern relationship as business partners and move away from an adversarial approach. The levy scheme which I am minded to determine will give them a shared interest in developing their businesses to their mutual benefit. It is, however, clear that the levy system as a whole is flawed, and should not be needed if satisfactory commercial agreements between the parties can be made to work. We remain committed to its abolition, when parliamentary time permits.

East and Mexborough (Jeff Ennis).

Football

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she last met representatives of the Football Association to discuss progress with proposals for a new national stadium at Wembley; and if she will make a statement. [29748]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last met representatives of The Football Association on 13 December 2001. Since then and following her announcement to the House on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 291–93, DCMS officials have been working closely with The Football Association, WNSL and Sport England to monitor progress on the National Stadium project.

Golden Jubilee

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 624W, on the Golden Jubilee, what activities will take place during the Jubilee Weekend of 1–4 June. [30371]

Tessa Jowell: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, columns 758–59W. Further details will be announced as they become available.

Christian Broadcasting

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions she has had with representatives of Christian organisations on the subject of broadcasting. [31261]

Dr. Howells: Ministers have had no recent meetings with representatives of Christian organisations.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will (1) review broadcasting legislation to redefine access for Christian broadcasting stations; [31263]

(2) make a statement on what reasons there are for preventing the setting up of Christian radio and television stations. [31262]

Dr. Howells: The regulators have licensed a number of Christian radio and television stations using their discretion under the Broadcasting Act 1990 to award local analogue, satellite and cable sound programme and cable and satellite television service licences to religious bodies. The Broadcasting Acts do not permit them to award licences for national analogue, national digital or local digital sound programme and terrestrial analogue and terrestrial digital television services.

I am reviewing broadcasting legislation in the light of responses to the recent "Consultation on Media Ownership Rules" which announced that the Government will bring forward legislation to allow religious bodies to hold a local digital sound programme licence. The paper also invited views on whether the restrictions on ownership of other terrestrial licences by religious bodies should be relaxed, and we are currently considering the responses. The Government will publish details of its proposals in the draft Communications Bill which we expect to publish this spring.

DEFENCE

Project Falcon

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what budget cuts have been made to Project Falcon; and if he will make a statement. [31101]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 825 to the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne).

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if down selection for the Falcon project will be made on the basis of the original specifications set out in November 2000; and if he will make a statement; [28726]

(2) what role the new study required by 4 February will play in the down selection for Falcon; and if he will make a statement. [28727]

Dr. Moonie: There are no plans for the supplementary Falcon study to play a role in the current down selection process.

The current work on Falcon is examining a possible reduction in the number of competing consortia prior to the assessment phase but competition will continue. The down selection is being conducted on the basis of the original capability requirement set out in November 2000.

In keeping with the principles of Smart Acquisition, capability requirements may evolve to ensure that trade-offs between time, cost and performance are used to provide the best value for money and reflect user needs—final down selection to a single supplier will therefore take place against a requirement developed on this basis.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to ensure that capabilities of the Falcon system remain as specified in the operational requirements issued in November 2000. [28719]

Dr. Moonie: A key element of Smart Acquisition is an evolutionary requirements process that reflects the need to trade between time, cost and performance. Therefore, the Falcon capability requirement may evolve from that set out in November 2000, to ensure delivery of the most effective solution within cost and time constraints. We will, however, ensure that the competing consortiums are kept fully informed of the requirements against which their bids are being assessed.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what capacity for battlefield integrated system applications Falcon is specified to support; and if he will make a statement. [28721]

Dr. Moonie: Project Falcon will provide an operational level communications infrastructure. As such, it will support the transfer of data generated from any Battlefield Information System Application being developed as part of the Land Digitisation process.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the specification for the Falcon system will retain the requirement to avoid a single point of failure. [28720]

Dr. Moonie: We have defined Falcon system failure in capability terms by stating a required service availability, so providing contractors with the freedom to deliver efficient and effective solutions within time and cost constraints.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the down selection for the Falcon project will be made. [28722]

Dr. Moonie: We are currently examining a possible reduction in the number of competing consortia prior to the assessment phase. This initial down selection process is due to report in February 2002. In accordance with the principles of Smart Acquisition, it is planned that subsequent down selection to a single supplier will take place following completion of the assessment phase.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what provision has been made to adapt AFV 432 vehicles to carry the Falcon system; and if he will make a statement. [28723]

Dr. Moonie: There is no specific requirement for AFV 432s to carry the Falcon system. In the longer term, Falcon will be incorporated into armoured vehicles and this process will be aligned with plans to deliver new armoured fighting vehicles.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what encryption system has been specified as part of the Falcon project; and if he will make a statement. [28725]

Dr. Moonie: The Falcon project includes plans to develop a new generation encryption system to enable secure communication. The precise encryption system requirement has not yet been confirmed.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what provision is being made to integrate the Apache attack helicopter into the Falcon system; and if he will make a statement. [28728]

Dr. Moonie: On current plans, the secure voice and data communications infrastructure provided by Falcon will include Apache attack helicopter ground support facilities.

Defence Estates

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to achieve the 10 per cent. improvement in the condition of defence estates. [30833]

Dr. Moonie: The Strategy for the Defence Estate "In Trust and on Trust" sets out a provisional goal to demonstrate improvements in estate condition of at least 10 per cent. by 2005.

"The Stewardship Report on the Defence Estate 2001", which was published on 22 January, shows the baseline against which magnitudes of change year on year can be judged and reported. The report is available on the Ministry of Defence website www.mod.uk.

Animal Experiments

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many animal experiments were carried out at Porton Down in the last year for which figures are available. [31205]

Dr. Moonie: Dstl Porton Down submits annual returns to the Home Office detailing the number of procedures undertaken which involve the use of animals.

In the year 2000 a total of 11,985 procedures were returned to the Home Office. The figures for 2001 are expected to be available late February 2002.

NIBAT 2 Accommodation (Dungannon)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans exist to upgrade NIBAT 2 accommodation at Dungannon; and if he will make a statement. [31488]

Dr. Moonie: A contract has been let for installation of a number of additional portable accommodation units at Killymeal House, Dungannon to augment the current accommodation and improve the quality of life for the soldiers of NIBAT 2 who are stationed there on a six month roulement tour. In addition, existing accommodation is currently being painted and some minor refurbishment work is being undertaken, again to improve the quality of life for those stationed at Dungannon.

A400M

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he had with the German Defence Minister on the subject of the A400M during the meeting in Ashfield on Friday 18 January. [31290]

Dr. Moonie: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and the German Defence Minister, Herr Scharping, discussed a range of topics in a routine meeting held at East Midlands airport on Friday 18 January, including progress towards securing final Bundestag approval of the A400M programme. They both expressed the hope that this issue will be resolved quickly.

Common Missile Programme

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the Common Missile Programme Memorandum of Understanding. [31100]

Dr. Moonie: Yes.

Pensions

Lawrie Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give the latest estimate of the total cost of refunding tax to those retired Army personnel or their widows and widowers who are, or were, in receipt of a service invalidity pension. [31696]

Dr. Moonie: In my statement to the House of 23 January 2002, *Official Report,* columns 891–902, I estimated the total cost of refunding wrongly taxed Army pensioners at around £30 million. The latest Inland Revenue estimate is that, to date, it has refunded in the order of £6.5 million to eligible pensioners or their spouses. We believe that the majority of these pensioners or their spouses have already been identified but we recognise that there may be some beneficiaries eligible to claim where the pensioner is deceased. It is not easy to establish their number or the cost attached to such claims. Nonetheless, I would not expect the total to exceed £30 million, and based on the repayments that have been made to all of the cases that have been identified it is likely to be significantly less. Of those so far identified as having wrongly paid tax, only 14 have not yet had refunds.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the cost to the Armed Forces Pension Scheme of increases to future pension payments to bring them to the level which would have applied but for the pay restraint policy in the mid 1970s. [28724]

Mr. Ingram: A number of previous Governments have operated pay restraint policies that have affected the pensions of all public servants retiring at the time. No estimate has been made of the costs of increases to future payments to remedy these effects or that specifically relating to the pay restraint policy in the mid-1970s. Periods of "trough" are not clearly defined and we therefore see major difficulties in costing any remedial measures. Nonetheless, for the information of veterans organisations, we are looking to see whether it would be practicable to give a broad estimate of the costs that might be involved for the major periods at issue. However, it has been the policy of successive Governments that retrospective action to redress such issues would not be appropriate and we do not plan to change this policy.

Armed Forces Pay Review Body

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the report and recommendations of the Armed Forces Pay Review Body. [31723]

Mr. Hoon: The 2002 Report of the Armed Forces Pay Review Body has been published today. Copies of the report are available in the Vote Office and the Library of the House. I wish to express my thanks to the Chairman and members of the Review Body for their clear and wide-ranging report.

The AFPRB has recommended an increase in basic military salary of 3.7 per cent. for the majority of personnel and 4.2 per cent. for privates, lance corporals, captains and majors. The AFPRB has also recommended increases in the rates of additional pay (eg flying pay, submarine pay and diving pay) and in charges. The AFPRB has also recommended two Financial Retention Incentives to help address the issues identified by the Comprehensive Review of Aircrew Retention undertaken with HM Treasury and external consultants last year.

The additional cost to the Defence budget will be £236 million. This will be met within existing departmental expenditure limits.

The AFPRB's recommendations are to be accepted in full, with implementation effective from 1 April 2002.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions the Armed Forces Pay Review Body has taken into account the non-pensionability of specialist pay when setting rates of specialist pay in each of the last five years. [28718]

Mr. Ingram: As with all the areas covered by its remit, the Armed Forces Pay Review Body recommends the rate it believes appropriate in the light of all the evidence and its terms of reference.

Export Licences

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how the MOD Form 680 procedure functions; and how it relates to final licensing decisions; [29436]

(2) how many export licence applications were considered under the MOD Form 680 procedure in each of the past five years; and how many received a positive response; [29437]

(3) what proportion and how many of arms export licence applications approved by the Arms Working Party under the MOD Form 680 procedure were subsequently refused an export licence in each of the past five years. [29438]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 14 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 57W to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner).

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment was given to sustainable development when the sale of the BAE Systems air-traffic control system to Tanzania was considered by the Arms Working Party under the MOD form 680 procedure. [28300]

Dr. Moonie: In July 1997, when the assessment took place, sustainable development was not a specific factor to be taken into account when considering F680 applications, although the impact on the economy of the recipient country was. Sustainable Development was included in the EU Code of Conduct on arms exports that came into effect in June 1998. However, as the F680 application for the Air Traffic Control System for Tanzania did not include cost information it would have been difficult to take any impact related specifically to the financing of the equipment into account.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the sale of the BAE Systems air-traffic control system to Tanzania was first raised with the Arms Working Party under the MOD Form 680 procedure. [28298]

Dr. Moonie: Siemens Plessey Electronic systems (now part of Alenia Marconi Systems) first submitted an F680 application relating to the supply of radar equipment to Tanzania in February 1993. A further application was submitted in July 1997, following a change to the specification of the original requirement.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the date was of the first involvement of the Department for International Development in considerations of the Tanzanian air traffic control system. [29444]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* The then Overseas Development Agency first heard of the proposal to sell air traffic control equipment to Tanzania in 1992. The Department for International Development (DFID) was first aware of an export licence application for the Tanzanian air traffic control system in 1997.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment was made by the Arms Working Party under the MOD Form 680 procedure of the adequacy of the Tanzanian air traffic control system for civilian purposes; and what the conclusions were. [29442]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* I am withholding this information under Exemptions 2 and 13 (Internal discussion and advice; and third party commercial confidences respectively) of Part II of the Government's Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the characteristics were of the Tanzanian air traffic control system that meant it should be considered by the Arms Working Party under the MOD Form 680 procedure. [29441]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* The F680 process is an informal process under which companies can obtain advice on the prospects for the approval of exports at the marketing stage. Any goods that are subject to Strategic Export Controls are eligible for consideration under this procedure.

Afghanistan

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent assessment he has made of the need for additional warm weather clothing and footwear for soldiers deployed in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [26641]

Mr. Ingram: After monitoring the climatic conditions in Afghanistan we issued a cold weather-clothing supplement to all troops deploying with the International Security Assistance Force. This supplement to Soldier 95 includes warmer and windproof clothing as well as boots more suitable for colder weather.

As with all operations, we will continue monitoring the climatic conditions and make the necessary changes to the equipment issued.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the safety of the first contingent of Royal Marines to be flown in to Bagram in Afghanistan in November 2001 while they were being deployed. [31106]

Mr. Hoon: My overriding concern is for the safety of British forces deployed in any theatre of operations. Although conditions on the ground at the time were fluid, I was satisfied that the deployment could proceed at manageable risk. The deployment entirely fulfilled its objectives.

Type 45 Destroyers

Mr. Hanco[illegible]: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if a decision has been made on which of the companies downselected for the supply of the medium frequency sonar for the Type 45 destroyers will be chosen; on what basis the decision is made; and if he will make a statement. [29804]

Dr. Moonie: BAE Systems Electronics, the Type 45 Prime Contract Office (PCO) announced on 18 January 2002 that Ultra had been selected as the preferred supplier for the Medium Frequency Sonar (MFS) for the Type 45 Destroyer. Ultra are teaming with the US sonar and combat system specialist EDO Corporation to supply the MFS-7000, a development of the proven sonar system supplied to the Brazilian Navy.

The tenders were of high quality and the Ultra bid was selected on the grounds of performance and programme risk.

Arms Sales (India)

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what role he is playing in the promotion of arms sales to India; and what assessment he has made of the impact of sales on the *(a)* dispute between India and Pakistan over Kashmir and *(b)* stability in that region. [29684]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* In accordance with the need to maintain a strong defence industry, which is a vital part of our strategic defence capability, it is Government policy to help promote legitimate UK defence exports in co-ordination with industry.

Assessment such as my hon. Friend describes are performed across Government as part of the case by case consideration given to export licence applications against the consolidated national and EU arms export licensing criteria.

MOD Guard Service

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made on the PPP to replace the MOD Guard Service. [30794]

Dr. Moonie: None. There is no general public-private partnership initiative to replace the Ministry of Defence Guard Service.

War Pensions

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what recent changes have been made to the statutory criteria to facilitate and determine the level and payment of war pensions; [30776]

(2) on what date the present statutory criteria were issued to facilitate and determine the level of payment of war pensions. [30777]

Dr. Moonie: The first War Pension Scheme was established in 1917. The scheme has undergone many changes, the latest being the introduction of extended appeal rights under section 57 of the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act 2000.

Gulf War

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what status Iraqi prisoners who were captured during the Gulf war had. [31271]

Mr. Ingram: Iraqi combatants taken prisoner during the Gulf war were classified as prisoners of war in accordance with the 3rd Geneva Convention 1949.

European Technology Acquisition Programme

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the European Technology Acquisition Programme Memorandum of Understanding. [31103]

Dr. Moonie: Yes.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Director of Public Prosecutions

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Solicitor-General what was the average time taken by the Director of Public Prosecutions to make a decision in Northern Ireland in the last 12 months; and when the Director of Public Prosecutions will issue his direction in respect of ref 875/01. [30207]

The Solicitor-General: Information maintained by the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland indicates that the average time taken between the receipt of a police investigation file and the issue of a direction as to prosecution is 38 days.

The director has sought the independent advice of senior counsel in relation to ref. 875/01 which he anticipates he will receive in February 2002. Thereafter, decisions as to prosecution will be taken as soon as possible.

NORTHERN IRELAND

David McCombe and Padraig McCracken

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland further to his answer of 30 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 135W, on David McCombe and Padraig McCracken, what the outcome was of complaints filed against the RUC concerning the arrest of David McCombe and Padraig McCracken in Belfast in December 2000; and if he will ensure that an assessment of the handling of this incident is included in the UK Periodic report under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. [29247]

Jane Kennedy: The Police Ombudsman's Office advises that the investigation of a complaint lodged on behalf of David McCombe and Padraig McCracken against the police has been completed. Following referral of the case to the Director of Public Prosecutions, who has directed no prosecution, the Police Ombudsman is now considering whether or not disciplinary proceedings should be brought.

The UK Periodic report under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is a general report where references to specific cases would not normally be made. Therefore it would be inappropriate to include an assessment of the handling of this case in the report.

Departmental Expenditure (Publications)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what his estimate is of the expenditure of his Department on newspapers, magazines and periodicals in each of the last four years. [30097]

Dr. John Reid: Details of the Department's (including its agencies) expenditure (£000) on newspapers, magazines and periodicals in each of the last four years are as follows:

Year	*£000*
1998–99	67.3
1999–2000	60.6
2000–01	56.6
2001–02[1]	53
2001–02[2]	[3]70.6

[1] To date

[2] Full year

[3] Estimate

RUC Training

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the numbers were and what the drop out rate was during RUC training programmes conducted in *(a)* 1982, *(b)* 1992 and *(c)* 1997. [29813]

Jane Kennedy: The table shows the number of recruits and drop out rate for each of the specified years:

	Recruits	*Dropped out*	*Percentage drop out*
1982	555	4	0.72
1992	420	2	0.48
1997	287	3	1.05

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many officials from his Department have attended the Environmental Appraisal and Integration into Policy training course run by the Civil Service College. [29032]

Dr. John Reid: To date, no officials from the Northern Ireland Office have attended the Environmental Appraisal and Integration into Policy training course run by the Civil Service College.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Nepal

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the components are of the planned short-term increase in development aid for Nepal; what proportion is *(a)* military, *(b)* policing and *(c)* intelligence-related; and if she will make a statement. [30341]

Clare Short: There is no short-term increase in UK development assistance to Nepal. The aid framework for 2001–02 is £20 million and DFID Nepal expects to spend all of this on development activities, including a number of short-term initiatives to deliver development benefits to people in conflict affected areas.

DFID Nepal has worked to assist the Nepal police to develop into a more open and accountable service, and we are discussing the possibility of continuing support for reforms and modernisation. We have not of course used development assistance to fund any military or intelligence-related activities. The UK has provided training and logistics support to the Royal Nepal Army through the Global Conflict Prevention Pool, which is jointly funded by MOD, FCO, HMT and DFID.

Zimbabwe

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when her Department stopped providing funds directly to the Government of Zimbabwe. [30399]

Clare Short: Our direct co-operation with the Government of Zimbabwe reduced substantially in 2000. In April 2001 I halted our remaining Government to Government programmes. One programme of capacity building for rural district councils was allowed to run until its planned end date of September 2001. We continue to support a Government initiative to promote the inheritance rights of poor women, but money for this does not go through the Government. We support activities where the principal partner is not central Government, but which operate within Government systems where they are the only means of providing direct services to the poor, and where we are satisfied that they remain effective and impartial. These include the national HIV/AIDS prevention programme where our support is partially channelled through the public health system, and funding to complete long-standing commitments to rural water and sanitation projects through local government.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the total external spend by her Department was on private finance initiative consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PFI consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by her Department over this period; and if she will make a statement. [31036]

Clare Short: DFID has no private finance initiative projects and we have not engaged external PFI consultants.

TREASURY

Euro

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 17 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 437W, if he will list the Treasury management units which are involved in the preliminary technical work for evaluating the five economic tests for membership of the euro; and if he will make a statement. [30700]

Ruth Kelly: A wide range of officials from several Treasury management units is contributing.

Spectacles

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to review the partial exemption from VAT of prescription spectacles; and if he will make a statement. [30880]

Mr. Boateng: Customs and Excise are to hold discussions with the optical industry about the implications of the recent legal rulings about the exemption from VAT of opticians' dispensing services provided at the same time as spectacles or contact lenses.

Eurozone

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 17 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 439W, on eurozone, if he will list the interest rate forecasts prepared by the Treasury which are not for publication; and if he will make a statement. [30666]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury makes interest rate assumptions for the UK and an aggregate for the G7 for the purposes of constructing the pre-Budget and Budget forecasts. In line with the practice of previous Governments, we do not publish the interest rate paths underlying the economic forecasts.

Adjudication Officer

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the full remit for the Adjudication Officer. [30366]

Dawn Primarolo: The remit of the Adjudicator for the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise is shown in detail in the booklets AO1 for the Inland Revenue and AO2 for Customs and Excise. Those booklets show what the adjudicator can and cannot do, copies of which are available from the Adjudicator's Office and most Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise offices; and is also set out in the joint Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise Service Level Agreement with the Adjudicator's Office. Under the agreement the adjudicator provides an independent adjudication service into unresolved complaints about the way in which Inland Revenue or Customs and Excise have handled a person's tax etc. affairs but excludes matters arising out of a commercial or employment contract, or matters relating to their tax liability, valuation affairs, national insurance contributions or any issue to be determined by any court or tribunal.

ECOFIN Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the outcome was of the ECOFIN Council held in Brussels on 22 January; what the Government's position was on each issue discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [30373]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I attended the ECOFIN on 22 January.

The incoming Spanish presidency and the Commission introduced their work programmes. In the ensuing debate, I stressed the need for the EU to pursue vigorous structural reforms in product, labour and capital markets to stimulate growth and create jobs.

ECOFIN adopted Opinions on the Stability and Convergence Programmes of Austria, Belgium, Finland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Sweden.

Ministers endorsed the Economic Policy Committee's report on Research and Development, and agreed that it should be sent to the March European Council in Barcelona. The Government support the report's proposals for boosting innovation in the EU.

The European Commission gave an oral update on the transition to euro notes and coins. ECOFIN welcomed the smooth progress achieved so far.

Ministers discussed the state of ratification of the Own Resources Decision. This was due to take effect from 1 January 2002, but has still to be ratified by some member states. The UK completed the process of ratification on 4 December 2001.

The European Commission gave an oral update on negotiations with third countries regarding the draft directive on the taxation savings. ECOFIN agreed a statement on Argentina, in response to the economic crisis there.

No votes were taken at the meeting.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many employers in Glasgow, Cathcart constituency his Department identified in 2001 as paying less than the national minimum wage to their employees. [31213]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Tom Harris, dated 29 January 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question about the number of employers in Glasgow, Cathcart constituency who pay their employees less than the national minimum wage (NMW). (31213)

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) does not collect information on the number of employers who pay their employees less than NMW rates. However, estimates of the number of jobs paid less than NMW rates are available for the United Kingdom and Government Office Regions on the National Statistics website at: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/themes/labour_market/pay_and_earnings/measuring_low_pay.asp

Estimates for Parliamentary Constituencies are not available.

Births, Marriages and Deaths

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what proportion of records of births, marriages and deaths held by the General Record Office have been micro-filmed; [31476]

(2) when he plans to make micro-filmed copies of births, marriages and deaths held by the General Records Office available to the public; [31475]

(3) what charges he will make for public access to micro-filmed records of births, marriages and deaths held by the General Records Office. [31474]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Registrar-General. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Dr. Murrison, dated 29 January 2002:

As Registrar General for England and Wales, I have been asked to reply to your recent questions on microfilmed records of births, marriages and deaths. (31474, 31475, 31476)

The General Register Officer holds paper copies of all records of births, deaths and marriages registered in England and Wales from 1837 to September 2001. Those for the remainder of 2001 are expected from registrars very shortly. All records up to and including those for 2000 have been microfilmed. Microfilming of birth and death records for 2001 is underway. However, an index is essential to find the appropriate record. Computerised indexes are only available for records dating from 1983.

On 22 January, the Government published the White Paper — 'Civil Registration: Vital Change'. It includes proposals on access to registration records and their computerisation.

Legislation is needed to implement these changes and will take at least two years. Phased implementation will follow. Charging arrangements will be determined as part of implementation.

Pension Tax Codes

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 15 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 224W, on pension tax codes, whether the rate of increase in the basic state pension supplied by the DWP is applied to all state pension income for tax code purposes; and if this will result in an amount in excess of people's actual state pension income being included in tax codes in years where the basic state pension is indexed by more than any additional state pension in payment. [31273]

Dawn Primarolo: Most pensioner tax codes are adjusted individually according to information provided by DWP about the taxpayer's state pension entitlement. In a minority of cases where information on a pensioner's state pension has not been provided by DWP, the estimated amount of state pension already included in the tax code is increased by reference to the appropriate percentage increase in state pensions as announced in the pre-Budget report.

This estimate may be incorrect where an individual receives an additional state pension. However as soon as the pensioner or the DWP bring the correct pension to the Revenue's attention their tax code will be altered and from that point on the pensioner will be included in the DWP's yearly update.

Insurance Premium Tax

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost was of collecting and administering insurance premium tax in 2000–01. [31550]

Ruth Kelly: The cost to HM Customs and Excise in collecting and administering insurance premium tax in 2000–01 was £2 million in net current expenditure.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of insurance premium tax on the ability of British insurance companies to compete against foreign insurance suppliers for British customers. [31549]

Ruth Kelly: Insurance premium tax applies equally to general insurance of risks in the UK, regardless of the location of the insurer.

Foot and Mouth

Brian Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many businesses have been allowed to defer their taxation payments to the Inland Revenue as a result of the foot and mouth crisis; what the total value is of these deferred payments; how many businesses have since been required to recommence payments on deferred taxes; and what the total value of payments is that have been received on these deferred taxes. [30548]

Dawn Primarolo: In the cumulative period 21 March 2001 to 20 January 2002 the Inland Revenue has helped 14,517 businesses by agreeing to defer £118.60 million tax and National Insurance contributions for mainly between three and 12 months. No businesses seriously affected by the FMD outbreak have been required to recommence payments of deferred tax and we do not have full details of payments received on deferred taxes. However, a sample review of these cases in December 2001 revealed that as much as £49.81 million had been paid voluntarily.

Bankruptcy Petitions

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the Inland Revenue's policy with regard to the use of *(a)* the London High Court and *(b)* local county courts to file bankruptcy petitions. [30367]

Dawn Primarolo: Where the Inland Revenue has to take bankruptcy proceedings to obtain payment of a tax debt, the proceedings are heard in the High Court in London.

Empty Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the *(a)* annual cost and *(b)* total value of the empty properties owned by (i) his Department, (ii) his agencies and (iii) other public bodies for which he has had responsibility in each of the last four years. [30082]

Ruth Kelly: The annual cost of the empty properties owned by the Chancellor's Department and the agencies in 2000–01 is estimated as £2,047,327. The total number of empty properties in this year was 30, but of these eight were disposed of in the year.

The total open market value attributable to vacant properties in 2000–01 was £15.311 million.

Data for the previous three years can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

PAYE

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people the Inland Revenue employed in *(a)* PAYE coding administration, *(b)* all other remaining aspects of PAYE administration, *(c)* all other taxation matters not covered in *(a)* and *(b)* above and (d) all other tasks not covered in *(a)* to (c) above in (i) 1979–80, (ii) 1996–97, (iii) 1999–2000 and (iv) 2000–01. [26861]

Dawn Primarolo: The total numbers of staff employed in the Inland Revenue on administering PAYE and on other tasks is included in the table.

	1999–2000	*2000–01*
PAYE	16,434	17,854
Other taxation	40,900	43,362
Other tasks	6,558	5,704
Total	63,892	66,920

The Inland Revenue is unable to provide detailed staff figures for the years 1979–80 and 1996–97 as records were not kept in the manner required and it would therefore involve disproportionate cost to provide this information.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total cost of administering the PAYE system of income tax in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1990, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 2000–01 at (i) current and (ii) historic prices. [26865]

Dawn Primarolo: The total cost to the Inland Revenue of administering the PAYE system of Income Tax in 2000–01 was £534.4 million. In 1999–2000 the cost was £485 million. This represents £498.6 million in current prices.

It has not been possible to provide the requested data for the years 1980 and 1990. This is because the Inland Revenue did not record PAYE work separately during this period.

Departmental Expenditure (Publications)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the expenditure of his Department on newspapers, magazines and periodicals in each of the last four years. [30093]

Ruth Kelly: The answer is as follows:

1997–98 total expenditure: £271,031

1998–99 total expenditure: £259,112.

Since 1999 expenditure on newspapers, magazines and periodicals has not been held centrally. Such information could be obtained only at disproportionate costs.

Tax Receipts

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average income tax and national insurance paid per tax unit was in each of the last four years. [26277]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates for income taxpayers and income tax liabilities can be found in Inland Revenue Statistics tables 2.1 and 3.3. The latest versions can be found on the Inland Revenue website http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk.stats/income_tax/it_t01–1.htm http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/income_distribution/pi_t03_1.htm. The average national insurance contributions per contributor are in the table:

£

	Average national insurance liabilities per contributor[1]
1997–98	1,000
1998–99	1,000
1999–2000	1,000
2000–01	1,100

[1] Estimates are net of contracted out rebates and exclude employer contributions.

Amounts (provided by the Government Actuary's Department) have been rounded to the nearest £50.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the regional breakdown was of the investigations carried out in respect of WFTC and DPTC in each year since the credits commenced. [23307]

Dawn Primarolo: The table shows the number of investigations carried out by the Inland Revenue on working families tax credit and disabled person's tax credit applications for the periods listed. This information is logged by postcode, and so any applications where a postcode has not been supplied have been listed 'region not identified'.

Government Office Region	*WFTC investigations*	*DPTC investigations*
Period 1 (1 October 1999 to 31 March 2000)		
North East	866	22
North West	1,512	35
Yorkshire and The Humber	1,739	28
East Midlands	1,159	22
West Midlands	1,140	32
East of England	948	14
London	1,046	10
South East	1,222	19
South West	1,254	21

Government Office Region	*WFTC investigations*	*DPTC investigations*
Wales	608	21
Scotland	1176	23
Region not identified	617	3
Total	13,287	250
Period 2 (1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001)		
North East	1,906	50
North West	3,678	138
Yorkshire and The Humber	3,093	80
East Midlands	1,535	46
West Midlands	2,636	94
East of England	1,336	65
London	1,421	47
South East	1,857	49
South West	1,962	54
Wales	1,619	89
Scotland	2,020	67
Region not identified	2,166	20
Total	25,229	799
Period 3 (1 April 2001 to 30 November 2001)		
North East	937	48
North West	1,786	111
Yorkshire and The Humber	1,310	51
East Midlands	881	35
West Midlands	1,367	71
East of England	851	37
London	824	32
South East	911	47
South West	886	63
Wales	769	52
Scotland	942	58
Region not identified	402	14
Total	11,866	619

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Standard Spending Assessment

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to reduce the variation of education standard spending assessment per pupil between local education authorities. [28450]

Mr. Timms: We are currently working up proposals for a reformed system of school and LEA funding for introduction in 2003–04. We aim to create a simpler, more transparent and fairer formula that reflects fairly, on the basis of up to date evidence, the needs of authorities in different parts of the country. We do not want there to be disparities in the formula which are not justified by the education needs of children.

In the meantime we are continuing to make significant increases in funding overall. In 2002–03 Education Standard Spending will increase by over £1.3 billion; Standards Fund grant will increase by almost £160 million: and direct grants to schools will increase by 2.75 per cent.

School Land Sales

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the Government's policy regarding the selling of school-owned land for development purposes. [29263]

John Healey *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* Land at maintained schools is owned and held by a number of different bodies depending on the origins and category of school in question. Normally, only the governing bodies of foundation schools own their school land. At voluntary schools, the site ownership is usually split between school trustees and the local education authority, although at voluntary schools that were formerly grant-maintained, governing bodies will own the land transferred to them from the local authority. Local education authorities own land at community schools. It is also the case that some governing bodies may own land that is gifted to the school, but such land is usually held on specific trusts.

Governing bodies of foundation schools have always needed the Secretary of State's consent before they could dispose of any land. At any other category of maintained school where governing bodies own land they may be required to obtain consent from the Secretary of State before they sell their land. In other cases the sale of land will be subject to the terms of the trust on which the land is held. The sale of trustee owned land at schools has always been governed by the terms of the trust under which the land is held.

Empty Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her estimate is of the *(a)* annual cost and *(b)* total value of the empty properties owned by (i) her Department, (ii) her agencies and (iii) other public bodies for which she has had responsibility in each of the last four years. [30080]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The estimate of *(a)* annual cost of the empty properties owned by (i) my Department, in each of the last four years is £304,000 in 2000–01, £270,000 in 1999–2000, £173,000 in 1998–99 and £180,000 in 1997–98.

The estimate of *(b)* total value of the empty properties owned by (i) my Department, in each of the last four years is £290,000 in 2000–01, £146,000 in 1999–2000, £133,000 in 1998–99 and £125,000 in 1997–98.

Note:

The Department's agencies and other public bodies do not own any empty properties.

Bidwell Brook Community Special School

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the level of funding for the Bidwell Brook Community Special School in Dartington from the targeted capital fund in 2002–03; and for what reason funding was not made available in this financial year. [30222]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* Up to the end of this financial year, where statutory proposals at special schools have involved building work, local education authorities have been able to apply to the Department for capital support through the Annual Capital Guidelines. Resources are held in reserve for later allocation and released as and when the local School Organisation Committee approves the proposals and the accommodation and building plans, including costs, have received a satisfactory assessment from the Department's building consultants.

In the case of Bidwell Brook, although the School Organisation Committee had approved the statutory proposal, substantial changes have had to be made to the building plans. These revised plans are currently with the Consultants for assessment. The resources in the reserve have now been fully allocated. The local education authority has accordingly submitted a bid to the Targeted Capital Fund for 2002–03. We expect to announce allocations by March 2002.

Teachers (Portsmouth)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent assessment she has made of teacher shortages in Portsmouth; what steps she is taking to improve the situation; and if she will make a statement. [30278]

Mr. Timms: Information on the number of teacher vacancies in local education authorities is collected once a year in January as part of the annual census of teachers and vacancies. In January 2001 there were 59 vacancies for full-time teachers in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools in Portsmouth. In recognition of the position in Portsmouth we have made £280,000 available directly to schools to fund local recruitment and retention initiatives. In addition, Portsmouth will also receive assistance through the £250 million Starter Homes Initiative which will enable teachers, as key workers, to purchase homes with the help of £10,000 free equity loans. We have also announced our proposal to accept the School Teachers' Review Body's recently announced recommendations, including a further above inflation pay increase of 3.5 per cent. for all teachers and that good, experienced, teachers should in future be able to receive a £2,148 pay increase on crossing the threshold after five years instead of seven. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set out our longer term proposals for teachers and teaching in a pamphlet, "Professionalism and Trust", published in November 2001.

Fast Track Teaching Scheme

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many applications there were from *(a)* teachers already in service and *(b)* others for the Fast Track teaching scheme by 31 December 2001 broken down by subject. [30281]

Mr. Timms: Applications to the second recruitment round of the Fast Track Teaching Programme were as follows.

Subject	*Number of applications*
Primary	217
Secondary	
Geography	36
Art	13
Science	149
Business and Economics	18
Design and Technology	19
English	118
Modern Foreign Languages	63
History	86
IT	30
Maths	79
Music	11
PE	4
RE	10
Unspecified	53
Total	906

Where applications arrived after the closing date of 31 December 2001, but had been delayed for reasons beyond the applicants' control, they were accepted up to 7 January 2002. Processing of applications from teachers already in service had not begun by 31 December 2001.

Specialist Schools

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what grants have been made from the Technology Colleges Trust in each of the last four years to contribute towards the £50,000 of sponsorship money needed by schools seeking specialist status, broken down by *(a)* year, *(b)* school and *(c)* amount; and if she will make a statement. [30420]

Mr. Timms: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave previously, 24 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1016W. More detailed information cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost.

Maintained Schools

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average cost is of a place in a maintained school for a secondary pupil between the ages of 11 and 16 years, including *(a)* the average spending per pupil needed to provide, maintain and equip school buildings and *(b)* the average administration cost per pupil, specifying the elements of capital spending and administrative costs that have been included in that figure. [30440]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* The information is not available in the exact form in which it has been requested, but the average level of total recurrent funding per secondary pupil is almost £3,700 in 2001–02 and the average level of capital funding per pupil (excluding PFI credits) is £230 per pupil.

Parent Survey Forms

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many parent survey forms were issued by Ofsted; what the average response rate was, and what the total cost was in the last year for which figures are available. [30836]

Mr. Timms: Parents' views are an important part of the evidence base for an inspection. To ensure that parents have an opportunity to express those views, a parents' meeting must be arranged by the school prior to an inspection. In addition, schools are invited to distribute the parents' survey form. The decision to do so is entirely a matter for the school and any costs associated with the survey are borne by the school. An analysis of the data held by Ofsted is currently being undertaken. Once complete the results will be made available to the House through the Library.

Examination Boards

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many complaints she has received about the performance of the EdExcel examination board *(a)* each month between June 2001 and 18 January 2002 and *(b)* since 18 January 2002. [31094]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* The number of complaints which the Secretary of State received about the performance of the EdExcel examination board (a) during each month between June 2001 and 18 January 2002 and (b) since 18 January 2002 is set out in the table:

	Number of complaints
June 2000	1
July 2001	1
August 2001	0
September 2001	3
October 2001	4
November 2001	1
December 2001	1
1–18 January 2002	1
18–24 January 2002	12

Teachers' Salaries

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills by how much the take home pay of a teacher with five years experience will increase after the rise of 3.5 per cent. in salary and London weighting. [31246]

Mr. Timms: A teacher in inner London with five years's experience would normally be paid on point six of the teacher's main scale, which will be worth £24,729 per annum on 1 April 2002. This represents an increase of £867 per annum over 1 April 2001. On 1 September such a teacher will assimilate to point M5 of the new main pay scale, and will earn £26,973 per annum. Take-home pay is subject to an individual's tax position.

Assaults on Staff

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many school staff were assaulted on local education authority property in each of the London local education authorities in each of the last five years. [31366]

Mr. Timms: The Department does not collect this information from local education authorities.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

India-Pakistan Border

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the number of anti-personnel mines on the India-Pakistan border. [31280]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are concerned by reports that both India and Pakistan are laying anti-personnel land mines (APLs) along the international border, and will continue to monitor the situation closely. We urge India and Pakistan to cease the deployment of land mines, to clear existing mines and to sign the Ottawa Convention. We continue to press for India and Pakistan to resolve the issues between them through dialogue.

The British Government are completely opposed to the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of APLs. We ratified the Ottawa Convention in July 1998 banning APLs, and announced a complete ban on their use by British forces.

Genocide

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made through the ICC on agreeing an international definition of genocide. [31265]

Mr. MacShane: The crime of genocide is defined in Article II of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. This definition is repeated as Article 6 of the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. The Rome Statute will come into force once 60 states have ratified or acceded to it; 48 States have done so to date including the United Kingdom.

Gibraltar

Mr. Terry Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department has had with the Government of Gibraltar regarding the appointment of the Head of Police in Gibraltar. [30730]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* Under the provisions of the 1969 Gibraltar constitution the Governor is responsible for the internal security of Gibraltar, including the Royal Gibraltar police. The Governor appointed the current Commissioner of the Royal Gibraltar police on 1 November 2001.

Mr. Terry Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what evidence the Government have collated regarding Spanish allegations on the level of smuggling out of Gibraltar; and if he will make a statement. [30731]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 26 January 2002]:* We have asked the Spanish Government to make available to us evidence that they have of smuggling. We will investigate such evidence.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will secure the support of the Government of Gibraltar for an agreement between Spain and Britain on the future status of Gibraltar before seeking the support of the people of Gibraltar through a referendum. [30698]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Tamworth (Mr. Jenkins) on 21 November, *Official Report*, column 331W. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs stated in the House on 14 January we have invited the people of Gibraltar, represented by the Government of Gibraltar, to take part in the talks under the Brussels Process. The Foreign Secretary and I discussed this further when we saw the Chief Minister of Gibraltar in London on Friday 25 January.

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if a referendum in Gibraltar on the future sovereignty of the territory will be held before the resumption of talks with Spain under the terms of the Brussels Process. [30621]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. MacKinlay) on 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 853W.

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs with which organisations he has discussed *(a)* the replacement of the Governor of Gibraltar and *(b)* an extension to the present Governor of Gibraltar's period in office. [30619]

Peter Hain: None. Her Majesty the Queen appoints Governors to all Her overseas territories.

UN Subscriptions

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) of 16 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1149W, whether the sum referred to in his statement has been released to the United Nations; and what proportion this represents of the total moneys due. [29730]

Mr. MacShane: United States Congress authorised payment of arrears to the United Nations in three tranches. Tranche I was paid in 1999. Of the tranche II total of $582 million, a $465 million cash payment was made by the United States to the United Nations in November last year. The remainder is being offset in the form of reimbursements owed to the US by the United Nations. We expect tranche III to be paid some time this year.

Tranche II represents approximately 60 per cent. of the moneys due to the United Nations in the three-tranche package.

Departmental Expenditure (Publications)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his estimate is of the expenditure of his Department on newspapers, magazines and periodicals in each of the last four years. [30101]

Mr. MacShane: The information is as follows:

	£
1997–98	489,895
1998–99	586,510
1999–2000	566,067
2001–01	588,078

Market Research

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what expenditure has been incurred by his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years on (i) opinion polling, (ii) focus groups and (iii) other forms of market research; and if he will list the surveys commissioned and the purpose of each. [27941]

Mr. MacShane: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has conducted little opinion polling and market research in the United Kingdom. No focus groups were used. In the last four years total expenditure was:

	£
1998–99	0
1999–2000	0
2000–01	15,550
2001–02	39,913

The figures cover market research for the "Know Before You Go" consular awareness campaign, and an opinion poll of public knowledge and understanding of the European Union. The results of the latter polling were laid in the Libraries of the House of Commons on 5 December 2001.

Overseas, various embassies have commissioned surveys about attitudes towards the United Kingdom to underpin strategies aimed at increasing positive foreign perceptions of Britain.

The FCO's non-departmental public body, the British Council also undertook an overseas research project to explore how well-informed young professionals perceive the United Kingdom. The survey was entitled "Through Other Eyes". Countries were researched in 1999 and 2000.

In the United Kingdom, the British Council has made use of focus groups and market research: (i) to assist in the understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of UK education compared to that in the United States and Australia, (ii) to evaluate the effectiveness of initiatives to increase the number of international students studying in the UK, and (iii) to assess perceptions of the British Council in Scotland post-devolution.

The cost of this research and activity was:

	£
1998–99	0
1999–2000	[1]36,000
2000–01	15,275
2001–02	2,878

[1] Estimate

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Greenhouse Gases

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs by what factor each of the other greenhouse gases is more damaging than carbon dioxide. [29616]

Margaret Beckett: The Global Warming Potential (GWP) for each greenhouse gas measures its effectiveness at global warming over the next 100 years compared to CO_2. For example, an emission of 1 tonne of methane (CH_4) will have a warming effect over the next 100 years that is 21 times greater than the warming produced over that time scale by an emission of 1 tonne of CO_2.

The following table shows the UK emissions of the greenhouse gases in 1999 (latest complete annual figures); the GWP of each of the gases and the amount of CO_2 that would produce the same warming.

Direct greenhouse gases	*Emissions in 1999 (kT)*	*GWP (100 years)*	*Equivalent kT of CO_2*
CO_2 (carbon dioxide)	547,800	1	547,800
CH_4 (methane)	2632	21	55,266
N_{2O} (nitrous oxide)	138	310	42,890
HFCs (hydrofluorocarbons)	2.749	560–12100	6,206
PFCs (perfluorocarbons)	0.098	6000–7400	678
SF_6 (sulphur hexafluoride)	0.055	23900	1,314

Flood Defence

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to publish proposals for change to flood defence funding and related administrative arrangements. [27540]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* This Department is finalising a public consultation document about future funding of flood defence and related institutional and administrative arrangements with a view to issuing it as soon as possible.

Parliamentary Questions

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many answers to parliamentary questions have not been answered by her Department under exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information in each year since 1994. [29420]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* As the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs was created on 8 June 2001, the information requested is not available.

Circuses

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will review the regulations governing the use of animals in circuses; and if she will make a statement. [30205]

Mr. Morley: A review of the legislation which might apply to animals kept by man for enjoyment, sport, companionship or farming purposes is taking place. The regulations relating to circus animals are included in the review. Further details of the review can be found on the DEFRA website www.defra.gov.uk.

Correspondence

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letters of 28 September and 31 October from the hon. Member for Buckingham on behalf of his constituent, Mr. David Body. [17065]

Mr. Morley: A response to the hon. Member's letters of 28 September and 31 October were sent on 20 November 2001 and 14 January 2002 respectively.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the hon. Member for West Chelmsford will be given a reply to his letter of 12 June 2001 to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which was transferred to her Department on 18 June, concerning Dr. Reza Hussain of St. John's hospital, Chelmsford. [26357]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 928W.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total external spend by his Department was on Private Finance Initiative consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PFI consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by his Department over this period; and if he will make a statement. [31030]

Mr. Morley: The Department has been in existence only since June 2001. Information covering earlier periods is therefore not available, and could be constructed retrospectively only at disproportionate cost.

Empty Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her estimate is of the *(a)* annual cost and *(b)* total value of the empty properties owned by (i) her Department, (ii) her agencies and (iii) other public bodies for which she has had responsibility in each of the last four years. [30081]

Mr. Morley: The information requested is set out in the tables. As the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs was created on 8 June 2001, this relates to the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The Department does not hold centrally information about properties occupied by non-departmental public bodies.

Under Treasury guidelines, Departments have up to three years or more to dispose of surplus properties to ensure that the best possible price is obtained. The values of some empty properties will, therefore, be included in more than one of the total annual values shown.

Estimated annual cost[1] *of empty core DEFRA properties*

	£ million
2000–01	1.47
1999–2000	0.88
1998–99	3.26
1997–98	2.26

[1] Includes rent or capital charge, service charges and rates, plus estimated maintenance, facilities management, and marketing costs based on average property values.

Estimated total value[1] *of empty core DEFRA properties*

	£ million
2000–01	10.6
1999–2000	9.8
1998–99	12.5
1997–98	16.0

[1] Based on Valuation Office Agency capital valuation or actual sale price

Estimated annual cost[1] *of empty DEFRA executive agency properties*

	£ million
2000–01	0.15
1999–2000	0.21
1998–99	0.25
1997–98	0.00

[1] Includes rent or capital charge, service charges and rates, plus estimated maintenance, facilities management, and marketing costs based on average property values.

Estimated total value[1] *of empty DEFRA executive agency properties*

	£ million
2000–01	2.00
1999–2000	13.4
1998–99	1.45
1997–98	1.45

[1] Based on Valuation Office Agency capital valuation or actual sale price

Genotype Test Errors

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the extent of genotype test errors by laboratories undertaking work for her Department in December 2001; and if she will make a statement. [29987]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* We announced on 14 December that DEFRA's quality control arrangements had revealed errors in the genotype results sent to the owners of five flocks participating in the national scrapie plan. The results had been provided to DEFRA by LGC, a private sector laboratory. As a precautionary measure DEFRA arranged for all of the blood samples tested so far by LGC under the national scrapie plan to be re-tested. This has involved re-testing over 4,000 samples. Although we have no had re-test results for all but 163 of those samples, the re-testing exercise is not yet complete. However, the re-testing has revealed some further errors in the original tests done by LGC. The re-testing exercise will be completed as soon as possible. All flock owners affected have been kept informed, and will be given revised results where this is necessary. DEFRA has already given corrected results to the owners of the five flocks where errors were originally detected. LGC has acknowledged the failure of their systems and has taken remedial action. Following a detailed inspection, DEFRA is now satisfied with LGC's revised procedures, but we regard as serious the shortcomings which have occurred, and we will be closely monitoring LGC's future performance.

Definitive Map

Mrs. Dean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to enable local authorities to deal with applications for modifications to the definitive map more rapidly. [30120]

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she plans to take to reduce the backlog of applications for modifications of public rights of way. [30615]

Alun Michael: Following enactment of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, we have provided new funding to assist local authorities with their rights of way duties. This includes additional funding for processing applications for modifications to the definitive map. We are also funding a project, managed by the Countryside Agency, that will improve the quality of applications from the public. This should enable local authorities to process modification orders faster.

Dioxins

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if her Department will produce a strategy for reducing the release of dioxins to the levels recommended by the Committee on Toxicity for the tolerable daily intake for dioxins and dioxin-like polychlorinated biphenyls, with particular reference to releases from *(a)* Environment Agency regulated activities, *(b)* local authority-regulated activities and *(c)* activities that are not regulated; and if she will make a statement. [25197]

Mr. Meacher: The recommendation of the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT) is for a tolerable daily intake (TDI) for dioxins and dioxin-like polychlorinated biphenyls of 2 picogrammes TEQ/kilogramme bodyweight. The Food Standards Agency's programme of research and surveys for these contaminants has shown that the average dietary exposure in the UK (1.8 picogrammes TEQ/kilogramme bodyweight per day) is already below the new TDI, although consumers who eat a lot of fatty foods can exceed the TDI.

Emissions from Environment Agency and local authority regulated activities are controlled under the systems of Integrated Pollution Control (which are progressively being replaced by the Pollution Prevention and Control Regulations) and Local Air Pollution Control. These and other controls have made a major contribution to the approximately 70 per cent. reduction in emissions of dioxins to air during the past decade. As the major industrial sources are reduced, the less well regulated diffuse sources such as bonfires have become relatively more important, so action is also needed in these areas. The Government believe that there is a strong case for reducing environmental emissions of dioxins and dioxin-like polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), particularly in the light of the revised recommended tolerable daily intake by the COT. In consultation with the devolved Administrations, other Government Departments and agencies the Department is, therefore, producing a UK position paper on dioxins and PCBs, which will set out proposals for achieving further reductions in emissions of these compounds, for consultation with a wide range of stakeholders.

Date-based Export Scheme

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with her European Union counterparts regarding the continued implementation of the date-based export scheme. [30407]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* The date-based export scheme continues to be available as the means of exporting beef from the UK, although it has been in abeyance for the duration of the foot and mouth disease outbreak. We recognise that the conditions of the scheme are onerous and that this is a disincentive to potential beef exporters to operate under the scheme. For this reason we are pressing the European Commission to propose changes to the conditions of the scheme to make it a more viable prospect for a wider range of beef exporters.

Fishing (Decommissioning)

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the source was of the funding for the £6 million offered to those vessels which successfully bid for fishing vessel decommissioning during October 2001. [30651]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* I announced the £6 million decommissioning scheme on 10 May 2001. These funds are additional to the £5 million provision for Cornwall I announced on 24 July 2000 would be available for the period 2001–02 to 2003–04, and the £6 million which I similarly announced for the rest of England. The scheme will be co-financed by the EU under the EU structural fund for fisheries (FIFG).

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress she has made in respect of fulfilment of her Department's obligations regarding the completion of this year's fishing vessel decommissioning scheme. [30652]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* The applications which offer best value for money have now been approved, and I have extended the final date for claims by a month at the request of applicants.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of the funding for this year's fishing vessel decommissioning scheme was *(a)* European and *(b)* UK moneys. [30650]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* The fisheries structural fund rules apply. For vessels meeting the scheme definition as Cornish 75 per cent. of payments will be funded by the EU. For vessels from the rest of England 50 per cent. is funded by the EU.

Impact Fishing

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with her counterparts in *(a)* Europe and *(b)* Norway, regarding the proposal to (i) take low impact fishing methods out of the quota system, (ii) introduce management regimes which encourage low impact fishing methods and (iii) establish systems which afford protection for low impact fishing methods in future policy development. [30618]

Mr. Morley: Under Community legislation we are required to take account of all landings for quota management purposes: there are no exceptions. However, in the context of the on-going review of the common fisheries policy, the Government have made it clear that we have at hand an opportunity to give new recognition to the role of fishermen using selective and environmentally friendly fishing techniques which have a low impact on stocks, such as North sea cod long liners and mackerel handliners. In our public response to the European Commission's Green Paper on the future of the CFP, we make exactly that point.

In some cases, however, the Government have already introduced measures recognising the importance of certain low-impact fisheries. We have, for example, implemented enhanced underpinning arrangements in the south-west mackerel handline fishery, whereby the handliners receive a guaranteed minimum quota allocation each year. We also arrange 'quota swaps' to obtain additional fish where necessary.

Marine Environment

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to protect the marine environment. [30335]

Mr. Meacher: Measures under way to provide further protection for the marine environment include the review of marine nature conservation, extension of the habitats directive out to the limit of jurisdiction of UK waters and proposals for integrated coastal zone management. The forthcoming Marine Stewardship report will set out our strategy for the sustainable development and conservation of the marine environment.

Rural Definition

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the progress being made towards the development of a single definition of rural for use by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* other sections of Government. [30670]

Alun Michael: Neither the Department nor the Government as a whole uses a single definition of a rural area, and it would be unrealistic to impose a standard definition for use in all contexts. For example, within a broadly "rural" county or district, not all parishes would be properly described as "rural". However, we recognise that there is a need for a more co-ordinated and consistent approach to the categorisation and use of definitions of urban and rural areas. For that reason DEFRA, DTLR, the Countryside Agency and the Office for National Statistics are working together towards a better set of definitions of urban and rural areas. In the short term, we plan to use for statistical purposes the definitions presently used by the Countryside Agency.

Fishing

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what assessment she has made of the effects of industrial fishing on whitefish species; and if she will make a statement; [30356]

(2) what action she is taking to ensure that industrial fishing vessels in the North sea do not net whitefish species while fishing for sandeels; and if she will press for an EU-wide ban on industrial fishing. [30355]

Mr. Morley: The annual weight of bycatch reported to the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) in relation to industrial fishing in the North sea averaged 6,000 tonnes of haddock, 9,000 tonnes of whiting and 1,000 tonnes of cod for the years 1995 to 1999.

The following table compiled by the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Research (CEFAS) from statistics reported to ICES, shows how these industrial bycatch tonnages compare with landings and estimated discards for the same species, again averaged over the period 1995–99:

	Haddock	*Whiting*	*Cod*
Landings	74,000	36,000	126,000
Discards	54,000	22,000	[1]8,000
Bycatch	6,000	9,000	1,000

[1] 1999 only

Although these figures leave no doubt that whitefish are caught in the small-meshed industrial fisheries, they do not in themselves, especially when viewed alongside the tonnages discarded by the whitefish fleets, make out a case for banning industrial fishing.

However, on-going work by CEFAS, in part carried out in co-operation with Danish fishery managers, is aimed at refining our understanding of the bycatch, in particular in relation to the extent to which young fish of each of the whitefish species figure in it.

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effect of industrial fishing for sandeels on the sea-life food chain. [30357]

Mr. Morley: Using data from international scientific studies, CEFAS has related estimates of the abundance of the fish and seabirds in and around the North sea to information on the amount of sandeel found in their stomachs. The information results from comparing the average populations for the period 1974 to 1995 with a large amount of stomach data collected during intensive sampling of North sea stocks throughout two reference years, 1981 and 1991.

This work suggests that, on average, natural predators have eaten about 2.7 million tonnes of sandeels each year, compared with around 700,000 tonnes currently taken by the sandeel fishery.

On average 46 per cent. (1.2 million tonnes) was taken by mackerel, 22 per cent. (600,000 tonnes) by whiting, 6 per cent. by haddock, 5 per cent. by birds and 2 per cent. by cod.

As a percentage averaged over the year, sandeels represented 20 per cent. of the diet for mackerel and whiting, 10 per cent. for haddock and 5 per cent. for saithe and cod. For sea birds the percentage was higher, averaging 40 per cent. for sea birds, rising to 90 per cent. during the chick rearing period. This is why sandeel fishing is currently not allowed on the Wee Bankie and why there is a seasonal closure at Shetland.

Further national and international work is in hand to extend our detailed knowledge so that further measures can be considered if necessary.

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she last discussed the issue of industrial fishing with her Danish counterpart; what recent representations she has made; and if she will make a statement. [30358]

Mr. Morley: Senior officials from the Department held lengthy and productive discussions with their Danish counterparts on 16 November 2001. Scientific collaboration between Denmark and the United Kingdom on industrial fisheries is on-going, in particular in relation to by-catch and to the ground-breaking sandeel closure at Wee Bankie.

Parish Councils

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the 2001 report of the Countryside Agency on the quality of parish councils; if she will estimate how many parish councils were classed as *(a)* sleeping and *(b)* barely active; and if she will make a statement. [30561]

Alun Michael: The Countryside Agency has not produced a report on the quality of parish councils, but it has undertaken to produce an indicator of community vibrancy. I refer the hon. Member to answers given on 24 January 2002 to the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), *Official Report,* columns 1033–34W, for information on this issue.

IACS

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of the current financial year's integrated administration and control system payments have been received by farmers. [30868]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* As of 23 January 2002, 85.2 per cent. of claims under IACS (Arable Area Payments Scheme) have been paid.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received concerning delays in paying farmers for claims within the integrated administration and control system; and if she will make a statement. [29080]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, has received a number of representations mainly in the form of parliamentary questions and correspondence.

The industrial action which commenced on 20 August 2001 and which has severely impacted on claims processing was suspended for two weeks, beginning 11 January 2002. This is good news and has enabled the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) to put more resources into processing through overtime working. Additionally those offices with the largest backlogs are being reinforced by transferring in staff from other sites. The staff are keen to make up the lost ground and are working enthusiastically. That said there is no chance of RPA being able to recover before 31 January 2002 the several thousand man days of claims processing that has been lost. Arable Area Payments (AAPS) has been most seriously affected because this is a complex scheme on which it is not easy to deploy inexperienced staff.

By the end of the payment window on 31 January 2002 RPA expect to have paid around 90 per cent. of claims and providing the industrial action remains suspended, AAPS payments should be completed by around mid-February 2002.

Livestock scheme payments are also being affected but, although software has had to be upgraded to reflect regulatory changes on the bovine schemes and to carry out cross-checks on claims where holdings were affected by foot and mouth disease, RPA expect to make all the payments within the regulatory timescales.

My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, also had a meeting with the British Banking Association (BBA), including representatives of all the main clearing banks, on 22 November 2001. It is hoped that as a result of that meeting the BBA will be sympathetic to the effect that the industrial dispute is having on the cash flow of farmers who have received their payments later than normal.

GM Crops

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Government will issue a public consultation on the future of GM crops in this country. [28251]

Mr. Morley: In response to their "Crops on Trial" report, we have asked the Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission (AEBC) to provide further advice by the end of April on how and when to promote an effective public debate on the possible commercialisation of the crops in the Farm Scale Evaluations. The full Government response to the AEBC report is available at www.defra.gov.uk.

Refrigerators

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department has taken to deal with domestic refrigerator decommissioning following the recent European directive. [31272]

Mr. Meacher: EC Regulation No. 2037/2000 requires the removal of controlled ozone depleting substances from domestic refrigeration units prior to scrapping. The Department has worked closely with stakeholders to ensure that adequate disposal routes exist for domestic fridges. Waste fridges may be refurbished and re-used, disposed of via incineration, exported to other member states for recycling, or stored in the UK pending treatment. In early December the Department issued guidance on the storage of fridges pending treatment, along with draft standards for the removal of ODS from fridges, which are now being finalised by the Environment Agency. The Department also announced £6 million funding for English local authorities for dealing with fridges and freezers until March 2002. We are continuing to assess the impacts of the regulation and will determine what further action is required beyond that.

Aggregates Levy

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many responses were received to her Department's consultation on the distribution of aggregates levy sustainability fund; and when she will publish a response. [30354]

Mr. Meacher: The aggregates levy sustainability fund is a new fund with the aim of addressing the environmental effects associated with aggregates extraction.

DEFRA published in October 2001 a consultation paper on the possible distribution of the aggregates levy sustainability fund in England.

The consultation paper proposed to support work under three main objectives:

Minimising the demand for primary aggregates

Promoting environmentally friendly extraction and transport

Reducing the effect of local aggregate extraction.

The consultation period closed on 27 November 2001. A copy of the consultation document is available in the House of Commons Library 474 organisations were consulted. The consultation generated a total of 120 responses, 87 of which were received by 27 November. Following is a table of responses by sector.

Responses by sector

	Number of respondents	*Percentage*
Local authorities	54	45
Waste management companies	2	1.7
Environmental bodies	21	17.5
Countryside and rural bodies	8	6.7
Minerals trade associations and operators	10	8.3
Individuals	3	2.5
Other interested parties	22	18.3
Total	120	100

We are currently reflecting on all the issues raised by the consultation and will decide on the final shape and distribution of the fund shortly.

Nitrates

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the scientific advice she has received concerning the designation of nitrate vulnerable zones; and if she will make a statement. [28506]

Mr. Meacher: The Environment Agency has provided science-based advice on the methodology used to identify areas for designation. This is included as an annex in the consultation document "How should England implement the 1991 Nitrates Directive" published on 20 December 2001.

Nitrate vulnerable zones comprise land designated because it drains into nitrate polluted waters, or waters that could become nitrate polluted. Three methods are used to identify such waters.

For surface waters, monitoring data for nitrates collected over recent years are analysed statistically to identify monitoring points exceeding the level of 50 mg per litre referred to in the directive. In addition, trend analysis methods will be used to identify any additional monitoring points that can be expected to exceed 50 mg per litre in the future.

For ground waters, monitoring data from existing boreholes are processed using mathematical modelling to predict where ground water can be expected to exceed the level of 50 mg per litre, either now or in the future, as a result of nitrate leaching from land.

For inland, coastal and estuarine waters the Environment Agency consider a variety of criteria to assess whether waters are eutrophic or may become eutrophic if no action is taken. These criteria include: nutrient concentrations; occurrence and duration of algal blooms; low dissolved oxygen concentrations; changes in fauna, plant growth and algal growth; and occurrence and magnitude of paralytic shellfish poisoning. Only those waters where nitrate is considered to be a factor causing eutrophication are included for the purposes of designating nitrate vulnerable zones.

Aarhus Convention

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to ratify the Aarhus Convention signed on 25 June 1998; and if she will make a statement. [26936]

Mr. Meacher: The Government strongly support the Aarhus convention and signed the treaty when it opened for signature in 1998. The three underlying principles of transparency, participation and access to justice are central to achieving sustainable development.

The majority of the convention is already implemented in the UK although some legislative amendments will be necessary, in particular to the public access to environmental information regime. The Government intend to ratify the convention as soon as all of the necessary provisions are in place. The exact date by which this will be done is dependent on the legislative timetables of the devolved Administrations.

Foot and Mouth

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the findings and recommendations of the National Farmers Union's report entitled, "Lessons to be Learned from the 2001 outbreak of foot and mouth disease"; and whether she intends to publish a response to the report. [31512]

Mr. Morley: I welcome the National Farmers Union report. I understand that it has been sent to the Lessons Learned inquiry, which I expect will take account of the report's findings in making recommendations.

Farm Subsidy Claims

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what penalties are imposed on farmers who make mistakes when they are filling in claim forms for farming subsidies; and whether farmers can rectify mistakes on claim forms without a penalty being imposed. [28363]

Mr. Morley: The penalties imposed vary according to the type and severity of the mistake. The penalties applied for the 2001 scheme year are detailed in Annex 7 of the 2001 Integrated Administration and Control System Explanatory Guide, copies of which are being placed in the Library of the House. A summary of Annex 7 follows:

Part 1. Applications received after the closing date

1–25 calendar days late. The applicant will lose 1 per cent. of their entitlement to aid for each working day by which the application is late and for each scheme to which the application relates.

Over 25 calendar days late. The applicant will lose their entire entitlement to aid for each scheme to which the application relates.

Part 2. Inaccuracies discovered in areas declared

Area found is more than declared. No penalty, but the applicant's entitlement will be based on the declared area.

The area found is less than declared. The applicant's entitlement will be based on the lower figure. In addition this lower figure will be adjusted as follows: if difference is more than 3 per cent. or 2 hectares, but not more than 20 per cent. of the area found, the adjustment will be twice the difference found. If the difference is more than 20 per cent., no area-linked aid will be granted.

Part 3. Inaccuracies discovered in number of eligible animals

Number of animals found is more than declared. No penalty, but payment will be based on the number declared.

Number of animals found is less than declared. (In cases where a claim covers a maximum of 20 animals.)

(i) Difference between numbers found and declared is one or two animals. The applicant's entitlement will be based on the number found, but rate of premium adjusted by the percentage difference found.

(ii) Difference between numbers found and declared is three to four animals. The applicant's entitlement will be based on the number found, but rate of premium adjusted by twice the percentage difference found.

(iii) Difference between numbers found and declared is more than four. No premium will be paid under the scheme concerned.

Number of animals found is less than declared. (In cases where a claim covers 21 or more animals.)

(i) Difference between the number declared and found is not more than 5 per cent. of the number found. The applicant's entitlement will be based on the number found, but rate of premium will be reduced by the percentage difference found.

(ii) Difference between the number declared and found is more than 5 per cent. but not more than 20 per cent. of the number found. The applicant's entitlement will be based on the number found, but rate of premium reduced by twice the percentage difference found.

(iii) Difference between the number declared and found is more than 20 per cent. of the number found. No premium will be paid under the scheme concerned.

Mistakes

Mistakes in area aid applications and livestock claims which can be classified as "obvious" according to European Commission guidelines, and where the farmer acted in good faith and there is no risk of fraud, can be rectified without penalty at any time, and are summarised as follows. All other mistakes attract the penalties listed in Annex 7 of the 2001 Integrated Administration and Control System Explanatory Guide which is summarised in Parts 1–3.

Types of obvious errors, which can be rectified

(i) Errors of a purely clerical nature, which are obvious during a simple examination of the claim, i.e.:

boxes not filled in or information lacking

erroneous statistical information

(ii) Errors detected as a result of a contradiction appearing in a more in-depth examination (manual or computerised) of the claim, which compares information (including supporting documentation, such as a map) submitted in the same claim, i.e.:

arithmetical mistakes

inconsistencies between the information provided on the same form (for example, a parcel declared twice in a single claim);

parcels declared for two different types of usage

(iii) Anomalies involving parcel numbers or references which are detected during the crosscheck of the claim with databases, such as the parcel identification system, i.e.:

figures reversed (parcel number 1169 instead of 1196

mistakes in the map reference number

number of neighbouring parcel given, resulting from map reading error.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Lost/Stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list those items valued at more than £50 which have been stolen or lost from his Department in each of the last four years. [28006]

Mr. Leslie: For the purpose of this answer my Department includes the Prime Minister's Office. Items stolen or lost in each of the last four financial years, and their approximate value, are shown in the table.

Corresponding figures for the 2001–02 financial year have yet to be collected.

Lost or stolen property	£
1997–98	
Various IT equipment	13,095
3 Computers	1,371
1 Bicycle	300
Ladders	200
Cash; credit cards; payable orders	135
1 Car stereo (stolen from a leased car)	100
Consumables	89
Total	15,290
1998–99	
Various IT equipment	18,454
Cash; credit cards; payable orders	2,500
Software	300
1 Computer printer	237
1 Car stereo (stolen from a leased car)	100
Total	21,591
1999–2000	
2 Projectors	12,678
6 Laptop computers	9,800
7 Computers	5,600
4 Computer printers	990
Tools	850
Other IT equipment	657
2 Amplifiers	500
1 Video recorder	300
2 Mobile phones	237
Consumables	200
Cash, credit cards; payable orders	171
1 Tape recorder	115
Total	32,09
2000–01	
13 Computers	14,627
10 Laptop computers	13,800
Cash;, credit cards; payable orders	3,000
1 CD writer	800
2 Cameras	714
2 Mobile phones	333
1 Minidisc player	200
1 Car stereo (stolen from a leased car)	100
Total	33,574

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his estimate is of the cost of theft and fraud to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [27976]

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what estimate his Department has made of the cost to its budget since 1 May 1997 of fraud; and if he will make a statement. [27296]

Mr. Leslie: The cost of theft and fraud to my Department, its agencies, and non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years, is shown in the table.

Corresponding figures for 2001–02 financial year have yet to be collated.

£

	Department	*Agencies*	*NDPBs*	*Total*
1997–98	15,360	0	0	15,360
1998–99	48,472	0	1,000	49,472
1999–2000	32,097	0	0	32,097
2000–01	33,574	0	1,200	34,774

Public Relations Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much was spent by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* bodies for which it is responsible on external public relations consultants in each of the last four years. [27389]

Mr. Leslie: Expenditure on external public relations consultancy is not separately identifiable on the Department's accounting system and is therefore available only at disproportionate cost.

Market Research

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what expenditure has been incurred by his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years on (i) opinion polling, (ii) focus groups and (iii) other forms of market research; and if he will list the surveys commissioned and the purpose of each. [27949]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) on 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 594W.

A list of the surveys commissioned and the purpose of each could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Remuneration

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will estimate the number of individuals in his *(a)* Department, *(b)* related agencies and *(c)* related non-departmental public bodies whose annual remuneration including benefits in kind exceeded (i) £100,000 and (ii) £200,000 in each of the last four years. [26328]

Mr. Leslie: The information in relation to the number of individuals in *(a)* the Cabinet Office, which includes the Parliamentary Counsel Office, and *(b)* related agencies whose annual remuneration included benefits in kind exceeded £100,000 in the last four years is set out in the table.

No individual received an annual remuneration in excess of £200,000 during this period. Annual remuneration includes basic salary and allowances.

As at 1 April	*Department*	*Related agencies*
1998	4	0
1999	13	0
2000	14	0
2001	18	0

The information for *(c)* related non-departmental public bodies is available in the annual Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies" copies of which are placed in the Libraries of the House.

Civil Service

Mr. Wray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister in each of the civil servant grades, what proportion are *(a)* women and *(b)* from ethnic minorities. [28070]

Mr. Leslie: Figures for April 2001 show that 24.2 per cent. of the senior civil service were women, and 2.4 per cent. of staff at this level were from an ethnic minority background. At levels below the senior civil service, Departments and agencies are responsible for their own grading structures, but these have been allocated to broad responsibility levels to give a common basis for tabulation.

Percentage of female and ethnic minority staff by responsibility level—April 2000

Headcount

		Percentage	
	Number	*Female*	*Ethnic minorities*[1]
Grades 6 and 7	22,750	24.3	2.6
Senior/Higher Executive Officer	74,920	30.6	3.1
Executive Officer	114,580	50.4	5.7
Administrative Officer/Assistant	249,090	62.4	7.5
Grade not reported	2,670	37.1	2.5
All non-industrial staff	467,770	52.0	6.0
All industrial staff	29,870	14.6	1.0
All staff	497,640	49.8	5.8

[1] Ethnic minority as a percentage of known ethnic origin

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what equipment has been stolen from his Department since 1 May 1997; and what the approximate value of each item was. [26835]

Mr. Leslie: Items stolen between 1 May 1997 and 31 March 2001, and their approximate value, are shown in the table.

Corresponding figures for the 2001–02 financial year have yet to be collated.

Description	*Number of items*	*Value (£)*
Computers	23	21,598
Laptop computers	16	23,600
Various other IT equipment	—	32,205
Projectors	2	12,678
Computer printers	5	1,227
Mobile phones	3	570
Cameras	2	714
Car Stereos (stolen from leased cars)	3	300
Video recorder	1	300
Minidisc player	1	200
CD writer	1	800
Amplifiers	2	500
Bicycle	1	300
Tape recorder	1	115
Ladders	—	200
Software	—	300
Tools	—	850
Consumables	—	309
Total		96,766

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Magistrates

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many serving magistrates live in the Knowsley, North and Sefton, East constituency; and if he will make a statement. [30973]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who is responsible for the appointment of magistrates in Knowsley and Sefton has asked me to say that the Knowsley, North and Sefton, East constituency covers two Petty Sessions areas—Knowsley and South Sefton. 34 magistrates live in this constituency.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many magistrates serve in the Knowsley area; how many of those live in Knowsley; and if he will make a statement. [30974]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who is responsible for the appointment of magistrates in Knowsley, has asked me to say that there are 88 magistrates on the Knowsley bench, 48 of whom live in the Knowsley area.

Guardian ad Litem Service

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what targets she has set for the Guardian ad Litem Service for answering mail from *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public. [30439]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Guardian ad Litem Service is now a part of the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS). The Lord Chancellor expects CAFCASS to give a timely response to mail from both hon. Members and members of the public.

CAFCASS is working to establish standard response times for procedures across the service. CAFCASS is also undertaking work to devise a unified complaints procedure for the Service. CAFCASS aims to meet my Department's target for replying to mail from hon. Members within 20 working days of receipt.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proposals she has for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the Guardian ad Litem Service. [30480]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor has tasked the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) with delivering improvements to the efficiency and effectiveness of the guardian service.

CAFCASS is developing a new, unified service bringing together: the family court welfare services previously provided by the probation service; the children's division of the official solicitor's department; and local authority guardian ad litem and reporting officer services. The establishment of CAFCASS creates a new national body with a national voice to be an effective champion for children involved in family proceedings.

Empty Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what his estimate is of the *(a)* annual cost and *(b)* total value of the empty properties owned by (i) his Department, (ii) his agencies and (iii) other public bodies for which he has had responsibility in each of the last four years. [30073]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor's Department has owned no empty properties in the last four years. The Court Service and the Northern Ireland Court Service have owned a total of 17 properties which have been empty at some point over the last four years. In all cases the buildings were empty only while being marketed for sale, except in one case where the building was empty prior to refurbishment. The estimates of cost and value are shown in the table:

£

Period	*Cost*	*Value*
1997–98	275,263	363,100
1998–99	122,186	1,638,060
1999–2000	331,688	2,473,210
2000–01	99,538	1,816,630

The other public bodies for which the Department is responsible have owned no empty properties in the last four years.

Department Expenditure (Publications)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what his estimate is of the expenditure of his Department on newspapers, magazines and periodicals in each of the last four years. [30098]

Mr. Wills: The estimated expenditure on newspapers, magazines and periodicals in each of the last four years is as follows:

1997–98: £60,200

1998–99: £61,700

1999–2000: £64,600

2000–01: £67,500.

Court Reporting Officers

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement on the work and role of court reporting officers. [31288]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor has tasked the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) with operational responsibility for the work and role of court reporting officers.

CAFCASS is developing a new, unified service bringing together: the family court welfare services previously provided by the probation service; the Children's Division of the Official Solicitor's Department; and local authority Guardian ad Litem and Reporting Officer services. The establishment of CAFCASS creates a new national body with a national voice to be an effective champion for children involved in family proceedings.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans she has to review the role and work of court reporting officers, with particular reference to the evaluation of the reports, complaints procedures and their ability to make recommendations. [31289]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor has tasked the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) with operational responsibility for the work and role of court reporting officers.

CAFCASS has day to day responsibility for the services provided by all of its staff. There are currently no plans to review the role and work of court reporting officers. CAFCASS is undertaking work to devise National Standards and a complaints procedure. The effectiveness of such procedures will be monitored by their Inspectorate who will report their findings to me.

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many regulatory impact assessments have been produced by his Department since August 2001; and if he will list those produced *(a)* following initial consultation with affected parties about the most appropriate methodology for assessing costs and other impacts and *(b)* which set out full commercial impacts, including profitability, employment, consumer prices and competitiveness, as recommended in Good Policy Making. [28408]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor's Department has produced two partial regulatory impact assessments since August 2001. The partial regulatory impact assessments, which were included in the relevant consultation papers, relate to:

Payments into court in satisfaction of claims

General pre-action protocol.

No full regulatory impact assessments have been produced since August 2001. For further information, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 17 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 483W.

Shared Residency Orders

Gillian Merron: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent research she has commissioned into the effect of shared residency orders on benefits for non-resident parents when custody is divided equally. [29791]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor's Department has not commissioned any research specifically on the effect of shared residence on benefits for non-resident parents. The Children Act 1989 makes the welfare of the child the court's paramount consideration. The Department has therefore undertaken a research review and commissioned research on the impact on children of family breakdown. Income-related benefits for non-resident parents are a matter for the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

Law Commission Report No. 270

Mr. Flook: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans the Government have to bring forward the draft legislation contained within Law Commission Report No. 270. [30432]

Mr. Wills: Following the publication of the Law Commission's Report No. 270: "Limitation of Actions", the Lord Chancellor is currently considering the recommendations contained in the report and will announce his decision before the summer.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Pensions (Prisoners)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if prisoners are entitled to receive their state pension. [15674]

Mr. McCartney: No. Prisoners are disqualified for receipt of social security benefits including retirement pension.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will provide a breakdown of the costs of the publicity campaign for the minimum income guarantee. [18991]

Mr. McCartney: The Government's MIG take-up campaign has so far resulted in more than 127,000 successful claims with newly eligible pensioner households gaining on average an extra £20 per week. Advertising and media costs of the campaign have amounted to £4.015 million.

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners he estimates are eligible to claim the MIG in Loughborough; and how many claim. [30384]

Mr. McCartney: As at August 2001 there were 2,000 minimum income guarantee (MIG) claimants in the Loughborough constituency. Estimates of the numbers of people who may be eligible for, but who have not claimed the MIG, are not available below national level.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate how many of the single pensioners who have failed to take up their entitlement to the minimum income guarantee are *(a)* male and *(b)* female. [31274]

Mr. McCartney: Estimates of take-up for the minimum income guarantee (MIG) by single male and single female pensioners were published in "Income Related Benefits—Estimates of Take Up in 1999/2000", a copy of which is held in the House of Commons Library.

Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners in Kirklees claim the minimum income guarantee. [26250]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

As at August 2001, there were 12,400 customers in receipt of the minimum income guarantee in Kirklees.

Regulation (Costs)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the cost to public funds in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 of regulations introduced by his Department in 2000–01. [19261]

Mr. McCartney: We are satisfied that the benefits of regulations introduced by the Department in 2000–01 justify the cost to public funds.

National Teleclaims Service (Retirement Pension)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the cost in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 of the national teleclaims service for retirement pension. [19264]

Mr. McCartney: The national teleclaims service for retirement pension has been in operation from October 2000. The cost in 2000–01 was £1,003,327 and is estimated at £2,265,801 in 2001–02. For both years, such costs include a subsidy for inbound calls made by customers at local call rates.

Working Families Tax Credit

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the *(a)* number of recipients of working families tax credit who are also in receipt of housing benefit (i) in England and (ii) each English region and *(b)* estimated current net cost of discounting working families tax credit for the purposes of calculating housing benefit for existing claimants. [26244]

Malcolm Wicks: Information on the number of housing benefit recipients in England who are also receiving working families tax credit by Government office region is in the table.

It is estimated that the net cost in 2000–01 of discounting working families tax credit in calculating entitlement to housing benefit for benefit recipients in Great Britain at May 2000 would have been £250 million.

Government office region	*Number of housing benefit recipients also receiving working families tax credit*
North East	12,000
North West	26,000
Yorkshire and Humberside	20,000
East Midlands	14,000
West Midlands	21,000
East	16,000
London	28,000
South East	29,000
South West	19,000
England Total	185,000

Notes:

1. The data refer to households, which may be a single person, a couple or a family.

2. The figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.

3. Figures include those people in receipt of either the standard working families tax credit or the 30 hour premium working families tax credit.

Source:

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information System, annual one per cent. sample, taken in May 2000. This is the latest available data source that provides the number of housing benefit recipients who also receive working families tax credit.

Regulation 61 Payment Scheme

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what was the total grant available to local authorities in 2001–02 following the introduction of the discretionary payment scheme to those persons who require additional assistance to pay their rent or council tax; [26957]

(2) how much money was claimed by local authorities from his Department in 2000–01 from the Regulation 61 payment scheme; [26955]

(3) what are the estimated savings to his Department from the abolition of Regulation 61 payments and the introduction of the discretionary payment scheme for those persons who require additional assistance with rent or council tax; [26958]

(4) what was the budget available to local authorities in 2000–01 for Regulation 61 payments; and how much of this money *(a)* was direct grant and *(b)* had to be funded from the general fund of local authorities; [26956]

(5) what consultations his Department had with the local authority associations regarding the abolition of the Regulation 61 payment scheme. [26959]

Malcolm Wicks: From 2 July 2001 we replaced the exceptional hardship and exceptional circumstances schemes with improved arrangements that are broader in scope than the old Regulation 61 provisions. Subject to certain conditions, local authorities are now able to give additional payments to any person whose housing benefit or council tax benefit is restricted where they are satisfied the person is in need of further financial assistance with housing costs. Unlike the old scheme there are no prescribed definitions of either "exceptional hardship" or "exceptional circumstances".

The new measures give local authorities an incentive to direct funds to helping those people most in need and were not introduced to generate savings.

The total budget available to local authorities in 2000–01 for exceptional hardship payments under Regulation 61(3) was £50 million of which the Government contribution was £20 million. Each local authority was allocated a share of the £20 million. In the same year the budget available to each local authority for exceptional circumstance payments under Regulation 61(2) was 0.1 per cent. of its total housing benefit expenditure in that year. No Government contribution was made towards these payments.

The total budget available to local authorities under the new arrangements from their introduction on 2 July 2001 until 31 March 2002 is £37.5 million, of which the Government contribution is £15 million.

We consulted the local authority associations in the usual way about these changes. In addition, a user group of local authority representatives was actively involved in the development of the new arrangements.

Local Reference Rent

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) in how many and which registration areas the Rent Service uses administrative boroughs to determine the locality by which the local reference rent is ascertained; [27418]

(2) what assessment he has made of the implications and economic consequences of the Court of Appeal Judgment in the case of Regina (Saadat and others) *v.* The Rent Service; [27419]

(3) what consultations took place in the drawing up of SI 2001, No. 3561; when the LGA was informed of SI 2001, No. 3561; and for what reason the SI was not referred to the Social Security Advisory Committee; [27420]

(4) how he will apply SI No. 3561 to ensure that in determining local reference rent, the Rent Service is not disadvantaging otherwise eligible claimants from more affluent areas; [27421]

(5) if the purpose of SI No. 3561 is to allow the Rent Service to continue to use administrative boundaries to set local reference rent. [27422]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* Our priorities for housing benefit are to drive up standards of service, tackle fraud and error, reduce barriers to work and tackle social exclusion. In support of these aims we want to ensure that housing benefit does not provide a disincentive to work by subsidising accommodation which a person could not otherwise afford. That is why housing benefit for rented accommodation in the deregulated private sector is restricted to the broadly average rent level for similar sized properties in a locality (the local reference rent).

Our policy is that local reference rents should reflect the generality of the market and must therefore be based on a geographical area large enough to take account of the bigger picture, reflecting a broad choice of housing.

Rent officers use their professional expertise and judgment to determine the size and boundaries of localities. Using fixed boundaries, such as local authority areas, would not necessarily reliably reflect the market. Moreover, market forces mean that, over time, the size and shape of localities will change. Information on those localities which happen to be co-terminous with local authority areas at a particular point in time is not collected.

The Court of Appeal in its recent judgment Regina (Saadat and others) *v.* The Rent Service took the view that the locality used by the rent officer to calculate a local reference rent was larger than that needed reliably to decide such a rent. The formula arrived at by the court under the order then in force runs counter to our intention that localities should be based on broad geographical areas. The application of this formula could also have led to a large increase in the number of localities nationally, making it impractical to operate, resulting in delays for people claiming benefit and putting an extra burden on local authorities.

We therefore acted swiftly to introduce amending legislation in the Rent Officers (Housing Benefit Functions) (Amendment) Order 2001, SI 3561 which now defines locality in a way which reflects Rent Service good practice. These amendments are designed to ensure that our policy is achieved and to restore certainty. They are not designed to change the way in which localities and local reference rents are decided or to widen the definition of localities so that they increase in size. The position for people claiming housing benefit is therefore unchanged, irrespective of the affluence of the area in which they live.

The Department wrote to the local authority associations on 1 November 2001, four days before the order was laid before Parliament, outlining the nature of the proposed amendments. No representations were received in the intervening period. There is no statutory requirement to consult the Social Security Advisory Committee about proposals to make orders, but the committee was informed of the proposed amendments, as a matter of courtesy, at the same time as we wrote to the associations.

Benefit Recipients

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the number of people who will, in October 2003, be in households in receipt of one or more of *(a)* pension credit, *(b)* housing benefit, *(c)* council tax benefit, *(d)* child tax credit, *(e)* working tax credit, *(f)* income support and *(g)* income-related jobseeker's allowance. [27689]

Mr. McCartney: The estimated number of people receiving one or more of the following: pension credit, housing benefit, council tax benefit, income support and income-related jobseeker's allowance in 2003–04 is 6.9 million. Numbers of people expected to receive child tax credit and working tax credit are not available as the rates and thresholds have not yet been set.

Notes:

1. Figures are consistent with the expenditure totals for Social Security published in the pre-Budget report.

2. Benefit forecasts of numbers in receipt are provided on an annual average basis.

3. The estimated numbers in receipt of pension credit are based on an end of year figure. Recipients will have their payments backdated to October 2003.

Market Research

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what expenditure has been incurred by his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years on (i) opinion polling, (ii) focus groups and (iii) other forms of market research; and if he will list the surveys commissioned and the purpose of each. [27939]

Mr. McCartney: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many regulatory impact assessments have been produced by his Department since August 2001; and if he will list those produced *(a)* following initial consultation with affected parties about the most appropriate methodology for assessing costs and other impacts and *(b)* which set out full commercial impacts, including profitability, employment, consumer prices and competitiveness, as recommended in Good Policy Making. [28405]

Mr. McCartney: The Department has published one regulatory impact assessment (RIA) since August 2001. This related to the Disability Discrimination (Providers of Services) (Adjustment of Premises) Regulations 2001 which come into force on 1 October 2004. A copy of the RIA is available in the Library. No other regulations introduced in this period impact on business.

This RIA is based on one published in April 1999 on which full public consultation took place. Although no specific reference to commercial impacts was made in the RIA in that consultation, respondents were asked to suggest ways in which the assessment of costs, benefits and impact on small organisations could be improved. They were also asked for more general comments about the assessment and possible improvements to it.

I refer the hon. Member to the written answer my hon. Friend, the Cabinet Office Parliamentary Secretary gave on 17 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 483W, about the advice on RIAs contained in the Good Policy Making guide.

Winter Fuel Allowance

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many men aged 60 to 64 years have claimed the winter fuel allowance in Scotland; what percentage this represents of the total number of men aged 60 to 64 years who are eligible for the allowance; broken down by local authority area in Scotland; and if he will provide this information for each winter from 1997 to date. [29706]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested.

Hospital Stays

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), on 14 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 43W on hospital stays, if he will provide corresponding estimates for 2000–01 for other benefits affected by the rules; and if he will provide a breakdown in each case between pensioners and non-pensioners. [28676]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is in the table:

Million

	Working age	*Pension age*	*Total reduction*
Total reduction in benefit due to 6–52 weeks hospital downrating			
Incapacity benefit	6	n/a	6
Severe disablement allowance	3	0	4
Total reduction in benefit due to 52 weeks hospital downrating			
Incapacity benefit	8	n/a	8
Severe disablement allowance	19	*2	21
Total reduction in benefit due to benefit being withdrawn after 4 weeks in hospital			
Disability living allowance	10	22	32
Attendance allowance	n/a	80	80
Invalid care allowance	3	0	3

Notes:

1. The information has been obtained from a number of administrative sources and a number of assumptions have been made, ie numbers marked * are taken from a small number of sample cases and are subject to a relatively high sampling error and should only be used as an indication of the current situation and it has been assumed that figures in a given quarter remain constant throughout the year.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest million so total may not sum.
3. It is not possible to provide accurate total reductions for income support, housing benefit, or council tax benefit.

Unfair Dismissal

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for each year since 1992, how much compensation for unfair dismissal the Department of Work and Pensions has paid to its employees, broken down by *(a)* employees of each executive agency and *(b)* employees of other parts of the Department; and how many employees have received compensation in each year. [28968]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is not collected in the form requested except for that supplied in relation to the Employment Service. With the exception of the Employment Service approval for the settlement of these claims may be obtained either at area or head office level, these figures are not collated centrally.

Figures for the Employment Service are available for financial years 1993–94 to date. Prior to this figures were not collected in the form requested.

Employment Service

Year	*Total payments (£)*	*Number of employees*
1993–94	6,958.97	3
1994–95	6,488.00	3
1995–96	48,732.79	12
1996–97	63,421.65	6
1997–98	32,885.00	3
1998–99	1,000.00	1
1999–2000	4,334.44	1
2000–01	31,251.00	6

Stakeholder Pensions

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what is the average amount saved by each person who has taken out a stakeholder pension. [28970]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not yet available. Information on the total amount paid into stakeholder pensions on which claims for tax relief on pension contributions have been processed, and the number of individuals covered by such claims, is published by the Inland Revenue on its website. The information does not therefore cover all stakeholder pensions sold. Further details covering the period up to the end of September 2001 will be published on the website at the end of January.

Disabled People (Income Support)

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the maximum income support is payable to a *(a)* disabled pensioner and *(b)* disabled adult under 60 years of age. [29707]

Mr. McCartney: There is no maximum amount of income support or minimum income guarantee payable. The amount payable is dependent on an individuals circumstances and takes account of a number of factors. These include: whether the person is single, married or has dependants; their level of other income and savings; and receipt of other benefits such as attendance allowance.

From April 2001 the minimum income guarantee rate for a single pensioner is £98.15 and £140.55 for a couple. The severe disability premium is £41.55 for a single person or where one member of a couple qualifies and £83.10 for a couple where both qualify.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many elderly people were waiting for their winter fuel payment on 1 January; and what steps he is taking to eliminate the backlog in processing winter fuel payments. [29649]

Mr. McCartney: Winter fuel payments are made automatically to people who are in receipt of certain benefits, which include retirement pension. These payments were issued prior to 1 January 2002 and represent the majority of winter fuel payments. Other people who are entitled to a winter fuel payment are required to submit a claim form. If the claim was received before 24 September 2001, payments were also made by 1 January 2002. However, inquiries from individuals regarding payments not yet received are investigated and a payment issued as soon as possible, where appropriate.

Salary-related Pension Schemes

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to introduce changes to the minimum funding requirement for salary-related pension schemes; and if these changes will be applied retrospectively. [29789]

Mr. McCartney: On 7 March 2001 the Government announced proposals to replace the minimum funding requirement (MFR) with a long-term scheme specific standard in the context of a regime of transparency and disclosure, with additional measures to strengthen protection. Implementing these proposals in full will require primary legislation, and we are working with the pensions industry and other interested parties to develop proposals for legislation as soon as parliamentary time becomes available.

On 18 September 2001, we published "The Minimum Funding Requirement: The next stage of reform" which sets out our plans for the next stage of reform of the MFR, including consultation on draft regulations introducing interim changes to the MFR in advance of its replacement. The consultation period on the draft regulations ended on 10 December, and we plan to introduce changes before April this year. The regulations will not be retrospective.

Occupational Pensions

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will ensure that the review of the security of occupational pensions includes measures to protect the rights of non-pensioners to the fair value of their accrued rights in the event of insolvency. [29793]

Mr. McCartney: On 7 March 2001 the Government published "Security for Occupational Pensions: The Government's Proposals", which set out our proposals for providing more effective security for members of defined benefit occupational pension schemes. Implementing these proposals in full will require primary legislation, and we are working with the pensions industry and other interested parties to develop detailed proposals for legislation as soon as parliamentary time becomes available. As part of this process we are considering what arrangements should apply when a scheme is wound-up with an insolvent employer.

Child Support

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 610W, on child support, for what reason the December 2001 edition of the Appeals Service suggests that all existing CSA clients will be assessed on the new basis some time in 2003; and if he will make a statement on the extra resources being devoted to the Appeals Service in preparation for the anticipated increase in CSA-related appeals. [31257]

Malcolm Wicks: Changes to the child support scheme will take effect for new cases from April 2002. Existing cases will be transferred once the new scheme is working well, which we expect to be about a year later. Additional funding of £1.7 million has been allocated to the Appeals Service for 2002–03. This sum includes the staffing costs for 50 additional staff. A further £398,000 has been allocated to implement the necessary changes to IT procedures, and develop new training material for staff and panel members, resulting from the new child support legislation.

Disability Living Allowances

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 813W, on disability living allowances, in which constituencies *(a)* the revised arrangements for obtaining relevant information from claimants' general practitioners are being piloted and *(b)* the alternative system for extra-costs disability benefits based on activities for managing life are being tested; and what activities are encompassed within the phrase 'activities for managing life'. [31284]

Maria Eagle: The revised General Practitioner Factual Report is being trialed in the Wembley Disability Benefits Centre. This centre deals with cases in an area from Oxfordshire in the west, to Great Yarmouth in the east, and from North London up to Peterborough.

The test of the Activities for Managing Life (AML) model involves up to 600 volunteers throughout Great Britain. Volunteers are not selected on a constituency basis, but are drawn from those people making new claims for DLA/AA.

The AML model is based on 16 functional activities necessary for self-care. In addition there are two activities (17 and 18) specifically for children aged 12 or under to test the best way of gathering information on the care needs of children.

The activities are:

1. Feeding and drinking
2. Dressing and undressing
3. Washing and bathing
4. Using the toilet
5. Getting in/out and turning in bed
6. Mobility
7. Rising and sitting
8. Fits or blackouts
9. Orientation
10. Taking medication or undergoing therapeutic procedures
11. Reliance on machines and equipment
12. Communication

13. Budgeting
14. Hygiene
15. Daily routine
16. Awareness of danger
17. Childhood development
18. Help children need in connection with their treatment.

HEALTH

Ophthalmology

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on waiting times for ophthalmology referrals at the Kent and Canterbury hospital. [14332]

Ms Blears: We have been informed that over 200 patients are currently waiting more than 26 weeks for a first appointment for ophthalmology at the Kent and Canterbury hospital. However, since the start of the 2001–02 financial year, East Kent hospitals national health service trust has achieved a 4,990 reduction in the numbers of patients waiting over 26 weeks.

The trust has taken a number of actions to reduce waiting times for ophthalmology still further and ensure it achieves its year end target.

Wheelchair Services

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the level of funding was for the Harrow Wheelchair Service in each of the last five years; [8171]

(2) if he will make a statement on his plans to increase funding for wheelchair services and on the method of distribution used to allocate this funding. [8172]

Jacqui Smith: Figures for individual wheelchair services are not held centrally. Funding for wheelchair services is part of health authorities general allocations. It is for health authorities in partnership with primary care groups/trusts and other local stakeholders to determine how best to use their funds to meet national and local priorities for improving health, tackling health inequalities and modernising services. Health authority allocations for 2002–03 were announced on 6 December 2001.

NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Bill

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the use of confidential information held by community health councils following the implementation of the NHS Reform Bill. [22324]

Ms Blears: The use and storage of confidential records is covered by the Data Protection Act 1998 and Health Service Council 1999/053 "For the Record". This issue will form part of the formal transition process to the new system that will be managed following consultation with the Transition Advisory Board.

Beta Interferon

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with drug companies on the reduction of the cost of beta interferon in the UK to the level of other European countries; and if he will make a statement. [23322]

Ms Blears: The Department has held discussions with Schering, Biogen and Serono, the manufacturers of the three beta interferon products licensed in the United Kingdom, and with Aventis and Teva, who jointly market Copaxone (glatiramer), in relation to the possible provision of these therapies for patients with multiple sclerosis in a manner which could be considered to be cost effective. These discussions began on 5 September, after the Department and other consultees had received copies of the preliminary appraisal determination of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, and are still continuing.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the prescribing policy of Gloucestershire health authority of beta interferon; and if he will make a statement. [29309]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* In Gloucestershire health authority beta interferon is prescribed to patients with relapsing/remitting multiple sclerosis who fulfil the clinical criteria of the guidelines of the Association of British Neurologists. The health authority has provided additional funding of £300,000 a year to meet the costs of this treatment. This policy will be reviewed following the publication of guidance by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 828W, on asylum seekers, how many local authorities claimed grant for *(a)* under 16-year-olds, and *(b)* 16 and 17-year-olds in (i) 1997, (ii) 1998, (iii) 1999, and (iv) 2000. [17822]

Jacqui Smith [holding answer 27 January 2002]: The information requested is in the table. Data for 2000–01 on unaccompanied asylum-seeking children have been supplied by the Home Office which now administers the grant.

	LAs claiming UASC grant	*For under-16s only*	*For over-16s only*	*For both age groups*
1996–97	4[1]	—	—	—
1997–98	5[1]	—	—	—
1998–99	76	2	22	52
1999–2000	106	4	23	79
2000–01	108	—	14	94

[1] In 1996–97 and 1997–98 no distinction was made between age groups in terms of amounts claimable, so no separate figures are available.

Community Nurses

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many community nurses are employed in the West Midlands. [23703]

Yvette Cooper: Work force data do not show figures for community nurses separately. Figures for hospital and community nurses are shown in the table.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff within the community nursing areas of work by qualification in the West Midlands regional office area as at 30 September 2000

	Whole-time equivalents	Headcount
All staff	7,460	9,890
of which:		
Health Visitors	1,110	1,410
District Nurses	1,400	1,740
Other community nursing	4,950	6,740
of which:		
Qualified	3,260	4,260
Unqualified	1,690	2,490
Community psychiatric	1,420	1,550
of which:		
Qualified	1,180	1,270
Unqualified	240	280
Community learning difficulties	1,230	1,500
of which:		
Qualified	590	670
Unqualified	640	830
Community services	2,310	3,700
Of which:		
Qualified	1,490	2,320
Unqualified	820	1,380

Notes:

Figures are rounded to the nearest 10

Figures exclude learners and agency staff

Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts

Source:

Department of Health non-medical workforce census

Nursing Home Fees

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessments he has made of the compliance of the Review Panels to be established in order to adjudicate on the liability under Coughlan *v.* North Devon Health Authority, C.A. 1999 of a patient's property to be charged to pay for nursing home fees under Department of Health circular HSC 2001/015:LAC(2001)18 of 28 June, 2001 with Article VI of the Human Rights Act in *(a)* composition and *(b)* independence. [22958]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 18 December 2001]*: Counsel's view was sought before Health Service Circular 2001/015: Local Authority Circular (2001)18 was released, including compliance with the Human Rights Act 2000. Article 6 requires that in the determination of a person's civil rights and obligations there should be a fair and independent decision making process. A decision about whether someone is entitled to particular national health service services or particular local authority services is not considered to be a determination of a civil right within the meaning of article 6.

The question of whether a patient's property can be set against charges for nursing home fees is not a function of review panels.

The issue of nursing home fees is discussed in HSC 2001/17:LAC(2001)26 "Guidance on free nursing care in nursing homes" issued on 25 September 2001.

Neither the free nursing care nor the continuing care guidance deals with issues of whether the value of a patient's property should be included in the means test when assessing an individual's contribution towards the cost of nursing home fees. The relevant guidance, regarding local councils contribution to the costs of accommodation and board, is in the charges for residential accommodation guidance, which is underpinned by National Assistance (Assessment of Resources) Regulations 1992, regulation 25. Some of these decisions have to comply with article 6 of the Human Rights Act, and in these cases the complaints panel should be independent of the council.

NHS Appointments

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people who have been appointed to a position within the NHS by the NHS Appointments Commission have declared a political interest, broken down by political parties; and what proportion of the total number of appointees this represents for each political party; [24635]

(2) how many people who have been appointed to a position within the NHS by the NHS Appointments Commission have declared a party political interest; [24636]

(3) how many appointments to positions and bodies within the NHS the NHS Appointments Commission has made since its inception. [24638]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* Since its establishment on 1 April 2001 the National Health Service Appointments Commission has made 608 appointments to 313 bodies. 218 of those appointed had declared political activity in the previous five years. The breakdown by political party is given in the table, both under the Commission, and in relation to appointments made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State immediately before the Commission was established.

Appointments made by the Secretary of State to NHS trusts, health authorities and primary care trusts as at 31 March 2001 according to declaration on political activity

	Number	Percentage
Conservative	153	4.0
Independent	38	1.0
Labour	823	21.5
Liberal Democrat	123	3.2
Other	19	0.5
No political activity declared	2,671	69.8
Total	3,827	100

Appointments made by the NHS Appointments Commission to NHS trusts, health authorities and primary care trusts, as at 10 January 2002 according to declaration on political activity

	Number	Percentage
Conservative	30	4.9
Independent	9	1.5
Labour	143	23.5
Liberal Democrat	33	5.4
Other	3	0.5
No political activity declared	390	64.2
Total	608	100

Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to consult the *(a)* retiring and *(b)* incoming chairmen of the Worcestershire acute hospitals NHS trust on their preferred date for the transfer of their responsibilities; and if he will make a statement. [25404]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* Other than setting the criteria according to which appointments are made, Ministers no longer have any direct role in the appointments process for chairs of national health service trusts. The NHS Appointments Commission now has responsibility for the appointment, training and appraisal of chairs and non-executive board members of NHS trusts, health authorities and primary care trusts.

Health Action Zones

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been invested in health action zones by the NHS in each year since 1997. [27354]

Ms Blears: There are 26 Health Action Zones (HAZs) based in the most deprived areas of the country. Since their inception in 1998 up to the end of the 2001–02 financial year HAZs have received total direct funding of £274.2 million to tackle issues including smoking cessation and drug misuse. Health authorities in HAZ areas have also received £101.8 million Health Inequalities Adjustment funding (HIA).

The table shows the HAZ and HIA funding for 1998 to 2001.

£ million

	Core funding[1]	*Targeted funding*	*Health inequalities adjustment*	*Total*
1998–99	7.5	—	—	7.5
1999–2000	56.5	30	—	86.5
2000–01	59.5	60	—	119.5
2001–02	60.8	—	101.8	162.6
Total	184.3	90	101.8	376.1

[1] Includes smoking cessation and drug misuse moneys

Note:

Figures have been rounded

Insurance

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent by NHS bodies on insurance in each year since 1997. [27252]

Ms Blears: Information about expenditure on insurance by national health service bodies is not centrally collected by the Department.

The risk pooling scheme for trusts (RPST) was introduced in April 1999 as an alternative to purchasing commercial insurance for non-clinical risks, other than motor vehicle insurance. More than 90 per cent. of NHS trusts are involved in the scheme. The figures show the net amounts contributed to the pool by trusts between 1999 and 2003:

	£ million
1999–2000	12.3
2000–01	17.3
2001–02[1]	9.1
2002–03[1]	8.3

[1] Outstanding amounts left in the pool are rebated two years in arrears. Therefore the 2001–02 figure reflects a rebate of £10.4 million left over from 1999–2000 and the 2002–03 figure reflects a rebate of £12.3 million left over from 2000–01.

Segregated Ablutions

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of trusts have failed to provide segregated washing and toilet facilities for patients. [27234]

Ms Blears: The target date for the provision of segregated washing and toilet facilities for patients is December 2002. National health service trusts are taking action, including construction schemes, to achieve this target and a report will be made at that time.

Blood Donors

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people gave blood in Buckinghamshire in each financial year since 1997. [27780]

Ms Blears: Figures received from the National Blood Service show that the number of blood donors in Buckinghamshire in each financial year since 1997 is shown in the table.

Financial year	*Number of donors*[1]	*Donations collected*
1997–98	[2]—	[2]—
1998–99	[2]—	35,378
1999–2000	28,137	36,331
2000–01	26,901	33,630
2001–02	25,970	[3]24,905

[1] Donor numbers taken at the mid-year point

[2] Unavailable

[3] To date

Out-patients

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many out-patients were waiting for treatment between *(a)* 0 and 12 weeks, *(b)* 13 and 25 weeks and *(c)* over 26 weeks in the Portsmouth hospitals trust areas in (i) 1997, (ii) 1998, (iii) 1999, (iv) 2000 and (vi) 2001. [27681]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* Information is not collected centrally on out-patients waiting for between 0 and 12 weeks. Information in the table relates to Quarter two figures for the years 1997 to 2001.

Portsmouth hospitals trust out-patients waiting times

Quarter 2 figures	*Not seen 13 to 25 weeks*	*Not seen 26 weeks plus*
1997	2,273	793
1998	2,441	861
1999	3,185	753

Portsmouth hospitals trust out-patients waiting times

Quarter 2 figures	*Not seen 13 to 25 weeks*	*Not seen 26 weeks plus*
2000	4,748	1,274
2001	4,231	1,249

Note:

The large increase between 1999 and 2000 is the result of incorrect counting procedures. This was picked up by Portsmouth hospitals trust and is now reporting in line with NHS Executive (south-east regional office) guidance.

Delayed Discharges

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were waiting to leave hospital who were delayed by lack of availability of social services beds in *(a)* September 2001, *(b)* October 2001, *(c)* November 2001 and *(d)* December 2001 broken down by local authority; and if he will make a statement. [28335]

Jacqui Smith: Information is collected centrally on a quarterly basis and is collected on the basis of health authority. Reasons for delay are collected on the basis of "awaiting public funding" and "awaiting care home placement". The second group includes those who are not social services' responsibility. The information available for September 2001 has been placed in the Library—the information for December 2001 is not yet available.

In October 2001 we announced the investment of an additional £300 million over this year and next as part of a radical 'cash for change' programme. This funding has gone to councils to enable them to reduce delayed discharges and targeted on the areas with the most severe problems. We are already seeing reductions in delayed discharge as a result of the funding.

Dentistry

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists *(a)* are registered and *(b)* were registered as providing NHS dental treatment (i) in Enfield and (ii) in Haringey in each year since 1997. [28838]

Ms Blears: The number of principal dentists on Enfield and Haringey health authority's list who carry out the majority of their general dental service (GDS) work in that HA area is shown in the table for September in the years 1997 to 2000. Data are also shown for 31 March 2001, the day before the HA was merged with Barnet HA. The total number of GDS dentists is also included in the table.

Separate information for Enfield and Haringey is not available.

Between 1 April 2001 and 30 September 2001 the number of GDS dentists in Barnet, Enfield and Haringey HA increased from 370 to 377 dentists.

General dental service: principal dentists and total number of dentists, 1997 to 2001

Enfield and Haringey health authority[1]	*Principal dentists*	*All GDS dentists*[2]
September 1997	184	194
September 1998	188	198
September 1999	189	205
September 2000	192	209
March 2001	198	213

[1] Dentists who do the majority of their work in Enfield and Haringey HA. Excludes dentists in the Enfield and Haringey HA area who do most of their work in other HAs.

[2] All GDS dentists cover principal dentists on the health authority list, their assistants and vocational dental practitioners.

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what notice dentists are required to give patients of the termination of the availability of NHS treatment; and if he will make a statement. [28839]

Ms Blears: Dentists, as independent contractors, can decide whether or not to accept patients for national health service care and treatment under a continuing care arrangement (for patients over-18 years of age) or under a capitation arrangement (for those under-18).

If a dentist decides to withdraw NHS care arrangements, under the terms of service he has the right to terminate these arrangements, provided that he gives the patients three months notice, in writing, and uses his best endeavours to complete any outstanding treatment, before the arrangements come to an end. He must also notify the health authority accordingly and give details of any care and treatment which he has agreed to provide and which is outstanding, including any arrangements made for completion of that care and treatment.

If a dentist wishes to terminate an arrangement with less than three months notice, he must apply to the HA setting out the reasons and asking the HA to terminate the arrangement. A dentist may ask the HA to terminate the arrangement immediately in the case of violent patients.

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements are in place to assist patients to register with an NHS dentist; what support is provided where a local dentist is not available; and if he will make a statement. [28840]

Ms Blears: We are committed to ensuring that national health service dentistry is available to all who want it through registration with an NHS dentist or via NHS Direct. In supporting this commitment we have invested over £100 million in the last two years. Significant resources have been invested in personal dental service pilots to improve access to NHS dentistry in areas with significant problems.

Registration can play an important role in promoting oral health through strengthening the relationship between patient and dentist. However, many people do not visit a dentist regularly. The systems are now in place for NHS Direct to advise patients in all parts of the country on where they can find a NHS dentist, within locally defined time and distance standards.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many NHS registered dentists there were in the Buckinghamshire health authority area in each year since 1997; [24854]

(2) how many dental practices in the Buckingham constituency *(a)* closed and *(b)* opened in each year since 1997. [24853]

Ms Blears: The total number of dentists and principals in Buckinghamshire health authority 1997 to 2001 are shown in the table.

General dental service: Total number of dentists and principals in Buckinghamshire health authority, 1997–2001

At 30 September each year	*All GDS dentists*	*Of which: Principal dentists*
1997	265	248
1998	260	246
1999	281	262
2000	272	252
2001	294	273

[1] Dentists who do the majority of their work in Buckinghamshire HA. Excludes dentists in Buckinghamshire HA area who do most of their work in other HAs.

[2] All GDS dentists covers principal dentists who are on the HA's list, their assistants and vocational dental practitioners.

In addition two Personal Dental Services schemes have commenced since 1997. The number of dentists were as follows:

September each year	*Number of dentists*	*Of which: also worked in the GDS*
1999	13	2
2000	18	3
2001	27	3

The number of dental practices in Buckinghamshire health authority that *(a)* closed and *(b)* opened is shown in the table for the years 1997 to 2000 and for January to September 2001. This information is not available by parliamentary constituency.

Number of dental practices that have closed and opened in Buckinghamshire health authority 1997–2001

	(a) Practice closed	*(b) Practice opened*
1997	4	8
1998	5	9
1999	3	4
2000	6	10
2001 (up to end September)	—	—

[1] Data cover the General Dental Service and Personal Dental Service

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in Dorset were registered with an NHS dentist in April *(a)* 1991, *(b)* 1996, *(c)* 1997 and *(d)* 2001. [30319]

Ms Blears: The table shows the number of adults and children registered with a general dental service dentist in Dorset health authority for each of the years 1996, 1997 and 2001.

Comparable data for 1991 are not available as registrations were only introduced in October 1990 and registration numbers had not yet had time to reach consistent levels.

In September 1996, the registration period for new adult and child registrations was shortened to 15 months. Previously adult registrations lasted for 24 months and child registrations expired at the end of the following calendar year. This affected registration numbers from December 1997 onwards.

Some people who are not registered with a dentist choose to attend occasionally.

General dental service: number of adult and child registrations Dorset HA

30 April each year	*Adults*	*Children*	*Total*
1996	304,958	99,921	404,879
1997	294,422	99,667	394,089
2001[1]	271,711	102,348	374,059

[1] Figures affected by the change in the registration periods to 15 months

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists in Dorset were taking new adult NHS patients in each of the years between 1991 and 2000 for which information is available. [30318]

Ms Blears: The number of general dental service dentists taking new adult patients for national health service treatment in Dorset health authority are estimated to be around 88 in 1999 and around 92 in 2000. These figures are estimates for November of each year, and are based on the number of dentists meeting certain registration criteria (including a minimum level for new adult registrations).

These estimates are not available for years prior to 1999.

Health Authority Allocations

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will state in respect of *(a)* Buckinghamshire health authority, *(b)* Oxfordshire health authority and *(c)* Berkshire health authority, (i) their allocations from his Department for 2002–03 and (ii) the amount by which these allocations differ from their national level if they were funded in accordance with his Department's weighted-capitation funding formula. [26558]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* The 2002–03 allocations and the amounts each health authority are under their targets determined by the weighted capitation formula are shown in the table.

£ million

Health authority	*2002–03 allocation*	*2002–03 distances from targets*
Buckinghamshire	493.96	–12.20
Oxfordshire	445.46	–8.88
Berkshire	588.57	–23.16

Pulmonary Disease

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make it his policy to collect statistics for the number of patients in each health authority area with chronic pulmonary illnesses; [29356]

(2) what estimate he has made of the prevalence of disability owing to chronic respiratory disease. [29354]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the incidence of individual conditions is not routinely collected centrally. We consider that it would not be cost effective to do this, due to the many conditions involved and the large investment in manpower and other resources that would be required to collect, maintain and update this type of statistical information.

In 1999, however, the Department commissioned the Wessex Institute for Health Research and Development to produce a report on chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. The report estimated that, in a typical health authority of 500,000 people, around 3,000 in the 45 plus age group would have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

No estimates have been made on the prevalence of disability although the Government do recognise that lung disease can be very debilitating.

Figures from the Office for National Statistics for causes of death show that, in 1999, around 150,000 people died from respiratory disease.

Health Care (Gloucestershire)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the number of delayed discharges at hospitals in Gloucestershire; and if he will make a statement. [29303]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The Gloucestershire Health Community has been working closely with Gloucestershire county council social services and the independent sector in order to reduce the number of patients who although fit to be discharged from hospital are still occupying an acute bed. Since July local information shows the average number of patients waiting for discharge has declined from 109 to 47 on 20 January.

The national health service regional office and social care region are closely monitoring the action being taken in Gloucestershire to reduce delayed discharges.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the anticipated impact on Gloucestershire of the structural reforms proposed for the NHS. [29310]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The structural reforms proposed for the national health service will mean that as from April 2002, primary care trusts will be responsible for securing services, improving health and integrating health and social care in their areas. PCTs are local organisations led by clinicians and local people. They will work with partners from the local community to ensure that the local health service is responsive to local needs and best represents the needs of patients. By 2004, PCTs will receive 75 per cent. of the NHS budget to help them achieve their new agenda. All three PCTs in Gloucestershire will be located within the newly created Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire health authority, an organisation which will help to develop and performance manage the health service within its borders.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the availability of carers in Gloucestershire; and if he will make a statement. [29307]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* Gloucestershire county council have the statutory duty to provide home care in that county.

The most recent statistics on domiciliary staff numbers employed by Gloucestershire county council returned to the Department, for the year 2000, are as follows:

	Number
Home/domiciliary care/help organizers	58
Assistant and trainee home care/help organizers	16
Home care staff/home helps	561

Councils generally provide a significant proportion of their home care by contracting private and voluntary sector agencies. Central data on the level of this provision are not kept.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of shortages of *(a)* doctors, *(b)* nurses and *(c)* scientific staff in the NHS in Gloucestershire; and if he will make a statement. [29306]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* Information on the number of vacancies at national health service trusts within Gloucestershire health authority in March 2001 that had been unfilled for more than three months are given in the table.

Vacancies in NHS trusts in Gloucestershire HA, all staff groups, three month vacancies[1] for total of each group

	Number
Medical and dental staff	0
Total consultants	0
Other doctor and dentists (excluding training grades)	0
Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	50
Qualified Allied Health Professionals	10

[1] Three month vacancies are vacancies as at 31 March 2001 which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole-time equivalents).

Notes:

1. Numbers are rounded to the nearest 10.
2. Qualified Allied Health Professionals includes qualified staff from the following occupational groups: chiropody, dietetics, occupational therapy, orthoptics/optics, physiotherapy, diagnostic and therapeutic radiography.

Source:

Department of Health Vacancies Survey 2001

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* nursing home and *(b)* residential care home places there were (i) in May 1997 and (ii) at the latest date for which figures are available, in Gloucestershire; and if he will make a statement. [29304]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The table shows the number of registered nursing beds in nursing homes, private hospitals and clinics and the number of places in residential care homes in Gloucestershire in 1997 and 2001.

Number of nursing beds and residential places[1] in Gloucestershire, 1997 and 2001—as at 31 March

	Nursing care[1,2]	*Residential care*	*Total care beds*
1997	4,047	3,737	7,784
2001	3,064	4,241	7,305

[1] Excludes places in childrens' homes

[2] Registered beds in general and mental nursing homes, private hospitals and clinics.

[3] Information for registered nursing beds for 1997 relates to the period 1 October 1996 to 31 March 1997.
Source:
Department of Health Annual Statistical returns

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* nurses and *(b)* doctors were employed in the NHS in Gloucestershire (i) in May 1997 and (ii) at the latest date for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [29308]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The numbers of doctors and nurses employed in the national health service in Gloucestershire are shown in the table and show a 13.8 per cent. rise in the number of doctors and 2 per cent. rise in the number of nurses employed in the NHS in Gloucestershire between September 1997 and September 2000.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): medical and dental staff¹, general medical practitioners² and nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff in Gloucestershire health authority each year as at 30 September

Headcount

	1997	2000
Gloucestershire HA		
All doctors	870	980
of which:		
HCHS doctors	500	610
Practitioners (excluding GP retainers)	360	380
All nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	5,420	5,530
of which:		
Qualified	3,360	3,590
Unqualified	1,830	1,720
Practice nurses	230	220

[1] Figures exclude medical hospital practitioners and medical clinical assistants, most of whom are also GPs working part time in hospitals.

[2] All practitioners (excluding GP retainers) include UPEs, restricted principals, assistants, GP registrars, salaried doctors (para. 52 SFA) and PMS others. GP retainers were collected for the first time in 1999, in 2000 there were 1,117 in England, 224 in South West RO and 44 in Gloucestershire HA.

Notes:
1. Due to the new regional office boundaries in 1999 the 1997 figures are an estimated regional split.
2. Figures exclude learners and agency staff.
3. Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts.
4. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

Sources:
Department of Health Medical and Dental Workforce Census.
Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics.
Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census.

Oncology Unit, Cheltenham General Hospital

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the average time waited on the day for their treatment by out-patients at the oncology unit at Cheltenham General Hospital; and if he will make a statement. [29305]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The information requested is not available centrally.

Crawley and Redhill Hospitals

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the emergency closure of the accident and emergency department at Crawley and Redhill hospitals effective from 21 January. [30115]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* The accident and emergency departments in the Surrey and Sussex healthcare national health service trust were not closed to emergency cases.

Emergency cases where paramedics determined that the patient should be treated at the nearest accident and emergency department were accepted as were all patients self referring to the accident and emergency departments. Diversion arrangements were made for neighbouring hospitals to take other urgent (but not emergency) cases.

Class A Drugs

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths were caused by the use of *(a)* ecstasy, *(b)* cocaine and *(c)* heroin in the last 12 months; what steps he is taking to reduce the incidence of deaths caused by the use of class A drugs; and if he will make a statement. [29830]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* The latest year for which figures are available is 1999. The number of deaths in England and Wales where ecstasy, cocaine and heroin/morphine was mentioned on the death certificate, with or without other substances, are as follows:

	Number
MDMA/Ecstasy	26
Cocaine	88
Heroin/Morphine¹	754

[1] As heroin breaks down in the body into morphine, the latter may be detected at post mortem and recorded on the death certificate.

Source:
Office for National Statistics database of deaths from drug related poisonings

In November 2001 we launched our action plan to prevent drug-related deaths which aims, by promoting practical measures such as resuscitation training for drug users and harm reduction training for drug treatment staff, to reduce the number of these deaths. A press release was issued at launch, reference 2001/0543, and can be found on the Department's website.

Postponed Operations

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations were postponed in South Tyneside in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [30334]

Jacqui Smith: The number of operations postponed in South Tyneside in 1999, 2000 and 2001 is shown in the table.

	1999	2000	2001
Number of elective operations	12,044	13,024	13,595
Number of operations postponed	41	53	75

Diabetes

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what scientific advice he has received on the relative merits of *(a)* cell research and *(b)* the further development of pharmaceutical products in developing a cure for type 1 diabetes. [30544]

Jacqui Smith: We have received no advice on the relative merits of cell research and the further development of pharmaceutical products in developing a cure for Type 1 diabetes. The Human Genetics Commission provides us with strategic advice on developments in human genetics and their social and ethical implications. To date, the Commission has given no advice relevant to cell research and diabetes. The Gene Therapy Advisory Committee has received no proposals for gene therapy research relating to diabetes and none is expected at present. We will, however, continue to monitor developments with interest.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice his Department provides to primary care trusts and other health bodies on screening vulnerable individuals for early signs of the onset of diabetes. [30545]

Jacqui Smith: We have asked the UK National Screening Committee to assess the benefits and disbenefits of screening for Type 2 diabetes. The Committee has decided that further research, which may require some complex studies, is needed to inform its advice. It will report to the Department in 2005.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have *(a)* Type I and *(b)* Type II diabetes; and what research his Department has (i) commissioned and (ii) evaluated on (A) the costs to the health service of diabetic care, (B) the numbers of undiagnosed diabetics and (C) the costs and benefits of a high risk screening programme for Type II diabetes. [31279]

Jacqui Smith: An estimated 1.3 million people in England have diagnosed diabetes, of whom around 15 per cent. have Type 1 diabetes and around 85 per cent. have Type 2 diabetes. In addition, as many as 1 million people may have Type 2 diabetes without yet knowing it. Around 5 per cent. of total national health service resources is used for the care of people with diabetes. We see bringing clarity to the question of screening for Type 2 diabetes as a priority. We have asked the United Kingdom National Screening Committee to assess the benefits and disbenefits. The committee will make recommendations in 2005.

Lymington Community Hospital

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when construction of the new Lymington community hospital will *(a)* start and *(b)* be completed; and if he will make a statement. [27345]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* New Forest primary care trust, which manages Lymington hospital, has been actively working on plans for a new hospital which are now very advanced. The PCT intends to submit an outline business case to the south-east regional office of the Department of Health in February 2002 seeking approval to proceed with the detail design and build of the new hospital.

Social Services

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Government's funding of social services in Gloucestershire, with particular reference to disabled people. [29934]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* Gloucestershire's Personal Social Services Standard Spending Assessment (PSS SSA) increases from £81.3 million for 2001–02 to £84.2 million for 2002–03, which is an increase of over 5 per cent. In addition, Gloucestershire will receive substantial increases in grants for social services. Their carers grant will increase by 21 per cent. Their building capacity and deferred payment grant will double. Their children's services grant will increase by 13 per cent.

It is for Gloucestershire city council to decide how much of its PSS SSA to use for services for disabled people.

Road Traffic (NHS Charges) Amendment Regulations

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations he has had from insurance companies about the introduction of the Road Traffic (NHS Charges) Amendment Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement; [29916]

(2) what discussions he had with insurance companies before introducing the Road Traffic (NHS Charges) Amendment Regulations 2001; and if he will make a statement. [29915]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* The Department advised the Association of British Insurers of planned increases under the provisions of the Road Traffic (NHS Charges) Act 1999 in the tariff and cap on 7 December 2001. Officials have since corresponded with the association on these matters and I understand a further approach has been made to me seeking to delay implementation. However the increased charges will not have an immediate impact as they will only apply to road traffic accidents happening on or after 28 January 2002. As the average time to settle the relevant insurance claims is around 18 months, the full effect of the increases will not occur until summer 2003.

Occupational Health Services

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people the Government's Chief Medical Officer estimates were covered by occupational health services in *(a)* 1975, *(b)* 1985, *(c)* 1995 and *(d)* the last year for which survey figures are available. [30189]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* The only estimates of occupational health provision the Department holds are taken from the 1993 Health and Safety Executive (HSE) contract research report "Occupational Health Provision at Work" (reference: 57/1993). The HSE has recently commissioned a new survey to assess the current level of usage of occupational health support among employers.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the implications for the payment of ambulance staff of tri-service working with police and the fire service. [30306]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* The three invest to save projects in Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and Cleveland have been established to test the cost and operational effectiveness of joint ambulance, fire and police control rooms and a range of shared support facilities such as fleet management, information technology and accommodation.

National health service ambulance trusts have the local freedom to vary the rates paid to their staff to take account of local circumstances, including the discretion to make local pay supplements.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on pay and conditions of service for *(a)* ambulance technicians and *(b)* ambulance paramedics. [30304]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* The Ambulance Whitley Councils determine the pay for all ambulance staff on national terms and conditions. Negotiations on pay for 2002–03 will begin shortly.

For the future we remain committed to working closely with unions, professional organisations and employers to introduce a new pay system that will offer staff working in the national health service a more attractive career structure and fairer pay.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has for personal development for ambulance staff; and what monitoring occurs of ambulance trusts to ensure that they deliver these. [30307]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* Maintaining and extending the skills, potential and careers of national health service staff taking into account service developments and patient need in health and social care is a fundamental part of the NHS Plan and the Framework for Lifelong Learning for the NHS, "Working Together—Learning Together", copies of which are available in the Library or can be accessed on the DOH website: www.doh.gov.uk/lifelonglearning.

In 2001–02 £20 million has been invested in the NHS via workforce development confederations to ensure that trusts, including ambulance trusts, have the capacity to deliver training effectively and to support them in meeting personal and professional development needs identified as a result of appraisal.

The new strategic health authorities will monitor progress on implementing the lifelong learning framework targets, through mainstream performance management processes.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will investigate the eight minute limit for emergency calls for the ambulance service, with special reference to congestion, road works and other restrictions to journeys. [30305]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* Standards, supported by evidence of clinical and cost effectiveness, have been set for ambulance responses to emergency and urgent ambulance calls. Current standards require that calls to people with potentially life-threatening illnesses and conditions should be responded to within eight minutes irrespective of location in 75 per cent. of cases. All other calls should be responded to within 14 minutes in urban areas and 19 minutes in rural areas in 95 per cent. of cases.

Road conditions do have an impact on ambulance response times but clinical evidence suggests that achievement of the 75 per cent. standard could save 1,800 lives each year in people under 75 years of age suffering heart attacks.

In March 2000, we recurrently invested an extra £21 million in the ambulance services to support the delivery of the 75 per cent. Category A eight minute target. This is being invested in more ambulance staff and front line vehicles.

Residential Care Homes

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds there were in residential care homes *(a)* in May 1997 and *(b)* on the latest date for which figures are available in (i) England, (ii) Kent and (iii) the Tonbridge and Malling constituency. [30016]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* The table shows the number of places in residential care homes in England and in the Kent area in 1997 and 2001. Information for Tonbridge and Malling constituency is not collected. Information relates to 31 March each year.

Residential care places[1] *in England and Kent, 1997 and 2001*

As at 31 March *Rounded numbers*

	(i) England	*(ii) Kent*[2]
(a) 1997	338,100	16,000
(b) 2001	341,200	15,900

[1] Excludes place in children's homes.

[2] Information is presented for the county of Kent prior to local government re-organisation on 1 April 1998. Figures for 2001 therefore relate to the area corresponding to the unitary authority of Medway Towns and the county area of Kent.

Source:

Department of Health Annual Statistical returns

Day Centres

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the timetable is for local authorities to deliver best value in terms of care, with specific reference to the management of day centres. [30302]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* Every council has to conduct best value reviews, which together must cover all their functions over the five year period ending 31 March 2005.

Electronic Medical Equipment

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost to the NHS in each of the last five years has been of compensation to patients and their families as result of adverse incidents involving the use of electronic medical equipment; and what contingencies the NHS is making for the next five years. [29773]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* Information about clinical negligence claims involving the use of electronic medical equipment is not held centrally. The clinical negligence scheme for trusts is a global fund paid into on an on-going basis. It does not operate as a contingency fund for specific types of claim.

Private Hospitals

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of private hospitals have crash teams for the purpose of resuscitation. [31125]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* This information is not held centrally at present. However, when the National Care Standards Commission takes over from health authorities the regulation of private health care services on 1 April this year, it will compile a comprehensive national database about service providers and the facilities they offer.

Macular Degeneration

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to reduce the number of age-related macular degeneration patients eligible for treatment *(a)* losing sight and *(b)* registering blind owing to a lack of regional availability of visudyne; [30715]

(2) what discussions his Department has held with representatives of *(a)* general practitioners, *(b)* primary care trusts, *(c)* health authorities and *(d)* ophthalmologists to discuss (i) the speed of referral for age-related macular degeneration patients eligible for treatment and (ii) the shortening of the treatment process; [30716]

(3) if he will issue guidance to primary care trusts on treatable age-related macular degeneration to increase referral speed to an ophthalmologist and the shortening of the treatment process; [30717]

(4) what plans he has to include screening for wet age-related macular degeneration as part of the regular sight test for the relevant age groups. [30718]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* Research trials suggest that photodynamic therapy may be capable of arresting sight loss among certain patients with 'wet' age-related macular degeneration. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence is currently undertaking an appraisal of this treatment and will advise if it should be made generally available under the national health service. The NICE Appraisal Committee will meet on 7 March 2002 to produce draft guidance. The Appraisal Committee is to have a second meeting on 15 May and guidance to the NHS is expected in July 2002, providing there are no appeals.

The Department has asked NHS bodies to continue with local arrangements for the managed introduction of new technologies where guidance from NICE is not available at the time the technology first became available. These arrangements should involve an assessment of all relevant factors including the available evidence on effect.

We will consider any implications for primary and secondary eye care in the light of NICE's draft guidance.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the number of patients with age-related macular degeneration eligible for treatment who have *(a)* lost eye sight and *(b)* been registered blind since visudyne received regulatory approval; [30714]

(2) how many patients are eligible for photodynamic treatment for *(a)* wet and *(b)* dry age-related macular degeneration annually; [30719]

(3) what estimates he has made of the number of age-related macular degeneration patients eligible for treatment who have lost the sight of one eye before they visit an ophthalmologist. [30721]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* We are unable to estimate how many patients may benefit from photodynamic therapy until the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has completed its appraisal of the therapy. NICE's guidance is expected in July 2002.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were treated with photodynamic treatment for *(a)* wet and *(b)* dry age-related macular degeneration in the (i) NHS and (ii) private sector in the last year for which figures are available. [30720]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* In 2000–01 there were 3,317 finished consultant episodes coded "degeneration of macular and posterior pole" in the national health service. Currently it is generally accepted that only 'wet' macular degeneration is susceptible to treatment but we do not hold information on the extent of the use of visudyne in these treatments. The Department does not routinely collect information on operations carried out in the private sector.

Western General Hospital, Swindon

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 671W, on Western General hospital, Swindon, what hospital equipment is purchased *(a)* centrally and *(b)* by each trust; what budgetary controls he exercises over equipment purchases for new hospitals; what recent discussion he has had with the trust responsible for the new Swindon hospital about equipment purchases; and if he will make a statement about the procedure used to purchase the equipment for the Western General hospital at Swindon. [31007]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* Equipment purchases are the responsibility of individual national health service trusts who are expected to obtain best value for money. The NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency does however negotiate national contracts on behalf of the NHS where these contracts produce value for money and genuine savings. It is then up to each individual trust to purchase its own equipment according to its needs. The only recent example of centrally purchased equipment is that provided for cancer care funded from the New Opportunities Fund.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no discussions with Swindon and Marlborough NHS trust about equipment purchases. Approximately £8 million of public money has been made available for the purchase of equipment for the Great Western hospital, Swindon by the Swindon and Marlborough NHS trust. The procurement procedure for the equipment is a matter for the trust.

Correspondence

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the interim reply of 15 January 2002 (ref: PQ 4078/2001/2002), when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a substantive reply to his letter of 28 November 2001 (ref: POOO1146 (27311)). [31287]

Ms Blears: I shall ensure that my hon. Friend receives a reply to his letter as soon as possible.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Acceptable Behaviour Contracts

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many acceptable behaviour contracts have been issued to date *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each crime and disorder partnership; and if he will make a statement. [27640]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* Figures for the number of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) are not held centrally as they are an informal measure, however we are aware that they are being used by many police forces and local authorities throughout the country. The Government recognise the effectiveness of this and other measures in turning round behaviour at the earliest opportunity and in our White Paper on police reform we encourage their widespread use and recognise the role that they can play in supporting the antisocial behaviour order process in preventing antisocial behaviour.

Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons have been detained under the internment provision of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001; on which day each was arrested; which have been appealed; what progress has been made in each appeal; and if he will make a statement. [28324]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 16 January 2002 to my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), *Official Report*, column 350W.

Appeals are proceeding in relation to each of those detained before the Special Immigration Appeal Commission. A directions hearing was held on 28 January and a substantive hearing will be set in due course.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those detained under the recent Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, indicating the reason why each one has been detained. [29230]

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many certificates he has issued using his powers under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001; if he will profile those persons detained by *(a)* country of origin, *(b)* nationality, *(c)* gender, *(d)* those over and under 18 years of age, *(e)* religious belief and *(f)* language spoken; and at what location detained persons have been held. [29253]

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been detained under Section 4 of the Anti-terrorism Crime and Security Act 2001; and how many remain detained. [28670]

Mr. Blunkett: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave on 16 January 2002 to my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), *Official Report*, column 350W.

Appeals are proceeding in relation to each of those detained before the Special Immigration Appeal Commission. A directions hearing was held on 28 January and a substantive hearing will be set in due course.

Errol Flynn

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to place in the Public Records Office *(a)* the MI5 files and *(b)* other records relating to Errol Flynn; and if he will make a statement. [29231]

Mr. Blunkett: The Security Service systematically reviews and where appropriate releases historical records to the Public Record Office in accordance with the criteria agreed with them and endorsed by the Advisory Council.

The Security Service has reviewed and released all archived files covering the First World War. Moving on to the Second World War, the second phase in its release programme, the service released in November 2001 its fourth tranche of files on the period up to the end of that war. The service is reviewing its inter-war records in preparation for further releases. It will then move on to the period after the Second World War. If there is any record about Errol Flynn, it will be reviewed as part of this process. The timing of this depends on the resources that the Service is able to devote to the process.

The Home Office can find no other documents about Errol Flynn.

Probation Service

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if there will be a public sector comparator in respect of the tendering for Probation Service Facilities Management Services and if the details will be published; what the estimated costs are of the procurement process in respect of the tendering of Probation Service Facilities Management Services; whether there is a better quality services review in respect of the arrangements; whether the employee status of relevant Probation Service staff would change following successful tendering of these services; and if he will make a statement. [28783]

Beverley Hughes: Although a public sector comparator is primarily used in Public Private Partnerships/Private Finance Initiative (PPP/PFI) type procurements, which Probation Services Facilities Management is not, it is planned to seek to use it to test whether any proposed contract represents good value for money. It is not planned to publish the details. The costs of the procurement process for tendering facilities management services is subsumed within the overall costs of arranging facilities and estates management services for the new national service and are therefore not separately identifiable. The principles of a better quality services review are being applied as appropriate. Should services currently provided by Probation Service staff in the future be provided by other organisations the Transfer of Undertakings Regulations (TUPE) would determine whether employee status would change. This would need to be assessed on an individual basis.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the National Probation Service will put Probation Service Facilities Management Services out to tender; when the outline business case for tendering Probation Service Facilities Management Services was published; when the final business case for the tendering of Probation Facilities Management Services will be published; if he will place a copy in the Library; whether the notice for tendering Probation Facilities Management Services was placed in the Official Journal of the European Union; and if he will make a statement. [28782]

Beverley Hughes: It is planned to put out to tender the National Probation Service's (NPS) facilities management functions in a phased manner between January 2002 and August 2002. The outline business case for the management of NPS property, which incorporated facilities management, has not been published and it is not normal practice to publish business cases or make them widely available during a procurement process. A notice for facilities management services was despatched on 27 November 2001 for placing in the Official Journal of the European Union.

Young Offenders

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what specialist *(a)* support and *(b)* therapy programmes are available for young offenders to help them address the underlying problems of their actions. [28766]

Beverley Hughes: Juveniles receiving final warnings or sentenced to community or custodial orders undergo rehabilitation programmes designed to address their offending behaviour and give them skills which will help them avoid getting into trouble again. The programmes include family support, treatment for alcohol and drugs abuse and assessment for mental health needs.

For young adults the National Probation Service draws up supervision plans to address individuals' needs, including specialist counselling and support.

Community Orders

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment has been made of the scope for increased use of community orders for young women who have committed non-violent crimes as their first offence. [28765]

Beverley Hughes: The Government believe that serious, dangerous and persistent offenders should be sent to prison. However, it may not be the best, or most effective, option for less serious offenders, whether men or women, who can often be better dealt with in the community. The Government believe that greater use should be made of community punishments for some non-violent offenders, such as those convicted of theft and handling or fraud.

We are committed to seeing a reduction in the number of women who are sent to prison and to ensuring that the courts have available to them a full range of community punishments, designed using the what works principle, which are effective, strictly enforced and in which the courts and the public can have confidence.

Child Protection Policies

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library copies of the child protection policies operating at *(a)* Oakington, *(b)* Tinsley House, *(c)* Yarl's Wood, *(d)* Harmondsworth and *(e)* John Gavell immigration detention and reception centres. [29593]

Angela Eagle: I shall arrange for copies of the relevant documents to be placed in the Library.

Surrey Police

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason Surrey police receives the lowest per-capita grant. [30262]

Mr. Denham: Grant for police authorities is distributed on the basis of a formula which is intended broadly to reflect the relative needs of police authorities.

Family Visitor Appeals

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reform the fee charges for family visitor appeals; and if he will make a statement. [28928]

Angela Eagle: We await the results of the review of family visitor appeals, which ends this month. We will consider the future of the scheme, including the fees, in the light of the review team's report.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the last occasion was on which he requested an environmental appraisal before making a policy decision. [29009]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* To date no such request has been made. However, the Department's policy checklist states that policy proposals should be considered in relation to Government objectives on achieving sustainable development, and the standard format for policy submissions includes a section on environmental considerations.

EU Arrest Warrant

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the EU arrest warrant will be included in the Extradition Bill; when he expects the Bill to be published; whether the agreed text of the EU arrest warrant covers the offence of xenophobia; whether a United Kingdom citizen could be arrested under the EU arrest warrant for an alleged act which is not an offence under UK law; and whether the EU arrest warrant can be used to arrest a United Kingdom subject in the United Kingdom for an alleged offence committed from within the United Kingdom's boundaries. [29404]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Government have made their commitment to an Extradition Bill clear, and it will be brought before the House in the usual way; the Bill will include provisions to implement the Framework Decision on the European arrest warrant and the surrender procedures between member states.

The text of this Framework Decision, which was provisionally agreed at the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 6 December 2001, includes in the list at Article 2(2) for which the dual criminality test has been abolished, the generic heading of racism and xenophobia.

In respect of any warrant, the offence for which surrender is sought will be framed by the issuing judicial authority under its national law. The generic headings listed at Article 2(2) relate to conduct for which there are criminal sanctions in all the member states of the European Union (EU), although the definitions of the offences do not match precisely. Where the issuing judicial authority includes an offence on the warrant which does not fall under one of the headings at 2(2), the dual criminality test may be applied by the executing judicial authority.

Article 4(7) of the Framework Decision provides that the executing judicial authority may refuse to execute the European Arrest Warrant:

> "Where the European arrest warrant envisages offences which:
>
> (1) are regarded by the law of the executing member state as having been committed in whole or in part in its territory or in a place treated as the territory of that member state;
>
> (2) have been committed outside the territory of the issuing member state and the law of the executing member state does not allow prosecution for the same offences when committed outside the territory of the executing member state".

The Framework Decision, therefore, contains protection against the surrender of a fugitive, of any nationality, from the United Kingdom for an alleged offence committed in the United Kingdom which is not an offence under our law. The Government's position will be finalised in the Extradition Bill.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the agreement reached on the EU arrest warrant. [29817]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: At the meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Council of the European Union on 6–7 December 2001 all member states bar Italy reached provisional agreement on the European arrest warrant; on 11 December, Italy indicated that it too could accept the text. Agreement was subject to national parliamentary scrutiny reservations entered or retained by five member states, including the United Kingdom (the others were Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and Ireland). The European Parliament is being reconsulted on the European arrest warrant, and the Council will need to consider its opinion, expected in February, before the European Arrest Warrant can be adopted.

CCTV

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 777W, on CCTV, how many applications have been received from schemes in the Buckingham constituency; and what was the outcome in each case. [30119]

Mr. Denham: Two applications for funding have been received from the Buckingham constituency, both for the Buckingham Town Centre Close Circuit Television (CCTV) system.

Under Round 2 of the CCTV Challenge Competition (1996–97), the Home Office provided part funding of £9,500 towards the installation of the system.

Under Round 2 of the Crime Reduction Programme CCTV Initiative (2001), a bid seeking £151,045 to upgrade the system was not successful.

Crime Reduction

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 778W, what progress has been made in meeting the crime reduction target. [30122]

Mr. Denham: National crime reduction targets are: to reduce vehicle crime by 30 per cent. by 2004, and, by 2005, to reduce domestic burglary by 25 per cent, and robbery in our principal cities by 14 per cent.

The latest published recorded crime statistics show that in the 12 months to March 2001, thefts of and from vehicles had reduced to 968,447 offences, a reduction of 10.1 per cent. against the 1998–99 baseline; domestic burglary had reduced to 402,984, a reduction of 14.9 per cent; but robbery had increased to 68,447, a rise of 13 per cent.

We remain determined to reduce robbery rates, and the 12 month increase is half the 26 per cent. rise in the previous year. The robbery figures relate to the following police forces: Metropolitan Police Service, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, West Midlands and West Yorkshire.

Crime (Gwent)

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes were recorded by Gwent Police in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 2001 as (i) violent crime, (ii) burglary, (iii) thefts of vehicles, (iv) thefts from vehicles, (v) drug offences and (vi) total crime; and what the percentage of each change was each year. [30154]

Mr. Denham: Recorded crime figures are published in financial years, with the most recent available figures being for the year ended March 2001. The information for the years from 1 April 1998 is given in the table.

The number of recorded crimes will be affected by changes in the public's willingness to report crime and police recording practices, as well as the real extent of crime. For example, the British Crime Survey has shown that, in England and Wales as a whole, victimisation for the violent crime in the survey which is comparable to recorded crime decreased by 19 per cent. between the 1999 and 2000 calendar years, whereas comparable violent crime recorded by the police increased by 9 per cent.

Recorded crimes for Gwent—number of offences and percentage change

	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	Percentage change 1998–99 to 1999–2000	Percentage change 1999–2000 to 2000–01
Violent crime	11,980	14,493	14,882	21	3
Burglary	8,416	7,656	6,905	–9	–10
Theft from vehicle	6,145	5,714	5,035	–7	–12
Theft or unauthorised taking of motor vehicle	3,601	3,393	3,074	–6	–9
Drug offences	2,447	2,214	2,196	–10	–1
Total recorded crime	58,738	60,132	56,728	2	–6

Note:

Violent crime is comprised of violence against the person, sexual offences and robbery

Police (Gwent)

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many whole-time equivalent police officers were employed by Gwent police in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 2001; and what the percentage change was in each year. [30158]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is set out in the table. The latest increases in Gwent police numbers have taken the force to record numbers of officers.

Year ending 30 September	*Police officers (Fte)*[1]	*Percentage change*
1998	1,254	—
1999	1,261	+0.6
2000	1,271	+0.8
2001	1,303	+2.5

[1] Full time equivalents

Source:

Home Office

Community Resource Fund

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment has been made by the Government of the cost to the taxpayer of operating the *(a)* Community Resource Fund and *(b)* neighbourhood renewal community chests; [29920]

(2) if he will make a statement on the Community Resource Fund; and how much money has been distributed through the fund to voluntary and community organisations; [29923]

(3) what assessment has been made by the Government of the administrative requirements on voluntary and community organisations applying to the Community Resource Fund. [29921]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* The Community Resource Fund was launched in 1999 as a three-year pilot small grants fund, with the purpose of making grants of between £50 and £500 to support community activity in areas of serious deprivation. This was a direct response to recommendation 20 in the Policy Action Team 9 report, on community self-help, where it was recognised that small sums of money with simple application procedures and a rapid response could have a substantial beneficial effect on local groups.

The fund has been managed for the Active Community Unit (ACU) by the Community Development Foundation (CDF) and the Community Foundation Network CFN, and individual grants have been administered by local community foundations in 30 deprived neighbourhoods.

The total grant made to the Community Development Foundation CDF in 1999–2000 and 2000–01 was £338,000, of which £308,000 was paid in small grants to local community groups, and £30,000 was allocated to cover operating costs. In the current year, it has been agreed to make a grant to CDF of £168,000, of which £72,000 will be distributed to local community groups, approximately £7,000 will be allocated in direct operating costs, and approximately £69,000 has been allocated to a research project into the alternative approaches to involving local residents in decision-making on small grants.

The cost of operating the Community Resource Fund over three years will have been £42,000, plus a small allocation of staff time within the ACU.

The application process for the Community Resource Fund was designed to be as simple as possible, drawing on the extensive experience of the two voluntary organisations managing the fund. Some improvements to lighten the administrative requirements on applicants were made as a result of the evaluation of year one of the Fund.

The cost of operating the neighbourhood renewal community chests at local level will not exceed £7.5 million (out of a total allocation of £50 million, of which a maximum of £5 million (10 per cent.) will be spent on administration, and £2.5 million (5 per cent.) on outreach and development support. Some further cost will be incurred by staff in the neighbourhood renewal unit, and the Government offices for the regions, particularly on setting up the programme, but it is not possible to arrive at an accurate figure at short notice.

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications have been made to the Community Resource Fund; and how many of these were successful. [29922]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* The number of applications made to the Community Resource Fund is 815 for years one and two. This equates to 426 in year one and 389 in year two. Out of these applications, 305 were granted in year one, and 254 were granted in year two. The average grant was £450. The Fund has been managed for the active community unit by the Community Development Foundation and the Community

Foundation Network and individual grants have been administered by local community foundations in 30 deprived neighbourhoods.

Drug Action Teams

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will inform drug action teams of their financial allocations for 2002–03. [30034]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I will write shortly to the Member for Epsom and Ewell and place a copy of the reply in the Library.

Drug Action Teams (DATs) receive funding from a variety of sources. The Spending Review 2000 (SR2000) settlement provided a total of £185 million for the year 2002–03 for the delivery of the National Drugs Strategy. In addition, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a total of £235 million—£220 million (£50 million/£70 million/£100 million) to Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships and £15 million (£5 million/£5 million/£5 million) direct to Drug Action Teams for the Communities Against Drugs Initiative (a three year programme running from 2001–04 to help local communities disrupt local drug markets and tackle drug related crime and the antisocial behaviour so often associated with it. Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships have to agree with Drug Action Teams how best to spend their allocation.

The detail of the SR2000 for 2002–03 allocations were published as follows:

	£ million
Young people	29
Communities	29
Treatment	120

The allocations for Communities Against Drugs to Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships will be announced shortly. We have communicated to Drug Action Teams the Home Office share of the treatment allocations which are due to them. Other treatment allocations are a matter for the Secretary of State for Health and the National Treatment Agency. We understand an announcement for the pooled treatment allocations will be made shortly.

On 7 November, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills announced a further £25 million funding for three years (£7 million/£8 million/£10 million) from 2001–04. This was in addition to £7.5 million baseline for each of these years.

In respect of other financial allocations to Drug Action Teams wrote to Drug Action Teams Chairs on 21 January setting out the terms of the DAT Development funding for 2002–03. Drug Action Team Co-ordinators were advised of their allocations of the £5 million for 2002–03 under the Communities Against Drugs Initiative on 24 January.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: (1) To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 22 October 2001 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Mr. Aamir Akbar; [29962]

(2) when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 10 December 2001 from the Right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Mrs. Azad Bakhat; [29959]

(3) when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 27 November 2001 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Mrs. Faiza Bafadhez. [29960]

Angela Eagle: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary wrote to my right hon. Friend on 21 January. I am sorry that he did not receive an earlier reply.

Mobile Phone Theft

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he will bring forward to compel mobile telephony companies to track stolen handsets. [28950]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* The Government are pressing the mobile phone industry to take a whole range of measures to enhance the security of their product and prevent their customers from becoming the victims of crime. The United Kingdom operators are already working with the police on exercises to track stolen phones. They have agreed some early measures to test ways of putting stolen phones out of action, including a text-bombing initiative. They have also agreed to improve security as investment takes place in new systems. We are seeking a similar commitment from mobile phone manufacturers. We will continue to press the industry for their co-operation in tackling mobile phone theft, by enhancing security features and practices for both the current and third generation mobile phones.

It is already the case that communications data, including location data, may be supplied voluntarily for specified purposes (eg investigation of crime) under the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Telecommunications Act 1984. It may additionally be supplied in obedience to court orders. A more tightly controlled regulatory regime will be provided for under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 RIPA.

Stop and Search

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research has been undertaken into technology required to enable officers to provide subjects of a stop and search with an immediate printed record of the incident; what information on this research is in the public domain; and what assessment he has made of the potential applications such technology will have for other aspects of police work. [29736]

Mr. Denham: To date no research has been undertaken specifically on the technology required to enable police officers to issue subjects of stops and searches with an immediate printed record of the encounter.

On 1 November 2001 my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary published an independent study entitled "Diary of a Police Officer", which considered what more could be done to free police officers from the unnecessary paperwork and other obstacles which prevent them from spending more time in public. Subsequently in the White Paper, "Policing a new Century" (CM 5326), published on 5 December 2001, my right hon. Friend announced the establishment of a task force, chaired by Sir David O'Dowd, to consider how to take forward the recommendations in this and other relevant reports, in order to reduce unnecessary administrative burdens on the police. The task force is considering the implementation of information technology as part of this project.

Baton Rounds

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 92W, on baton rounds, how many plastic baton rounds have been procured in each year since 1981 by each of the 36 police forces in England and Wales and three non-Home Office forces; and what the annual cost of such procurement for each force was. [29737]

Mr. Denham: I have accepted the advice of the Association of Chief Police Officers that the disclosure of this information, on an individual force basis, would be prejudicial to operational effectiveness.

23,090 baton rounds were purchased by Home Office and non-Home Office forces in 2000, at a total cost of £157,474; and 25,500 in 2001 at a total cost of £173,910. Information for previous years is not readily available.

Sustainable Development

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department met its aim of identifying departmental sustainable development indicators by December 2001. [27535]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* Yes. Fifteen key topics have been identified upon which the Department has an impact, and sustainable development indicators are being finalised. They will be in line with national indicators and cross-Government targets where these exist.

Racial Offences

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research he has undertaken into the operation of laws on race hate and racially aggravated offences; what the conclusions of this research are; what relevance this research has for consideration of a religious hate law; and if he will place research findings in the Library. [29734]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* We commissioned researchers from the Cambridge University Institute of Criminology to evaluate the implementation of the legislation on racially-aggravated offences as contained in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. This research explored the first two years of this legislation to find out how criminal justice agencies had responded in their use of these new laws, and in their practices and procedures. It is expected that the report will be published in the spring.

This research was commissioned well in advance of the events of September 11 last year. It was these events that prompted our proposing the introduction of religious hatred provisions as part of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill.

Immigration Service Staff

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 922W, how many Immigration Service staff speak *(a)* Arabic, *(b)* Hindi, *(c)* Urdu, *(d)* Farsi or Dari and *(e)* Pushtu; how many persons of what grades are trained to speak each language; and how many translators have been employed for how many paid hours in each language; and at what cost. [29821]

Angela Eagle: Since September 2001 the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) has held a national database of all its interpreters. The database currently holds 473 Arabic speakers, 359 Hindi, 429 Urdu, 261 Farsi, 84 Dari and 64 Pushtu. No records are currently held centrally as to the amount of hours interpreters have worked in individual languages.

Details of the languages spoken by immigration staff are not currently held centrally and could be collected only at disproportionate cost. However, the Immigration Service is creating a database of training received and qualifications held by immigration service staff. The majority of interpreting and translation services for those in the care of the Immigration Service are largely provided by external translators.

Police (Hampshire)

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to provide funds to increase police numbers in Hampshire. [30952]

Mr. Denham: Under the Crime Fighting Fund (CFF) recruitment initiative, funds have been provided to enable Hampshire constabulary to recruit a total of 243 recruits, over and above the force's previous recruitment plans, for the three years to March 2003.

Hampshire officers appointed since 1 September 1994 and not in receipt of housing allowances, benefit from a new allowance introduced 1 April 2001 for officers in eight forces around London, in view of the higher cost of living in those force areas. The allowance followed agreement in the Police Negotiating Board and for Hampshire officers is £1,000 a year. The Home Office meets 75 per cent. of the cost of the allowance for each qualifying officer.

All police forces, including Hampshire, benefit from the national recruitment advertising campaign funded by the Home Office. The campaign was launched in August 2000 and the latest phase began on 1 January 2002.

Deportations

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time taken was from the refusal of asylum status and exceptional leave to remain to removal from the country in the last 12 months. [29816]

Angela Eagle: I regret that the information requested is not available and could be obtained only by examining individual case files at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions in the last three months airlines have refused to carry deportees; what reason was given in each case; and if he will make a statement. [29823]

Angela Eagle: An airline may occasionally refuse to carry passengers refused entry, illegal entrants and those subject to formal deportation proceedings if it has concerns for the safety of their aircraft, crew and passengers. We are aware of a small number of incidents where airlines have refused to carry certain individuals because of concerns they have about their conduct when boarding the aircraft. Where there have been concerns, the United Kingdom Immigration Service has arranged for the individual to be escorted during the flight.

On 11 January 2002, British Airways refused to remove a failed asylum seeker to Zimbabwe. Removal directions were temporarily suspended by the Home Office following representations from legal representatives.

During a recent meeting with British Airways (BA), the Minister for Asylum and Immigration confirmed with BA that it was their concern for the safety of their aircraft, crew and passengers that prompted them to refuse to carry.

Asylum Appeals

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time taken between the receipt of asylum appeals by his Department and the final appeal decision in *(a)* all cases, *(b)* the cases of single asylum seekers and *(c)* family cases was in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [29724]

Angela Eagle: For the 12 month period ending 30 September 2001 data from the Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA), for those cases where data are available, indicates that the average time taken from receipt of an asylum appeal by the Home office to final determination through both tiers of the IAA is:

(a) 26 weeks for all asylum appeals;

(b) 25 weeks for non-family cases (the IAA do not hold data on single asylum seekers separately);

(c) 27 weeks for family cases.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time taken was from lodging an asylum appeal with the Home Office to the final decision in each year since 1998. [29818]

Angela Eagle: For the 12-month period ending 30 September 2001, data from the Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA), for those cases where data are available, indicates that the average time taken from receipt of an asylum appeal by the Home Office to final determination through both tiers of the IAA, is 26 weeks.

Data are not available for the earlier periods.

Asylum Cases

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time taken was from initial application to the granting of an initial decision in asylum cases for *(a)* all cases, *(b)* single adults and *(c)* families in the last 12 months. [29819]

Angela Eagle: The table provides the information requested for the period of October 2000 to September 2001, inclusive. The average decision times have been calculated using all decisions made for which data are available, including a minimal number of cases decided under the backlog criteria, as well as new cases. These data are subject to revision following quality checking.

Average time to initial decision[1,2], October 2000 to September 2001

	Average time taken[3]
All initial decisions[4,5]	14
Of which:	
Family	8
Individual	14

[1] The average length of time (in months) is calculated from date application is lodged to the date of initial decision and relates to the month in which the decisions were made.

[2] Figures are estimates based on cases for which information is recorded.

[3] Provisional figures.

[4] Based on data from A-CID (Asylum Cases Information Database).

[5] Excluding dependants.

Asylum Induction Centres

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the trial of asylum induction centres to begin; and if he will make a statement. [29815]

Angela Eagle: The first induction centre opened in Dover on 21 January. This introduced a number of the initiatives outlined by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary in October which are intended to deliver a more efficient and streamlined system for asylum seekers. Over the forthcoming weeks we will be developing the induction processes with a view to opening two further induction centres near London at the end of March.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many recorded asylum seekers entered the United Kingdom in 2001 who were *(a)* under and *(b)* over 18 years. [29686]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* I regret that reliable information on the entry routes of asylum seekers, including when asylum seekers first enter the United Kingdom (UK), is not available. In 2000 more than two thirds of applications (68 per cent.) were made in-country (that is by people who had already entered the UK). Annual figures for 2001 are not yet available.

Between January and August 2001, inclusive, 1,334 applications for asylum were lodged at UK ports by unaccompanied children under the age of 18. During the same period, it is estimated that over 16,000 applications were lodged at ports by principal applicants aged 18 or more.

Information on unaccompanied minors is published annually in the statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom", a copy of which is available in the Library, and from the RDS website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the countries of origin were of asylum seekers who entered the UK in 2001. [29687]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* I regret that reliable information on the entry routes of asylum seekers, including when asylum seekers first enter the United Kingdom, is not available. However, information on the nationality of asylum seekers who applied at port and in-country between January and September 2001, inclusive, is given in the table. Annual figures for 2001 are not yet available.

Information on asylum applications and initial decisions is published quarterly. The next publication will present data for the final quarter of 2001, and will be available from 28 February 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Applications[1] for asylum, received in the UK, excluding dependants, by nationality, January to September 2001, inclusive

Number of principal applicants

	Applied at port	*Applied in-country*	*Total*
Europe			
Albania	140	715	855
Czech Republic	750	60	810
FRY[2]	155	1,420	1,575
Poland	305	155	460
Romania	125	920	1,045
Russia	45	290	335
Turkey	1,330	1,525	2,855
Ukraine	79	265	340
Other Former USSR	195	695	890
Other Former Yugoslavia	45	1,440	1,485
Others	105	135	240
Total	3,270	7,615	10,890
Americas			
Colombia	35	180	215
Ecuador	20	145	165
Others	110	260	370
Total	165	585	750
Middle east			
Iran	885	1,765	2,650
Iraq	2,150	2,725	4,875
Others	250	505	750
Total	3,285	4,995	8,280
Africa			
Algeria	230	650	880
Angola	140	570	715
Democratic Republic of Congo	225	650	870
Ethiopia	70	390	460
Gambia	10	30	35
Ghana	45	70	115
Ivory Coast	35	170	205
Kenya	45	165	210
Nigeria	255	175	430
Rwanda	60	345	405
Sierra Leone	655	790	1,445
Somalia	680	4,350	5,030
Sudan	125	170	290
Tanzania	15	45	60
Uganda	35	270	305
Zimbabwe	860	365	1,225
Others	495	1,480	1,975
Total	3,970	10,695	14,665
Asia			
Afghanistan	4,165	2,650	6,815
Bangladesh	80	250	330
China	1,240	335	1,575
India	300	980	1,275
Pakistan	510	1,480	1,990
Sri Lanka	2,110	1,930	4,035
Others	280	635	915
Total	8,685	8,255	16,940
Other and unknown nationalities	375	260	635
Grant total	19,750	32,405	52,155

[1] Figures rounded to nearest five, and are provisional

[2] Includes applications from other Yugo.

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent advice he has received from Merseyside police concerning the future housing of asylum seekers at Landmark and Inn on the Park in Liverpool; and if he will make a statement. [30732]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* Ministers have received two recent letters from Merseyside police about the use of the Landmark and Inn on the Park buildings to house asylum seekers.

Officials are looking into the matters raised in these letters, and in the meantime dispersal of asylum seekers to these buildings remains suspended.

Asylum White Paper

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with children's organisations on how the proposals in the forthcoming Asylum White Paper will impact on asylum seeking children and young people. [30360]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* Proposals relating to asylum seeking children were discussed at the last meeting of the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children Stakeholders' Group on 10 January 2002. The Group comprises representatives from the Home Office, the Department of Health, local authorities, and non-governmental organisations including the Refugee Council and Save the Children.

Police Morale (Havering)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on police morale in the London borough of Havering. [21014]

Mr. Denham: Morale within the Metropolitan Police Service is a matter for the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. I am assured by the Commissioner that he takes action as a matter of routine to ensure that morale remains good.

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many regulatory impact assessments have been produced by his Department since August 2001; and if he will list those produced *(a)* following initial consultation with affected parties about the most appropriate methodology for assessing costs and other impacts and *(b)* which set out full commercial impacts, including profitability, employment, consumer prices and competitiveness, as recommended in Good Policy Making. [28404]

Angela Eagle: Since August 2001 the Home Office has produced two regulatory impact assessments (RIAs) on the Proceeds of Crime Bill; and the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill. These RIAs are in the Library. One consultation paper has been issued since August 2001, the Motor Salvage Operators Regulations 2002, this contained a partial RIA. The consultation paper can be accessed via the Home Office website or www.ukonline.gov.uk/citizenspace/consultations/.

On the Proceeds of Crime, consultation took place after the publication of the draft Bill. This consultation helped us review the draft Bill and some of our proposals and costings were modified. No assessment of commercial impacts was made.

No consultation with business was carried out before the Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Bill was published. The RIA made it clear that many of the powers, with significant cost implications, would only be used should the need arise and a number of other measures would depend on the proposals to be covered in secondary legislation. Such secondary legislation will be developed in close consultation with the industry to ensure that there will be effective compliance with the measures proposed and that the costs of such compliance will be minimised.

I also refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister to him on 17 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 483W.

Street Wardens

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations his Department has had with public and community representatives about the proposed introduction of street wardens; and what powers and authorities will be invested in street wardens in dealing with public order. [30111]

Mr. Denham: The Policy Action Team 6 report "Neighbourhood Wardens", published in 1999, was drawn up following visits to a number of existing schemes.

Proposals for new functions to be carried out by non-police officers were set out in "Policing a New Century" (CM5326), which included examples of similar schemes already in operation. The proposed new powers for Community Support Officers under the control of the Chief Officer of Police, or for members of Accredited Community Safety Schemes employed by others, are set out in the Police Reform Bill.

Cannabis

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by what date he expects the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs to report on the reclassification of cannabis; and if he will make a statement. [31087]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* I understand that the council hopes to report soon.

Heroin

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under what circumstances GPs are allowed to prescribe heroin to addicts; what plans he has to change circumstances under which addicts can be prescribed heroin *(a)* by GPs and *(b)* through specialist clinics; what the timetable is for the proposed changes; and if he will make a statement. [31086]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* Current practice is to restrict to consultant psychiatrists and their clinical assistants the issue of licences to prescribe diamorphine (medical heroin) to drug addicts. In certain circumstances a GP may act as a consultant's assistant and therefore be licensed to prescribe under that consultant's supervision.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has indicated that he would like to examine heroin prescribing for the small number of chaotic users who would benefit. The Department of Health has invited clinical experts to come together to review the current position of diamorphine prescribing, and it is intended to develop clinical guidance.

Afghanistan

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications were received for asylum from Afghan citizens *(a)* in the period from 11 September 2001 to the date when British peacekeeping forces were deployed in Afghanistan and *(b)* since the latter date. [31091]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* I regret that the information requested is unavailable. Information on asylum applications is published quarterly and provides data for latest available months and quarter. The latest published information relates to the third quarter of 2001.

The latest published information shows that 745 applications for asylum were lodged by nationals of Afghanistan in September, compared with 930 in August and 825 in July. These figures are provisional.

The next publication (relating to the final quarter of 2001) will be available from 28 February 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria he will use to decide whether Afghanistan is a safe country of origin for the purpose of asylum applications. [31090]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* All applications for asylum by Afghanistan nationals are individually considered under the terms of the 1951 United Nations convention relating to the status of refugees and take full account of the conditions in Afghanistan at the time the decision is made.

Blakenhurst Prison

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 13 December

2001, *Official Report*, column 490W, on Blakenhurst prison, when the report of the inspection of HMP Blakenhu[illegible]n January 2001 will be published. [31008]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* The report of the former Chief Inspector of Prisons' inspection of Blakenhurst was published on 19 September 2001. A copy of the report is available in the Library.

Neighbourhood Watch

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 237W, how much funding was provided by central Government to neighbourhood watch in each of the financial years from 1997–98 to 2001–02; and how much will be provided in the next financial year. [25305]

Mr. Denham: Neighbourhood Watch is a movement of over 160,000 local schemes covering 6 million households. Local schemes are independent and largely self-financing. The police play a crucial supporting role, including providing advice on how to set up schemes and assisting with administration and publicity.

The Government have supported the National Neighbourhood Watch Association by sponsoring the cost of their annual conference in 2001, which was £80,000. The organisation is largely self-financing with core funding being provided by the private sector. The Government recognise the role Neighbourhood Watch plays in the fight against crime and in building communities. We have given and will continue to give support in kind to the National Neighbourhood Watch Association. In 2000–01 we produced publicity and training material for Neighbourhood Watch at a cost of more than £100,000.

Juvenile Care

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he plans to take to ensure that babies and children taken abroad are accounted for when their parents, guardians or minders return to this country; and if he will make a statement. [30137]

Angela Eagle: In the year 2000, 90 million people of all nationalities arrived in the United Kingdom. In light of this fact, it would be impracticable to conduct a check of all babies and children taken abroad when their parents, guardians or minders return. A child may have been left in a foreign country for an extended and legitimate period, for example for the purposes of education.

We do however take the well-being of children very seriously. That is why, following a careful review and consultation with interested parties, the United Kingdom Passport Agency moved to a policy of separate passports for British children from 5 October 1998. The reasons for this change of policy included the need to improve identification and prevent the unauthorised addition of children to an adult passport, and to reduce the potential for child abduction by giving better control of documents in cases of parental difference.

Where problems arise, the British police enjoy a close relationship with their European Union partners and exchange intelligence regularly. A Ports Precautions Scheme operates through local police to prevent the unlawful and permanent removal of a child abroad and in cases of urgent need, the assistance of Europol and, where appropriate, Interpol, may be invoked.

Transforming Youth Work Development Fund

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the success of the Transforming Youth Work Development Fund; and if he will make a statement. [31165]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I have been asked to reply.

The Transforming Youth Work Development Fund will be available from April 2002 to March 2004. The majority of the fund will be allocated to local authorities. Regional Government offices will be asked to carry out an approval and monitoring role. In addition the Youth Service Unit will discuss reporting and management information with Government offices following the distribution and spending of funds. To aid this process local authorities will need to clearly indicate the outputs and outcomes that they will achieve. Government offices will ensure that local authority proposals include activities linked to social and community cohesion that are consistent with Public Order and Community Cohesion and Cantle recommendations. The Youth Service is a key partner in the delivery of the Connexions Service. Government offices will ensure that funds are used to build Youth Service capacity to engage effectively with Connexions. The success of the Transforming Youth Work Development Fund will be judged against whether these outcomes are achieved.

Agricultural Work

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the number of student permits allowed for seasonal agricultural work; and if he will make a statement. [31695]

Angela Eagle: Representations in support of an increase in the present quota of non-European Economic Area students participating in the Seasonal Agricultural Workers' Scheme have been made by a number of interested parties, including the National Farmers Union.

The Government have listened to these representations and have agreed to increase the number of work cards available for use under this scheme. As agreed with the Industry, the student quota will increase from the present 15,200 to 20,200, spread over the next two years. Within that, a higher proportionate increase of 3,500 work cards will be made available to the scheme's operators this year, pro rata to the additional needs they have identified, for allocation to participants in the scheme.

Written Answers to Questions

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INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable Development Summit

6. **Richard Ottaway:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the agenda for the world summit on sustainable development in Johannesburg in September. [29129]

Clare Short: The UK Government are working to try to ensure that the world summit on sustainable development in Johannesburg in September commits the international community to work for the systematic reduction of poverty in a sustainable planet. It is only on this basis that the world community will be able to agree on the need to manage the resources of the world sustainably. My own hope is that the summit will bring the development and environment agendas together and thus strengthen the international commitment to poverty eradication.

10. **Chris McCafferty:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the United Kingdom's involvement in the preparation for the world summit on sustainable development in Johannesburg in September. [29133]

Clare Short: The UK is fully engaged in preparations for the world summit. The Prime Minister was the first world leader to announce his intention to attend. A Cabinet Committee has been established, under the chairmanship of the Deputy Prime Minister, to co-ordinate the Government's approach. We are working hard—within the EU and internationally—to ensure a successful outcome at Johannesburg.

HIV/AIDS

7. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance her Department provides to the Government of Nigeria in helping it to tackle AIDS. [29130]

Clare Short: Nigeria has an infection rate for HIV of 5.8 per cent. in the sexually active population. This is the level at which we normally see an exponential increase in infection rates. In some parts of Nigeria the rate is already 20 per cent. Given that one in four of the population of sub-Saharan Africa live in Nigeria, this situation poses a major threat. I recently approved a £50 million seven-year programme that supports behaviour change and distributes condoms using social marketing, targeting vulnerable and high-risks groups. We intend to do more.

25. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance her Department is giving to Botswana and Namibia to tackle the AIDS epidemic. [29148]

Clare Short: We are supporting a £7.5 million regional HIV/AIDS programme with the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The programme aims to develop capacity in Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho and Swaziland to mount an effective response to the HIV epidemic. DFID is also financing Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), and Soul City, a regional non-government organisation, for HIV/AIDS work in the region.

Zimbabwe

8. **Mr. Swire:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many projects are being funded by Her Majesty's Government in Zimbabwe; and what their costs are. [29131]

Clare Short: In Zimbabwe we are spending £18 million this year on 18 programmes, mostly aimed at providing food and medicines and slowing the spread of HIV and AIDS. Our aim is not to assist the Government, but to help the poor.

28. **Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her response to food shortages in Zimbabwe. [29151]

Clare Short: DFID has provided £4 million since September 2001 for a supplementary feeding programme implemented by NGOs, targeting 300,000 people (predominantly children) in the worst hit areas of Zimbabwe. At the beginning of January we announced a contribution of £6 million for the UNDP's Humanitarian Assistance and Recovery Programme; £3.5 million for further feeding programmes and £2.5 million for essential medical supplies and improved access to health care services.

Education Investment

9. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her priorities are for education investment in the poorest countries. [29132]

Clare Short: Our priority in education is to achieve the millennium development goals of universal primary education in all countries by the year 2015 and gender equity in primary and secondary schooling by 2005. Since May 1997 we have committed over £600 million in support of them. Our recent paper "Children out of School" proposes an eight-point plan of international action for accelerating progress towards the 2015 target.

14. **Mr. Joyce:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what importance she places on the role of education in the context of Government assistance to developing nations. [29137]

Clare Short: We give very high priority to education because education is a precondition of development and poverty reduction. We want other development agencies to do likewise. DFID's focus is on ensuring that we achieve the target of quality primary education for all children by 2015. Our education strategy paper, "The challenge of universal primary education", sets out DFID's overall approach and threefold strategy for delivering this goal.

Child Poverty

11. **Mr. Luke:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to combat child poverty in developing countries. [29134]

Clare Short: We seek to reduce the poverty of children, which causes suffering to today's children and jeopardises the well-being of future generations, by working to address the causes of deprivation in their communities. Support for children's rights to basic health care, education, nutrition, shelter, protection from violence and abusive labour, along with sustainable livelihoods for their parents, is central to my Department's work towards the millennium development goals.

We are determined to do our utmost to energise the international system to achieve the goals. The goals include the target of, by 2015, lifting one billion people out of abject poverty, universal primary schooling, and reducing under-five child mortality by two thirds. The goals are achievable given greater and more united international effort.

Agriculture Funding (Uganda)

12. **Patrick Mercer:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what funding is planned for agricultural developments in Uganda in the financial year 2002–03; and if she will make a statement. [29135]

Clare Short: My Department plans to spend approximately £3.35 million on rural livelihoods projects in Uganda in the financial year 2002–03. In addition, DFID intends to provide £35 million of general budget support to the Government of Uganda, which will be used to support Government programmes, including an innovative strategy for rural poverty eradication, known as the plan for the modernisation of agriculture (PMA). This incorporates reforms to key strategies that determine livelihood opportunities for the rural poor, including extension, research, lands and marketing.

Kenya

13. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on development aid to Kenya. [29136]

Clare Short: The aim of British development assistance to Kenya is to reduce poverty. Direct assistance in 2000–01 totalled £52 million, including £15 million as budget support and £12 million on drought relief. We also support the provision of primary school textbooks and materials, HIV/AIDS prevention and care, reproductive health care, malaria prevention, private sector development, public service reform and initiatives to promote civic education and improved access to justice for poor people. In addition, Britain contributed substantially through multilateral agencies including about £2.7 million through the EC's aid programme.

Air Navigation Contract (Tanzania)

15. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the developmental impact of the air navigation contract with Tanzania. [29138]

Clare Short: There is general agreement that Tanzania needs a civilian air traffic control system to ensure safety in the country's air space. The issue is whether the contract with British Aerospace meets Tanzania's needs, and represents value for money.

The Government of Tanzania are working with the World bank and the International Civil Aviation Organisation to address these issues. The developmental impact will depend on whether the system is technically appropriate and affordable within the Government of Tanzania's budget, which is being targeted on priorities set out in its poverty reduction strategy.

Fair Trade

16. **Mrs. Betty Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to promote fairer terms of trade for developing countries. [29139]

Clare Short: The Government believe that trade has a vital role to play in helping developing countries to boost their economic growth and generate the resources necessary for reducing poverty. We have made important steps towards achieving these objectives, not least of which was the development agenda agreed at the Doha Ministerial Conference. This is, however, only the beginning of negotiations. To make it a real development round we will work to ensure that these commitments become a reality. We are therefore working with the Department for Trade and Industry, the European Union, the WTO and developing countries to assist them in forming clear and pro-development negotiating positions.

The UK Government are also at the forefront of efforts to enhance developing countries' capacity to trade. In the White Paper on Globalisation we undertook to double our commitment over the next three years. We have recently pledged a £20 million package of trade related capacity building which will take us towards this goal.

St. Helena

17. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress has been made in improving transport facilities for St. Helena. [29140]

Clare Short: A "Comparative Study of Air and Sea Access" was published last July. A copy of the report was placed in the House of Commons Library. It identified various options, which have since been under consideration by the St. Helena Government. As part of that process, the views of the islanders are being sought on the possibility of developing air access in future as an alternative to replacing St. Helena's dedicated passenger and supply ship.

Pakistan

18. **Ms Munn:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what measures her Department is taking to promote peace and reduce poverty in Pakistan. [29141]

Clare Short: The UK's bilateral programme in Pakistan is focused on three objectives: creating the economic conditions for poverty reduction and improving health and education outcomes for poor people, improving the accountability of the political system and giving the poor a more effective political voice. We are also working to help entrench effective, inclusive and sustainable democracy in Pakistan.

Children (Armed Conflict)

19. **Mr. McGrady:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what further steps have been taken to ratify the optional protocol to the convention on the rights of children on the involvement of children in armed conflict; and if she will make a statement. [29142]

Mr. Ingram: I have been asked to reply.

The Ministry of Defence has been preparing detailed administrative procedures and guidelines for the UK armed forces which will give concrete form to the commitment, and accompanying declaration, we made on signing the optional protocol to ensure that all feasible measures are taken to avoid the direct participation in hostilities by any of our serving personnel who are under the age of 18. This process is in its final stages and we hope to proceed to ratification soon. Details of the means of implementing the protocol will be covered in an explanatory memorandum to be laid before Parliament in the lead up to ratification. Meanwhile great care continues to be taken in selecting the types of duty on which personnel under the age of 18 may be employed, and I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 14W to the hon. Member for Ludlow (Matthew Green).

Southern Africa

20. **Mr. Jim Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement about her Department's development work in southern Africa. [29143]

Clare Short: A new strategy paper will be published this year for DFID's work in the Southern Africa Customs Union area, which comprises Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland. DFID will continue to support the region's efforts to address inherited problems of poverty, inequality and exclusion. We will give increasing priority to work on HIV/AIDS.

Within the broader Southern African region, DFID also supports programmes in Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe. DFID is also working to strengthen its partnership with the Southern African Development Community (SADC), following its recent restructuring.

Afghanistan

21. **Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement about the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. [29144]

Clare Short: Thanks to the efforts of the UN-led humanitarian system, and with the support of the international community, a potential humanitarian catastrophe has been averted in Afghanistan. But at least five million people will remain dependent on food aid and other emergency support over the coming year. Unless there is significant rainfall in the next few weeks, a fourth consecutive year of drought looks likely. Large numbers of Afghans are beginning to return from neighbouring countries, including around 10,000 people from Iran in the last few weeks, and approximately 3,000 a day from Pakistan.

While it is vital that we prepare for longer-term development in Afghanistan, we must also continue to provide urgent humanitarian assistance, particularly over the remaining winter months. The UN has launched an Immediate and Transitional Assistance Programme (ITAP) for the Afghan people in 2002. This paper identifies a package of unmet humanitarian needs and calls for $736 million of donor support this year to help cover gaps in emergency provision.

At the Tokyo conference on Afghan reconstruction earlier this week, I announced a UK commitment of £200 million ($288 million) over the next five years. These funds will be used for both reconstruction and humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan.

27. **Tony Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the outcome of the Tokyo conference on reconstruction and development in Afghanistan. [29150]

Clare Short: I refer my hon. Friend to my statement to the House on 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 21–36.

Sudan

22. **David Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of Sudan's prospects for peace and long-term development. [29145]

Clare Short: I visited Sudan recently to assess the prospects for peace and development. In my discussions with Sudanese leaders and others in the north and south of the country, I found that both sides in the conflict were yearning for peace. I concluded that there is now a real window of opportunity for the UK and the rest of the international community to engage in dialogue to help Sudan bring this long running conflict to an end.

I believe the UK can play a significant role in helping resolve the conflict and that our involvement would be welcomed by both sides. My Department is now considering ways in which the UK can exert influence in the peace process. We will aim to raise and maintain the conflict's profile in the international arena, and to build the pressure for a just peace. This will involve discussing Sudan with the World bank, IMF and the EU as well as with African countries with the potential to help. It will also be important to maintain the continued interest and involvement from the US and we will work with them at official and ministerial level to ensure this.

Long-term development of Sudan cannot be achieved without an end to the war. Such a partnership would depend on an end to the conflict, sustainable peace and political stability, as well as a commitment on the part of the Sudanese Government to poverty eradication.

Illiteracy

23. **Mr. Lazarowicz:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to combat illiteracy in developing countries. [29146]

Clare Short: DFID's major focus for tackling illiteracy is helping developing countries achieve the millennium development goal of universal primary education for all by 2015. Increasing access to good quality primary education and ensuring that children are literate when they leave school is essential for development and poverty reduction. Since 1997 the Government have committed over £600 million to support sustainable education systems in developing countries able to provide high quality primary education for all children.

We will do more. We will also give increasing attention to helping developing countries tackle adult illiteracy.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

24. **Ms Oona King:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the United Kingdom Government's quick-start demobilisation programme in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. [29147]

Clare Short: During my visit to DRC in August last year, I pledged the UK's support for the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants. The DRC Government have not yet taken up this offer of assistance. They have, however, assembled 1,800 soldiers in the Kamina cantonment and we are working with the Congolese and Rwandan Governments to try to ensure that they are properly screened and, if appropriate, returned to Rwanda. We stand ready to provide any useful support we can to the process. We are also providing direct assistance to MONUC to enable peacekeeping forces to deploy in the east of DRC.

Education (India)

26. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to assist the Indian Government to provide education for the children of low-income families. [29149]

Clare Short: We have committed about £200 million to expanding and improving primary education in India through the District Primary Education Programme in Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and West Bengal, through the Lok Jumbish and Shiksha Karmi programmes in Rajasthan, and for post-cyclone reconstruction of schools in Orissa.

The programmes specifically target poor children, especially girls and disadvantaged groups, such as the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and working and disabled children. These are highly successful programmes that are having a significant impact on enrolment, retention and quality, reaching increasing numbers of out-of-school children and involving high levels of community participation.

We are currently discussing with the Government of India how we can further support their efforts to universalise education up to the age of 14, in the light of their 'Elementary Education as a Fundamental Right' Bill and recent Constitutional Amendment on the same subject.

Debt Relief

29. **John Barrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress the Government are making on relieving debt owed by the world's poorest countries. [29152]

Clare Short: Following a radical overhaul of the heavily indebted poor countries initiative in 1999, to ensure faster, deeper debt relief, up to $100 billion debt could be written off for the 42 HIPC countries. To date, 24 countries have qualified for this exceptional debt relief. Relief of more than $54 billion will be provided to these countries, reducing their debts by more than two-thirds on average. We hope that at least two more countries—Ghana and Sierra Leone—will qualify for debt relief in the coming months, but substantial further progress will be difficult, as many of the remaining HIPC countries are affected by conflict.

The Government have already written off their aid debts to all the poorest countries. The UK is also the second largest contributor ($306 million) to the HIPC Trust Fund to help international financial institutions meet their share of HIPC costs.

Western Sahara Refugees

30. **Jeremy Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what support she provides for refugees from the Western Sahara in Algeria. [29153]

Clare Short: Support for refugees from the Western Sahara in Algeria is mostly channelled through three agencies: the United Nation's High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR); the World Food Programme (WFP); and the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO). UNHCR's budget for the refugees from Western Sahara amounted to about US$3.3 million in 2001. The WFP aims to provide 64,500 tons of food (costing US$27.5 million) in its 2000–02 programme. ECHO's Global Plan 2001 began last September and aims to provide Euro 11.8 million in humanitarian support to the refugees, of which approximately 15 per cent. is attributable to contributions from the UK. Smaller amounts of financial and food aid assistance are provided by other EU member states.

Aid (Africa)

Mr. Joyce: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much was provided by the Government in *(a)* development and *(b)* humanitarian aid to (i) Burundi, (ii) Angola, (iii) Uganda, (iv) Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, (v) Zimbabwe, and (vi) Zambia in the financial year 1996–97; and what the projected figures are in each case for the 2001–02 financial year. [30369]

Clare Short: Historical expenditure figures broken down by aid type for each of the countries listed, for the five financial years 1996–97 to 2000–01, are published in "Statistics on International Development" (SID), Table 7.1 Bilateral Aid by Country (Africa). Beginning on page 77, the relevant column to read is Total Gross Public Expenditure (GPEX). A coy of this publication is in the Library of the House.

In the current financial year the following amounts have been allocated to each country for both development and humanitarian assistance (including in some cases peace related activities):

£ million

	Development	*Humanitarian assistance*	*Total*
Angola	2.5	1.27	3.77
Burundi	0.05	0	0.05
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	0.1	10.4	10.5
Rwanda	30.0	0	30.0
Uganda	68.0	0	68.0
Zambia	56.0	1.0	57.0
Zimbabwe	8.0	10.0	18.0

Note that these figures are incomplete estimates as provisional expenditure data will not be available until after the end of the financial year once information on spending by other UK Government Departments has been collected. Countries where final expenditure figures are likely to increase are Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia as they currently receive CDC investments and debt relief.

Inter-Congolese Dialogue

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if her Department will provide assistance to South Africa to help further the inter-Congolese dialogue this year. [30400]

Clare Short: Financial support for the inter-Congolese dialogue is channelled through the Office of the Facilitator. The UK has so far made the third largest contribution of all donors to the dialogue. We are in close touch with the Office of the Facilitator about future financial requirements. We are also in close touch with the Government of South Africa, who have offered to meet the main costs of hosting the next session of the dialogue.

Generic Drug Use

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement regarding the promotion of generic drug use in developing nations. [31277]

Clare Short: Generic drugs play a key role in addressing the disease burden of developing countries: at present 95 per cent. of drugs on the World Health Organisation's essential drug list (including almost all treatments for TB and malaria) are off patent and available generically.

But patent protection—as set out in the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights Agreement (TRIPS)—remains important for new medicines as an incentive for future research. We support the TRIPS agreement, and the recent declaration at the World Trade Organisation ministerial meeting in Doha, which made clear that the agreement should be interpreted and implemented in such a way as to protect public health and promote access to medicines for all.

We are promoting the appropriate use of both generic and patented drugs in developing countries. We will shortly be disbursing the first instalment of our $200 million contribution to the global fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, to finance increased coverage of tried and tested interventions for the three diseases. Since 1997 we have committed over £1 billion to strengthen developing countries' health systems, in order that more drugs reach the poor who need them.

PRIME MINISTER

Forward Strategy Unit

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 723–24W, Ref. 29065, for what reason the budgets of the *(a)* Forward Strategy Unit and *(b)* Delivery Unit have not yet been set; what working assumption has been applied to the budget provision; and on what date an announcement will be made. [30460]

The Prime Minister: Allocations to the new units within the Cabinet Office will be made in the usual way. They will be fully accounted for as with any other unit in the Cabinet Office. The Cabinet Office publishes an annual account. Budgets are not broken down by management unit.

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the projects under consideration by the Forward Strategy Unit. [30458]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 104W.

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister how many *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* civil servants were employed in (i) the Forward Strategy Unit and (ii) the Delivery Unit on 1 January. [30459]

The Prime Minister: At 1 January 2002, eight full-time and three part-time civil servants based in the Cabinet Office were working in the Forward Strategy Unit, and no special advisers.

Civil servants from other Departments assist the FSU with its work as required.

17 full-time and three part-time civil servants were employed in the Delivery Unit, and no special advisers, on that date.

Lord Birt

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 723–24W, on Lord Birt, for what reason he is not able to answer the questions relating to the role of Lord Birt, Refs. 29190, 29185, 29315, 29184, 29191, 29187, 29182, 29186, 29183, 29194 and 29188. [30667]

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to my previous answer.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Collins: To ask the Prime Minister if all papers under his control relating to the 2001 foot and mouth outbreak are being made available to Dr. Iain Anderson as part of his inquiry into lessons learned from the foot and mouth outbreak. [31396]

The Prime Minister: The Government are committed to full co-operation with the inquiry.

Mr. Collins: To ask the Prime Minister if he *(a)* has given and *(b)* will be giving (i) oral and (ii) written evidence to Dr. Iain Anderson's Lessons Learned Inquiry into the foot and mouth outbreak. [31397]

The Prime Minister: I am giving full co-operation to Dr. Anderson in this important inquiry and had an initial meeting with him on 22 January.

National Air Traffic Services

Chris Grayling: To ask the Prime Minister (1) on what recent dates the financial situation of NATS has been discussed by Cabinet Ministers; [31607]

(2) what discussions there have been by Cabinet Ministers on the CAA's representations relating to the ability of the Airlines Group business plan for NATS to withstand a major incident; and on what dates. [31608]

The Prime Minister: Information relating to the proceeding of Cabinet and internal discussions between Ministers is not disclosed under Exemption 2, Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Prime Minister (1) whether he received a copy of the CAA representations on the ability of the Airlines Group business plan for NATS to withstand a major incident; [31651]

(2) what advice he received from the CAA on representations it has made on the ability of the Airlines Group business plan for NATS to withstand a major incident. [31652]

The Prime Minister: The terms of the public-private partnership for National Air Traffic Services were accepted by all the parties involved, including the Civil Aviation Authority. It would not be appropriate to discuss the detail of discussions which led up to the conclusion of this commercial deal.

Hospitality

Chris Grayling: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the people who received official hospitality at No. 10 Downing street in 2001. [31606]

The Prime Minister: It is not my practice to give details of every visitor to 10 Downing street. In 2001, around 4,300 visitors received hospitality.

The programme of events is designed to give people the opportunity to visit No. 10, including for example regular children's tea parties and receptions for a wide-ranging cross section of the community. In 2001 these included receptions for teachers, NHS workers, the police, members of the emergency services and victims of the floods.

I also provided hospitality to visiting world political leaders, and a wide range of other organisations and individuals.

No. 10 has also been used for a large number of charity receptions which were funded by the charities involved, who were also responsible for drawing up the guest lists.

In addition, I hosted a number of political events funded by the Labour party.

Whittington Hospital

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister what information his officials *(a)* sought and *(b)* received from the Whittington hospital on the case of (i) Mrs. Rose Addis, (ii) James Scott-Faulkner, (iii) Mr. Sidney Hockley and (iv) Mr. Tom Grangevision; and if he will publish the verbatim text of briefings offered by his officials to the press on these cases. [31599]

The Prime Minister: My officials obtained copies of the press statements made by the trust after they were published which in themselves were in accordance with the guidance, "The Protection and Use of Patient Information", issued by the Department of Health. All Lobby briefings by my official spokesman are on-the-record An account of them is published on the No. 10 website.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what date he told Schroder Salomon Smith Barney that the Chairman of Railtrack had requested further financial support, as indicated in the letter from SSSB to his Department, dated 7 October. [26291]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department first contacted Schroder Salomon Smith Barney on 6 August 2001 to ask for advice in assessing Railtrack's request for additional financial support.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) whether Schroder Salomon Smith Barney advised him that Railtrack was insolvent; [26408]

(2) what advice he received from Schroder Salomon Smith Barney relating to factors other than Government support which would have prevented Railtrack from raising the additional debt finance assumed in its business plan. [26407]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 23 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 495W.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether a company limited by guarantee has been established to bid for Railtrack plc. [30241]

Mr. Jamieson: A team to develop a bid based on the concept of a company limited by guarantee has been established and its bid costs are being met by the Strategic Rail Authority. A company limited by guarantee has not yet been established.

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps are being taken to establish a value of Railtrack shares to allow individual shareholders to complete their financial affairs at the end of the tax year. [30809]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* The administrator will be seeking to obtain the best value that he can for the assets of Railtrack plc. Shareholders will receive the value to which they are properly entitled.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 861W, on Railtrack, for what specific purposes the additional public funding of £4.5 billion announced with the SRA strategic plan was allocated. [31540]

Mr. Jamieson: The additional £4.5 billion relates to (i) the October 2000 final conclusions of the Rail Regulator's periodic review of access charges, (ii) the April 2001 agreement between Government and Railtrack, and (iii) provision for further project development work.

Rail Fares

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what has been the percentage increase in unregulated rail fares *(a)* in the UK, *(b)* within the South Central franchise and *(c)* within the Thameslink franchise for each year from 1997; and what has been the largest individual price increase for a journey within the above categories for the same period. [27523]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* The information required is not held centrally. Unregulated fares are a matter for individual train operating companies who set the level of these according to their own commercial criteria.

Commuter Routes (London)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made on how Thameslink 2000, South London Metro and the East London line would use common corridors; and whether this can be achieved in a way consistent with the Strategic Rail Authority's goal of reducing the number of operators on key commuter routes in London. [28566]

Mr. Spellar: The integrated planning of the southern timetable is being carried out by Railtrack for GoVia, with active involvement from the SRA. The work is focused on maximising the use of the network for all relevant operators.

Strategic Rail Authority

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which investment commitments in the SRA plan have not been announced previously by the SRA or the Government. [28541]

Mr. Jamieson: The SRA Strategic Plan sets out, for the first time in nearly 50 years, a plan to lead to the expansion of Britain's railways. It sets out a series of prioritised measures to improve the rail network and ensure the 10-year plan rail targets are met. Many of the individual projects covered in the plan have been previously identified, including in the strategic agenda of 13 March 2001.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column 711W, on the Strategic Rail Authority, what proportion of the network will require ERTMS; and if he will list the lines concerned. [31564]

Mr. Jamieson: The plan for the deployment of the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS), incorporating an Automatic Train Protection (ATP) function, on the UK rail network is at present being prepared by a pan-industry team under the direction of the Strategic Rail Authority and Rail Safety Ltd. It is a complex undertaking as there are various levels of ERTMS at present under trial throughout Europe (including a major trial on West Coast Main Line) and the optimum infrastructure and rolling stock approach for the varied UK routes has to be found.

The work of the pan-industry team is progressing very well and it is anticipated that an industry plan defining the recommended extent of ERTMS fitment together with a major route by route strategy and timescale will be available in April. A key input into the team's work has been the recommended priorities and objective defined in the Uff Cullen report, which will, to the extent feasible, be reflected in the plan.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the commitments in the SRA Strategic Plan which are contingent on *(a)* the completion of franchise negotiations which are running behind schedule and *(b)* the establishment of special purpose vehicles. [30261]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer to my answer of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 601–02W. The Strategic Plan assumes that most large priority infrastructure projects will involve at least some funding through special purpose vehicles whose details and extent will be a matter for commercial negotiation in due course.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of the cost of the proposed South West Trains upgrade outlined in the SRA Strategic Plan is projected to be raised from the private sector; and what total amount that represents. [30250]

Mr. Jamieson: Costs of individual elements of the proposed new South West Trains franchise are a matter for the SRA's current commercial negotiations on the franchise.

Railways

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if it is his policy to close rural or under-used passenger rail services or lines to create additional capacity on major routes. [28553]

Mr. Jamieson: We have no such policy.

Channel Tunnel Freight Services

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps are being taken to ensure normal freight services are resumed through the channel tunnel. [30759]

Mr. Jamieson: There have been many contacts between the British and French Governments since November.

The removal of the restrictions is dependent on the implementation of additional security measures at the Calais Fréthun yard so that SNCF can deal effectively with potential illegal immigrants.

The Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and the Home Secretary have all written to their French counterparts to ask that all necessary measures be put in place as soon as possible, to enable full rail freight services to resume.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he last discussed with the French Government the SNCF restriction of channel tunnel rail freight services; and when he expects the restrictions to be removed. [28663]

Mr. Spellar: I discussed this issue with Monsieur Gayssot, the French Transport Minister, during the last Transport Council meeting in December. Since then, the Secretary of State has written personally to M. Gayssot and there have been a number of other contacts between our Governments.

The removal of the restrictions is dependent on the implementation of additional security measures at the Calais Fréthun yard so that SNCF can deal effectively with potential illegal immigrants. Work on strengthened fencing is now under way and, we are told, due to be completed by mid-February. The Prime Minister has written to M. Jospin asking him to do all he can to ensure the necessary physical security measures and police presence are put in place as soon as possible, to enable the resumption of a full rail freight service through the tunnel.

Work Force Injuries

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* Buckinghamshire left the work force following injury or illness caused at work, in each year since 1997. [30052]

Dr. Whitehead: The regular statistical sources do not provide a basis for reliable estimates of the data requested. However, the HSE publication "The costs to Britain of workplace accidents and ill health in 1995–96" (the most recent such data available) estimates that in Great Britain approximately 27,000 people[1] were forced to give up work in 1995 as a result of injury or illness caused by work.

Train Drivers

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps were taken by the Government *(a)* prior to 1 May 1997, *(b)* between 1 May 1997 and 24 February 1999 and *(c)* since 25 February 1999 to ensure adequate numbers of trained train drivers within the railway industry; and if he will make a statement. [29981]

Mr. Jamieson: When franchises were originally let in 1996 the purpose of the Government at the time was to give train operators full discretion and responsibility for providing resources, including drivers, to meet their obligations. In November 1998 the Government held a meeting with Railtrack and the train operating companies to discuss the poor performance of the industry and to agree a plan to deliver solutions. Part of that plan included the recruitment and training of 800 new drivers. The SRA is currently encouraging train operators to recruit sufficient drivers to meet their service obligations. In some cases the extension or replacement of franchise agreements will enable the SRA to contractualise measures to ensure adequate numbers.

London Underground

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who he intends shall be liable for maintaining disused underground tunnels under PPP. [30227]

Mr. Jamieson: All parts of the London underground infrastructure have been allocated to one of the three infrastructure companies that were established as subsidiaries of London Underground in April 2000. Under the PPP, the infrastructure companies will transfer to the private sector. They will continue to be responsible for maintaining and modernising the infrastructure in accordance with detailed contractual obligations. These obligations include a requirement to maintain disused underground tunnels in a safe and secure condition, and in a manner which prevents deterioration.

Sunday Bus Services

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many bus services were running on Sundays in each year between 1990 and 2000. [30935]

Mr. Spellar: This information is not held centrally.

Road Traffic Accidents

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many road traffic accidents took place on Sundays in each year between 1990 and 2000. [30934]

Mr. Spellar: The numbers of injury road accidents which took place on Sundays are as shown. No information is available regarding the numbers of damage only accidents.

Injury road accidents on Sundays: Great Britain

	Number
1990	29,592
1991	25,949
1992	26,121
1993	23,925
1994	24,539
1995	25,606
1996	26,025
1997	26,058
1998	25,945
1999	25,678
2000	25,941

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[1] It should be noted that this is a statistically imprecise estimate, based on aggregating two different sources, and the statistical 95 per cent. confidence interval around this estimate runs from 16,000 to 42,000.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the percentage of drivers of company vehicles who have had an accident in the last three years. [30739]

Mr. Jamieson: No estimate is available for the percentage of company vehicle drivers who have had an accident in the last three years.

However, recent research shows that fleet car drivers have a higher probability of involvement in accidents than other drivers. This confirms the results of other research studies. It has also been estimated that between a quarter and a third of road accidents involved someone who was working at the time.

Council Staff (Sunday Working)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many local council employees were required to work on Sundays in each year between 1990 and 2000. [30936]

Mr. Raynsford: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Libraries of the House.

High Hedges

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress is being made on preparing for control of high hedges. [30317]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* The Government will introduce legislation giving local authorities the power to deal with complaints about high hedges as soon as there is space in the parliamentary timetable. We supported the Private Member's Bill on this issue introduced by the hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) in the last session of Parliament and were disappointed that the Bill failed to complete all its stages before the election.

Guidelines commissioned by my Department, which provide an objective method for assessing whether high hedges block out too much light to adjoining properties, were published on our website in December. These guidelines are likely to be a factor for local authorities to take into account when determining complaints under a future statutory scheme. In the meantime, we want to encourage people to apply the guidelines and use the results to settle disputes with their neighbours amicably. We are preparing a leaflet specifically designed for this purpose, which we expect to launch in the spring.

Gatwick Airport

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the level of slot demand as a proportion of supply at Gatwick airport for summer 2002; and if he will make a statement on actual supply and demand for slots in *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 2000, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 1998 and *(e)* 1997. [31286]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* For summer 2001, the demand for slots at Gatwick was 206,41[illegible] and 174,484 slots were allocated. For summer 2002, the demand for slots rose to 231,211 with 177,657 slots being allocated. However, the increase in demand was due to a number of opportunistic bids for slots following the events of 11 September. I will write to my hon. Friend in due course to make a statement on supply and demand for slots in 1997–2001.

Lord Birt

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 24 January 2002, refs 29312, 29314 and 29316, *Official Report,* column 1054W for what reasons he is not able to answer the questions relating to the work of Lord Birt. [30562]

Mr. Jamieson: The answers to these questions are set out in the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 22 January 2002, *Official Report,* columns 723–24W, to which I have already referred the hon. Member.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what percentage of *(a)* large and *(b)* small NDPBs are subject to scrutiny by the Audit Commission. [30472]

Dr. Whitehead: The audit arrangements for all executive non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) are listed in the annual publication "Public Bodies". No audit details are provided for the other types of NDPB as their spend is usually negligible. In the majority of cases the National Audit Office (i.e. the Comptroller and Auditor General) is the external auditor. However, some executive NDPBs employ commercial auditors and, in such cases, the NAO has been granted inspection rights.

The Audit Commission rarely audits NDPB accounts. It does not keep records to enable it to identify separately any NDPB audits. The Audit Commission has only gained responsibility for auditing NDPB accounts when there has been a round of local government reorganisation and where some residuary or stand-alone bodies have been created by statute, which are treated by their founding legislation as local authorities, for the purposes of the Audit Commission Act 1998.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what powers local authorities have to influence the spending and policy of NDPBs that have branches at local level. [30462]

Dr. Whitehead: Local government has no statutory powers to influence the spending and policy of NDPB's that have branches at local level. Various powers exist which enable innovation and closer working between local authorities and their partners, including the discretionary power in the Local Government Act 2000 to do anything they consider likely to promote the economic, social and environmental well being of their area.

Tyne and Wear Metro

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 23 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 866W, on Tyne and Wear metro, what requirements imposed by the Health and Safety Executive have made this common usage possible. [31543]

Mr. Jamieson: The new extension of the Tyne and Wear metro runs, in part, along existing mainline network. Therefore, HSE has required all of the signals on the metro extension to be fitted with an automatic train protection system (Train Protection and Warning System) similar to those fitted to the rest of this stretch of the mainline network. This is to ensure that all trains that pass a signal at danger are automatically brought to a halt.

National Air Traffic Services

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what discussions he has had with the Treasury on the CAA representation on the ability of the Airlines Group business plan for NATS to withstand a major incident; [31645]

(2) what advice he received from the Civil Aviation Authority on the ability of the Airlines Group's business plan for NATS to withstand a major incident; [31648]

(3) if he will deposit in the Library a copy of the CAA's submission about the ability of the Airlines Group Business Plan for NATS to withstand a major incident. [31653]

Mr. Jamieson: The terms of the public-private partnership for NATS were accepted by all the parties involved, including the Civil Aviation Authority. It would not be appropriate to disclose the detail of discussions prior to conclusion of this commercial deal.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he has prepared a contingency plan for NATS going into administration or receivership. [31655]

Mr. Jamieson: No such plan has been prepared.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when *(a)* he and *(b)* his officials last met NATS to discuss its financial situation. [31656]

Mr. Jamieson: Ministers and officials maintain regular contact with NATS.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received, other than from that of the CAA, about the ability of NATS to withstand a major incident. [31654]

Mr. Jamieson: No such representations have been received.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received from banks backing NATS seeking additional public financial support for the business. [31644]

Mr. Jamieson: The banks backing NATS are in regular discussion with the Government and all other relevant parties regarding the company's financial situation.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he last met NATS' bankers to discuss its financial situation. [31643]

Mr. Jamieson: No such meetings have been held.

Central Trains

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what commitment Central Trains has made to introduce new rolling stock during the period of its two year franchise extension. [31537]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) is considering the possibility of a two year extension to the current Central Trains franchise aimed at achieving an early increase in capacity but no commitments have been made by either party.

Rail Interoperability

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether his Department has held discussions with its counterpart in the Irish Republic about rail interoperability on the routes that link ports with access to the Republic and the Channel Tunnel. [31386]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department and the Strategic Rail Authority are in regular contact with counterparts in the Irish Republic on a range of issues, but this has not included the specific issue of projects to adapt such routes to european interoperability specifications.

Rail Freight

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 865W, on freight facilities, what additional funds are being made available for rail freight. [31538]

Mr. Jamieson: The 10-year plan provides £3.5 billion of funding for rail freight over 10 years, to provide capital investment and revenue support.

East London Line

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 866W, on the East London line, if the references to the East London line in the SRA Strategic Plan apply only to the extension to Dalston Junction. [31541]

Mr. Jamieson: The references in the SRA Strategic Plan are to the full East London line extension project, including both northern and southern extensions.

Bus Services

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the financial allocation by his Department is to support bus services in *(a)* London and *(b)* the remainder of the south-east. [31392]

Ms Keeble: Bus services, and transport issues in London in general, are a matter for the Mayor and Transport for London. However, I hope that the following will be helpful.

The Government allocate a block transport grant which the Mayor is free to spend in accordance with the Transport Strategy for London. In the current financial year that grant is some £714 million, and will rise to just over £1 billion next year. The Government have also supported specific projects such as the London Bus Initiative, through its Capital Modernisation Fund. The Mayor has consistently stated that investment in buses is one of his highest priorities.

As far as bus services outside London are concerned, it is for individual local authorities to decide how much of their Revenue Support Grant settlement to allocate to the support of bus services.

However, authorities in the south-east, as elsewhere, benefit from the specific funding schemes we have introduced to support bus services. Authorities in the south-east Government office region have been allocated a total of £9.14 million in Rural Bus Subsidy Grant in the current financial year. This will increase to £10.46 million in 2002–03. In addition, we have recently announced awards for authorities in the south-east totalling £2.7 million as a result of latest round of the Rural Bus Challenge and of £461,000 from first round of the Urban Bus Challenge. We have also awarded £425,000 for an Urban Bus Challenge project in London.

In addition, under support for capital expenditure to implement their local transport plans, authorities in the south-east outside London have been allocated £179 million for local transport projects in 2002–03. Bus services will benefit significantly from many of these projects.

In addition all operators of local bus services, inside and outside London, receive Fuel Duty Rebate from my Department.

London Rail Termini

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answers of 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 866–67W, on London rail termini and Waterloo, if it is his policy to permit the new proposed Wessex franchise to operate services into Waterloo. [31542]

Mr. Jamieson: The review of whether services using Waterloo should continue to be controlled by a single operator has not yet been commenced by the Strategic Rail Authority. Statutory consultees will be involved by the authority in this review.

Ireland/UK/Benelux Road Link

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the status is of the Ireland/UK/Benelux road link in the Essen list, with particular reference to the proposed route west of the M6 motorway. [31544]

Mr. Jamieson: The Ireland/UK/Benelux road link is one of the 14 transport trans-European network (TEN) projects to which the Essen European Council attributed particular importance. There are no plans to change this status. Decision 1692/96/EC provides guidelines for the development of the TEN and Annex 1 to the Decision contains a map of the TEN road network in the UK. The European Commission has recently published proposals to amend the guidelines and in negotiations the Government will seek to ensure that all routes on the UK road map—including the one west of the M6 motorway—are, if appropriate, updated to reflect current circumstances.

Multi-modal Studies

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many multi-modal studies *(a)* have been completed and *(b)* will be completed during 2002. [31539]

Mr. Jamieson: The following list shows the multi-modal studies that have reported.

Multi-modal study

Access to Hastings

Cambridge to Huntingdon (A14)

South-east Manchester (Stockport, Manchester Airport Link West, Poynton)

West midlands area (M5/M6 and M42 between M40 and M6).

A list of the multi-modal studies expected to report in 2002 are set out as follows:

Multi-modal study

West midlands to north-west (M6)

Tyneside area (A1/A19)

South and west Yorkshire motorway box (M1 J30 to A1 west Yorks/M18/M62 and A1(M)

A453 (M1 to J24 (Nottingham)

North/south movements in east midlands (M1 junctions 21 to 30)

Hull (east/west) corridor (A63 and A1033 to port of Hull)

A1 (north of Newcastle)

London to Ipswich (A12)

South coast (Southampton to Folkestone coastal corridor)—(M27, A27 and A259)

M60 junction 12–18 (west to north Manchester)

London to south midlands (A1, M1, M11, A5 and A421)

London to Reading (Thames Valley -M4)

London to south-west and south Wales (A303, M4)

ORBIT-Transport solutions around London (M25).

Council Tax

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people have not paid council tax in each local authority in descending order for 2000–01. [30573]

Dr. Whitehead: Central Government does not collect information on the number of people who have not paid council tax.

Rate Capping

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which local authorities have been rate-capped in each of the last 10 years. [30475]

Dr. Whitehead: I am able to provide information on English local authorities only. Local government finance is a devolved matter and capping in Wales is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

For the financial years 1991–92 to 2001–02 the following English local authorities were capped for the purposes of the community charge and council tax:

1991–92

Basildon

Bristol

Ipswich

Lambeth

Norwich

Stoke-on-Trent

Warwickshire county council

Wirral

1992–93

Basildon

Cheltenham

Gloucester

Gloucestershire

Greenwich

Hillingdon

Lambeth

Warwickshire

1993–94

Castle Point

Gloucestershire

Harlow

1994–95

City of Sheffield

1995–96

Devon county council

Gloucestershire county council

Shropshire county council

Somerset county council

Lincolnshire police authority

Barnsley metropolitan borough

City of Newcastle-upon-Tyne

City of Sheffield

City of Norwich

1996–97

Cambridgeshire county council

Oxfordshire county council

1997–98

Oxfordshire county council

Somerset county council

Warwickshire county council

1998–99

Derbyshire county council

1999–2000

None

2000–01

None

2001–02

None.

Rent Arrears

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the level of rent arrears was by local authority in descending order in 2000–01. [30473]

Ms Keeble: A table showing the level of rent arrears as reported by each local authority in England at the end of the financial year 2000–01 has been placed in the Libraries of the House. The local authorities are shown in descending order of total arrears.

Mortgage Arrears

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many households were in mortgage arrears by region, expressed as *(a)* a percentage and *(b)* the total number, ranked in descending order according to percentage figures, in the latest year for which figures are available. [30583]

Ms Keeble: This information is not collected by my Department. Data are compiled by the Council of Mortgage Lenders, but only for the United Kingdom as a whole and not for individual regions. The number of UK households in mortgage arrears of three months or more in 2000 were as follows:

Length of arrears	*Number of households*	*As percentage of all households with mortgages*
3–6 months	95,260	0.85
6–12 months	47,820	0.43
Over 12 months	20,820	0.19
All with arrears of 3 months plus	163,900	1.47

Source:

Council of Mortgage Lenders

Housing Benefit Officers

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many housing benefit officers were employed by local authorities in each of the last 10 years. [30477]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested is not available.

Property Repossessions

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many court repossessions of property there were in each of the past 15 years. [30567]

Ms Keeble: The numbers of properties in the United Kingdom repossessed by mortgage lenders in each of the past 15 years is estimated to have been as follows:

	Properties repossessed
1986	24,090
1987	26,390
1988	18,510
1989	15,810
1990	43,890
1991	75,540
1992	68,540
1993	58,540
1994	49,210
1995	49,410
1996	42,560
1997	32,770
1998	33,820
1999	30,030
2000	22,960

Source:

Council of Mortgage Lenders

Household Overcrowding

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the number of households that are officially described as overcrowded by region according to *(a)* percentage figures and *(b)* total number, ranked in descending order according to percentage figures in the latest year for which figures are available. [30584]

Ms Keeble: No estimates are available based on the statutory definition of overcrowding in the Housing Act (1985). The information provided in the table is based on the 'bedroom standard', which is a well established statistical measure of overcrowding.

Households in England, 2000–01: Difference from bedroom standard[1]

	One or more bedrooms per household below the standard	
Region	*Number (thousand)*	*Percentage*
London	178	6
North-west	68	2
West midlands	49	2
East midlands	36	2
East	42	2
South-east	61	2
South-west	35	2
Yorkshire and the Humber	33	2
North-east	17	1
England	518	3

[1] 'Bedroom standard' is used as an indicator of occupation density. A standard number of bedrooms is allocated to each household in accordance with its age/sex/marital status composition and the relationship of the members to one another.

Source:

Survey of English Housing, DTLR

Gatwick

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what legal agreement exists between the Government and the BAA in respect of an additional runway at Gatwick. [31600]

Mr. Spellar: There is no agreement between the Government and BAA plc about an additional runway at Gatwick airport. But there is in place an agreement between the local authority, West Sussex county council, and the then British Airports Authority, which was agreed in August 1979, under the terms of section 52 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1970.

Ports (Policing)

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he has completed his review of the policing of ports; and if he will make a statement. [31292]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 7 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 296W. Work on the review has been delayed by other priority work on security issues, but I hope that the review will be completed by end April.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many police officers were employed in ports police forces at the most recent date for which figures are available. [31293]

Mr. Jamieson: There were 192 port police officers in August 2001.

Ordnance Survey

Mr. Walter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on service level agreements between Ordnance Survey and local authorities. [31012]

Ms Keeble: The current service level agreement between Ordnance Survey and local authorities took effect on 1 April 1999 and will continue until 31 March 2004. This five year agreement covers a range of organisations including county councils, borough councils, district councils, fire and police authorities and national parks.

The agreement allows for the provision of both large and small scale mapping to all participating organisations. The benefits of the service level agreement to the local authority community are wide ranging. The agreement provides a vehicle from which local authorities are able to obtain digital and paper mapping with both ease and speed. This has led to the widespread use of Ordnance Survey digital map data across the local government sector for use in their support of the local community. This widespread take up of Ordnance Survey's map data also ensures consistency of use across local government.

Youth Forums

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what effort he has made to encourage the creation of youth forums in each region; and if he will make a statement. [29971]

Mr. Denham: I have been asked to reply.

In November 2001 I published "Learning to Listen: Core Principles for the Involvement of Children and Young People". It commits Government Departments to increasing opportunities for children and young people to have a bigger say about policies and services relevant to them across Government and in their communities. Youth forums provide one way to help achieve this.

Both the Children's Fund and the Connexions Service provide financial and other support to local youth forums. The funding we are making available through the new "Transforming Youth Work Development Fund" will provide additional resources to promote increased participation, help to ensure there is enhanced youth work provision to underpin it, and contribute to our efforts to increase young people's engagement with local democracy.

The Government also support the initiative being spearheaded by the Local Government Association and the National Youth Agency, "Hear by Right", that fosters the active involvement of children and young people in decision making within their communities.

Child Workers

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many child workers were registered with local authorities in each of the last 20 years. [25016]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

Children and young people below the minimum school leaving age wishing to work must obtain permits from their local authority allowing them to do so. Numbers are not collected centrally.

DEFENCE

Public Relations Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was spent by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* bodies for which it is responsible on external public relations consultants in each of the last four years. [27400]

Dr. Moonie: This information is not held centrally in the form requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

However, since 1999–2000, a breakdown of Ministry of Defence's public relations expenditure has been published in the annual departmental performance report, broken down into categories of Royal Navy, Army, Royal Air Force and civilian recruitment, PR, marketing and business support services, Chief of PR, sales promotion, scholarships and National Employers' Liaison Committee.

Publicity expenditure figures were also published in the 1997–98 departmental performance report but on a slightly different basis.

Copies of these documents are available in the Library of the House.

Tanzania

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when a judgment was made by the Arms Working Party on the suitability of the sale of the BAE Systems air-traffic control system to Tanzania under the MOD form 680 procedure; [28299]

(2) when the application for a Tanzanian air traffic control system was considered under the MOD Form 680 procedure; and what the decision was. [29440]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* Siemens Plessey Electronic Systems (now part of Alenia Marconi Systems) submitted an F680 application in July 1997 for the supply of a radar system to Tanzania. In August 1997 the Government advised the company of preliminary clearance to supply an air-traffic control system to Tanzania subject to certain conditions. Within these conditions, it is routinely made clear to companies that such advice does not constitute an export licence, nor does it guarantee that a licence will be approved for the future export of goods or technology.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) which Government Departments and agencies are represented on the Arms Working Party under the MOD Form 680 procedure; [28297]

(2) which *(a)* sections and *(b)* Departments are represented at the Arms Working Party under the Form 680 procedure; and who has lead responsibility for assessing projects in terms of sustainable development. [29439]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* The term "Arms Working Party" is colloquially used to describe the F680 process under which informal advice is provided to companies on the prospects for approval at the marketing stage. Advisers consulted include the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Non-Proliferation Department, Geographical Departments, Human Rights Policy Department), the Ministry of Defence (Defence Intelligence, Equipment Security Branch, Headquarters Security Branch) and other Departments and agencies as necessary.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he was first informed of the views of the World bank about the *(a)* suitability and *(b)* cost of the Tanzanian air traffic control system. [29443]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* I am withholding this information under Exemption 2 (Internal discussion and advice) of Part II of the Government's Code of Practice on access to Government Information.

Royal Marines

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason permission was not sought for Royal Marines to land at Bagram Airport before they arrived. [30780]

Mr. Hoon: The deployment of Royal Marines to Bagram was a coalition operation carried out in close consultation with US forces. Appropriate contacts were made with elements of the Northern Alliance.

Strategic Defence Review

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the Civil Contingencies Secretariat over the new chapter of the Strategic Defence Review. [30791]

Mr. Hoon: Officials from the Civil Contingencies Secretariat, along with those from a number of other Government Departments, are contributing to the Ministry of Defence's continuing work on the new chapter to the Strategic Defence Review.

Tax (Forces Personnel)

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many retired officers and their widows have been identified as incorrectly paying tax on retired pay awarded since 1952 on the grounds of disability attributable to or aggravated by service. [31467]

Dr. Moonie: Further to the statement I gave the House on 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 891–902, the latest available figures are that the Ministry of Defence has identified 967 retired Army personnel and 75 widows of retired Army personnel who are entitled to a refund of tax mistakenly paid on attributable service invaliding pensions. We continue to publicise the error and further cases may emerge.

Afghanistan

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many deaths have been caused by military action in Afghanistan among *(a)* coalition forces, *(b)* Taliban forces and *(c)* civilians since 11 September 2001. [31142]

Mr. Hoon: Four US personnel have been killed in action and 17 US personnel have been killed in non-hostile incidents. Regarding Taliban and civilian deaths, I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 860W, to my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) and for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham). It is as difficult to estimate the number of Taliban military casualties as it is to estimate the number of civilian casualties.

Queen's Royal Lancers

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on the steps he is taking to improve recruitment to the Queen's Royal Lancers; [31603]

(2) to what causes he attributes the deficit in the established strength of the Queen's Royal Lancers. [31604]

Mr. Ingram: I apologise for the fact that, due to a coding error which excluded personnel not recorded against the main Unit Identification Number, eg Rear Party personnel, the establishment and strength of the regiments of the Royal Armoured Corps, the information that I gave to the hon. Member in my answer of 24 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 993W, was incorrect.

Consequently the current deficit in the Queen's Royal Lancers (QRL), as at 1 December 2001, is 41; not 198 as previously stated.

In the coming financial year, like other regiments, the QRL will benefit from a package of resources provided by the Army Training and Recruitment Agency's Recruiting Group to assist Regimental Recruiting Teams. This will include the provision of a minibus and recruiting trailer, mobile telephones and computing equipment, as well as funding for travel and marketing expenses.

Army Attributable Pensions

Dr. Jack Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of the number of Army pensioners who have lost income through the taxation error who are resident in *(a)* Cumbria and *(b)* Copeland; and if he will make a statement. [31010]

Dr. Moonie: Information identifying, from among the Army pensioners so far known to have been incorrectly taxed, those resident in Cumbria and Copeland could be provided only at disproportionate cost. We cannot at this time give a reliable estimate for how many new cases may emerge as a result of recent publicity, but we do not believe the numbers will be large.

Exercise Saif Sareea II

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends to publish the Lessons Learned report on Exercise Saif Sareea II. [31602]

Mr. Ingram: The full report on Exercise Saif Sareea is likely to be completed around the end of March. However, we have no plans to make this classified document public.

Royal Armoured Corps

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is *(a)* the establishment and *(b)* the actual strength, excluding attached troops, of the regiments of the Royal Armoured Corps. [28833]

Mr. Ingram *[pursuant to the reply, 24 January 2002, c. 993W]:* Owing to a coding error which excluded personnel not recorded against the main Unit Identification Number, eg Rear Party personnel, the establishment and strength of the regiments of the Royal Armoured Corps was incorrect. The correct figures are detailed in the table:

Regiment	*Establishment*	*Strength*
Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment	324	312
Queens Dragoon Guards	358	384
Scots Dragoon Guards	451	390
9th/12th Royal Lancers	358	354
2 Royal Tank Regiment	460	452
Royal Dragoon Guards	451	459
Household Cavalry Regiment	421	416
Queen's Royal Hussars	451	426
King's Royal Hussars	451	435
Light Dragoons	429	392
Queen's Royal Lancers	451	410
Joint Nuclear Biological and Chemical Regiment	200	196

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Remuneration

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will estimate the number of individuals in her *(a)* Department, *(b)* related agencies and *(c)* related non-departmental public bodies whose annual remuneration including benefits in kind exceeded (i) £100,000 and (ii) £200,000 in each of the last four years. [26315]

Dr. Howells: The number of individuals in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Royal Parks Agency receiving annual remuneration over £100,000 in the last four years is as follows:

1998: 0

1999: 1

2000: 1

2001: 1.

No individual received a salary over £200,000 in the last four years. These figures are based on total gross salary. No allowances or bonuses were paid.

Information on non-departmental public bodies is provided in the Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies".

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her estimate is of the cost of theft and fraud to *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years. [27984]

Dr. Howells: The available information is given in the table:

£

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
DCMS[1]	1,909	0	0	0
Royal Parks Agency	0	0	0	0
Historic Royal Palaces Agency[2]	13,600	—	—	—
Non-departmental public bodies[3]	417,493	240,530	6,228	79,872

[1] Net of amounts recovered.

[2] Historic Royal Palaces Agency became an non-departmental public body on 1 April 1998.

[3] Includes Lottery Bodies

Market Research

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what expenditure has been incurred by her *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years on (i) opinion polling, (ii) focus groups and (iii) other forms of market research; and if she will list the surveys commissioned and the purpose of each. [27938]

Dr. Howells: The Department's expenditure on opinion polling, focus groups and other forms of market research for the years in question is shown in the table.

£

Year	*Opinion polling*	*Focus groups*	*Market research*
1998–99	0	0	0
1999–2000	0	0	0
2000–01	0	0	0
2001–02	[1]36,382	[2]27,320	[3]10,800

[1] (a) Research undertaken that would assess consumers' perceptions of digital television and (b) questions on culture and the internet for Culture Online included in an omnibus survey.

[2] Eight focus groups with teachers, children and adults for Culture Online.

[3] An online survey of the use of culture websites of existing users of six cultural websites for Culture Online.

The Department's agency, the Royal Parks Agency, has not incurred expenditure on opinion polling or focus groups during the years in question. Its expenditure on market research is shown in the table.

£

Year	*Market research*
1998–99	29,000
1999–2000	30,000
2000–01	30,500
2001–02	41,500

Note:

The figure for each year covers expenditure on the annual visitor survey, 2001–02 also includes expenditure on monitoring the Kensington Gardens cycle trial.

Information on expenditure by the Department's non-departmental public bodies is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Empty Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her estimate is of the *(a)* annual cost and *(b)* total value of the empty properties owned by (i) her Department, (ii) her agencies and (iii) other public bodies for which she has had responsibility in each of the last four years. [30066]

Dr. Howells: My Department holds leasehold properties, used for its central London accommodation. There was one instance when such a property was left unoccupied for nine months from February to October 2001, while the lease was being transferred to the Cabinet Office. My estimate of the cost of this is £240,000.

My Department does not hold information centrally on the properties owned by the other public bodies, for which I am responsible, but I have contacted my agency, the Royal Parks Agency, for more information, and I will write to the hon. Member as soon as it is available, placing a copy of my letter in the Libraries of both houses.

Departmental Sponsorship

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the financial initiatives and resources sponsored by her Department in the last 12 months for Dorset, which are additional to the Government SSA grants. [29896]

Dr. Howells: My Department and our sponsored NDPBs are responsible for supporting an enormous range of cultural and leisure activity and funding is available from a variety of sources. In some cases it is possible to identify where this funding has been allocated to projects in Dorset but there are grants for the south-west region. and for England as a whole, which it is not possible to disaggregate.

According to information supplied to us by the distributing bodies for the National Lottery awards database a total of £14,428,240 National Lottery funding was distributed to 205 different projects in Dorset during 2001. £3,700,000 of this related to sport and leisure activity and £797,412 to libraries. I am arranging for a full list of Dorset's lottery awards in the last 12 months to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Resource—The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries, has allocated £82,000 to the tank museums in Bovington. In addition Resource has so far this year provided £485,903 to the South West Museums Council which covers the Dorset area. A further £119,379 will be paid next month.

Apsley House

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will publish the details of the proposal for a trust to manage Apsley House and the Wellington Museum referred to on 9 March 2000 by Lord McIntosh of Haringey. [29977]

Dr. Howells: The Department has considered a number of options for the future management of Apsley House and the Wellington Museum including the establishment of an independent trust. No decisions have been taken in favour of a trust as opposed to any other option. If the Contracting Out Order is approved, the Department will invite tenders from any interested parties.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on whose authority the advertisements for the post of Director of the Wellington Museum Trust, were placed. [29980]

Dr. Howells: The Wellington Museum Trust is an independent body created to bid for the contract to run the Wellington Museum and to maintain the fabric of Apsley House, provided that the Contracting Out Order currently before Parliament is approved. The advertisement for a director of the trust was discussed with the Department. However, the trust does not require the Department's authority to place an advertisement and the appointment of a director will not require the Department's consent.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how many tenders were received for the future management of Apsley House; [29978]

(2) when she decided which tender for the management of Apsley House to accept. [29979]

Dr. Howells: No tenders have yet been invited. These will be sought if the draft Contracting Out Order to be debated in both Houses is approved.

Tourist Boards

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what was *(a)* the total bill for salaries and expenses for board members, *(b)* the administrative operating costs and *(c)* the total annual budget in the latest year for which figures are available for each tourist board in England. [30201]

Dr. Howells: The 10 regional tourist boards (RTBs) of England are private companies and not public bodies. They are not required to present their financial records to the Government for scrutiny. The English Tourist Council have identified the following financial details based on information provided by the RTB's 2000–01 annual reports.

£

Regional Tourist Board	*Board members emoluments*[1]	*Executive directors' emoluments*[2]	*Operational expenses*[3]	*Total costs*[4]
Cumbria	0	130,294	n/a	1,574,077
East of England	0	79,138	n/a	2,006,799
London	20,000	91,406	669,126	4,981,111
Heart of England	0	52,270	n/a	2,946,964
Northumbria	0	[5]—	963,146	1,696,614
North West	5,000	[5]—	439,777	3,378,632
South East England	0	65,765	754,129	1,632,227
Southern	0	104,720	605,984	4,190,237
South West	9,000	92,235	n/a	2,612,918
Yorkshire	0	[5]—	n/a	4,078,187

[1] Only three RTB's indicate that fees are payed to their chairman and non-executive directors.

[2] Where separately identified, emoluments for executive directors are recorded. Some boards refer to the executive directors as board members.

[3] Some RTB's publish an aggregated group expenditure. Others allocate overheads over a range of activities.

[4] None of the RTB's publish an annual budget in their accounts. Total annual expenditure is shown here.

[5] For the Northumbria, North West and Yorkshire RTBs, neither the chief executive nor the finance director are listed as a director of the board.

Note:

Most RTB's appear to pay an attendance allowance to their board members only if they are not funded by the entity that they are normally employed by. Expenses are not separately identified as they are not considered to be significant.

Museums

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on her policy towards making funds available for *(a)* the National Tramway Museum and *(b)* the other six museums which have been designated through her Department as having outstanding collections and which are not in receipt of core funding from central or local sources. [28507]

Dr. Howells: The National Tramway Museum and six other major independent museums are among the museums and galleries whose collections have been recognised as being of pre-eminent importance under the Designated Museums Scheme. The Designated Museums Challenge Fund, which has provided £15 million for designated museums over the period 1999–2000 to 2001–02, will continue with a further £10 million to be awarded in 2002–03 and 2003–04. Designated Museums will shortly have an opportunity to bid for the first tranche of £5 million.

Children's Television

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the regulation of advertising in relation to children's television programmes. [30282]

Dr. Howells: Under the UK's broadcasting arrangements, responsibility for what is broadcast on television rests with the broadcasters and the broadcasting regulatory bodies. Television advertising is subject to regulation by the Independent Television Commission (ITC) and broadcasters must comply with their codes of advertising standards and practices.

The general principle governing advertising to children is that, at times when large numbers of children are likely to be viewing, no product or service may be advertised, and no method of advertising may be used, which might result in harm to them physically, mentally or morally; and no method of advertising may be employed which takes advantage of the natural credulity and sense of loyalty of children (regarded as those aged 15 and under).

Broadcasting Licences

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to change the law in respect of ownership of digital broadcast licences by religious broadcasters; and if she will make a statement. [31072]

Dr. Howells: The recent paper "Consultation on Media Ownership Rules" announced that the Government will bring forward legislation to allow religious bodies to hold a local digital sound programme licence. The paper also invited views on whether the restrictions on ownership of other terrestrial licences by religious bodies should be relaxed, and we are currently considering the responses. The Government will publish details of their proposals in the draft Communications Bill which we expect to publish this spring.

Broadcast Revenues (Sport)

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the voluntary code obliging governing bodies of major sports to invest at least 5 per cent. of broadcasting revenues in the grassroots development of their sports; and if he will make a statement. [31172]

Mr. Caborn: The Government believe that the Central Council of Physical Recreation's Voluntary Code on Broadcasting has been a great success since it was launched in 1996. Governing bodies in cricket, both codes of rugby, and other major sports have signed the code, and many invest rather more than the minimum of 5 per cent. of broadcasting income which it stipulates. Football's investments under the code have been successfully channelled through the Football Foundation since July 2000. The broadcasting provisions of the code apply to all signatories; these safeguard secondary, free-to-air television coverage of many major sports events.

National Lottery

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what procedures are in place to ensure an efficient transfer of lottery funds to the projects to which they have been committed; and if she will make a statement. [31598]

Mr. Caborn: There is no single central procedure designed specifically to facilitate swift transfer of committed funds to projects: this reflects their diversity. Project operators draw down funds from distributing bodies, and distributing bodies from the National Lottery Distribution Fund (NLDF), when they are needed. Much depends on the nature and size of individual projects, the terms on which individual distributing bodies offer grant to particular projects and the arrangements agreed between the distributing body and the project operator. We are, however, considering a number of measures to speed up transfer of NLDF funds to projects.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had in January with lottery distributors regarding the transfer of lottery funds to the projects to which they have been committed; on what date these discussions took place; and if she will make a statement. [31597]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met chairs of the National Lottery distributing bodies on 24 January. The distribution of National Lottery proceeds, and the Government's wish to see the National Lottery Distribution Fund (NLDF) balance fall, were agenda items.

The Department is considering, with the distributing bodies, a range of measures which might facilitate a faster release of the 92 per cent. of NLDF funds that are committed to projects. These include revising financial directions to permit advance payment for low risk projects and, to help applicants get their projects under way more quickly, taking a more flexible approach to partnership funding and providing more funding for project planning.

Listed Places of Worship

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on implementation of the Listed Places of Worship grant scheme. [27589]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* The new grant scheme to assist repairs and maintenance to listed places of worship was launched by Baroness Blackstone on 4 December 2001. Initial estimates are that the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme could be worth up to £30 million per year. There is no cap on the scheme; all listed places of worship that meet the criteria will receive a grant. CSL Group Ltd., our appointed contractors for the scheme, will be making the first grant payments to applicants later this month.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Communications Network

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, on how many occasions since 31 August 2001 the PDVN server has been out of action; what defects he has identified; and what action is being taken to rectify such defects. [31113]

Michael Fabricant: I have been asked to reply.

The Parliamentary Data and Video Network (PDVN) consists of interconnected systems hosted on a large number of servers. Since 31 August 2001, the Parliamentary Data and Video Network (PDVN) has suffered three major failures affecting the whole of the network. These occurred on 3 October 2001, 20 November 2001 and 21 November 2001. The PDVN had previously remained stable for 19 months. Subsequent investigation into these failures, which were related, identified saturation and overload of Central Processing Units as an immediate cause. Action was taken to rectify this and other faults. The Parliamentary Communications Directorate (PCD) has since asked the firm responsible for maintaining the PDVN to provide quicker on-site assistance in the event of a major failure. PCD staff have also been trained to respond more swiftly.

There have been other smaller-scale interruptions to individual services offered on the PDVN since 31 August. Some of these have occurred because of routine maintenance at weekends. If the hon. Gentleman has concerns about a specific service failure, he may like to raise them with the Director of Communications, Mr. Matthew Taylor.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what information he has collated about the time taken to log on to the Parliamentary Communications Network by hon. Members and their staff *(a)* within the Parliamentary Estate and *(b)* remotely; what defects he has identified; and what action is being taken to rectify such defects. [31114]

Michael Fabricant: I have been asked to reply.

The Parliamentary Communications Directorate does not routinely collate information on login times. However, poor performance with regard to the length of time it takes to log into the Parliamentary Data and Video Network (PDVN), whether from within the Parliamentary Estate or from elsewhere, will result in an increase in the number of calls to the Parliamentary Communications Helpdesk (extension 2001). Defects are then identified, enabling action to be taken.

The Citrix service which enables remote access to the PDVN has been enhanced over the past 12 months. Reliability has improved and login times have been reduced. However, if the hon. Gentleman is having difficulties, he might like to raise the matter with the Director of Communications, Mr. Matthew Taylor.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, when he last sought views on its performance from users of the parliamentary communications network. [31115]

Michael Fabricant: I have been asked to reply.

The Information Committee regularly passes on to officials in the Parliamentary Communications Directorate feedback from Members and staff on the performance of the Parliamentary Data and Video Network (PDVN). In December 2001, the committee e-mailed a bulletin to all Members with PDVN accounts, describing issues being considered by the committee. The bulletin was also publicised in the All-Party Whip. A number of Members responded with comments and suggestions, some of which related to the performance of the PDVN. These are actively being taken forward by the committee.

Modernisation

Mr. Drew: To ask the President of the Council if he will propose a mechanism to the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons whereby hon. Members who do not attend select committees other than for personal or health matters are removed after six months and replaced by other hon. Members. [31641]

Mr. Robin Cook: The Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons is currently considering a range of issues concerning Select Committees, including the matter of attendance. We hope to publish our report shortly.

WALES

KPMG

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what contracts his Department has with KPMG; and what the value is of each one. [31323]

Mr. Paul Murphy: None.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many environmental appraisals have been published by his Department since 1 January 2001; and if he will list the last four; [29033]

(2) how many officials from his Department have attended the Environmental Appraisal and Integration into Policy training course run by the Civil Service College; [29037]

(3) what procedures his Department has to ensure environmental appraisals are undertaken prior to *(a)* administrative and *(b)* policy decisions being made; [29035]

(4) when the last occasion was on which he requested an environmental appraisal before making a policy decision. [29034]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* My primary role is to safeguard the devolution settlement for Wales. The development of detailed policies of the kind which require environmental appraisal generally falls either to the National Assembly, or to other Government Departments in the case of non-devolved policy areas. As a consequence, my Department has undertaken no environmental appraisals since it was established on 1 July 1999.

My officials are aware of the need to subject relevant policies and other decisions to environmental appraisal. In the event of environmental appraisal being required of any Wales Office policy, steps would be taken to ensure that it was undertaken by individuals with the necessary knowledge and skills.

Empty Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what his estimate is of the *(a)* annual cost and *(b)* total value of the empty properties owned by (i) his

Department, (ii) his agencies and (iii) other public bodies for which he has had responsibility in each of the last four years. [30077]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department has had no empty properties since it came into being in July 1999. Nor does it have any agencies or NDPBs. Information in the form requested is not available for before July 1999.

Special Advisers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the average time is that the Head of his Department has recommended since May 1997 between a special adviser leaving his Department and taking up outside employment; and if he will make a statement. [28909]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer the Prime Minister gave him on 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 593W.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Annual Accounts 2000–01

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Solicitor-General when the Treasury Solicitor's Department Agency Annual Accounts 2000–01 will be published. [32395]

The Solicitor-General: I can confirm that I have today placed a copy of the annual accounts in the Library.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General what the total external spend by her Department was on private finance initiative consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PFI consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by her Department over this period; and if she will make a statement. [31031]

The Solicitor-General: My own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, and the Treasury Solicitor's Department have not employed any private finance initiative consultants in the last four years.

The total external spend by the Crown Prosecution Service on private finance initiative consultants in each of the last calendar four years was:

	£
1998	0
1999	0
2000	408,204
2001	1,004,367

The Compass project, management for an IT service, is the only private finance initiative that CPS has undertaken and this began in January 2000. The number of full-time equivalent consultants employed was 2.05 in 2000, and 4.42 in 2001.

The billed consultancy days for each year were:

Year	*Days*
1998	0
1999	0
2000	450
2001	973

The implied average cost of each PFI consultant was £907 in 2000 and £1,032 in 2001. The Crown Prosecution Service has used seven consultancy firms on this PFI project during this period.

The CPS employed external consultants on the Compass PFI project where the necessary expertise was not available within its own resources and where best practice was to employ independent external advisers. This approach delivered an effective procurement team, with the necessary skills to deliver a successful procurement on time, on specification and on budget.

The total external spend by the Serious Fraud Office on private finance initiative consultants in each of the last four tax years was:

	£
1998–99	29,724
1999–2000	76,489
2000–01	194,650
2001–02	0

The total figure of £303,863 was spent on project management, IT, contract, procurement and legal consultancy in relation to the letting of a PFI contract for an IT document management system. Three consultancy bodies were involved, one of which was CCTA. The remaining information requested could be made available only at disproportionate cost.

Ministerial Duties

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Solicitor-General how many times she has refused to meet hon. Members on constituency matters since taking office; and if she will make a statement about the criteria she uses in arriving at such decisions. [30964]

The Solicitor-General: Since my appointment I have not turned down any requests for meetings with hon. Members on constituency matters.

I assess requests for meetings with hon. Members on a case by case basis, but generally I would agree to them unless there is a strong reason not to.

Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Solicitor-General how many appointments to outside bodies she has made since her appointment. [31053]

The Solicitor-General: I have made no such appointments. However the Attorney-General has appointed Mrs. Rosalind Wright CB as Director of the Serious Fraud Office for a further year. This appointment was announced on 18 January 2002.

Mrs. Wright, whose original contract ends on 21 April 2002, will continue to direct the Serious Fraud Office until 20 April 2003.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Solicitor-General how many *(a)* CPS areas and *(b)* legal aid firms she has visited since her appointment. [31052]

The Solicitor-General: Since my appointment as Solicitor-General I have visited CPS offices in Hampshire, Durham, Nottinghamshire, West Yorkshire and Avon and Somerset and have visited five branches of CPS London. I have not visited any legal aid firms but have had meetings with the Law Society and the Birmingham Law Society.

SCOTLAND

Skye Bridge

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the private money involved in the Skye bridge private finance initiative has been classified as public borrowing; and if she will make a statement. [26718]

Mr. Foulkes: Issues relating to the Skye bridge are devolved under the Scotland Act 1998 and now fall within the responsibility of the Scottish Executive. Skye bridge was designed, built, financed and is operated under a PFI contract by Skye Bridge Ltd. (SBL). Under the Concession Agreement, signed in December 1991, SBL invested £28 million (1991 prices), the bulk of which was provided by a combination of commercial bank debt, a European Investment bank loan and index-linked loan stock. This private funding is not classified as public sector borrowing.

Glasgow/Edinburgh Airports (Rail Links)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what her assessment is of the impact on the Scottish economy of delay in investment in rail links to Glasgow and Edinburgh airports. [28428]

Mr. Foulkes *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* The development of surface links to airports should be addressed in the context of expected growth in passenger usage at Scotland's airports. The Government, jointly with the Scottish Executive, will shortly publish a consultation document on the development of air services and airports in Scotland. The results of this consultation exercise will feed into the preparation of the Government's White Paper on the future of the United Kingdom's air services and airports for the next 30 years to be published at the end of the year.

The Government have, with the Strategic Rail Authority and Scottish Executive, sponsored a scoping study into potential improvements in rail access to Scottish airports. These proposals are now being developed through a detailed economic and engineering study, led by the Scottish Executive in partnership with the Government, BAA, Scottish Enterprise, and the SRA. The study is examining options for direct rail links into Glasgow and Edinburgh airports.

Scottish Bus Group Pension Fund

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the answer of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, *Official Report,* 21 January 2002, column 661W, on the Scottish Bus Group Pension Fund, on what dates Scotland Office Ministers discussed the matter of the Scottish Bus Group Pension Fund Holders with Treasury Ministers; and what view the Scotland Office put forward in those discussions. [30869]

Mr. Foulkes *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* I am in regular contact with Treasury Ministers on a wide range of matters, including the Scottish Transport Group Pension Fund surplus. These discussions are held on a confidential basis.

I am pleased to note that, following recent discussions between the Treasury and the Scottish Executive, the amount now available for distribution to eligible former pension fund members has increased to £118 million, which I am sure is welcome news to them. It is necessary for the trustees to wind-up the pension schemes before ex-gratia payments can be made to former pension fund members.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

International Whaling Commission

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what recent discussions she has had with the Japanese Foreign Minister over her country's relationship with developing countries at the International Whaling Commission; and if she will make a statement; [31516]

(2) what assessment she has made of the Japanese relationship with developing countries at the International Whaling Commission; and if she will make a statement. [31515]

Mr. Morley: No discussions have taken place.

The UK Government would not and could not condone action directly linking overseas aid in exchange for support of any particular whaling policies. At the last annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission, we sponsored a resolution, agreed by consensus, which stressed the importance of transparency and lack of undue interference or coercion from other members within the IWC.

Zoos

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what assessment her Department has made of the extent to which the treatment of elephants in zoos within the UK is consistent with good practice in animal welfare; and if she will make a statement; [30450]

(2) if she will review the regulations relating to the management of elephants in zoos; and if she will make a statement. [30210]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* I have no current plans to review the legislation relating to the management of elephants in zoos. The Zoo Licensing Act 1981 makes clear that all animals, including elephants, should be kept in accommodation that is adequate for their proper care and well-being. Zoos are regularly inspected to ensure that that is the case and that all animals are treated in accordance with the guidance on animal welfare set out in the Secretary of State's Standards of Modern Zoo Practice.

Organic Produce

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what steps she is taking to encourage suppliers to make greater use of domestically produced organic produce; and if she will make a statement; [31297]

(2) what studies she has made of the organic produce and supply industry in the UK; and if she will make a statement. [31298]

Mr. Morley: We have already made considerable support available to encourage conversion to organic farming, which has increased the quantities of UK organic produce available. The action plan for organic farming, which we will be developing with the stakeholders in the light of the recommendations of the Policy Commission, will address the opportunities for UK producers to supply a higher share of the UK market for organic food.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the *(a)* value and *(b)* proportion of organically grown produce, broken down by category, that was (i) imported and (ii) domestically produced for the UK market in each year since 1990. [31296]

Mr. Morley: The best estimates we have are as follows:

Total retail value of UK organic market

£ million

	2000	2001
Cereals and bakery products	67	93
Dairy	106	148
Multi-ingredients	97	125
Meat	24	40
Eggs	31	39
Baby food	24	49
Beverages	24	40
Fruit and vegetables	230	268

Percentage of UK retail market supplied by UK product

	2000	2001
Cereals and bakery products	25	20
Dairy	60	65
Multi-ingredients	20	20
Meat	70	55
Eggs	100	90
Baby food	35	50
Beverages	15	20
Fruit and vegetables	15	15

We do not have information for previous years.

Nitrates

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the regions considered at risk from nitrogen pollution of water supplies. [31517]

Mr. Meacher: All regions of England are potentially at risk from agricultural nitrogen pollution of water supplies. Under the nitrates directive (91/676/EEC) 66 nitrate vulnerable zones (NVZs) were originally designated in 1996 for the protection of current drinking water supplies in England from agricultural nitrate pollution. Following a European Court of Justice judgment in 2000, we now need to designate NVZs for the protection of all waters in England. These include surface and groundwaters which could be used as water supplies in the future. The minimum designations are now required to complete implementation of the directive, and on which we are currently consulting, include proposed NVZ areas in every region of England.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact of the options proposed in the consultation document "Implementing the Nitrates

Directive" on agriculture by region; and if she will make a statement. [31518]

Mr. Meacher: A regulatory impact assessment of the proposals is included at Annexe E of the consultation document. This includes a compliance cost assessment broken down by agricultural sectors and by the different measures required. However, the assessment was made for England as a whole and there is no regional breakdown available. The tables included in Annexe E of the consultation document are reproduced.

Option 1 (100 per cent. designation): Summary of total compliance costs

Sector and measure	*Proportion of farms affected (%)*	*Estimated number of farms affected*	*Total annual cost*[1] *(£)*	*Average annual cost per farm affected (£)*
Dairy sector				
Storage	8	1,810	5,030,000	[2]—
Transport	10	2,210	1,070,000	[2]—
Beef sector				
Storage	2	800	290,000	[2]—
Transport	0	0	0	0
Sheep sector	0	0	0	0
Pig sector				
Storage	5	444	1,140,000	[2]—
Transport	100	8,330	3,390,000	[2]—
Poultry sector				
Storage	0	[3]n/a	0	0
Transport	100	[3]n/a	1,410,000	[2]—
Record keeping (all sectors)	100	141,000	24,000,000	200
Total			36,320,000	

[1] Numbers have been rounded to the nearest £10,000.

[2] We have not presented the mean average cost here. This would not accurately represent the average cost for a 'typical' farmer in this sector. The vast majority of farms are likely to incur relatively low costs, depending on factors such as the extent of on-farm manure spreading capacity and existing slurry storage facilities. A minority of farms will incur higher costs.

[3] It is not possible to provide a realistic figure for the number of commercial poultry farms affected from current agricultural census information. Calculations are based on an average-sized commercial poultry unit of 50,000 birds.

Option 2 (80 per cent. designation): Summary of total compliance costs

Sector and measure	*Proportion of farms affected (%)*	*Estimated number of farms affected*	*Total annual cost*[1] *(£)*	*Average annual cost per farm affected (£)*
Dairy sector				
Storage	9	1,265	3,660,000	[2]—
Transport	10	1,430	720,000	[2]—
Beef sector				
Storage	3	540	180,000	[2]—
Transport	0	0	0	0
Sheep sector	0	0	0	0
Pig sector				
Storage	6	354	1,040,000	[2]—
Transport	100	6,140	2,860,000	[2]—
Poultry sector				
Storage	0	[3]n/a	0	0
Transport	100	[3]n/a	1,210,000	[2]—
Record keeping (all sectors)	100	100,000	17,010,000	200
Total			26,670,000	

[1] Numbers have been rounded to the nearest £10,000.

[2] We have not presented the mean average cost here. This would not accurately represent the average cost for a 'typical' farmer in this sector. The vast majority of farms are likely to incur relatively low costs, depending on factors such as the extent of on-farm manure spreading capacity and existing slurry storage facilities. A minority of farms will incur higher costs.

[3] It is impossible to provide a realistic figure for the number of commercial poultry farms affected from current agricultural census information. Calculations are based on an average-sized commercial poultry unit of 50,000 birds.

Rural White Paper

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 859–60W, what proportion of announced funds and schemes was spent, broken down by category, during 2001–02. [31505]

Alun Michael: It is not possible to provide the information requested. The financial year to which it refers has not yet ended.

End-of-life Vehicle Directive

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her role is in the implementation of the European end-of-life vehicle directive; and if she will make a statement. [31507]

Mr. Meacher: The EC directive on end-of-life vehicles (ELV) passed into European law in October 2000. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has the responsibility for developing implementation options for the majority of the provisions in the directive. The Department works very closely with the Department of Trade and Industry on implementation of the directive and leads on the implementation of improved treatment facility standards required under Article 6 and Annexe 1 of the directive.

Waste Recycling

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what percentage of households broken down by *(a)* government region and *(b)* constituency have doorstep collections of recyclable waste; and if she will make a statement; [29974]

(2) what recent efforts have been made by *(a)* central and *(b)* local government to encourage recycling of (i) household and (ii) commercial/office waste; and if she will make a statement; [29975]

(3) what percentage of household waste is recycled in the UK broken down by *(a)* government region and *(b)* constituency; which materials are most commonly and least commonly recycled within each of these areas; and if she will make a statement. [29973]

Mr. Meacher: The following table shows, for each Government region, the percentage of households that have some form of doorstep (kerbside) collections of recyclable waste and the percentage of household waste recycled.

English regions 1999–2000

Percentage

Region	*Households served by kerbside*	*Household waste recycled*
North East	12	4
North West	35	7
Yorkshire and the Humber	32	6
East Midlands	55	10
West Midlands	24	9
East	63	14
London	46	10
South East	63	15
South West	58	14
England total	44	10

The estimates in the table are based on information from the DEFRA annual survey of municipal waste management. The information is not available by constituency. The most commonly recycled material in all English regions, by all forms of household recyclable collections is paper and card, which constitutes over 60 per cent. of total recyclable materials. It is not possible to accurately quantify the least commonly recycled material.The Government have set a challenging target to increase the recycling of municipal waste to 25 per cent. of household waste by 2005. To ensure that all local authorities contribute to achieving this target, the Government have set each authority in England statutory performance standards for recycling and composting of household waste. They have also encouraged best value networks and issued guidance on joint municipal waste management strategies.

We are helping councils deliver their statutory performance standards for recycling and composting through major extra funding from the Spending Review 2000. By 2003–04 revenue support will have risen by £1.1 billion over current provision; there is £220 million for PFI waste schemes over the spending review period; and there is a £140 million ring-fenced fund for waste and recycling over the next two years. £50 million of New Opportunities Fund moneys will also be available over the next two years to support community sector work on recycling in the UK.

The EC directive on packaging and packaging waste (94/62/EC) has been implemented in the UK by the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997. The directive requires that 50 per cent. of packaging waste, by weight, be recovered by 2001 half of which must be recycled, with a 15 per cent. recycling minimum per material. Much of the material to date has come from the industrial and commercial waste stream.

European Food Safety Authority

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what meetings her officials have had since 1 October 2001 with European Union institutions concerning the establishment of the European Food Safety Authority; and what subjects were discussed. [31003]

Mr. Morley: None. The Food Standards Agency took the lead for the UK in negotiations on the European Food Safety Authority.

Foot and Mouth

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has had on holding an independent public inquiry into her Department's handling of the foot and mouth crisis. [30713]

Mr. Morley: The Department has continued to receive a number of representations from a variety of sources on this subject—mainly from county, district, borough and parish councils.

The Department has also received two petitions.

GM Crops

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what compensation is available to organic enterprises whose status is affected by adjacent GM crops. [27744]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* Liability in respect of any damage from GM crops, including that to organic status, is being addressed at both European and UK levels. The European Commission is developing proposals for an environmental liability regime covering a range of activities, including the release of GMOs.

In order to minimise any impact from GM crops in the Farm Scale Evaluations (FSEs) on nearby conventional or organic farms, separation distances are used to help ensure that cross-pollination does not exceed 1 per cent. In many cases it will be much lower. We are working with organic sector bodies and the biotechnology and farming industry body, SCIMAC, to ensure that this situation continues in the final year of the evaluations.

I am also considering whether domestic liability provisions for GM crops might be needed in the light of the Commission's wider proposals. The benefits of a domestic regime might include increased reassurance for the public and nearby farmers, an effective mechanism for correcting environmental damage, and ensuring that producers of GM seeds and growers of GM crops take proper account of their potential impact on non-GM production. In the meantime, an individual who feels they have suffered a loss due to the release of a GMO may be able to commence an action in the courts.

Coastal Erosion

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she is taking to reduce the impact of coastal erosion. [31448]

Mr. Morley: We plan to reduce the impact of coastal erosion by investing in coastal defences in the highest risk areas. However as the bulk of expenditure is ultimately met by taxpayers, both DEFRA and the coast protection authorities have a responsibility to ensure that value for money is obtained when funding works.

This Department provides grants for flood defence and coast protection capital works, and associated studies, which meet essential technical, economic and environmental criteria and achieve an appropriate priority score (based on departmental priorities, urgency and benefit:cost ratio). Further to increases in the last two Spending Reviews, additional funding of £51 million over the four years from 2000–01 was announced in November 2000 following the severe flooding. In all DEFRA flood and coastal defence funding is set to increase from £66 million in 2000–01 to £114 million in 2003–04. Funding for future years will be considered in the Spending Review process. Responsibility for deciding which projects to promote and their timing rests with the operating authorities. The operating authority for each area draws on its local knowledge to decide what needs to be done.

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the cost of the effects of coastal erosion in the UK in each of the last seven years. [31449]

Mr. Morley: This Department has policy responsibility for coastal erosion in England. No estimates have been made of the cost of the effects of coastal erosion for each of the last seven years. However DEFRA commissioned research into a National Appraisal of Assets at Risk from Flooding and Coastal Erosion and the outcome was published in September 2001. This research estimated that the "do nothing" annual average damage was £84.3 million per annum but investment to date had reduced this to £16.6 million per annum.

Rhizomania

Mrs. Shephard: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many responses were received in the consultation on the future of rhizomania-protected zones which ended on 14 January; and what representations her Ministers have made to the Council of Ministers about rhizomania-protected zones. [31294]

Mr. Morley: 459 responses were received. No representations on this issue have been made to the Council of Ministers because, when the rules for protected zones were adopted in 1993, the council gave the Standing Committee on Plant Health the powers to amend the annexes to the plant health directive which provide for protected zone status.

Rodent Control

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will reintroduce the duty under the Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 for local authorities to notify her Department annually of their activities to control rats and mice; and if she will make a statement. [30743]

Mr. Morley: There are currently no plans to reintroduce this duty to local authorities.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the value of the rodent control industry in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales, with reference to (i) the manufacturing of rodenticides and (ii) the activities of servicing companies in the last five years. [30744]

Mr. Morley: We have not made any such estimate of the rodent control industry in England. Rodent control issues in Wales are the responsibility of the National Assembly for Wales.

Energy Efficiency

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the processes and initiatives by which the Government are encouraging the take-up of energy efficient techniques in industry. [7316]

Mr. Meacher: The climate change levy, a major component of the UK's climate change programme, was introduced on 1 April 2001 to encourage energy efficiency in industry. Climate change agreements with the most energy intensive sectors set challenging targets for reductions in energy consumption in return for an 80 per cent. reduction in the levy. The proceeds of the levy will be recycled to industry through a 0.3 percentage point reduction in national insurance contributions, and also through the provision of funds for the Carbon Trust.

The Carbon Trust is a not-for-profit organisation, set up by the Government and the devolved Administrations to develop a clear framework to encourage the u[illegible] low-carbon technologies in the industry sector. The Trust will take over management of the Government's Energy Efficiency Best Practice that has been running since 1989 as the UK's main source of energy efficiency information, providing best practice advice and support to organisations in the public and private sectors. The trust will also manage the enhanced capital allowance scheme that gives 100 per cent. first year capital allowances for businesses investing in approved energy saving equipment. Additionally the Carbon Trust will develop a low carbon innovation programme that will support new and emerging low-carbon technologies.

Combined heat and power is another vital component of the Government's strategy to enhance the energy efficiency of the UK economy. The CHP quality assurance programme assesses "Good Quality" CHP production that is energy efficient in operation. This provides a passport to climate change levy exemptions and other benefits which encourage the take-up of CHP and contribute to the Government's 2010 target of 10,000 megawatts of installed Good Quality CHP.

Vulnerable Household

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how many people in England wil as a result of long-term sickness or disability, be living in vulnerable households in (a) private accomodation and (b) public sector housing; and what sources of data have been used to calculate these figures. [26426]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

The latest source of data for the numbers in fuel poverty is taken from the 1998 Energy Follow Up Survey (EFUS) to the 1996 English House Condition Survey (EHCS), but information is not separately available from the 1998 EFUS split by long-term sickness and disability. However, the latest available information (relating to 1996) on figures for households where the head of household is long-term sick or disabled, is available from the Libraries of the House.

TREASURY

Premature Death

Chris Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many adults died prematurely broken down by region, expressed as *(a)* a percentage and *(b)* the total number, ranked in descending order according to percentage for the latest year for which figures are available. [30579]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Chris Ruane, dated 30 January 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question concerning how many adults have died prematurely by region expressed as (a) a percentage and (b) the total number, ranked in descending order according to percentage for the latest year in which figures are available. (30579)

The figures requested are given in the table:

Premature deaths[1] of adults[2] by Government office region, England[3], 2000[4]

Number and percentage

Government office region	*Number of deaths*	*Percentage of all deaths at ages 15 and over*
North-east	11,285	40.1
North-west	28,544	38.7
London	22,172	37.9
West Midlands	20,110	37.3
Yorkshire and the Humber	18,954	36.6
East Midlands	15,242	36.1
East	17,541	33.1
South-east	25,493	32.0
South-west	16,853	30.5

[1] Premature deaths were classified as those occurring below age 75

[2] Adults were classified as those aged 15 and over

[3] Residents only

[4] Data are for occurrences of death per calendar year

Source:

Office for National Statistics

Mortality Rates

Chris Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the *(a)* infant mortality rates and *(b)* child mortality rates were in descending order by (i) health authority and (ii) local authority in 2000–01. [30474]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Chris Ruane, dated 30 January 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking what the (a) infant mortality rates and (b) child mortality rates were in descending order by (i) health authority and (ii) local authority in 2000–01. (30474)

Figures are routinely compiled by calendar years. The most recent available figures are for 2000. These have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Randall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many persons were employed in the manufacturing industry in the UK in each of the last five years. [31365]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. John Randall, dated 30 January 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question about how many persons were employed in manufacturing industry in the UK in each of the last five years. (31365)

I refer you to the answer given in the Official Report No. 80 of 15 January 2002, columns 164–165 to Paul Flynn MP, which gives the requested information.

Mr. Randall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many redundancies there were in the manufacturing sector in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* the Uxbridge constituency in each of the past seven years. [31364]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. John Randall, dated 30 January 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question about redundancies in the manufacturing sector in the United Kingdom and Uxbridge constituency. (31364)

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) provides estimates of the numbers of people who have been made redundant from a job in the manufacturing sector in the United Kingdom and in Government Office Regions. However, the LFS does not provide estimates of redundancies for Parliamentary constituencies. the LFS sample size for redundancies in manufacturing in Greater London region is too small to provide reliable estimates.

The LFS provides estimates of redundancies in the manufacturing sector for each quarter from spring (March to May) 1997. Estimates prior to this are not available on a consistent basis. The estimates for the United Kingdom for each autumn (September to November) quarter from 1997 to 2001 are given in the table overleaf.

Redundancies in the manufacturing sector[1]: United Kingdom autumn (September to November) quarters 1997–2001[2]

Autumn	*Redundancy level (Thousand)*	*Redundancy rate (per 1,000 employees)[3]*
1997	41	8.7
1998	67	13.8
1999	49	10.4
2000	52	11.6
2001	71	16.3

[1] Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) 1992 Division D: Manufacturing.

[2] Not seasonally adjusted.

[3] The redundancy rate is based on the ratio of the redundancy level for the given quarter to the number of employees in the previous quarter, multiplied by 1,000.

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey

Paid Work

Chris Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many adults aged over 25 years were seeking paid work by region expressed as *(a)* a percentage and *(b)* the total number, ranked in descending order according to percentages for the latest date for which figures are available. [30591]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Chris Ruane, dated 30 January 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about adults aged over 25 years seeking work. (30591)

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) provides estimates of the number and percentage of people aged over 25 years who are seeking work: that is, people aged over 25 years who are unemployed, as defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

The latest available estimates are for autumn (September to November) 2001. These are given in the table below.

ILO unemployed people[1] aged 25 and over by Government Office Region, autumn (September to November) 2001[2]

	Percentage	*Thousand*
UK	2.4	953
London	3.5	172
North East	3.1	53
Scotland	3.0	104
Northern Ireland	2.8	30
North West	2.4	113
Yorkshire and Humberside	2.4	81
West Midlands	2.3	83
Wales	2.1	42
East Midlands	2.1	60
Eastern	1.8	69
South East	1.7	94
South West	1.5	52

[1] ILO unemployed people aged 25 and over as a percentage of all persons aged 25 and over.

[2] Not seasonally adjusted.

Source:

Labour Force Survey

Teen Pregnancy

Chris Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many conceptions by girls under the age of 16 there were by region *(a)* expressed as a percentage of under-16s and *(b)* the total number, in descending order according to percentage figures for the latest year in which figures are available. [30599]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Chris Ruane, dated 30 January 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking how many conceptions to girls under the age of 16 there were by region (a) expressed as a percentage of under 16s and (b) the total number, in descending order according to percentage for the latest year in which figures are available. (30599)

The figures requested are given in the table below:

Conceptions to girls aged under 16 by Government Office Region (GOR), England, 1999

GOR	*Number of conceptions to girls under 16*	*Girls conceiving under 16[1] as percentage of population*
North East	499	1.00
Yorkshire and the Humber	919	0.98
London	1,058	0.89
North West	1,178	0.88
West Midlands	890	0.88
East Midlands	616	0.80
South West	658	0.75
South East	963	0.67
Eastern	627	0.65

[1] The population at risk of conceiving under 16 is conventionally taken to be girls aged 13–15

Source:

Office for National Statistics

Children (Accidental Deaths)

Chris Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many accidental deaths of children there were broken down by region, expressed by *(a)* the percentage of population and *(b)* the total number, in descending order for the latest year for which figures are available. [30603]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Chris Ruane, dated 30 January 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question concerning the number of accidental deaths which occurred to children by region by (a) the percentage of the population and (b) the total number, in descending order for the latest year when figures were available. (30603)

The figures requested are given in the table below:

Deaths from accidents[1]; persons aged 0–15[2] by Government Office Region, England[3], 2000[4]

Number and rate per 100,000 population[5]

Government office region	*Number of deaths*	*Rate per 100,000 population aged 0–15 years*
Yorkshire and the Humber	45	4.4
West Midlands	41	3.7
East Midlands	30	3.6
North West	51	3.6
South West	30	3.2
North East	15	2.9
London	42	2.8
South East	43	2.6
East	27	2.5

[1] International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision, codes E800-E949

[2] Excludes deaths under 28 days

[3] Residents only

[4] Data are for occurrences of death per calendar year

[5] To facilitate comparison between areas the figures are presented as a rate per 100,000 population resident in the area, rather than as a percentage, because of small numbers of events

Source:

Office for National Statistics

Low Pay

Chris Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many adults aged over 25 years were on low rates of pay by region, expressed as *(a)* a percentage and *(b)* the total number, ranked in descending order according to percentages for the latest date for which figures are available; [30580]

(2) how many low paid adults aged 16 to 21 years there are, broken down by region, expressed as *(a)* a percentage and *(b)* total numbers, ranked in descending order according to percentage figures for the latest date available. [30614]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Chris Ruane, dated 30 January 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent questions about the number of adults aged 16 to 21 and over 25 on low rates of pay. (30614, 30580).

The estimated number of jobs in the United Kingdom with pay below National Minimum Wage (NMW) rates in April 2001 was 320,000. Of these, 50,000 relate to 18–21 year olds and 270,000 relate to 22 year olds and over.

The National Statistics website contains estimates for the numbers and proportions of jobs paid at below NMW rates for Government Office Regions for all persons, however, numbers are suppressed for some regions because of the small size of the estimates. Figures are posted at: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/themes/labour_market/pay_and_earnings/measuring_low_pay.asp

No estimates at regional level are available for the age groups requested.

Divorce

Chris Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many children there were whose parents are divorced by region expressed *(a)* as a percentage of all children and *(b)* the total number, in descending order according to percentage for the latest year in which figures are available. [30600]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Chris Ruane, dated 30 January 2002:

As Director of the Office of National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question on the number of children there were whose parents are divorced by region (a) expressed as a percentage and (b) the total number, in descending order according to percentage for the latest year in which figures are available. (30600).

Estimated numbers for the United Kingdom for 2000, derived from the Labour Force Survey[1], are as follows.

Dependent children[2] living in divorced lone parent families[3]

Thousand

Government office region/country	*Number of children*	*Percentage of UK total*
United Kingdom, 2000		
North West	118.1	13.7
London	111.4	12.9
South East	105.6	12.2
West Midlands	82.4	9.5
Yorkshire and the Humber	80.5	9.3
East of England	69.9	8.1
South West	63.4	7.3
Wales	61.7	7.1
Scotland	55.6	6.4
East Midland	54.3	6.3
North East	44.0	5.1
Northern Ireland	16.6	1.9
United Kingdom	863.5	100

Source:

Labour Force Survey 2000

Illness

Chris Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people had a limiting long standing illness or disability by region expressed as *(a)* a percentage and *(b)* the total number, ranked in descending order according to percentage figures for the latest year in which figures are available. [30581]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Chris Ruane, dated 30 January 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question on the number of people with a limiting long standing illness or disability by region expressed as (a) a percentage and (b) the total number, ranked in descending order according to percentage figures for the latest year for which figures are available. (30581)

The information requested is shown in the attached table.

Persons who reported limiting long standing illness by Government Office Region (a) percentages (b) numbers ranked in descending order

Great Britain: 2000

Government office Region/County	*(a) Percentage reporting limiting long standing illness*	*(b) Number reporting limiting long standing illness (000s)*	*Weighted base (000s) = 100% (total number of people in each region)*
North East	23	652	2,783
Merseyside	23	314	1,342
Yorkshire and the Humber	21	1,072	5,113
South West	21	1,022	4,925
Wales	20	584	2,908
North West	20	1,119	5,688
Scotland	19	971	4,999
East Midlands	18	664	3,754
West Midlands	17	891	5,161
East of England	17	858	5,129
London	16	1,143	7,121
South East	16	1,253	7,943
All England	18	8,987	48,960
Great Britain	19	10,542	56,866

Notes:

Published data from the General Household Survey (Table 7.10 Living in Britain 2000).

Weighted bases shown here differ slightly from the published table because the published table includes two other measures of self-reported sickness. Bases for each measure differ because of the varying number of "no answers" to each measure. In these instances, the smallest base only is shown.

Percentages are based on data weighted to compensate for differential non response. The weighted figures give a grossed up population estimate.

Figures for Scotland and Wales are included in the ranked list, an overall figure for England is given separately.

Unemployment

Chris Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many young adults aged 16 to 24 years are unemployed by region expressed as *(a)* a percentage of population and *(b)* the total number, ranked in descending order according to percentage figures for the latest date available. [30594]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Chris Ruane, dated 30 January 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about unemployed young adults. (30594)

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) provides estimates of the number and percentage of people aged 15–24 years who are unemployed, as defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

The latest available estimates are for autumn (September to November) 2001. These are given in the table below.

ILO unemployed people aged 16–24 by Government office region, autumn (September to November) 2001[1]

	Percentage[2]	*Thousand*
UK	8.9	580
Scotland	11.0	63
London	11.0	97
West Midlands	10.9	63
North-east	9.9	29
Wales	9.2	30
North-west	9.0	68
Eastern	8.0	43
Northern Ireland	7.8	16
South-west	7.5	37
Yorkshire and Humberside	7.3	41
East Midlands	7.3	33
South-east	7.2	59

[1] Not seasonally adjusted

[2] ILO unemployed people aged 16–24 as a percentage of all persons aged 16–24

Source:

ONS—Labour Force Survey

Chris Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many households were without work for two years or more by region expressed as *(a)* a percentage and *(b)* the total number, ranked in descending order according to percentages for the latest date for which figures are available. [30590]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Chris Ruane, dated 30 January 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about households that have been without work for two years or more. (30590)

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) household datasets provide estimates of working-age households that have been workless for two years or more: that is, households that include at least one person of working age where everyone has been without work for two years or more.

The LFS household datasets are available for the spring (March to May) and autumn (September to November) quarters of each year. The latest available estimates are for spring (March to May) 2001. These are given in the table below.

Working-age households without work for two years or more[1,2,3] *by Government office region spring (March to May) 2001*[4]

	Percentage[5]	*Thousand*
UK	11.0	2,060
Northern Ireland	16.5	84
Wales	16.2	147
North-east	16.0	131
North-west	13.5	289
Scotland	12.7	216
London	11.9	287
Yorkshire and Humberside	11.8	190
West Midlands	11.2	185
East Midlands	9.0	119

Working-age households without work for two years or more[1,2,3] *by Government office region spring (March to May) 2001*[4]

	Percentage[5]	Thousand
South-west	8.4	128
Eastern	7.3	126
South-east	6.4	159

[1] Households that include at least one person of working age (ie a man aged 16–64 or a woman aged 16–59) where everyone has been without work for two years or more.

[2] Excludes households where everyone of working age is a full-time student.

[3] Not adjusted for households with unknown economic activity

[4] Not seasonally adjusted

[5] Working-age households without work for two years or more as a percentage of all working-age households.

Source:

ONS—Labour Force Survey

Household Insurance

Chris Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many households were without household insurance, broken down by region, expressed as *(a)* a percentage and *(b)* the total number, ranked in descending order according to percentage figures for the latest year in which figures are available. [30612]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Chris Ruane, dated 30 January 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question about how many households were without insurance, by region, expressed as (a) a percentage and (b) the total number, ranked in descending order according to percentage figures for the latest year in which figures are available. (30612)

Estimates of households with neither contents nor structural insurance are shown in the table below. They are from the Family Expenditure Surveys of 1999–2000 and 2000–01, combined to improve the reliability of the regional breakdowns.

Like all estimates from sample surveys these figures are subject to sampling variability.

Households without household insurance by Government office region and UK countries, 1999–2000 to 2000–01

Percentages and numbers

	Households without structural or contents insurance	
	Percentage	*Number (thousand)*
London	33	1,540
Northern Ireland	30	330
North-east	29	580
North-west	23	1,440
Wales	22	630
Scotland	21	1,100
West Midlands	21	1,090
Yorkshire and the Humber	20	1,060
South-east	19	1,750
East Midlands	17	890
South-west	17	1,040
East	16	1,160

Source:

Office for National Statistics, Family Expenditure Surveys 1999–2000 and 2000–01.

Workless Households (Children)

Chris Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many children were living in workless households, by region, expressed *(a)* as a percentage of population and *(b)* the total number, in descending order according to percentage figures in 2000. [30608]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Chris Ruane, dated 30 January 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about children in workless households. (30608)

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) household datasets provide estimates of the number and percentage of children living in workless households; that is, households that include at least one person of working age with no one in employment.

The estimates for spring (March to May) 2000 are given in the table below.

Children[1] *in workless households*[2,3] *by Government Office Region; spring (March to May 2000); not seasonally adjusted*

	Per cent[4]	*Thousand*
United Kingdom	16.0	1,867
London	23.7	353
North East	21.8	115
Northern Ireland	20.1	76
Wales	19.5	116
North West	18.4	261
Yorkshire and the Humber	18.0	178
Scotland	16.7	151
West Midlands	16.1	170
East Midlands	12.4	98
East	10.6	111
South West	10.5	96
South East	9.2	143

[1] Children refers to all children under 16.

[2] Households that include at least one person of working age (i.e. a man aged 16–64 or a woman aged 16–59) where no one is in employment.

[3] Not adjusted for households with unknown economic activity.

[4] Children in workless households as a percentage of all children in working-age households.

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey

Suicides

Chris Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many suicides there were by young people aged 15 to 24 years by sex and by region expressed as *(a)* percentage figures and *(b)* total number, ranked in descending order of totals, expressed in percentage terms for the latest year in which figures are available. [30596]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Chris Ruane, dated 30 January 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning the number of suicides by young people aged 15–24 years by sex and by region in (a) percentage figures and (b) total number, ranked in descending order of totals, expressed in percentage terms for the latest year for which figures are available. (30596)

The figures requested are given in the attached tables.

Deaths from suicide[1] in the age group 15–24, males by Government Office Region, England[2], 2000[3]

Number and rate per 100,000 population[4]

Government Office Region	*Number of deaths*	*Rate per 100,000 males aged 15–24*
West Midlands	53	16.0
East Midlands	40	15.5
North West	64	15.0
South West	39	13.5
East	37	12.0
North East	19	11.4
Yorkshire and the Humber	33	10.1
South East	46	9.8
London	39	7.7

Deaths from suicide[1] in the age group 15–24, females by Government Office Region, England[2], 2000[3]

Number and rate per 100,000 population[4]

Government Office Region	*Number of deaths*	*Rate per 100,000 females aged 15–24*
South West	14	5.2
South East	22	4.9
West Midlands	13	4.2
North East	6	3.8
North West	15	3.7
East	8	2.8
Yorkshire and the Humber	8	2.6
London	11	2.3
East Midlands	3	1.2

[1] International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision, codes E950-E959 and E980-E989 excluding E988.8.

[2] Residents only.

[3] Data are for occurrences of death per calendar year.

[4] To facilitate comparison between areas the figures are presented as a rate per 100,000 population resident in the area, rather than as a percentage, because of small numbers of events.

Source:

Office for National Statistics

Pensioners (Telephones)

Chris Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many pensioners do not have a telephone, broken down by region expressed as *(a)* a percentage and *(b)* the total number, ranked in descending order according to percentage figures for the latest year in which figures are available. [30587]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Chris Ruane dated 30 January 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question on numbers of pensioners that do not have a phone by region. (30587)

Estimates of pensioner households without a telephone by region are shown in the attached table. They are from the three most recent years of the Family Expenditure Survey, 1998–99 to 2000–01, combined to improve the reliability of the regional breakdowns of this group. Pensioner households have been defined as those with a retired head.

Like all estimates from sample surveys these figures are subject to sampling variability. This is greater for estimates of a sub-group such as pensioner households than for all households.

Pensioner households without telephone by Government office region and UK countries: 1998–99 to 2000–01

	Households without telephone	
	Percentage	*Number (Thousand)*
North East	7	18
Northern Ireland	6	8
East Midlands	5	17
North West	4	28
Scotland	4	21
West Midlands	4	19
Yorkshire and the Humber	4	16
South West	3	16
East	3	17
Wales	3	8
London	2	14
South East	2	17

Source:

Office for National Statistics, Family Expenditure Surveys 1999–2000 and 2000–01.

Young Adults

Chris Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many young adults there are aged 16 to 18 years who are not in education, training or work by region, expressed as *(a)* a percentage of the population and *(b)* the total number, ranked in descending order according to percentage figures for the latest date available. [30598]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter for Len Cook to Chris Ruane, dated 30 January 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about young adults who are not in education, training or employment. (30598)

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) provides estimates of the number and percentage of people aged 16–18 years who are not in education, training or employment. The latest available estimates are for autumn (September to November) 2001. These are given in the table below.

People aged 16–18 who are not in education, training or work by Government Office Region Autumn (September to November) 2001 (not seasonally adjusted)

	Percentage[1]	*Thousand*
UK	12.0	264
Yorkshire and Humberside	16.3	32
Scotland	15.2	30
North West	14.0	39
Wales	13.8	15
North East	13.3	13
London	12.5	29
West Midlands	12.3	26
South East	11.0	31
Eastern	9.3	18
East Midlands	9.3	14
South West	7.0	12
Northern Ireland	[2]—	[2]—

[1] Sample size too small for reliable estimate.

[2] People aged 16–18 who are not in education, training or work as a percentage of all persons aged 16–18.

Source:

ONS—Labour Force Survey.

Babies

Chris Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many low birthweight babies there were by region by *(a)* percentage of population and *(b)* total number, in descending order in the year when figures were last available. [30604]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Chris Ruane, dated 30 January 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking how many low birthweight babies there were by region by (a) percentage of population and (b) total number, in descending order, in the most recent year for which figures are available. (30604)

The figures requested are given in the table below.

Low birthweight babies[1] *by Government Office Region, England*[2], *2000*[3]

Government Office Region	*Number of low birthweight babies*	*Percentage of all live births*
West Midlands	5,156	8.4
London	8,506	8.2
Yorkshire and The Humber	4,505	8.1
North West	6,020	7.9
East Midlands	3,568	7.8
North East	2,053	7.8
East	4,153	6.8
South East	6,090	6.7
South West	3,301	6.6

[1] Population at risk is taken to be the total number of live births with a stated birthweight, and is used to calculate the percentage of low birthweight babies (ie under 2,500 grams).

[2] Residents only.

[3] Data are for occurrences of births per calendar year.

Source:

Office for National Statistics.

Inland Revenue

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average turnover of companies with limited status in the UK, as reported to the Inland Revenue, in the last year for which figures are available. [31551]

Dawn Primarolo: It is not possible to provide an accurate estimate of the average turnover of companies from information held centrally by the Inland Revenue. However, relevant information on the numbers and turnover of companies and public corporations can be found in Table 6 of the Department of Trade and Industry Small Business Service publication "Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise Statistics for the UK 2000" which is located at: www.sbs.gov.uk/content/statistics/stats2000.pdf.

London Weighting

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been spent on London weighting in the public sector in the 2001–02 financial year. [31390]

Mr. Andrew Smith: We do not keep this information centrally. The payment of London weighting is a matter for individual public sector employers.

Public Sector Pay

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been spent on regional allowances to supplement public sector pay in the south-east, excluding London, in the 2001–02 financial year. [31391]

Mr. Andrew Smith: We do not keep this information centrally. The payment of regional allowances is a matter for individual public sector employers.

Regional Allowances

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of total expenditure on public sector pay is taken up by regional allowances. [31389]

Mr. Andrew Smith: We do not keep this information centrally. The payment of regional allowances is a matter for individual public sector employers.

Limited Companies

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the average profitability of companies with limited status in the UK, as reported to the Inland Revenue, in the last year for which figures are available. [31552]

Dawn Primarolo: It is not possible to measure average company profitability from the tax assessment information which the Inland Revenue holds centrally. But figures on the profitability of UK companies for the third quarter of 2001 from the latest National Statistics press release can be found at www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/puc0102.pdf

Euro

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 17 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 438W, on the euro, for what reason he was not able to indicate the number of officials involved in the preliminary technical work for euro preparations; and if he will make a statement. [30881]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him yesterday.

Building Programme

Chris Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which Government Departments operate a system of retention in their building programme. [30572]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Treasury does not collect data on which Departments do or do not operate a system of retention in their building programmes. This is a matter for individual Government Departments.

The Achieving Excellence in Construction initiative, led by the Office of Government Commerce, is placing greater emphasis on team working and value for money procurement strategies and is encouraging central Government construction clients to use partnering and long-term commercial agreements with suppliers to reduce the need for retentions in the future.

Railtrack

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Buckingham of 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 143–44W, on meetings regarding Railtrack, under what section of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information he did not provide the information requested. [32086]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave him on 6 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 520W.

Credit Institutions

Ross Cranston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which amendments to UK law *(a)* have been made and *(b)* are necessary to comply with Directive 2001/24/EC of 4 April 2001 on the reorganisation and winding-up of credit institutions; and if he will make a statement. [31717]

Ruth Kelly: The task of identifying all the relevant provisions of UK law that require amendment, in order to implement the directive by May 2004, has not yet been completed. In the circumstances, no amendments to UK law have been made so far.

KPMG

Mr. Watson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what contracts his Department has with KPMG; and what the value is of each one. [31320]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury has no current contracts with KPMG.

Large-scale Projects

Mr. McWalter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the instruments available for the financing of large-scale projects where returns are unlikely to be made within at least a decade. [30977]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The criterion for assessing the effectiveness of investment in projects is whether value for money is secured. The Treasury's guidance on project appraisal—the "Green Book"—is aimed to help Departments achieve this objective. Departments have set out their investment plans in "Departmental Investment Strategies" published in July 2000.

Listed Buildings

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he has taken to press for the establishment of a differential rate for VAT for repairs and renovations to listed buildings in the European Commission review of reduced rates of VAT. [30782]

Mr. Boateng: EC law already allows a reduced rate of VAT for works to housing. It does not permit a reduced rate for works to other types of building, whether listed or not. However, in response to representations made by the Government, the European Commission has indicated that it will consider a reduced rate of VAT for listed places of worship in their general review of the reduced rates, which is due to take place in 2003.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent studies his Department has undertaken of the management costs of PPPs relative to conventionally procured public sector projects. [27857]

Mr. Andrew Smith: It is the responsibility of Departments to account for the management of their programmes and projects. However the Treasury has instituted a number of reforms since 1997 to improve acquisition of services through all forms of procurement, notably through setting up the Office of Government Commerce. In the area of PFI, the reforms following the two Bates reports, including guidance on standard contract terms and conditions and the establishment of Partnerships UK, together with experience gained in both public and private sectors, are believed to have resulted in reduced procurement costs.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the value of public sector capital expenditure, including capital grants to the private sector, as a proportion of GDP in each of the last four years. [26112]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Figures for public sector net capital expenditure as a proportion of GDP are given in Table B23 on page 195 of the November 2001 pre-Budget report (Cm 5318).

Customs Officials

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Customs officials have been based at Newhaven in each year from 1987 to date. [25455]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* Increased flexibility, mobility and use of information technology means that numbers of Customs staff based at a location is not a valid indicator of Customs activity.

Precise figures for each year are not available following a series of structural changes and variations in the way in which levels of resource deployed are measured.

Estimated figures for Newhaven

Year	*Estimated staff*
1990	124
1993	82
1995	60
1999	45
2000	30
2001	26
2002	15

Duty Free Allowance

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to raise the per person duty free allowance on gifts and other goods purchased in non-EU countries and then brought to the UK. [31132]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* The duty free allowances are set out in Council directive 69/169/EEC. Member states revalorise the monetary limit on goods, depending on shifts in the value of the euro. There is no case for a review at this time.

Customs and Excise (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have been recruited to work within Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in Northern Ireland in each of the past five years. [23565]

Mr. Boateng: The information is given by financial year.

Year	*Number*
2001[1]	74
2000–01	108
1999–2000	11
1998–99	8
1997–98	34
1996–97	40

[1] 1 April to date

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have been promoted in Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in Northern Ireland in each of the past five years; and how many years each person promoted had *(a)* served at their previous grade and *(b)* worked in Her Majesty's Customs and Excise. [23564]

Mr. Boateng: 211 promotions and regradings with enhanced responsibilities took place in Customs and Excise in Northern Ireland between 1997 and 2001. In some instances staff were promoted or regraded more than once.

In accordance with Exemption 8 of the "Code of Practice on Access to Government Information", it would be inappropriate to provide the analysis sought of promotees previous service as this information would enable members of staff to be identified.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Ian Stillman

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations his Department has made concerning the continued imprisonment of Ian Stillman in India; and if he will make a statement. [29473]

Mr. Bradshaw: Ian Stillman was arrested on 28 August 2000, alleged to be in possession of 20 kg and 300 g of cannabis resin. On 2 June 2001 he was sentenced to 10 years rigorous imprisonment.

Mr. Stillman appealed against this conviction at the High Court, but on 11 January this appeal was turned down. It is for Mr. Stillman's lawyers to appeal to the Supreme Court. We understand that no decision as to whether to appeal to the Supreme Court has yet been made by Mr. Stillman's lawyers.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and British high commission in New Delhi have made many high-level representations to the Indian authorities regarding Mr. Stillman. The most recent of these was a meeting between the British high commissioner in New Delhi and the Indian Home Minister on 2 January 2002. This case has also been raised at various times by the Deputy Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary. We will continue to raise the case at appropriate opportunities if Mr. Stillman decides to appeal to the Supreme Court. We will also continue to monitor his welfare while in jail and ensure that his special needs are catered for.

War Against Terrorism

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his policy on extending the war against terrorism to countries other than Afghanistan. [30029]

Mr. Bradshaw: Our aim is to eliminate the global threat posed by al-Qaeda and other international terrorist groups. We will take the action we deem necessary in support of this objective. We are working in a number of fora, including the UN, the EU, G8, NATO and the Commonwealth, to ensure an appropriate international response to the threat of terrorism. We are also stepping up our support to countries which oppose terrorist activity, but lack the means to prevent it.

Guantanamo Base

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who comprises the British team visiting British citizens who are being held by the US at the Guantanamo base in Cuba. [29801]

Mr. Bradshaw: The British team consisted of officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Security Service. Under Exemptions 1a and 15 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, I am unable to publish the names of the officials.

Afghanistan

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on what consulting assistance the UK is providing to the interim Afghanistan Government in implementing democratic processes. [30271]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Government fully support the Bonn agreement and its aim to establish a broadly based, representative and democratic government in Afghanistan. We have pledged approximately £2 million in immediate assistance to the Afghan Interim Administration to support them in their efforts to implement the democratic processes outlined in the agreement.

The UN-led political process is central to this effort. We have also given £1 million in assistance to support the office of the UN Secretary General's Special Representative in Afghanistan, Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi.

Gibraltar

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which Government initiated the current round of talks on the future status of Gibraltar under the terms of the Brussels Process. [30620]

Peter Hain: The Brussels Process was established in 1984 by the Government of Lady Thatcher. During the debate on the Queen's Speech on 22 June 2001, *Official Report*, column 284, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs announced the continuation of the Brussels Process.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions have taken place with Spain on air safety on flights to Gibraltar. [30724]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* We have had regular discussions with the Spanish Government on a range of issues under the Brussels Process, including aviation security.

I also refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones) on 1 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 811W.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the creation of a joint Anglo/Spanish body with responsibility for *(a)* judicial issues concerning Gibraltar and *(b)* issues concerning the defence of Gibraltar are being discussed under the Brussels Process of talks regarding the future of Gibraltar. [30867]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) on 6 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 122W.

Pakistan

Ann McKechin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the staffing levels in the British Consulate offices in Pakistan will be returned to the levels which existed prior to 11 September 2001; and if he will make a statement. [30393]

Mr. Bradshaw: Staffing at the British high commission in Islamabad, the Deputy high commission in Karachi and the British high commission visa and consular office in Lahore has almost returned to the levels prior to 11 September. There are, however, three entry clearance vacancies in Islamabad and Karachi and two in Lahore. We are endeavouring to fill these vacancies as soon as possible. As from 7 January all three posts have been operating a staged return to normal service. Islamabad and Lahore are expected to resume a full service on 4 February and Karachi shortly thereafter.

The number of staff providing consular assistance has remained the same since 11 September.

Colombia

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the links between the Colombian army and paramilitary organisations in Colombia; what recent discussions he has had with the US Administration about these links; what support the UK Government give to *(a)* Colombia and *(b)* Plan Colombia; whether such support is conditional on the termination of links between the authorities and paramilitaries; and if he will make a statement. [31256]

Mr. MacShane: Allegations of collusion between the Colombian army and the paramilitaries remain a serious concern and recent reports by the United Nations and human rights groups have been critical of the Colombian Government's failure to tackle the problem effectively. In January 2001, the Colombian Government set up a financial task force to investigate, seize and disrupt the funding of paramilitary groups, and a special military unit was created to tackle them. But much remains to be done; laws need to be implemented, weak institutions strengthened, alleged military-paramilitary links investigated and, where proven to exist, terminated.

We continue to have extensive discussions with the US Administration about developments in Colombia, including the paramilitary problem. The US designated the main Colombian paramilitary organisation, the United Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC), as a terrorist organisation in September last year. In November, HM Treasury, in co-ordination with US authorities, circulated a list of 25 terrorist organisations (including the AUC) to financial institutions requiring that their assets be frozen.

The UK assists Colombia both bilaterally and via the EU and the UN. The EU aid package for Colombia to which the UK is contributing will support human rights and social and economic measures, including alternative development. I announced a further bilateral contribution of £120,000 to the UN Human Rights Office in Bogota; on 23 January. Britain has also provided training for Colombia's anti-narcotic police and customs officers. The UK has made no financial contribution to Plan Colombia, either bilaterally or via the EU.

Neither the UK nor the EU has tied its aid to specific conditions. Cutting off aid would only hurt the poorest and most vulnerable communities in Colombia.

International Criminal Court

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the USA to encourage them to accede to the treaty establishing the International Criminal Court. [31264]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has not had occasion to discuss this issue recently with members of the US Administration. However, it is frequently discussed between officials and has been the subject of EU presidency demarches in Washington on 30 October and 20 December 2001, in pursuance of the EU Common Position on the ICC.

European Union Business

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list *(a)* the forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union for February and *(b)* the major European Union events for the period between 31 February and July. [32266]

Peter Hain: The following is the information:

12 February—ECOFIN meeting—Brussels

1. Adoption of Agenda
2. Approval of list of "A" items
3. Preparation for the European Council in Barcelona

Commission report on the functioning of product and capital markets (cardiff report)

(poss.) Report on increasing employment levels and prolonging working life

Broad economic policy guidelines

= policy debate (on basis of, among other things, the Commission's summary report and contributions from other Councils)

4. Stability and growth pact

Examination of updated stability and convergence programmes

5. (poss.) Update on the euro changeover
6. Commission report on globalisation: challenges and responses
7. Indirect taxation

VAT: Electronic commerce

8. Progress report on the procedures for the ratification of the Council Decision of 29 September 2000 on the system of own resources (OJ L 253, 7.10.2000, p42)
9. Other business

6/7—Valladolid—Ministerial Seminar on Democracy and Development

9/10—Brussels—Gymnich (Ministerial Informal)

11—Brussels—Eurogroup (Evening)

14—Brussels—Education and Youth Council

14/15—Brussels—Justice and Home Affairs Council (Ministerial Informal)

18/19—Brussels—General Affairs Council

18/19—Brussels—Agriculture Council

22/23—Brussels—Telecoms and Information Society Council (Ministerial Informal)

28—Brussels—Justice and Home Affairs Council

28—Brussels—Inaugural meeting of the Convention on the Future of Europe.

The following are the principal events in the EU between 1 March and July 2002 (certain relevant events are also included: the list is based on the information available at the date of issue).

March	*Venue*	*Event*
1	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council (Evening)
1	Brussels	Internal Market, Consumers and Tourism Council
4	Brussels	Eurogroup (Evening)
4	Brussels	Environment Council
5	Brussels	ECOFIN
7	Brussels	Employment and Social Affairs Council
11	Brussels	Research Council
11–12	Brussels	General Affairs Council
15–16	Barcelona	European Council
18	Toledo	Trade Ministers Meeting (Ministerial Informal)
18	Toledo	EUROMED Trade Ministers Meeting
18–19	Brussels	Agriculture Council
23–24	Brussels	Defence Ministers Meeting (Ministerial Informal)
25–26	Brussels	Transport and Telecom Council
27–28	Monterrey, Mexico	Financing and Development Conference
April		
5–6	Luxembourg	Migrations Council (ASEM Ministerial Informal)
8	Luxembourg	Fisheries Council
13–14	Luxembourg	ECOFIN (Ministerial Informal)
15–16	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council
22–23	Valencia	Euromed Conference
22–23	Luxembourg	Agriculture Council
May		
25–26	Luxembourg	Justice and Home Affairs Council
27–30	Luxembourg	Agriculture Council (Ministerial Informal)
3–4	Brussels	Tourism Council (Ministerial Informal)
6	Brussels	Eurogroup (Evening)
7	Brussels	ECOFIN
9		Europe Day
13	Brussels	General Affairs Council and Defence Ministers meeting
17–18	Madrid	EU-Latin America and Caribbean Summit
21	Brussels	Internal Market, Consumers and Tourism Council
23	Brussels	Culture and Audio-visual Council
24–26	Brussels	Environment Council (Ministerial Informal)
27–28	Brussels	Agriculture Council
30	Brussels	Development Council
30	Brussels	Education and Youth Council
31–1 June	Brussels	Transport Council (Ministerial Informal)
June		
3	Brussels	Employment and Social Affairs Council
3	Brussels	Eurogroup (Evening)
4	Luxembourg	ECOFIN
6–8	Brussels	Foreign Affairs Council (ASEM Ministers)
6–7	Brussels	Industry and Energy Council
10–11	Brussels	General Affairs Council
10–11	Brussels	Agriculture Council
11	Brussels	Fisheries Council
June		
13–14	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council
17–18	Brussels	Transport and Telecoms Council
17–18	Brussels	General Affairs Council
21–22	Seville	European Council
24	Brussels	General Affairs Council (possible)
24–25	Brussels	Environment Council

March	*Venue*	*Event*
25	Luxembourg	ECOFIN
26	Brussels	Health Council
July		
6	Copenhagen	ASEM Ministers for Finance
12	Brussels	ECOFIN
12–13	Kolding	Meeting of Employment and Social Policy Ministers (Informal)
15–16	Brussels	Agriculture Council
19	Brussels	Budget Meeting
19–21	Arhus	Environment Ministers meeting (Informal)
22–23	Brussels	General Affairs Council

Special Operations Executive

Ian Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what continuing role there will be for the Special Operations Executive Adviser on the transfer of the remaining SOE files to the Public Record Office. [32267]

Mr. Straw: The process involved in the final stages of preparing the SOE personal files for release to the PRO mean that it is no longer practicable for the SOE adviser to deal satisfactorily with inquiries relating to those files.

There being no further series of files for review and release, the SOE adviser will cease to have a function. From 15 February 2002, therefore, no further inquiries will be accepted by his office, which itself will close on 31 March 2002. With the transfer of the remaining personal files at the end of the year, public inquiries for access should be directed to the PRO.

Ian Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he plans to release more records of the wartime Special Operations Executive. [32268]

Mr. Straw: The records of the Special Operations Executive (SOE) have been released progressively since 1993. The next batch of records, covering the General and Headquarters (including America) files, has been transferred to the Public Records Office, and will be opened on 8 February 2002. The last batch of SOE records (the personal files) should be transferred around the end of 2002.

Arms Exports (Azerbaijan)

Ian Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the United Kingdom will continue to uphold the OSCE embargo on the export of weapons and military equipment to Azerbaijan. [32269]

Peter Hain: The UK remains committed to the OSCE arms embargo against both Azerbaijan and Armenia, which the UK interprets as covering all goods and technology controlled under entries in Part III of Schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 (commonly known as the military list).

In March 2000 the Government approved a similar request for protective jackets for demining operations to Azerbaijan, a continuing problem.

While the grant of this licence constitutes an exception to the UK's interpretation of the scope of the embargo, it is in no way inconsistent with the purpose of the embargo and our continuing commitment to uphold it.

Georgia

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with representatives of the Government of Georgia regarding political development in that country; and if he will make a statement. [28890]

Mr. Straw: The last ministerial contacts were at the OSCE Ministerial meeting in Bucharest on 3 and 4 December when the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. McShane) met the Georgian Foreign Minister; the Minister for Europe also met the Foreign Minister in London on 12 September.

A senior FCO official visited Georgia from 22 to 24 January and held discussions on a wide range of issues with the Georgian Government. The Deputy Foreign Minister is coming to London for Political/Military discussions on 6 and 7 February. We will continue to support democracy and development in Georgia and assist the Georgian Government to build on the reforms they have stated.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the compliance by the Zimbabwe Government with the Abuja Agreement. [31601]

Mr. MacShane: The Abuja text sets out clear benchmarks on the rule of law, ending political violence and intimidation and promoting basic human rights. The Government of Zimbabwe has paid scant regard to the commitments.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

"Your Guide"

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the trial of "Your Guide" in post offices in Leicestershire will continue after the end of March. [25909]

Mr. Wilson: The six month pilot continues to schedule and will be withdrawn as planned on 1 March 2002. This allows complete focus on the detailed evaluation report and business case which will determine whether the service will be rolled out nationally. Work is already under way to plan for national roll-out so that in the event of a successful outcome rapid progress can be made.

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what initial assessment she has made of the trial of "Your Guide" in post offices in Leicestershire since October 2001. [25908]

Mr. Wilson: No formal assessment has yet been made of the trial. The outcome of the pilot will be fully evaluated by the Post Office, by those organisations participating in the pilot, and by the Government participating as a whole. The pilot ends on 1 March. The full evaluation report is expected in June.

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what publicity has been given to the trial of "Your Guide" in post offices in Leicestershire since October 2001. [25907]

Mr. Wilson: Operational management of the pilot project is a matter for Post Office Limited. I understand that since its inception in August 2001, the trial has been publicised by means of paid advertisements and editorial features in the local newspapers and radio. Leaflets have been distributed through a variety of channels including doctors surgeries and social security offices and presentations have been made to a variety of local groups. The publicity has continued since October 2001 with material adapted to include case studies and quotations from users of the service. A leaflet drop directly to households is planned for later in January.

Terrorist Attacks

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on how many occasions since 11 September she has met the Director of the Office of Civil Nuclear Security to discuss the readiness of nuclear installations against attack. [28493]

Mr. Wilson: None. I have considered advice, including advice from the Director of Civil Nuclear Security, on the security of civil nuclear installations in the light of the events of 11 September.

BAE

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what outstanding financial commitments BAE has to Government agencies. [28657]

Mr. Wilson: All previous Launch Investment contracts with BAE Systems have been transferred to Airbus UK. These contracts provide for the repayment of Launch Investment with a rate of return in the form of levies on sales of the products developed. BAES no longer has such commitments to the Department of Trade and Industry. Comprehensive information on BAE Systems' outstanding commitments to the Government cannot be provided without incurring disproportionate costs.

Arms Sales

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from BAE Systems concerning the sale of arms to *(a)* South Africa and *(b)* India. [28292]

Mr. Wilson: The promotion of any legitimate UK defence exports, in co-ordination with industry, is the responsibility of the Defence Export Services Organisation of the Ministry of Defence.

Electricity Generation

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what evidence she has collated on the impact on conversion efficiency of generation of electricity on a small localised scale. [29493]

Mr. Wilson: The Department publishes conversion efficiencies for power stations operated by major power producers in Table 5.9 of the Digest of UK Energy Statistics. Efficiencies of CHP systems are given in Table 6A of the Digest and electrical efficiencies within CHP systems can be calculated from the data in Table 6.8. Conversion efficiencies of electricity from biofuels, onshore wind and hydro can be calculated from data given in Chapter 7; by convention, energy inputs to wind and hydro are equivalent to the electricity produced.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the average cost is per kilo-watt hour of *(a)* onshore wind, *(b)* gas-fired, *(c)* nuclear and *(d)* hydro-electric-generated electricity. [30314]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* The Department published estimates of the cost of gas-fired generation in the 1998 White Paper (Cm 4071, paragraph 5.38).

The last study of nuclear costs was published in 1995 and indicated that generation costs would be around 3.9p/kWh. Since then nuclear generators have produced generation cost estimates for new designs of around 2.6p/kWh.

Estimates of the cost of renewables technologies are contained in a report by the Energy Technology Support Unit (New and Renewables Energy Prospects in the 21st Century: Supporting Analysis) published in March 1999. This report is available in the Library of the House.

The Department has also contributed to the work of the energy review being undertaken by the Performance and Innovation Unit at the Cabinet Office, which has looked at the cost of new nuclear generation. A copy of their paper which covers estimates for a range of generation technologies (including onshore wind) can be found at: http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/innovation/2001/energy/2050.pdf.

The full PIU report is expected to be published shortly.

BNFL Inc 1998 Annual Report

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will place copies of BNFL Inc's 1998 annual report in the Library. [29395]

Mr. Wilson: No. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 163–64W.

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many nuclear power stations are to be *(a)* constructed, *(b)* modernised and *(c)* closed under the Energy Review. [28016]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* The Energy Review team has now completed its work and I submitted the PIU report to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at the end of December. It is for Ministers collectively to determine next steps on the report, including publication arrangements. It would not be appropriate to speculate on the content of the report in advance of publication.

Energy Providers

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received about energy providers poaching domestic customers from other companies; and if she will make a statement. [29755]

Mr. Wilson: I have received a large number of representations about domestic gas and electricity competition. A competitive market requires consumers to have access to offers from a number of suppliers, to be able to compare those offers and to be able to transfer between suppliers to make financial savings or gain improved service. It is also entirely legitimate that suppliers should promote their offers. The vast majority of contracts between suppliers and consumers are carried out in an appropriate manner, to the advantage of both. Since competition was fully introduced 14 million customers have benefited from greater choice and reduced energy prices by switching suppliers, and new entrants have been able to join the market.

It is important that consumers have confidence in the competitive market, and that problems that serve to weaken that market and cause distress to consumers be addressed. The problems raised in the representations made to me chiefly surround the erroneous transfer of gas and electricity supply, whether by administrative or data error or dishonest sales practice. It is the responsibility of the industry regulator, the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (Ofgem), to oversee competition as a whole, and to monitor and address suppliers' performance and compliance with the range of statutory and regulatory instruments.

To reduce erroneous transfers, Ofgem and the Gas and Electricity Consumer Council—Energywatch—have developed the Erroneous Transfer Customer Charter. All domestic gas and electricity suppliers have accepted this charter, which came into force on 1 January. The charter should ensure that consumers transferred in error are restored to their original supplier swiftly, and with the minimum of inconvenience. Ofgem will review the industry's response to the charter in August 2002. If it feels that the response has been inadequate, or that insufficient progress has been made, it will consider the use of regulatory measures. These include the imposition of standards of performance (which can carry requirements for automatic compensation) and the modification of supply licence conditions. Ofgem will shortly also have the powers to levy financial penalties on companies for breach of licence conditions.

In addition, in November 2001, I wrote to all gas and electricity suppliers to express my support for the charter, and to stress the need for all suppliers to eradicate sales malpractices, which cause distress and inconvenience to consumers and bring the competitive market into disrepute. I made it clear that, if the problems surrounding sales malpractices were not dealt with, we would have to look again at how best consumers could be protected.

Overhead Transmission Lines

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she has taken to curb the number of overhead transmission lines that have been planned for the future. [30143]

Mr. Wilson: The National Grid company has a duty to develop and maintain an efficient, co-ordinated and economical system of electricity transmission. It is a matter for that company what proposals it brings forward. These applications are then considered by the Department in the section 37 procedure and decisions reached on them.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she has taken to ensure that National Grid abides by the relevant planning conditions when erecting pylons for the Lackenby to Shipton overhead transmission lines, with particular reference to access to land in dry conditions. [30142]

Mr. Wilson: It is a matter for the relevant local planning authorities to enforce the planning conditions applied to the North Yorkshire power line. However, where there is doubt over the interpretation of a condition the Department has been willing to provide clarification.

Miscarriage

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of recent research by the National Radiological Protection Board on the relationship between magnetic fields and the risk of miscarriage. [30192]

Mr. Wilson: The National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) has not recently conducted specific research into any possible relationship between magnetic fields and the risk of miscarriage.

Two papers have, however, been published in the January 2002 journal *Epidemiology* by authors funded by the California Department of Health Services. Both papers purport to show an epidemiological association between magnetic fields and the risk of miscarriage and have attracted some media attention.

One leading American epidemiologist has, in an editorial in the same journal, already questioned the papers' findings and the possible influence of confounding factors.

The conclusions of the papers are also contrary to the findings of an expert Standing Committee of the International Commission for Non-Ionising Radiation Protection, who thoroughly reviewed the published epidemiological literature on electric and magnetic fields and health over the last three decades. Their review was published in December 2001.

The NRPB's Advisory Group on Non-Ionising Radiation (AGNIR) will be looking at these papers during the coming weeks and will report its views.

End of Life Vehicles Directive

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with other EU member states regarding the implementation of the end of life vehicles directive. [30149]

Mr. Wilson: None within the past few months. Officials are, however, monitoring other member states' implementation plans, to ensure that our own transposition and implementation of the directive do not place UK businesses at a competitive disadvantage.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on recent progress of negotiations on the implementation of proposed European legislation on vehicle recycling. [30224]

Mr. Wilson: 116 responses were received to the DTI's consultation paper on options for implementing the end of life vehicles directive and these are now being assessed, along with the recommendations and conclusions of the recent Trade and Industry Committee report, to help the Government decide on the best means of transposition and implementation of the directive. We are committed to achieving the important environmental objectives of the directive at least cost, and without putting UK business at a competitive disadvantage.

Manufacturing

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many times the ministerial group on manufacturing job losses has met since 21 December 2000. [30129]

Mr. Wilson: There is no ministerial group such as the hon. Member assumes. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 16 January 2001, *Official Report*, columns 218–19W, to the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady).

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what advice the Manufacturing Advisory Service is offering to firms in respect of the climate change levy. [30146]

Mr. Wilson: The Manufacturing Advisory Service (MAS) is being set up to help increase the competitiveness of UK manufacturing (especially SMEs), by the transfer of knowledge, new technologies, best practice methods and processes, and facilitating innovative training, education and skills development. Although the MAS will not offer specific advice on the climate change levy (CCL), it will encourage manufacturers to look at the efficiency and cost effectiveness of their energy usage and be able to signpost businesses to the relevant organisations for this. HM Customs and Excise provides advice on administrative arrangements for the CCL; the Carbon Trust will provide advice through the Energy Efficiency Best Practice Programme which will cover information on cost-effective, low carbon technologies and other measures, including information on the enhanced capital allowances scheme for investments in energy saving technologies; while the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) handles the climate change agreements including advice on eligibility for these.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the impact of the climate change levy upon the manufacturing sector. [30153]

Mr. Wilson: The climate change levy is an environmental protection measure designed to avoid damaging the competitiveness of UK manufacturing. The levy's impact on individual manufacturing businesses will depend on the extent to which they take advantage of the various levy exemptions, the new scheme of enhanced capital allowances for energy efficiency, and energy support from the new Carbon Trust; and whether their sites qualify for a discount from the levy. Eligible sites in energy intensive industries are receiving an 80 per cent. levy discount where they have committed to challenging energy saving targets in negotiated agreements with the Government.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what recent representations she has received from British industry regarding the climate change levy; [30152]

(2) what recent representations she has received from the manufacturing sector regarding the climate change levy. [30166]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has received a number of representations from business about the climate change levy.

The Government are keeping in touch with business on the levy to monitor initial experience with its operation. Primary responsibility for the levy lies with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor the Exchequer.

Waste Incineration

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the amount of energy generated from waste incineration in the Buckingham constituency in each of the last five years. [30042]

Mr. Wilson: Statistics of energy generation from renewables and wastes are not available at a level below that of Government office region, but I am not aware of any waste incineration facility within the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

Respiratory Diseases Claimants

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* interim and *(b)* final payments were made between (i) 1 January and 1 July 2001 and (ii) 2 July 2001 and 1 January 2002 to respiratory diseases claimants in St. Helens, South. [29832]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* IRISC, the Department's claims handlers, have made the following payments in the St. Helens, South constituency in relation to compensation for respiratory disease. In total the Department has paid over £819,000 in this region to date.

	Number of interim payments	*Number of full and final payments*
Period 1 1 January to 1 July 2001	32	9
Period 2 2 July 2001 and 1 January 2002	32	17

Nanotechnology

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the status is of the Department's research into nanotechnology. [30331]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has put in place an initiative to establish a national strategy for nanotechnology.

An advisory group on nanotechnology, comprising experts from industry and academia and chaired by the Director General of Research Councils, Dr. John Taylor, has been established to advise on the actions needed to ensure that the UK is well positioned to exploit the nanotechnology revolution. A report commissioned by the advisory group on the opportunities for the UK is due to be published in the near future. Copies will be placed in the House Library.

The Government are already making a significant investment in nanotechnology research and exploitation. As part of this, DTI is providing £7.2 million over three years to support a University Innovation Centre (UIC) in Microsystems and Nanotechnology in the north-east of England.

Glass Industry

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is on European legislation affecting the glass industry. [30226]

Mr. Wilson: The glass and glazing industry covers a wide spectrum of DTI interests ranging from glass tableware to construction materials. The Government therefore consider each proposed item of European legislation and the transposition and implementation of adopted EU legislation on its merits and consults widely with interested parties. Legislation and regulations are implemented with a light touch and in a way that maintains a broadly level playing field with other member states. The Government are particularly concerned that extra costs should not be loaded onto UK businesses.

Combined Cycle Gas Turbine Power Stations

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the capability is for holding stocks of back-up fuels at each of the combined cycle gas turbine power stations commissioned since 1990 in days of use at full levels of generation. [30195]

Mr. Wilson: We do not keep such statistics. It is for the owners of those power stations to ensure adequate stocks of back-up fuels to meet their contractual and contingency liabilities.

Energy Contingency Planning

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 109W, on energy contingency planning, if she will give details of *(a)* the contingency plans developed by the Gas Industry Emergency Committee and *(b)* the recent exercises, and their impacts on (i) gas and (ii) electricity customers. [30284]

Mr. Wilson: The Gas Industry Emergency Committee's work is not yet finished but I shall ensure that copies of the plans are placed in the Libraries of the House as soon as they are ready. I hope this will be in early April. The plans will supplement existing and well rehearsed emergency arrangements including Transco's Network Gas Supply Emergency Procedures. Copies of Transco's plans are already held in the Libraries of the House.

GIEC's aim is to dovetail those existing plans with wider Government and regulatory emergency powers and procedures to protect, as far as is possible, consumers from supply failures, and, should consumers be affected, to ensure that all available support is delivered speedily and effectively.

There have been two major exercises carried out in the last four months. The first was part of a regular test carried out under the Gas Safety (Management) Regulations. It was organised by the Health and Safety Executive. Among other things it tested the links between Transco, the Department for Trade and Industry and the National Grid Company (managers of the high-voltage electricity transmission system). It gave us a greater understanding of how the gas and electricity systems and markets would operate in an emergency.

The second exercise was broader and looked at the communications and roles and responsibilities across Government and other agencies (including the police and local authorities) in the event of terrorist action.

The results of both these exercises are being taken into account, not just in the development of the gas plans, but also in other emergency procedures, including those for electricity.

Mineworkers' Pensions

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many former miners in Barnsley, East and Mexborough on low mineworkers' pensions will benefit from the one-off lump sum payments she recently announced. [R] [30523]

Mr. Wilson: This information is not kept on a constituency basis and can be identified only at a disproportionate cost.

However, we estimate around 15,000 members in Yorkshire will benefit from this one-off lump sum payment, including those living in my hon. Friend's constituency of Barnsley, East and Mexborough.

Retail Petrol Stations

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many retail petrol stations closed in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [30216]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* The Institute of Petroleum's (IP) annual "UK Retail Marketing Survey" (last published in March 2001) provides data on the total number of petrol retail outlets in operation in the UK.

The table, using the IP data, shows the number of petrol retail outlets in operation in the UK at the end of 1998, 1999 and 2000. The data for the end of 2001 will not be published until March of this year.

	Number
1998	13,758
1999	13,716
2000	13,043

Miners' Compensation

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the target time is for a miner's compensation cheque *(a)* to be sent to a claimant after he has accepted an offer and *(b)* to be paid following the acceptance of an offer being met. [30332]

Mr. Wilson: The Handling agreement for compensation for respiratory disease specifies that a payment is made to the claimant's solicitor within 14 days of acceptance of an offer. In relation to vibration white finger, VWF, a payment should be made within 42 days. However, offers of compensation are usually paid by IRISC, the Department's claims handlers, within 10 days of receiving confirmation from a claimant's solicitor that their client's offer is being accepted. This is subject to IRISC being in receipt of the correct documentation, such as Grant of Probate in deceased cases.

Payment by the claimant's solicitor to the claimant is not specified in the Handling agreement. The Department's opinion is that payment should be made as soon as a cheque has been received.

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much was paid by the Government from January to December 2001 in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* England, pursuant to the Miners' Compensation Scheme as (i) damages to claimants, (ii) legal costs for claimants' lawyers and (iii) medical costs incurred by the claimants. [30740]

Mr. Wilson: Between January and December 2001 the Department has paid out £392.7 million to respiratory disease and Vibration White Finger claimants in Wales and England in relation to damages payments and legal costs, broken down as follows:

£ million

	Damages	*Legal costs*
Respiratory Disease		
England	84.4	21.5
Wales	36.9	7.7
VWF		
England	193.3	20.8
Wales	25	2.9

The cost of medical examinations is normally borne by the Department. Where, exceptionally, claimant's have incurred medical costs the Department has paid out £64,434 broken down as follows:

	Medical costs (£ million)
Respiratory Disease	
England	19,357
Wales	3,193
VWF	
England	37,870
Wales	3,014

Miners Pension Scheme (Easington)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many ex-miners in the Easington constituency will benefit from the recently announced one-off lump sum payments from the MPS. [31028]

Mr. Wilson: This information is not kept on a constituency basis and can be identified only at a disproportionate cost.

However, we estimate around 12,000 members in the British Coal north-east area will benefit from this one-off lump sum payment, including those living in my hon. Friend's constituency of Easington.

Arms Sales (India)

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what role she is playing in the promotion of arms sales to India; and what assessment she had made of the impact of sales on the *(a)* dispute between India and Pakistan over Kashmir and *(b)* stability in that region. [29685]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* The promotion of any legitimate UK defence exports, in co-ordination with industry, is the responsibility of the Defence Export Services Organisation of the Ministry of Defence.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what support she is providing to industry for the development of renewable forms of energy; and if she will make a statement. [30803]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* The Government are providing substantial support to industry for the development of renewable forms of energy.

Introducing the new Renewables Obligation, exempting renewables from the climate change levy and protecting existing Non-fossil Fuel Obligation (NFFO) contracts will together create a long-term market incentive for renewables worth over £1 billion per year by 2010.

We are underpinning the obligation with direct Government funding for renewables worth over £260 million between 2001 and 2004. We are setting up extensive capital grants programmes, in particular for offshore wind and energy crops projects, initiating a major photovoltaics demonstration programme, and boosting research and development.

We recently introduced an order to allow locational flexibility for NFFO 3, 4 and 5 projects that have not yet been commissioned. This will allow more appropriate locations to be found in order to overcome problems in securing planning permission.

We have initiated studies of each UK region's capacity to generate electricity from renewable sources. Once all these assessments are completed, it is expected that specific regional targets for renewable energy will be adopted across the UK.

The Government are also exploring the scope for upgrading the electricity distribution system to enable the UK's huge renewable energy resources to be exploited to the full. For example, we have commissioned an initial study of the feasibility of an underwater cable to connect parts of the western seaboard of the UK directly to the National Grid.

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of electricity was provided by renewable carbon free energy sources at *(a)* January 1999, *(b)* January 2000, *(c)* January 2001 and *(d)* January 2002; and what her forecast is for each of the next 10 years. [31360]

Mr. Wilson: The percentages of electricity generated in the United Kingdom from hydro, wind, solar photovoltaics, wave and tidal sources in 1998, 1999, 2000 were 1.7 per cent., 1.7 per cent. and 1.6 per cent., respectively. The percentage declined in 2000 because of the lower level of hydro output in that year resulting from lower precipitation.

The Government's target is that by 2010, 10 per cent. of licensed UK electricity sales will come from renewable sources eligible for the Renewables Obligation. It will be for suppliers to determine the proportion of the 10 per cent. which comes from individual renewable sources.

Oldbury Nuclear Power Station

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the development of the Oldbury nuclear power station. [30804]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* As stated in BNFL's Annual Report and Accounts for 2001, Oldbury power station is projected to end its generating life in 2008. There are no plans for further development of the station.

Chapel Cross Power Station

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to examine the restrictions upon Chapel Cross power station which prevent it from supplying energy to Scotland. [31259]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* The Department has had a number of discussions with BNFL and Ofgem over this issue. Ofgem are currently considering all the views expressed, as part of their consultation exercise and I will continue to monitor developments.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had recently with Ofgem on its proposal to reduce the amount of energy that Chapel Cross power station can supply to the market. [31260]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* The Department has had a number of discussions with both BNFL and Ofgem over this issue. I also discussed this, and a number of other issues, with Callum McCarthy, the Chairman of Ofgem, on 29 January.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Young Offenders

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents of cell damage have been recorded at each of the prisons in the juvenile estate; and what the cost of each was. [29598]

Beverley Hughes: For the period April to December 2001, figures held centrally show the cost of damage to cells within the juvenile estate was as follows:

	£
Brinsford	26,888.22
Castington	[1]3,204.96
Feltham	[2]725.00
Hollesley Bay	6,213.28
Huntercombe	22,474.80
Lancaster Farms	[3]1,432.00
Onley	23,497.55
Portland	[4]—
Stoke Heath	6,162.01
Thorn Cross	0
Werrington	[5]5,482.22
Wetherby	22,775.00
Total	118,855.04

[1] December only

[2] November and December only

[3] September to December only

[4] Figures not held centrally

[5] July to December only

Notes:

1. Hindley prison and young offender institution will not start providing data until April 2002.

2. Ashfield young offender institution as a contracted out establishment does not provide Prison Service Headquarters with this information.

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether families have attended review meetings at prisons in the juvenile estate. [29605]

Beverley Hughes: Yes. The release of all young persons into the community from prison establishments is planned through a series of meetings. These meetings form an action plan and begin on reception and conclude prior to release. A support plan will be drawn up to enable the young person to be supported on discharge. Attendees at these meetings include sentence planning staff, community supervising officers and families. To date, 34 per cent. have been attended by families.

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents of self-harm have been recorded at each of the prisons in the juvenile estate since April 2000. [29595]

Beverley Hughes: The table shows the number of reported incidents of self-harm for the 15 to 17-year-old age group in each juvenile establishment for the financial years 2000–01, 2001–02 up to 30 November 2001.

Establishment	2000–01	2001–02[1]	Total
Ashfield	112	65	177
Brinsford	6	5	11
Brockhill	13	13	26
Bullwood Hall	1	2	3
Castington	41	44	85
Eastwood Park	3	29	32
Feltham	9	5	14
Hindley	—	1	1
Hollesley Bay	4	7	11
Holloway	8	13	21
Huntercombe	6	3	9
Lancaster Farms	6	6	12
Low Newton	1	1	2
New Hall	18	36	54
Onley	4	15	19
Portland	12	7	19
Stoke Heath	11	10	21
Styal	11	1	12
Werrington	1	—	1
Wetherby	8	16	24
Total	275	279	554

[1] Figures up to 30 November 2001 include establishments in the female estate which hold juveniles.

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many self-harm forms F2052SH were opened at each of the prisons in the juvenile estate last year. [29594]

Beverley Hughes: Provisional data for the numbers of F2052SH (Self-harm at Risk forms) forms opened through the juvenile estate in the period 1 January 2001 to 31 December 2001 are as follows:

	Number
Ashfield	134
Brinsford	141
Castington	253
Feltham	444
Hindley	24
Hollesley Bay	164
Huntercombe	273
Lancaster Farms	63
Onley	205
Portland	68
Stoke Heath	244
Thorn Cross	1
Werrington	95
Wetherby	403

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children are on the basic level of the incentives and earned privileges scheme in each of the prisons in the juvenile estate. [29604]

Beverley Hughes: Owing to the fluidity of the review process, these figures are not held centrally as they change from day to day. As a guide it was envisaged that not more than 10 per cent. of the population would be on the basic regime. However, this figure is rarely reached and almost never exceeded.

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* request and *(b)* complaint forms have been issued at each of the prisons in the juvenile estate since April 2000. [29599]

Beverley Hughes: Provisional date showing the numbers of request and complaint forms issued in the juvenile estate during the stated period is as follows:

	Number
Ashfield	323
Brinsford	61
Castington	32
Feltham	[1]307
Hindley	0
Hollesley Bay	[2]39
Huntercombe	444
Lancaster Farms	53
Onley	37
Portland	129
Stoke Heath	59
Thorn Cross	31
Werrington	33
Wetherby	96

[1] From April 2001

[2] April to December 2001

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times control and restraint was used in each of the prisons in the juvenile estate since April 2000. [29596]

Beverley Hughes: Provisional data on the use of force on juveniles in the establishments currently in the juvenile estate since April 2000 to 22 January 2002 are as follows:

	Number
Ashfield	368
Brinsford	312
Castington	450
Feltham	511
Hollesley Bay	215
Huntercombe	436
Lancaster Farms	120
Onley	309
Portland	129
Stoke Heath	413
Thorn Cross	1
Werrington	184
Wetherby	167

EU Arrest Warrant

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what representations have been made to other EU member states, to shorten the period between arrest, detention in custody and charge in their jurisdictions; [29403]

(2) what representations have been made to other EU member states to ensure that United Kingdom citizens subject to the EU arrest warrant will not be held in custody for long periods before trial. [29402]

Beverley Hughes: None. These are matters for the competent authorities in each member state, including the United Kingdom. Under Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which is binding on all member states, arrested or detained persons must be brought promptly before a judge or other officer authorised by law to exercise judicial power, and they are entitled to a trial within a reasonable time or to release pending a trial. Persons who are deprived of their liberty by arrest or detention are also entitled to take proceedings by which "the lawfulness of their detention shall be decided speedily by a court". The European arrest warrant cannot be used for the purpose of interrogating a suspect, but only for the purpose of conducting a criminal prosecution or executing a custodial sentence or detention order.

Gartree Prison Furniture Workshop

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason the furniture workshop at Gartree prison was closed. [29592]

Beverley Hughes: Gartree prison is currently undergoing a four-year refurbishment programme. The furniture craft workshop at the prison has been closed temporarily during the refurbishment period and will re-open at the conclusion of the work.

The course content of the work carried out in Gartree's workshops will be reviewed to ensure it meets the needs of life sentence prisoners who are in the early years of their sentence as Gartree now holds only life sentence prisoners.

Convictions

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of criminal prosecutions resulted in a conviction in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [29640]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The following table provides the available information, extracted from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database, which relates to the number of defendants proceeded against and those found guilty in each of the years 1996 to 2000 in England and Wales.

Statistics for 2001 are not yet available.

Defendants proceeded against and those found guilty of all offences, 1996 to 2000—England and Wales

	Defendants proceeded against	*Defendants convicted*	*Percentage convicted*
1996	1,919,494	1,438,027	75
1997	1,855,333	1,385,822	75
1998	1,951,915	1,469,734	75
1999	1,881,765	1,408,461	75
2000	1,904,677	1,423,702	75

Deportations

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many failed asylum seekers were removed from the country in 2001. [29759]

Angela Eagle: There were 6,830 principal asylum applicants (to the nearest five) removed from the United Kingdom in the period January to September 2001 (the latest period for which information is available). Further information is given in the table.

Asylum removals in 2001[1]

	Principal applicants removed	*Dependants removed*[2]	*Total asylum seekers removed*
Q1 2001	2,070	n/a	n/a
Q2 2001	2,375	215	2,590
Q3 2001	2,385	355	2,745

[1] Includes persons departing 'voluntarily' after enforcement action had been initiated against them and persons leaving under Assisted Voluntary Return Programmes run by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

[2] Data on dependants of asylum seekers removed have only been collected since April 2001.

Note:

Provisional figures, rounded to the nearest five. Figures may not sum due to rounding.

Information on the number of asylum removals is published on a quarterly basis. Information for the fourth quarter of 2001 will be published on 28 February 2002 on the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate website http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Asylum Support

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress is being made towards the introduction of an alternative to the voucher scheme of asylum support; and if he will make a statement. [29814]

Angela Eagle: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced that by early autumn 2002 he would have established a less divisive and more socially acceptable alternative to vouchers. That remains his intention.

Sex Offenders Register

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are on the Sex Offenders Register in *(a)* West Somerset and *(b)* Sedgmoor. [29739]

Beverley Hughes: Until March 2001 data on the number of registered sex offenders were collated bi-annually on a national basis from the Police National Computer, however, this arrangement has been overtaken by guidance issued by the Home Office in respect of the statutory provisions in Section 67 of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000. The guidance requires information about the number of registered sex offenders in each police area to be published. This will take place from June 2002 and local systems are being put in place to deliver it. Until these systems are in place such information could only be obtained by a specific exercise by the particular police force concerned which would entail disproportionate costs.

Strip Searches

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 928W, on strip searches, what response he has made to the recommendation of the Searches on the Person Review concerning statistical *(a)* recording and *(b)* monitoring of strip searches. [29735]

Beverley Hughes: I have not made any such response—this was an internal Prison Service review and the Prisons Board accepted the recommendations made.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 7 November 2001 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Mrs. M. Brown. [29963]

Angela Eagle: I replied to my right hon. Friend on 24 January 2002.

Prisoner Releases

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners were released on temporary licence in the last year for which figures are available; on how many occasions; for what purpose; and on how many of these occasions the prisoner *(a)* failed to return and *(b)* otherwise breached the conditions of the licence. [29526]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* In the year 2000, 10,559 persons were released from prisons in England and Wales on temporary licence. Licences can be given for a short period, for example, a day to attend a funeral, or may be given several times over a longer period, for example where a prisoner is working outside of the prison and for the purpose of resettlement and preparation for release. A total of 256,837 temporary release licences were granted over the year 2000. 318 of these were failures, the inmate did not return to prison at the time that they were required to. This represents a failure rate of 0.1 per cent. of licences granted and was the lowest rate since 1991.

The purposes for which temporary release from prisons in England and Wales was granted in the year 2000 are given in the table.

There are no data held centrally on how many people have breached the terms of their temporary release other than for failure to return.

Purpose	*Number of releases*
All licences	256,837
Local visit	46,406
Resettlement	66,520
Accommodation	160
Community service	32,158
Employment	21,528
Family ties	11,052
Pre-parole release	535
Probation service	595
In hostel etc.	492
Facility	135,501
Reparation	26,083
Training and education	14,043
Working out	94,019
Other	1,356
Compassionate	8,411
Carer	664
Deaths	408
Family needs	551
Family occasions	34
Medical	5,816
Religious service	938

Victim Support

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on funding to local victim support schemes which retain local autonomy while remaining part of a county-wide scheme that includes the witness service. [30036]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The allocation of Home Office grant to victim support schemes is determined by the Victim Support Funding Panel, a sub-committee of the Victim Support Board of Trustees, in accordance with criteria agreed annually between the Home Office and the Board of Trustees.

It is Government policy that the delivery of Government funded criminal justice services should be organised on a criminal justice area basis. The grant criteria agreed between the Home Office and the Victim Support Board of Trustees have accordingly been framed in a way to encourage victim support schemes to plan their service delivery on an area basis, to achieve best use of resources through integrated planning.

Female Prisoners

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of the female prison population *(a)* have children and *(b)* have children under the age of four years. [28764]

Beverley Hughes: The last major survey of mothers in prison was at the end of 1994. The findings were included in Home Office Research Study 162, "Imprisoned women and mothers", first published in 1997.

61 per cent. of the population surveyed were mothers of children under 18. 30 per cent. of these had children under five years.

Research conducted for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prison's thematic review, "Women in Prison", published in 1997, indicated that 66 per cent. of the population surveyed were mothers, with over a third of the mothers having one child or more under five.

Segregation Cells

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children have been held in segregation cells in each of the prisons in the juvenile estate since April 2000. [29602]

Beverley Hughes: Provisional data on the number of children held in segregation during the stated period are given in the table. The length of stay is dependent on the reason and will vary from no more than a few hours to a carefully prescribed number of days.

	Number
Ashfield	134
Brinsford	55
Castington	882
Feltham	154
Hindley	[1]90
Hollesley Bay	504
Huntercombe	487
Lancaster Farms	228
Onley	661
Portland	[1, 2]124
Stoke Heath	660
Thorn Cross	78
Werrington	0
Wetherby	380

[1] From July 2001

[2] Previous records held by police for investigation

MI5

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the policy of MI5 is in respect of release of its post-1945 records to the Public Record Office. [30665]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* The Security Service systematically reviews and where appropriate releases historical records to the Public Record Office in accordance with the criteria agreed with them and endorsed by the Advisory Council.

The Security Service has reviewed and released all archived files covering the first world war. Moving on to the second world war, the second phase in its release programme, the service released in November 2001 its fourth tranche of files on the period up to the end of that war. The service is reviewing its inter-war records in preparation for further releases. It will then move on to the period after the second world war. The timing of this depends on the resources that the service is able to devote to the process.

Surveillance

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to paragraphs 14.1, 14.2 and 14.3 of the report of the Chief Surveillance Commissioner for 2000–01, (1) for what reasons no codes of practice had been issued under section 71(1) of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000; and if he will make a statement; [31377]

(2) if he will list the public authorities entitled at 1 January to carry out surveillance under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, and which of those authorities have exercised such powers since the introduction of the Act; [31374]

(3) pursuant to paragraph 2.4 of the report of the Chief Surveillance Commissioner for 2000–01, to what reasons he ascribes the delay in recruiting assistant surveillance commissioners; what the appropriate establishment is for the Commissioner's Office; and on what date he expects this to be achieved; [31375]

(4) what guidance has been provided to the Chief Surveillance Commissioner in respect of the determining of applications made to him by public authorities which involve eliciting matters subject to *(a)* legal privilege, *(b)* confidential personal information and *(c)* confidential journalistic material; and if he will make a statement. [31376]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* The three part-time assistant surveillance commissioners approved to support the Chief Surveillance Commissioner were appointed on 1 May 2001, the five inspectors were appointed during April 2001. The office of the surveillance commissioners is fully up to strength.

The public authorities entitled to carry out covert surveillance under Part II of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) 2000 are those listed in schedule 1 of the Act and the British Broadcasting Corporation which was added by order on 16 March 2001. All those public authorities have (as far as records indicate) used the powers available to them under Part II of RIPA.

The draft codes of practice on covert surveillance and covert human intelligence sources have been issued in draft and were publicly consulted on. The consultation process finished on 17 November 2000. It raised a number of complex issues which required detailed consideration. The draft codes will be before the House shortly. The draft code of practice on covert surveillance provides guidance on authorisations involving confidential information which consist of matters subject to legal privilege, confidential personal information and confidential journalistic material.

Drug Addicts

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many registered young drug addicts aged 16 to 24 years there are by region, expressed as *(a)* a percentage figure and *(b)* the total number, ranked in descending order according to percentage figures for the latest date available. [30597]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The term "registered addict" has no generally agreed definition in the United Kingdom. However, the Department of Health has published information on the number of drug misusers in treatment in England in 2000–01. The information available is in the following table. No comparable figures are available for Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

Number and percentage of drug misusers aged under 25 years in treatment by the national health service regional office area 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001

	Number	*Percentage*
England	37,453	100
Northern and Yorkshire	8,031	21
London	6,512	17
North West	5,020	13
South West	4,552	12
West Midlands	3,918	10
Trent	3,784	10
South East	3,346	9
Eastern	2,290	6

Source:

Department of Health Statistical Bulletin 2001/33: Statistics from the Regional Drug Misuse Databases on drug misusers in treatment in England, 2000–01 (tables 5 and 6). Available at www.doh.gov/public/sb0133.pdf

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Norman Baker: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what criteria he applies in deciding whether the creation of a new NDPB is justified. [30461]

Mr. Leslie: In "Quangos: Opening the Doors", published in June 1998, the Government stated that they would ensure that a new non-departmental public body is only set up where it can be demonstrated that this is the most cost-effective and appropriate means of carrying out the given function. This remains Government policy and the analysis in each case will depend upon the specific circumstances.

Norman Baker: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of *(a)* large and *(b)* small NDPBs are covered by the Efficiency report published by the Cabinet Office. [30464]

Mr. Leslie: The executive NDPBs 1999 report, which was last published in March 2000, covers only the larger executive NDPBs. The threshold for inclusion was expenditure of £15 million and above in financial year 1998–99.

Norman Baker: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many and what percentage of *(a)* large and *(b)* small NDPBs produce an annual report; and of those what percentage in each case is a public document; [30463]

(2) how many *(a)* large and *(b)* small NDPBs release summary reports of meetings with (i) the general public, (ii) local authorities and (iii) Government Departments; [30465]

(3) how many *(a)* large and *(b)* small NDPBs consult their users by means of (i) questionnaires, (ii) public meetings and (iii) other forms; [30466]

(4) how many and what percentage of advisory NDPBs have formed their own codes for board members; and how many, and what percentage, operate registers of interest; [30468]

(5) how many and what percentage of *(a)* large and *(b)* small NDPBs publish information on their role and work programme on the worldwide web. [30470]

Mr. Leslie: The Government set out their policy on making the operation of non-departmental public bodies more open in "Quangos: Opening the Doors", published on 29 June 1998, copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Detailed information in the form requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

I anticipate that the next edition, "Public Bodies 2001", will be published shortly.

Norman Baker: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of *(a)* large executive, *(b)* small executive and *(c)* advisory NDPBs are under the jurisdiction of the parliamentary ombudsman. [30467]

Mr. Leslie: All executive NDPBs are brought within the jurisdiction of the parliamentary ombudsman, unless there are exceptional reasons for not doing so, or they are already within the jurisdiction of another ombudsman. Those advisory NDPBs that exceptionally have direct dealings with members of the public are also brought within the ombudsman's jurisdiction.

Norman Baker: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether NDPBs are obliged to submit a description of functions to the annual publication of "Public Bodies". [30469]

Mr. Leslie: In "Quangos: Opening the Doors", published in June 1998, the Government stated that future editions of "Public Bodies" would include a description of the functions of each body listed. In line with this, a description of each individual body's terms of reference was included in "Public Bodies 1998" and has been similarly included in subsequent editions.

Relationships (Civil Registration)

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the impact that the enactment of the Relationships (Civil Registration) Bill would have on Government servants who are in long-term unmarried partnerships. [30814]

Mrs. Roche: Civil partnership registration and associated rights and responsibilities raise a number of complex issues, which have prompted a growing debate within society and the Government are watching this debate with interest.

These issues potentially have significant financial and administrative implications and the Government cannot commit themselves to making any changes in these areas before undertaking a comprehensive analysis of all the implications. The Government are examining the issues in detail.

Civil Defence

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what communication his Department has had with civil defence officers in local government since 11 September 2001. [31242]

Mr. Leslie: I have met local authority representatives to discuss civil defence matters on a number of occasions and will continue to do so.

The Civil Contingencies Secretariat has regular contact with local authority representatives and emergency planning officers, and they have met representatives of the Local Government Association and the Emergency Planning Society on 14 January to discuss a range of issues. In October the "Response to the Deliberate Release of Chemicals or Biological Agents—Guidance for Local Authorities" was issued. Local authority representatives are also directly involved in various working groups set up after 11 September.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the civil defence grants in *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99, *(d)* 1999–2000 and *(e)* 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [31243]

Mr. Leslie: The civil defence grants for the years 1996–97 to 2000–01 are as follows:

	£ million
(a) 1996–97	14.9
(b) 1997–98	14.4
(c) 1998–99	14
(d) 1999–2000	14
(e) 2000–01	14

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent assessment he has made of funding needed to help local authorities prepare for and deal with terrorist activity in the last 12 months. [31240]

Mr. Leslie: The payment of civil defence grants to local authorities supports their planning of generic responses to all local disasters or crises, which includes their contingency planning for responses to terrorist activities. The level of funding is set in the light of all demands placed upon local authorities.

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what additional security measures are planned by his Department to deter and detect theft and fraud. [31791]

Mr. Leslie: A number of baseline security measures exist to try to reduce the likelihood that thefts will occur and to limit the scope for fraud. Chiefly, these are centred on detecting those with likely criminal intent through effective vetting procedures and denying them access to our buildings through effective access control procedures.

Whenever theft has occurred, or fraud is suspected or has been detected, an internal investigation is conducted by departmental security staff. Where appropriate, the police subsequently become involved.

Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration has regarding the continued discharge of his functions. [32396]

Mr. Leslie: Sir Michael Buckley has indicated he is minded to step down in the summer. He currently holds the post of Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and Health Service Commissioner for England, as well as equivalent posts in Scotland and Wales. The Government will shortly put in place arrangements to fill these posts and in doing so will take full account of their commitment to create a new unified ombudsman body in England, as set out in my statement of 20 July 2001.

Ministerial Transport

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his estimate is of the cost of *(a)* ministerial cars and drivers and *(b)* taxis for his Department in each of the last four years. [27904]

Mr. Leslie: Responsibility for the provision of ministerial cars and drivers has been delegated under the terms of the Framework Document to the Government Car Despatch Agency. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. Nick Matheson, to write to the hon. Gentleman.

The figures for expenditure on taxis used by staff in the Cabinet Office are £18,572.69 in 1997–98; £86,362.25 in 1998–99; £113,857.62 in 1999–2000; and £135,391.14 in 2000–01.

Public Service Agreement

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will place in the Library details of the performance of the Cabinet Office in each year since 1999 for each Public Service Agreement listed in the document Cm 4181 Public Service Agreements 1999–2002 under the headings *(a)* performance targets and *(b)* increasing the productivity of operations; and if he will make a statement. [30206]

Mr. Leslie: Details of the performance of the Cabinet Office in each year since 1999 for each Public Service Agreement listed in the document Cm 4181 Public Service Agreements 1999–2002 pertaining to the Cabinet Office were reported in: Cabinet Office—The Government Expenditure Plans 2000–01 to 2001–02 Cm 4618; and Cabinet Office—The Government Expenditure Plans 2001–02 to 2003–04 Cm 5119. Copies of both publications are held in the House of Commons Library and are available via the Cabinet Office website.

Some of the Public Service Agreement targets listed in Cm 4181 which were agreed as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) were subsumed in new Public Service Agreements agreed as part of the 2000 Spending Review. These are detailed in Cm 5119.

The Cabinet Office Departmental Report for 2002 which will be published before the summer recess will also detail the Department's performance against its Public Service Agreement targets.

The Government Car and Despatch Agency (GDA), which is an executive agency of the Cabinet Office, and the Central Office of Information (COI), which is an executive agency and separate Government Department reporting to me/DPM, also have key performance targets.

The GCDA performance was reported in the agency's annual report and accounts for the financial year 2000–01, which were laid before Parliament on 17 July 2001.

Central Office of Information (COI) performance was reported in the agency's annual report and accounts for the financial year 2000–01, which were laid before Parliament on 20 July 2001.

Regional Government Offices

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what were *(a)* the administrative operating costs and *(b)* the total annual budget in the latest year for which figures are available for each regional Government office in England. [30197]

Mrs. Roche: The administrative running costs and the total annual budgets (including a small capital allocation) for each of the Government offices for the regions for 2000–01 are detailed in the table.

Programme budgets administered by the Government offices are the responsibility of the Secretaries of State for the relevant sponsor Departments. They have therefore not been included in the figures shown.

£000

Government offices	*Actual operating costs 2000–01*	*Annual budget 2000–01*
North East	8,197.33	8,292.91
North West	13,651.03	13,630.52
Yorkshire and Humber	9,357.21	9,358.75
West Midlands	9,960.77	9,937.89
East Midlands	7,335.77	7,318.82
East	7,542.50	7,494.00
South West	8,711.39	9,465.30
South East	9,477.27	8,721.83
London[1]	18,593.81	18,690.40
Total	92,827.08	92,910.42

[1] GO London figures include the Regional Co-ordination Unit.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Youth Parliament

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for what reason the Minister responsible for children and young people has not responded to the UK Youth Parliament's Manifesto; and if she will make a statement. [25821]

Mr. Denham: I have now made a comprehensive response on behalf of the Government to the UK Youth Parliament Manifesto. Officials in the Children and Young People's Unit are working with co-ordinators in the UK Youth Parliament to ensure that all members of the Parliament have copies and it is available on the unit's website at www.cypu.gov.uk.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she intends to make information available to schools on the level of financial support for the teachers' pay award next year. [31295]

Mr. Timms: The pay award will be funded from schools' general budgets. The effective increase in Education Standard Spending is 5.7 per cent. for 2002–03 compared with an estimated cost of the pay settlement of 4 per cent. It is for local education authorities to notify schools formally of the level of their budgets in 2002–03 by 31 March.

SSA (Cambridgeshire)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the Cambridgeshire local education authority spend on education above SSA per pupil for the primary and secondary sectors, and in total, for 1990–91 to 2000–02 and projected for the financial year 2002–03, adjusted for inflation at current values. [29507]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The following table contains the latest available information:

Cambridgeshire

Real terms figures[1]

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
[illegible]E per pupil										
Pre Primary/Primary	1,640	1,790	2,130	2,100	2,190	2,180	2,120	2,030	2,090	2,200
Secondary	2,590	2,670	2,910	2,800	2,850	2,750	2,740	2,700	2,630	2,770
Total	2,030	2,150	2,460	2,390	2,470	2,420	2,380	2,300	2,300	2,430
SSA per pupil										
Pre Pri/Primary	1,790	1,960	2,010	1,970	2,010	1,990	2,030	1,910	2,080	2,190
Secondary	2,570	2,670	2,700	2,760	2,730	2,640	2,670	2,640	2,640	2,680
Total	2,110	2,250	2,300	2,300	2,310	2,260	2,290	2,200	2,300	2,390

[1] All figures are in real terms at 2000–01 prices, and rounded to the nearest £10.

Notes:

1. Information for 2000–02 and 2[illegible]02–03 is not yet available and as a result it is not possible to arrive at a projection.
2. Figures for 1990–91 to 1998–99 include grant maintained schools. Figures for 1999–2000 include ex-GM schools.
3. Expenditure data for 1999–2000 is taken from S52 outturn statements completed by local education authorities and returned to DfES. Data for all previous years is taken from DETR's Revenue Outturn Returns.
4. For the years 1990–91 to 1992–93, Net Current Expenditure after recharges was not recorded in the RO1. Net Recurrent Expenditure is used for these years. Therefore, per pupil figures for these years may not be strictly comparable with the later years.
5. SSA figures implicitly cover funding for Special Schools, and there is no split available for special schools.
6. The NCE figures provided here are for pre primary/primary and secondary only. Hence the two sets of figures are not comparable
7. Pupil numbers used in calculating per pupil figures are financial year averages, based on January Annual School Census returns.
8. Pupil numbers for secondary schools for 1990–91, 1991–92 and 1992–93 include sixth form colleges; these ceased to be classified as schools in April 1993.
9. Cambridgeshire was re-organised in 1998–99.

Training

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many adults aged over 25 years are without access to training, broken down by region expressed as *(a)* a percentage and *(b)* the total figure, ranked in descending order according to percentage figures for the period in which the latest figures are available. [30578]

John Healey: Set out is information from the National Adult Learning Survey (NALS2001). It shows the number of people (in thousands) aged 26 and over who are classed as non-learners. A non-learner is someone who has not taken part in any of the NALS-defined learning activities over the past three years. The information is not available for Scotland or Northern Ireland.

Government office region	*Percentage of GOR who are non-learners*	*Number (Thousand)*	*Population in GOR (Thousand)*
Wales	47	916	1,962
Yorkshire and Humberside	41	1,373	3,349
North West	37	1,695	4,543
North East	37	637	1,713
West Midlands	35	1,251	3,545
East Midlands	34	966	2,832
London	31	1,472	4,738
South West	30	1,013	3,394
Eastern	28	1,028	3,695
South East	25	1,347	5,473

It is important to note that most of these non-learners have chosen not to do any learning or are restricted by family/work circumstances. They are not usually non-learners as a result of access problems.In terms of factors that might restrict access, some of the access-related obstacles to learning (not mutually exclusive) mentioned by non-learners include:

Cannot find local opportunities to learn (12 per cent.);

Problems arranging transport to the course (15 per cent.);

Course difficult due to health/disability (9 per cent.).

Qualifications (19-year-olds)

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many 19-year-olds there are without a basic qualification, broken down by region, expressed as *(a)* a percentage and *(b)* total number, ranked in descending order according to percentages for the latest date for which figures are available. [30592]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information readily available has been derived from the Labour Force Survey and is given in the table.

Estimates of the numbers and proportions of 19-year-olds[1] with no qualifications by region, 2000–01, United Kingdom

	Population aged 19 (Thousand)	*Numbers with no qualifications (Thousand)*	*Proportion with no qualifications[2] (Percentage)*
United Kingdom	726	61	8
Home countries			
Northern Ireland	23	2	9
Wales	43	4	9
England	605	49	8
Scotland	54	4	7
Government office regions			
East Midlands	55	6	10
West Midlands	61	6	10
East	63	6	9
Yorkshire and the Humber	61	5	8
London	93	7	7
North West	74	5	7
South East	101	7	7
North East	38	2	6
South West	59	3	6

Notes:

1. Due to small sample sizes, the proportion of 19 to 21-year-olds with no qualifications have been used as a proxy for 19-year-olds without qualifications.

2. Estimates of the proportion with no qualifications are subject to sampling error. Figures are accurate to:

±1 percentage point for UK and England estimates (eg estimate for England lies between 7 per cent. and 9 per cent.),

±2 percentage points for Yorkshire, London, North West, South East, South West and Scotland estimates,

±3 percentage points for East Midlands, West Midlands, East of England, North East and Wales estimates, and

±4 percentage points for the Northern Ireland estimate (eg the proportion lies between 5 per cent. and 13 per cent.)

Source:

DfES estimates from the Labour Force Survey, averaged data—winter 2000–01 to autumn 2001

Excellence in Cities

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the Standards Fund and Excellence in Cities allocations for the City of Newcastle upon Tyne in 2001–02 and the provisional indication of allocations for 2002–03. [31473]

Mr. Timms: The following table shows allocations for the Standards Fund and Excellence in Cities for the city of Newcastle upon Tyne in 2001–02, and the provisional allocations so far announced for 2002–03. The figures include both Government and local authority contributions.

2001–02 Standards fund allocations for City of Newcastle upon Tyne council

	£
Adult: Pupil Ratios in Reception Classes	685,209
Advanced Skills Teachers	162,500
Beacon Schools	116,500
Children in Public Care	44,317
Children of Asylum Seekers	57,500
City Learning Centres	1,200,000
Class Size Recurrent Funding	1,319,707
Devolved Capital	2,025,164
Drug Prevention	69,510
Early Years Training and Development	72,002
Education Health Partnerships	31,689
Ethnic Minority Achievement	613,453
Family Literacy and Numeracy	45,200
Fresh Start	250,000
Gifted and Talented Children Summer Schools	18,000
Induction of Newly Qualified Teachers	278,145
Information Management Strategy	146,998
Key Stage 3: National Implementation	288,063
LEA Music Services	234,600
Literacy and Numeracy Summer Schools	70,000
Maintained Nursery School Service	119,189
National Curriculum	88,062
National Grid for Learning	1,145,169
NDS Condition Funding	1,701,927
Performance Management	146,664
Playing for Success	50,000
Primary Literacy and Numeracy Strategies	1,031,147
Qualifications	11,202
Schools Achievement Awards	266,280
School Improvement	961,000
School Laboratories	339,716
School Leadership	125,647
School Security	107,799
Seed Capital Challenge	192,864
Sick Children	12,662
Small Education Action Zones	318,120
Small Schools Fund	328,591
Social Inclusion: Pupil Support	1,405,300
Special Educational Needs	462,163
Specialist Schools	1,099,620
Study Support	287,697
Supported Early Retirement Scheme for Heads	40,000
Teachers' Sabbaticals	90,000

2001–02 Standards fund allocations for City of Newcastle upon Tyne council

	£
Teaching Assistants	1,094,654
Teenage Pregnancies	100,900
Traveller Children Achievement	31,502
Year 6 Booster Classes	222,892
Year 9 Booster Classes	54,000
Youth Service	11,650
Excellence in Cities	
Excellence in Cities: Excellence Challenge	262,334
Excellence in Cities: Secondary[1]	1,903,000
Total	21,740,308

2002–03 Standards fund allocations for City of Newcastle upon Tyne council

	£
Adult: Pupil Ratios in Reception Classes	298,958
Advanced Skills Teachers (ASTs)	128,250
Beacon Schools	154,500
Capital Funding for Nursery Education in Disadvantaged Areas	98,178
Class Size Initiative	31,875
Drug, Alcohol and Tobacco Prevention	73,107
Early Years Training and Development	72,002
Education Health Partnerships	32,439
Ethnic Minority Achievement	613,453
Gifted and Talented Summer Schools	18,000
Induction of Newly Qualified Teachers	327,117
KS3 Strategy and Summer Schools	891,734
LEA Music Services	403,926
National Grid for Learning	1,580,283
NDS Condition Funding	2,609,476
NDS Devolved Formula Capital	1,435,678
New School Security Projects	49,051
Performance Management and Threshold Assessment	150,829
Playing for Success	50,000
Primary Literacy and Numeracy Strategies	926,761
Qualifications	17,875
School Improvement	1,056,250
Seed Challenge Capital	322,740
Sick Children and Children in Public Care	63,567
Small Schools Fund	376,000
Social Inclusion: Pupil Support	1,445,949
Special Educational Needs	514,894
Study Support	480,658
Teacher Recruitment Incentives	96,115
Teacher Sabbaticals	162,000
Teaching Assistants	1,086,584
Teenage Pregnancies	56,646
Traveller Children Achievement	31,502
Year 6 Booster Classes	224,658
Excellence in Cities	
Excellence in Cities: Excellence Challenge	594,094
Excellence in Cities: Primary and Secondary[1]	2,033,663
Total	18,508,812

[1] Including Gifted and Talented Children, Learning Support Units and Learning Mentors

School Run

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she has taken to discourage the use of private cars to transport pupils to and from school; and if she will make a statement. [31492]

Mr. Timms: The Department for Education and Skills continues to work closely with the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the Department of Health and other members of the School Travel Advisory Group to promote alternatives to the car for the journey to school. We have also produced practical guides and software to assist local authorities and schools in introducing school travel plans and encouraging more sustainable school travel.

Special Grant Allocation

Ann Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will *(a)* set out the criteria for allocation of special grant to authorities most affected by the transfer of funding for sixth form provision to the Learning and Skills Council and *(b)* list the amount of special grant to be made available to each local education authority. [32088]

Mr. Timms: The special grant will be paid to local education authorities: *(a)* whose post-16 SSA (after their Learning and Skills Council allocation for sixth form provision has been deducted) is less than 7.5 per cent. of their original post-16 SSA, and the grant will be such as would make up the post 16-SSA to 7.5 per cent. of the original post-16 SSA; or *(b)* who have less than 85 per cent. of their increase in education SSA (before the LSC transfer) available for purposes other than the increase in sixth form funding compared with the total of 2002–03 real terms guarantees for the authority, and the grant will be such as would make 85 per cent. of that increase available. The table sets out the allocations of special grant by LEA.

£ million

LEA name	*Allocation*
Kensington and Chelsea	0.075
Barnet	0.800
Bromley	0.522
Ealing	0.369
Kingston upon Thames	0.137
Merton	0.107
Coventry	0.398
Wolverhampton	0.236
Sefton	0.561
Wirral	0.203
Doncaster	0.111
Calderdale	0.454
Gateshead	0.106
North Tyneside	0.223
Sunderland	0.024
Bath and North East Somerset	0.426
South Gloucestershire	1.433
East Riding of Yorkshire	0.575
North Yorkshire	1.093
York	0.316
Dorset	1.222
Poole	0.301
Leicestershire	1.836
West Berkshire	0.294
Peterborough	0.428
Cheshire	0.387
Devon	0.625
Worcestershire	0.771
Medway	0.179
Cumbria	0.478
Gloucestershire	0.413
Northumberland	0.883
Suffolk	0.466
Warwickshire	0.696
Total	17.149

WORK AND PENSIONS

Housing Benefit

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which local authorities had *(a)* the best and *(b)* the worst record in paying housing benefit in 2000–01. [30478]

Malcolm Wicks: There are many factors involved in the effective administration of housing benefit. There is therefore no single objective measure by which to judge local authorities' achievements as best or worst overall.

Income Support and Family Credit

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many incorrect income support and family credit awards there were in each of the past 10 years, as a percentage of the total; and what the total cost to the Department was. [30568]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available in the format requested. Family credit was replaced by working families tax credit in October 1999, and is the responsibility of the Inland Revenue.

Widowers' Pensions

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to introduce widowers' pensions. [30577]

Malcolm Wicks: Our reforms to bereavement benefits introduced in April 2001 concentrate the help available where and when it is needed most—on immediate needs and on families with children. For the first time these benefits are available equally to both men and women.

Immediate help with costs arising on bereavement is provided by a lump sum bereavement payment of £2,000—double the old widow's payment of £1,000. There is a weekly benefit for widowed parents who satisfy the qualifying conditions. A bereavement allowance is also available for 12 months, to give widows and widowers aged 45 or over without dependants time to adjust to their new circumstances.

We keep all our policies under review but we have no plans to introduce a bereavement pension for either widows or widowers.

Pensioners (Incomes)

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners had no private income by region, expressed as *(a)* a percentage and *(b)* the total number, ranked in descending order according to percentage figures for the latest year for which figures are available. [30588]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is in the table:

Pensioners with no private income

Government office region	*Percentage*	*Number*
North-east	24	80,000
London	22	170,000
Scotland	19	100,000
North-west and Merseyside	18	150,000
Yorks and Humber	16	90,000
Wales	16	60,000
West-midlands	15	90,000
Eastern	13	90,000
East-midlands	12	60,000
South-west	11	70,000
South-east	8	70,000
GB average	15	1,040,000

Notes:

1. Private income has been assumed to mean any income other than that provided by state benefits. The estimates have been given for all pensioner units and are from the Family Resources Survey 1999–2000.
2. Pensioner units are defined as single (non-cohabiting) people over state pension age (65 and over for men, 60 and over for women) and couples (married or cohabiting) where the man is over state pension age.
3. Proportions have been rounded to the nearest 1 per cent. and numbers to the nearest 10,000. Due to small sample sizes some figures are uncertain.
4. The FRS relies on self-reporting of private income and hence estimates are subject to error.

Both pensioners with no private income and those with some private income will benefit from the Pension Credit.

Incomes

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many children were living in households below 60 per cent. of median income by region, expressed as *(a)* percentage of population and *(b)* total number, in descending order according to percentage figure in 2000; [30605]

(2) how many individuals had incomes below 50 per cent. of average income, by region, expressed as *(a)* a total number and *(b)* a percentage of population, in descending order according to percentage figures in 2000. [30609]

Malcolm Wicks: Such information as is available can be found in the publication "Households Below Average Income 1994/5–1999/00", a copy of which is held in the Library. Results for 2000–01 will be published in April.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people spent at least two out of three years on a low income, broken down by region, expressed as *(a)* a percentage of population and *(b)* a total number, in descending order according to percentage figures in 2000. [30607]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested is not available.

Bank Accounts

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many households were without a bank or building society account, broken down by region, expressed as *(a)* a percentage and *(b)* the total number, ranked in descending order according to percentage figures for the latest year in which figures are available [30613]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the table.

Households without a bank or building society account

Region	Number without account (thousand)	Percentage without account
Scotland	320	14
North East	170	14
Wales	160	12
Yorks and Humberside	230	10
West Midlands	200	10
London	290	9
North West	270	9
East Midlands	150	8
Eastern	110	5
South West	90	5
South East	140	4
All	2,140	9

Notes:

1. Post office accounts, TESSAs and ISAs are included as bank or building society accounts.
2. The estimates are based on sample counts that have been adjusted for non-response using multi-purpose grossing factors that control for tenure, council tax band and a number of demographic variables. Estimates are subject to sampling error and to variability in non-response.
3. Estimates of numbers in each region are subject to greater uncertainty, as FRS-based results are not reconciled to regional-level population estimates, except for London.
4. The numbers are rounded to the nearest 10,000.

Source:

Family Resources Survey 2000–01

Minimum Income Guarantee

Paul Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the number of pensioners in Wythenshawe and Sale, East who *(a)* qualify for and *(b)* claim the minimum income guarantee; and how many will be eligible for the new pension credit. [30882]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows:

As at August 2001 there were 4,700 minimum income guarantee (MIG) claimants in the Wythenshawe and Sale, East constituency.

Estimates of the number of people who may be eligible for, but who have not claimed the MIG are not available below national level.

It is estimated that around half of all pensioner households, that's over 5 million pensioners, stand to gain from the introduction of pension credit.

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many applicants there have been to date for the minimum income guarantee from pensioners within the Harwich constituency; how many have been approved; and what estimate he has made of the total number of potential applicants. [30981]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows:

As at August 2001 there were 4,200 minimum income guarantee (MIG) claimants in the Harwich constituency.

Estimates of the number of people who may be eligible for, but who have not claimed the MIG, are not available below national level.

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners in Glasgow, Cathcart constituency are benefiting from the minimum income guarantee. [31214]

Mr. McCartney: As at August 2001 there were 2,500 minimum income guarantee claimants in the Glasgow, Cathcart constituency.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what are the projected additional annual costs at current prices for each of the next 35 years for *(a)* the annual uprating of the minimum income guarantee in line with average earnings, *(b)* the pensioner credit, *(c)* raising the level of the basic state pension to the level of the MIG for (i) all pensioners, (ii) all pensioners over 75 and (iii) all pensioners over 80 years and *(d)* the annual uprating of the state second pension in line with average earnings. [20235]

Mr. McCartney *[pursuant to his reply, 17 January 2002, c. 459–60W]:* The information requested for *(b)* is set out in the paper "The Pension Credit: long-term projections", which has been placed in the House Library.

The additional information requested is set out in the tables:

(a) Additional annual costs of earnings uprating of minimum income guarantee (MIG)[1]

Year	£ billion
2002	0.4
2003	0.6
2004	0.7
2010	1.0
2020	3.0
2030	7.0
2040	9.0
2050	11.0

[1] 2001–02 prices

(c) Annual costs in 2001–02 prices of increasing the basic state pension to the level of the Minimum Income Guarantee and then uprating by earnings thereafter

£ billion

Year	All	Over 75s	Over 80s
2002	8.5	3.8	2.2
2005	10.7	4.7	2.8
2010	15.8	6.6	3.9
2015	21.3	8.9	5.3
2020	27.5	12.1	7.0
2025	36.8	17.3	9.6
2030	48.6	22.2	13.6
2035	61.0	28.5	17.1
2050	92.3	51.4	34.1

(d) Annual costs in 2001–02 prices of earnings uprating state second pension (S2P)

Year	£ billion
2002	0.0
2005	0.0
2010	0.0
2015	0.1
2020	0.3
2025	0.7
2030	1.2
2035	2.0

Notes:

1. All costs are for Great Britain.
2. The costs of earnings uprating of the MIG are rounded to the nearest one billion pounds from 2010 onwards. Costs are not available for every year requested.
3. The costs of earnings uprating of the MIG assumes that pensioners' incomes grow over the long term at the same pace as average earnings and the distribution of earnings is the same over time in earnings terms. Average earnings are assumed to grow in line with Treasury economic assumptions until the end of the Parliament and then 1.5 per cent. above inflation over time.
4. The costs of earnings uprating of the MIG are calculated as compared to price uprating. Because pensioners' incomes tend to grow over time faster than inflation, the costs of the MIG under price uprating would fall dramatically over time as ever fewer pensioners would be entitled to ever smaller amounts. The costs of increases in the basic state pension and state pension are net of income related benefit savings that would be generated by these increases.
5. The costs of increases in the basic state pension and state second pension are net of income related benefit savings that would be generated by these increases.
6. The costs given for earnings uprating of second state pension assume that expenditure on SERPS (accruals up to 2001–02) would not be affected.
7. The costs of earnings uprating of the state second pension only begin to become significant by 2015 because S2P only begins accruing in 2002–03 and therefore the amount of S2P in payment will be negligible for some time after that.
8. The costs shown for state second pension in the table have been calculated based on the estimated costs of S2P which were shown in the report by the Government Actuary on the Financial Effects of the National Insurance Fund of the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Bill 1999 (Cm 4573). The costs shown are the increase in expenditure over and above the baseline projected S2P expenditure shown in this report.
9. It has been assumed that the basic state pension and state pension changes would not happen together. If they did, there would be an interaction because the lower earnings limit is linked to the basic state pension. This means that the cost of S2P would be reduced if the basic state pension and, therefore, the LEL were raised.
10. The pensioner population is assumed to grow according to GAD's central population growth estimates.

Source:

The Government Actuary's Department

Private Pension Funds

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 812W, if he intends to include potential or attributed income from individual private pension funds, not yet annuitised or drawn down, in the assessment of pension credit. [31452]

Mr. McCartney: I refer my hon. Friend to the written answer I gave him on 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 851W.

Medical Assessment Services

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action he is taking to improve professional expertise and awareness of disability issues by medical assessment staff contracted to his Department. [29070]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: All doctors who work for SchlumbergerSema Medical Services on benefit assessments receive mandatory training in disability assessment. This includes assessment of mental health problems, and appropriate behaviours, attitudes, and sensitivities for dealing with people with disabilities.

All Medical Services doctors participate in a regular programme of continuing professional education, which ensures they maintain up to date knowledge of disabling conditions. The current year's programme includes a module on sensory impairment, which has been developed in consultation with organisations representing people with visual and/or hearing impairments; and a module on rehabilitation.

Medical Services and this Department encourage and sponsor doctors working for Medical Services to sit the examination for the Diploma in Disability Assessment Medicine.

Vocational Rehabilitation

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking in conjunction with other Departments to improve awareness of vocational rehabilitation issues by general practitioners *(a)* in their initial training and *(b)* through continuing professional development. [29071]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: A major goal of the Government is to help those people who become sick or disabled and who can work to do so, either by retaining their job or by rehabilitating to new employment. The Government recognise the important role that general practitioners play in this area through the treatment they provide to patients of working age and through the advice they provide as certifying medical practitioners.

This Department's Chief Medical Adviser issues guidance to GPs in relation to their role as certifying medical practitioners which stresses the need for clinical management which will encourage and support work retention and rehabilitation. In conjunction with the medical professional bodies this Department has developed training material for GP registrars. This material, along with further information for established GPs, such as evidence based recovery times, can be found on the Department's website www.dwp.gov.uk/medical. This information is also available in the House of Commons Library. We have also supported a project by Staffordshire university to develop a distance learning course for GPs in occupational health and rehabilitation matters. We are planning to develop additional on-line educational tools for GPs which will support work retention and rehabilitation.

Winter Fuel Allowance

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reason payments of winter fuel allowances have been delayed for up to 28 days. [28856]

Mr. McCartney: It is the Department's intention that winter fuel payments are received before Christmas. Because of the volumes involved they are made on a rolling programme throughout November. This year around 11 million, the overwhelming majority, were made before Christmas as we had undertaken to do.

For those customers who were required to make a claim (normally men aged 60–64) payment should be made before Christmas on claims received prior to 24 September.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many men over the age of 60 years who were entitled to the winter allowance in their own right have so far failed to make such a claim; and if he will make a statement. [27225]

Mr. McCartney: Those who attained age 60 before or during the qualifying week and were not in receipt of benefits which trigger automatic entitlement, have to claim. To date, 74 per cent. of claim forms that were issued to all potentially eligible people have been returned. The deadline for claiming is 30 March 2002.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate *(a)* the number of households entitled to an automatic winter fuel payment this winter and *(b)* the number of those payments that were issued before 25 December 2001. [28181]

Mr. McCartney: The number of households entitled to an automatic winter fuel payment this winter will not be available until later in the year. However, around 11 million individual automatic payments were identified with most issued before 25 December 2001.

New Deal

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the *(a)* Government Departments and *(b)* agencies which have (i) signed national new deal employer agreements, (ii) signed employer agreements with local jobcentres and (iii) not signed new deal employer agreements. [25982]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The following Government Departments and agencies have signed national new deal employer agreements:

Benefits Agency
Cabinet Office
Charity Commission
Child Support Agency
Court Service
Crown Prosecution Service
Department for Education and Skills
Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Department for Work and Pensions
Department of Health
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency
DSS Youth Training
Employment Service
Health and Safety Executive
HM Customs and Excise
HM Land Registry
HM Prison Service
HM Treasury
Home Office
Inland Revenue
Insolvency Service
Lord Chancellor's Department
Maritime and Coastguard Agency
Radiocommunications Agency
The Rent Service
Treasury Solicitors Department
Vehicle Inspectorate.

Information on those Departments and agencies which have and those which have not signed employer agreements with local jobcentres is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many job brokers have been appointed under the New Deal for Disabled People; what the average client-base is per broker; how many brokers have a case load *(a)* exceeding 100 and *(b)* less than 10; and what proportion of job placements have resulted in long-term employment. [27670]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* A total of 64 job brokers have been appointed under the new deal for disabled people.

Under the new deal for disabled people, long-term employment is defined as sustained employment of six months or more. As the new deal for disabled people only became operational on a national basis in July 2001, it is too early to provide figures on job placements resulting in long-term employment.

Some job brokers are area-based while others operate nationally so it is not possible to produce an "average" client base. Latest figures of job brokers in operation show that 14 have a current caseload of less than 10 clients but 15 already have a caseload of over 100.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his estimate is of the cost of buildings refurbishment carried out by his Department in each of the last four years. [27969]

Mr. McCartney: The cost of buildings refurbishment in DWP for each of the last four years is as follows:

	£
1998–99	6,923,448
1999–2000	9,682,536
2000–01	8,662,522
2001–02	17,613,051

Refurbishment of former DSS offices is the responsibility of Land Securities Trillium as the prime contractor in accordance with their Life Cycle Capital Expenditure programme. This programme is designed to maintain the required accommodation standard within our offices. The cost of this is already accounted for in the contract price that is paid for each building.

The refurbishment costs quoted are for offices in the former ES and include Jobcentre Plus Pathfinder offices from April 2001. The increase in 2001–02 over previous years is accounted for by the commencement of the roll out of Jobcentre Plus.

Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 6 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 195W, on industrial injuries disablement benefit, for what reason information is not available on claims for industrial injuries disablement benefit which have been refused as a result of the applicant's condition being caused through work processes and not as a result of accident or prescribed disease; and how the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council monitors this situation. [28310]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 29 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1145W.

Benefit Statistics

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of people in *(a)* the constituency of Buckingham and *(b)* total UK population claim (i) incapacity benefit, (ii) the children's tax credit, (iii) bereavement benefit, (iv) attendance allowance, (v) council tax credit, (vi) invalid care allowance, (vii) housing benefit and (viii) disability living allowance. [22535]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Population figures are not available for parliamentary constituencies. The available information is in the table.

Percentage of GB population in receipt of benefits[1]

Benefit	*Great Britain*[2]
Incapacity benefit	4.2
Bereavement benefit[3]	0.5
Attendance allowance	2.2
Disability living allowance	3.9
Council tax benefit	10.0
Housing benefit	8.0
Invalid care allowance	0.7

[1] Children's tax credit is the responsibility of the Inland Revenue.

[2] Figures for Northern Ireland are not included. Social security matters in Northern Ireland are the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

[3] Bereavement benefit includes bereavement allowance and widowed parent's allowance which were introduced for new claims from April 2001 and widow's pension or widowed mother's allowance.

Sources:

Incapacity benefit—5 per cent. sample at 31 August 2001.

Bereavement benefit—100 per cent. count at 31 August 2001.

Disability living allowance and attendance allowance—100 per cent. count at 31 August 2001.

Housing benefit and council tax benefit—100 per cent. case load stock-count at 10 May 2001.

Invalid care allowance—100 per cent. extract of the computer system at 30 September 2001.

Population data—Office for National Statistics, Population Estimates Unit (estimated resident population mid-2000 based on the 1991 census).

Unemployment (Disabled People)

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many disabled people were on Disability Employment Service instigated training courses in each month since January 1997, expressed *(a)* numerically and *(b)* as a percentage of total unemployed disabled people (i) nationally and (ii) in the south-west. [11373]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information requested is not collected centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

HEALTH

Beta Interferon

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the prescribing of beta interferon. [12550]

Ms Blears: We are currently holding discussions with the manufacturers to consider a range of options under which drugs for multiple sclerosis might be made available under the national health service. One option is a 'risk-sharing' scheme which will evaluate their clinical and cost effectiveness.

NHS Estate

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all NHS estate disposals undertaken in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02, specifying the additions to public funds achieved. [15761]

Mr. Hutton: A schedule provides details of the disposals achieved by National Health Service Estates on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in 2000–01 and the total proceeds generated from them in that year has been placed in the Library.

Details of the individual properties sold by NHS trusts are not collected centrally. In 2000–01 NHS trusts received income from the sale of fixed assets of £378 million. While this sum covers all fixed assets, the majority was from the disposal of land and buildings. This information is not yet available for 2001–02.

Cloned Embryos

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the recent high court decision on the regulation of the creation or use of cloned human embryos. [18018]

Yvette Cooper: In its judgment given on 15 November 2001 in the judicial review brought by the Pro-Life Alliance, the High Court declared that embryos created other than by fertilisation were not regulated by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990. The Government were granted leave to appeal.

On 18 January 2002 the Court of Appeal unanimously overturned the original judgment. This means that the creation and use of embryos created by cell nuclear replacement (so called 'cloned embryos') is governed by the 1990 Act and regulated by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority. The Pro-Life Alliance was refused leave to appeal to the House of Lords and costs were awarded to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his oral statement of 6 December 2001 on waiting lists, if individuals in Worcestershire who have removed themselves from NHS waiting lists and paid to have major heart surgery performed will be able to seek reimbursement for their local health authority or elsewhere; and if he will make a statement. [22259]

Yvette Cooper: On 6 December 2001, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced a patient choice package. From July 2002, if a patient with coronary heart disease has been on an in-patient waiting list for over six months, they will be able to seek swifter treatment in either the private sector, in another European Union country or in a different national health service hospital.

This patient choice package is not, however, retrospective and patients who have previously chosen to elect for private treatment, cannot be reimbursed by the NHS under any circumstances.

The decision to treat NHS patients in private facilities will be made locally. Those local decisions should be made on the basis of proper involvement in the planning process. Services bought from the private sector will be paid for by the NHS body commissioning the work (usually the primary care group/primary care trust) and the patient will receive free NHS service in the private sector organisation.

Any decision to use private sector providers will be made on the basis of value for money, clinical need and all appropriate clinical standards must be maintained.

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of patients that have hospital appointments postponed as a result of being away from home when contacted by hospitals. [31372]

Mr. Hutton: Data are not collected centrally on the numbers of patients whose operations have been postponed as a result of being away from home when contacted by hospitals.

Hospital Beds (Birmingham)

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* general and *(b)* acute beds are (i) provided at the Queen Elizabeth and Selly Oak hospitals in Birmingham and (ii) proposed for the replacement hospital; how many intermediate care beds (A) are provided by the NHS in Birmingham and (B) will be provided in 2007; and if he will make a statement on the definition of general, acute and intermediate care beds. [23280]

Yvette Cooper: The average daily number of available general and acute beds at University Hospital Birmingham national health service trust, for 2000–01 is 1,000 beds[1]. According to the University Hospital Birmingham national health service trust business plan for the new hospital current proposals are based on an assumption of 1,185 general and acute beds for 2008.

For the first time the Department has been collating data for availability of intermediate care beds. Central figures are not currently available, but local data suggest that there are 220 intermediate care beds in Birmingham. This includes those provided in non-NHS organisations. The National Beds Inquiry model suggests that Birmingham needs at least a further 100 intermediate care beds, for when the new private finance initiative hospital is completed. Birmingham health authority is planning phased development of this.

General and acute includes all in-patient beds open overnight except for maternity, mental illness and learning disability beds. General and acute include intermediate care beds provided by national health service trusts and primary care trusts.

Intermediate care encompasses a wide range of service models and can be provided in a range of settings. The beds in this category reflect the residential rehabilitation service model and may be either 'step down' that is following a stay in acute hospital, or 'step up' that is referral by a general practitioner, social services or a rapid response team in cases which would otherwise necessitate acute admission or admission to longer-term residential care.

[1] *Source:*

Korner—KH03

Efficiency Task Force

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the NHS Efficiency Task Force last met. [24574]

Mr. Hutton: The Efficiency Task Force last met on 28 June 1999.

We now take a wider view of performance, that also includes the delivery of quality and access targets. The continued development of our approach to performance is now informed by the Performance Working Group. The aim of the Performance Working Group is to provide practical advice on the design and implementation of a system and approach to performance management. It has members from the national health service, academics, and patient's organisations. It met four times in 2001, and last met on 24 January 2002.

We have introduced a range of measures to improve performance in the NHS. This includes the publication of comparative information—as part of the performance indicators; investment—including 7,500 more consultants and 20,000 more nurses by 2004; setting national standards—through the national service frameworks; stronger regulation and inspection—where the Commission for Health Improvement plays a key role; and spreading best practice—for example, by the Modernisation Agency.

Health Trusts (Private Medical Insurance)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate for each English health trust *(a)* the total expenditure by the trust on private medical insurance for trust employees and *(b)* the number of employees provided with private medical insurance in each of the years 1997–98 to 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [24038]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 18 December 2001]*: Information about the provision of private medical insurance for national health service trust employees is not collected centrally.

Roaccutane

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with the Medical Control Agency about greater controls on the use of Roaccutane and better information on the packaging of this drug. [25364]

Ms Blears: Roaccutane (isotretinoin) is licensed only for the treatment of very severe and disfiguring forms of acne. Roaccutane is a prescription only medicine and the terms of the marketing authorisation specify that it must be prescribed by, or under the supervision of, a consultant dermatologist. In addition, the supply of Roaccutane is restricted to hospitals or specified retail pharmacies. It is rare for the licensing authority to restrict prescription and supply in this way.

The safety of all medicines on the United Kingdom market is continuously monitored by the Medicines Control Agency. The product information includes the summary of product characteristics for prescribers and the patient information leaflet included in each pack of the medicine. These are also kept under continuous review to make sure that they provide the most up to date and relevant information to healthcare professionals and the public regarding the safe use of the medicine.

The product information for Roaccutane was last updated in June 2001 with regard to warnings and possible side effects. One of the key previous amendments to the product information was the strengthening of the warning relating to depression and other psychiatric reactions including suicide, which was approved in March 1998.

Hospital PFI Projects

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the *(a)* progress and *(b)* likely future timescale of each of the hospital PFI projects which have been selected as pilots for the contracting-out of the management of ancillary staff. [25496]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* Recent progress has been good. The risk matrix, which states which parties manage the various risks in the retention of employment model, has been agreed by Unison, private sector contractors and the Department. Bidders at the three pilot sites are now finalising their best and final offers incorporating the risk matrix and these will be received shortly. This will allow an evaluation of the model, along with establishing if it is value for money, to take place during March. If successful, the first contracts should be signed in March.

NHS (Early Retirement Costs)

Mr. Francois: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total cost of early retirement to the NHS budget was in the financial year 2000–01. [26613]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not hold details of total early retirement costs for 2000–01 for the national health service. However, under the provisions of the NHS compensation for premature retirement scheme, during 2000–01, NHS employers have paid ongoing contributions totalling £86,118,000 and capital sums totalling £106,603,000, which includes £46,419,000 for a special exercise to clear residual liabilities for scheme members over age 60. These contributions defray expenditure on benefits, in respect of early retirements in the years up to and including 2000–01.

Vein of Galen

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what facilities are available within the NHS for treating the condition of Vein of Galen; what specialists on the treatment of Vein of Galen are available to treat patients through the NHS; and whether the Great Ormond Street Hospital provides specialist treatment for the Vein of Galen malformation. [26049]

Jacqui Smith: Great Ormond Street jointly manages the provision of national health service funded specialist clinical services for this condition in partnership with the National Hospital for Neuroscience. As a national tertiary centre, Great Ormond Street arranges treatment and aftercare for all United Kingdom referrals for children who either have or have had this condition. As this is a relatively new, highly specialist and developing service, a clinical review body has been organised to assess the most appropriate interventions on an individual case by case basis.

Great Ormond Street has recently appointed a new consultant in this specialty, whom they intend to send to Paris for specific training in this procedure. There are currently no children waiting for surgical intervention for this condition in the UK.

Respiratory Disease

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the cost of treating respiratory disease to the NHS in each of the last five years. [27459]

Yvette Cooper: The Department does not have precise details of the cost of treating respiratory disease. However it estimated that respiratory disease accounted for approximately 6 per cent. of hospital expenditure, 13 per cent. of primary care expenditure and 12 per cent. of pharmaceutical expenditure.

Two Shires Ambulance NHS Trust

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent on improved ambulance communications in the Two Shires Ambulance NHS trust area in each year since 1997. [27785]

Ms Blears: Information is not available centrally on expenditure on improved ambulance communications by the trust in each year since 1997.

Care of Vulnerable Adults

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what legislation is in place to prosecute individuals who *(a)* neglect and *(b)* abuse vulnerable adults in care settings; and if he will make a statement. [27034]

Jacqui Smith [holding answer 15 January 2002]: It is an offence under section 127 of the Mental Health Act 1983 to ill-treat or wilfully neglect mentally ill patients. In addition, the Mental Health Act 1959 makes it an offence for a man to have sexual intercourse with a mentally disordered woman in his care. Those who commit offences against other vulnerable adults will be liable to prosecution for criminal offences which are of general application.

Food Standards Agency

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are employed by the Food Standards Agency in *(a)* the north-west and *(b)* Lancashire. [27858]

Yvette Cooper: In the north-west (defined as covering Cheshire, Merseyside, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Cumbria) 180 staff currently work for the Food Standards Agency and the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS), which is an executive agency of the FSA. Of these, 90 staff work in Lancashire.

The MHS also employs some 49 contract official veterinary surgeons in the north-west, of which 16 are in Lancashire. The actual numbers vary from week to week.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are employed by the Food Standards Agency in Wales. [28656]

Yvette Cooper: 21 staff currently work for the Food Standards Agency (FSA), Wales. Of these, 18 staff are on loan from the National Assembly for Wales.

The Meat Hygiene Service, which is an executive agency of the FSA, employs a further 241 staff. The Meat Hygiene Service also employs some 55 official veterinary surgeons on contract although the actual number varies from week to week.

Epidemiological Data

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether continuity of epidemiological data will be maintained for areas which were health authorities before the latest reorganisation. [28210]

Mr. Hutton: Information needs in the light of the current re-organisation are currently being considered. Continuity of data will be an issue but it will also be important to provide data at operational levels of the new organisation where responsibilities will lie and decisions be made.

From later this year primary care trusts will be taking on the majority of functions of existing health authorities and will be the focal point locally for improving the health of the community, securing high quality services and integrating health and social care locally. Data at this level will therefore be the main priority.

Health Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the planned expenditure on health as a percentage of GDP in *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03 and *(c)* 2003–04. [28031]

Mr. Hutton: The planned gross national health service expenditure on health as a percentage of gross domestic product for the financial years 2001–02, 2002–03 and 2003–04 is shown in the table. The figure for 2002–03 includes the extra £1 billion announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his pre-Budget report on the 27 November 2001.

Gross NHS spend as a percentage of GDP

	NHS spend
2001–02	6.3
2002–03	6.5
2003–04	6.6

Note:

These figures do not include private spending

Rheumatoid Arthritis

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effects of *(a)* surgery and *(b)* medicinal drugs on the life expectancy of those who have rheumatoid arthritis. [28116]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* Research in England does not answer this specific question. However, recent research in the United States of America suggests that the average life expectancy of those with rheumatoid arthritis is shortened by about four years for women and eight years for men. Although modern medical and surgical treatment have done a great deal to improve the quality of life for people with rheumatoid arthritis, evidence suggests that there is still room for the development of more effective treatments.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence is currently considering the clinical use of etanercept and infliximab as second-line treatment of rheumatoid arthritis in adults. The appraisal is expected to be issued in March 2002.

Carbon Monoxide

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to increase awareness of the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning among the medical profession. [28055]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* In September 1998, the then Chief Medical Officer, Sir Kenneth Calman and the then Chief Nursing Officer, Mrs. Yvonne Moores published a letter "Carbon Monoxide: The Forgotten Killer". The letter pulled together the most current information available on carbon monoxide and was forwarded to community nurses, midwives, health visitors and general practitioners, who are most likely to be aware of patients' living conditions and so can identify those at increased risk. This letter is currently being revised for re-issue and will be circulated soon.

The Department is also hoping to forward a video tape, prepared for the Health and Safety Executive, to all GP surgeries. This video tape highlights the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning and advises medical practitioners on how to diagnose possible cases of poisoning.

Health Authorities

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the proportion of non-executive posts filled by people living in Warrington, North in health authorities and trusts covering the Warrington, North constituency *(a)* in 1997 and *(b)* at the latest available date. [28056]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 17 January 2002]:* The information requested is given in the table:

Non-executive posts on national health service boards serving the Warrington North constituency occupied by people living in Warrington North[1]

	1997 (April)	*2002 (January)*
Clatterbridge Centre Oncology NHS Trust	0 (6)	0 (6)
Mersey Regional Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0 (5)	0 (5)
North Cheshire Health Authority	1 (6)	1 (6)
North Cheshire Hospitals NHS Trust	[2]—	1 (6)

Non-executive posts on national health service boards serving the Warrington North constituency occupied by people living in Warrington North[1]

	1997 (April)	*2002 (January)*
Warrington Community Trust	2 (6)	2 (6)
Warrington Primary Care Trust	[2]—	[3]0 (0)
Warrington Hospital NHS Trust	0 (6)	[2]—
5 Boroughs NHS Trust	[2]—	[3]0 (0)
Cheshire and Merseyside Strategic Health Authority	[2]—	[4]0 (1)
Total	3 (29)	4 (30)

[1] Figures in brackets give total number of non-executives on board.

[2] Body did not exist or no longer exists

[3] No appointments made to date

[4] Only chair appointment made to date

Care Homes (London)

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* nursing and *(b)* residential homes have closed in each London borough in each year since 1997. [28490]

Jacqui Smith: The number of residential care homes and nursing homes[1] for each year since 1997 is given in the tables.

Information on nursing homes is collected at health authority rather than local authority level.

[1] General and mental nursing homes, private hospitals and clinics. Includes dual registered homes, therefore the number of residential homes and nursing homes should not be added together.

Table 1: Number of nursing homes and private hospitals and clinics, 1997 to 2001—as at 31 March

Health authority[1]	*1997*[2]	*1998*[2]	*1999*[2]	*2000*[2]	*2001*[2]
Barking and Havering	18	22	23	24	24
Barnet	29	34	35	36	32
Bexley and Greenwich	19	29	28	24	23
Brent and Harrow	24	32	37	35	37
Bromley	35	34	29	29	29
Camden and Islington	14	14	17	18	17
Croydon	33	36	40	[3]—	38
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	23	33	30	34	32
East London and The City	15	16	26	19	20
Enfield and Haringey	30	32	31	28	29
Hillingdon	13	12	13	14	15
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	40	57	63	63	71
Kingston and Richmond	23	23	22	22	22
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	49	58	68	69	67
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	61	61	66	66	68
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	24	27	26	27	24

[1] Information on nursing homes is collected at health authority rather than local authority level.

[2] The number of homes in 1997 refers to the period 1 October 1996 to 31 March 1997

[3] Not available

Source:

Department of Health annual returns

Table 2: Number of residential care homes[1,2] *1997 to 2001*

At 31 March

London Borough[3]	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Barking and Dagenham	29	33	33	33	31
Barnet	112	130	127	132	126
Bexley	58	64	67	67	63
Brent	92	95	97	87	87
Bromley	112	100	107	107	99
Camden	70	66	56	55	47
City of London	0	0	0	0	0
Croydon	143	185	183	192	207
Ealing	101	120	100	72	100
Enfield	113	126	124	117	123
Greenwich	46	50	19	45	47
Hackney	39	39	34	38	46
Hammersmith and Fulham	34	33	[4]—	33	32
Haringey	104	94	109	116	122
Harrow	77	76	75	77	76
Havering	66	61	64	63	65
Hillingdon	68	70	67	71	68
Hounslow	39	44	43	48	40
Islington	43	42	55	41	40
Kensington and Chelsea	22	21	18	18	16
Kingston-upon-Thames	71	70	71	66	65
Lambeth	119	115	114	108	105
Lewisham	83	76	87	84	85
Merton	54	52	60	56	61
Newham	47	52	50	55	57
Redbridge	69	77	72	75	70
Richmond-upon-Thames	54	63	59	55	55
Southwark	78	46	73	72	72
Sutton	62	64	62	60	59
Tower Hamlets	31	28	28	28	23
Waltham Forest	99	98	118	109	108
Wandsworth	80	77	78	98	95
Westminster	40	41	35	36	35

[1] Excludes children's homes

[2] Includes dual registered homes, therefore the number of nursing homes and residential homes should not be added together.

[3] Information is collected at the local authority geographical level and is presented for each London borough

[4] Not available

Source:

Department of Health annual returns

Children's Hospices

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent discussions he has had with the Children's Hospice Movement about their funding from the NHS; and if he will make a statement; [28515]

(2) what guidance he plans to give to primary care trusts about purchasing care from children's hospices; and if he will make a statement. [28516]

Yvette Cooper: I have not been in recent discussion with the Children's Hospice Movement, however officials in the Department maintain a line of communication with the Association of Children's Hospices, particularly but not exclusively on the subject of funding. This includes the role to be played by the New Opportunities Fund which, later this year, will invite applications for finance in support of projects to assist children with life threatening illnesses.

Funding available from primary care trusts for services provided by children's hospices is subject to local negotiation. Guidance was issued in February 1998, "Evaluation of the Pilot Project Programme for Children with Life Threatening Illnesses" which addresses the range of options available including hospice care. Regional offices of the Department have been asked to work with health professionals and agencies to identify current service provision and any gaps in this provision, with a view to obtaining a better strategic fit.

As we develop the National Service Framework (NSF) for children we will consider the needs of disabled children, including those whose disability is sadly of a life threatening nature and for whom respite care at a children's hospice is the option of choice. Francine Bates, chief executive of Contact-A-Family, is chairing the Disabled Child Working Group, one of six working groups which are developing detailed advice on the content of the NSF.

Monitored Dosage Medicines

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with primary care groups and trusts concerning the handling charge on monitored dosage medicines being introduced by Boots the Chemists. [28655]

Ms Blears: We have had no such discussions.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many patients of the NHS receive monitored dosage medicines; [28654]

(2) how many patients of the NHS on monitored dosage medicines do not get free prescriptions. [28653]

Ms Blears: Monitored dosage systems and other multi-compartment medicines compliance aids are widely used, especially by residents of care homes. We do not, however, hold any information centrally about the number of national health service patients whose medicines are dispensed in this way, nor about how many of those patients are entitled to free prescriptions.

Health Trusts (Leeds)

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* nurses, *(b)* doctors, broken down by specialty and *(c)* consultants, broken down by specialty were employed by trusts in Leeds in (i) 1997, (ii) 1998, (iii) 1999, (iv) 2000 and (v) 2001. [28978]

Mr. Hutton: The number of nurses employed by trusts in Leeds in the years 1997 to 2000 are shown in table 1. The number of doctors and consultants, broken down by specialty, employed in the Leeds health authority area in the years 1997 to 2000 are shown in table 2. Data are not held on the number of doctors and consultants, broken down by specialty, employed by trusts. Figures for 2001 are not yet available.

Table 1: NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS): Nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff employed by trusts within Leeds HA as at 30 September each year

	1997		*1998*		*1999*		*2000*	
	wte	*hc*	*wte*	*hc*	*wte*	*hc*	*wte*	*hc*
Total Leeds HA								
Total nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	5,620	6,980	5,440	6,880	5,420	6,900	5,570	7,050
of which:								
Qualified	4,860	5,790	4,720	5,750	4,700	5,710	4,890	5,870
Unqualified	770	1,190	720	1,130	720	1,190	680	1,170
Leeds community and mental health services, teaching hospitals NHS trust								
Total nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	1,530	1,970	1,450	1,850	1,470	1,930	1,500	2,010
of which:								
Qualified	1,160	1,400	1,130	1,370	1,150	1,400	1,160	1,410
Unqualified	370	570	320	490	320	520	340	600
St. James's and Seacroft university hospitals NHS trust								
Total nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	1,920	2,400	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
of which:								
Qualified	1,680	2,030	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Unqualified	240	370	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
United Leeds teaching hospitals NHS trust								
Total nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	2,170	2,610	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
of which:								
Qualified	2,020	2,360	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Unqualified	150	250	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Leeds teaching hospitals NHS trust								
Total nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	[1]—	[1]—	3,990	5,020	3,950	4,970	4,060	5,030
of which:								
Qualified	[1]—	[1]—	3,590	4,380	3,550	4,300	3,720	4,460
Unqualified	[1]—	[1]—	400	640	390	670	340	570

[1] Not applicable

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
2. Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts.
3. Figures exclude learners and agency staff.
4. Unqualified figures include unclassified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff
5. wte = whole-time equivalents
6. hc = head count

Source:

Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census

Table 2: Hospital, public health medicine (PHM) and community health service (CHS) medical and dental staff at Leeds health authority by specialty and grade

As at 30 September *Numbers and whole-time equivalents*

	1997				*1998*			
	All staff no.	*Consultants wte*	*All staff no.*	*Consultants wte*	*All staff no.*	*consultants wte*	*All staff no.*	*Consultants wte*
All specialties	1,550	1,300	530	440	1,520	1,310	520	460
Accident and emergency medicine	60	50	10	10	60	60	10	10
Additional dental specialties	0	0	'—	'—	0	0	'—	'—
Anaesthetics	160	140	70	60	150	140	70	70
Audiological medicine	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—
Cardiology	40	30	10	10	40	40	20	20
Cardio-thoracic surgery	20	20	10	10	20	20	0	0
Chemical pathology	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Child and adolescent psychiatry	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
Clinical cytogenetics and molecular genetics	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—
Clinical genetics	10	10	0	0	10	10	0	0
Clinical neurophysiology	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Clinical oncology	30	20	20	10	30	30	20	20
Clinical pharmacology and therapeutics	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Clinical radiology	70	60	40	30	70	60	30	30
Community health service dental	20	10	'—	'—	10	10	'—	'—
Community health service medical	30	20	'—	'—	30	20	'—	'—
Dental public health	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dermatology	20	10	10	10	20	10	10	10
Endocrinology and diabetes melitus	10	10	0	0	10	10	0	0
Forensic psychiatry	0	0	0	0	'—	'—	'—	'—
Gastroenterology	20	20	10	10	20	20	10	10
General (internal) medicine	60	60	10	10	70	60	10	10
General psychiatry	70	50	30	20	70	60	30	20
General surgery	90	90	30	30	90	80	20	20
Genito-urinary medicine	10	10	0	0	10	10	0	0
Geriatric medicine	80	70	20	20	70	60	20	20
Haematology	30	20	10	10	20	20	10	10
Histopathology	40	30	20	20	40	30	20	20
Immunology	10	10	10	10	0	0	0	0
Infectious diseases	10	10	0	0	10	10	0	0
Intensive therapy	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—
Med microbiology and virology	20	10	10	10	20	20	10	10
Medical oncology	20	10	10	0	20	20	10	0
Neurology	20	10	10	10	20	10	10	10
Neuropathology	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Neurosurgery	20	20	10	10	20	20	10	10
Obstetrics and gynaecology	90	70	20	20	80	70	20	20
Occupational medicine	0	0	'—	'—	0	0	'—	'—
Old age psychiatry	30	20	10	10	20	20	10	10
Ophthalmology	40	30	10	10	40	30	10	10
Oral and maxillo-facial surgery	20	20	10	10	20	20	10	10
Orthodontics	10	10	10	0	10	10	0	0
Other	10	10	0	0	0	0	0	0
Otolaryngology	20	20	10	10	20	20	10	10
Paediatric cardiology	0	0	'—	'—	0	0	'—	'—
Paediatric dentistry	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Paediatric surgery	20	10	10	10	20	20	0	0
Paediatrics	100	80	30	20	110	90	30	30
Palliative medicine	10	10	0	0	10	10	0	0
Plastic surgery	10	10	0	0	10	10	0	0
Psychiatry of learning disability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Psychotherapy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Public health medicine	30	20	20	10	20	20	20	10
Rehabilitation medicine	10	10	0	0	10	10	0	0
Renal medicine	20	20	10	10	20	20	10	10
Respiratory medicine	20	10	0	0	20	10	10	10
Restorative dentistry	30	10	10	10	40	20	10	10
Rheumatology	20	10	10	10	20	10	10	0
Trauma and orthopaedic surgery	40	40	20	10	50	40	20	10
Urology	20	20	10	0	20	20	0	0

As at 30 September *Numbers and whole time equivalents*

	1999				*2000*			
	All staff		*Consultants*		*All staff*		*Consultants*	
	no.	*wte*	*no.*	*wte*	*no.*	*wte*	*no.*	*wte*
All specialties	1,550	1,330	510	460	1,550	1,380	510	470
Accident and emergency medicine	70	70	10	10	60	60	10	10
Additional dental specialties	0	0	'—	'—	0	0	'—	'—
Anaesthetics	150	140	70	70	150	140	80	70
Audiological medicine	0	0	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—	'—
Cardiology	50	50	20	20	40	40	20	20
Cardio-thoracic surgery	20	20	10	10	30	30	10	10

As at 30 September *Numbers and whole time equivalents*

	1999				2000			
	All staff		Consultants		All staff		Consultants	
	no.	wte	no.	wte	no.	wte	no.	wte
Chemical pathology	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Child and adolescent psychiatry	20	10	10	0	20	10	10	0
Clinical cytogenetics and molecular genetics	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	0	0	0	0
Clinical genetics	10	10	0	0	10	10	0	0
Clinical neurophysiology	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Clinical oncology	30	20	20	10	30	20	20	10
Clinical pharmacology and therapeutics	0	0	0	0	0	0	[1]—	[1]—
Clinical radiology	60	60	30	30	70	60	40	30
Community health service dental	10	10	[1]—	[1]—	10	10	[1]—	[1]—
Community health service medical	30	10	[1]—	[1]—	30	10	[1]—	[1]—
Dental public health	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dermatology	20	20	10	10	20	20	10	10
Endocrinology	10	10	0	0	10	10	0	0
Forensic psychiatry	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Gastroenterology	20	20	10	10	30	30	10	10
General (internal) medicine	50	40	10	10	40	40	0	0
General psychiatry	100	90	30	30	100	90	30	20
General surgery	100	90	30	20	110	100	30	30
Genito-urinary medicine	10	10	0	0	20	10	0	0
Geriatric medicine	50	50	20	10	60	60	10	10
Haematology	20	20	10	10	20	10	10	10
Histopathology	40	30	20	20	40	40	20	20
Immunology	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Infectious diseases	10	10	0	0	10	10	0	0
Intensive therapy	0	0	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Med microbiology and virology	20	10	10	10	20	10	10	10
Medical oncology	30	20	10	0	20	20	10	0
Neurology	20	20	10	10	10	10	10	10
Neuropathology	0	0	0	0	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Neurosurgery	10	10	10	10	20	20	10	10
Obstetrics and gynaecology	80	60	20	20	80	60	20	20
Occupational medicine	0	0	[1]—	[1]—	0	0	[1]—	[1]—
Old age psychiatry	40	30	10	10	30	20	0	0
Ophthalmology	40	30	10	10	40	40	10	10
Oral and maxillo-facial surgery	20	20	10	10	20	20	10	10
Orthodontics	10	10	0	0	10	10	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Otolaryngology	10	10	0	0	10	10	10	10
Paediatric cardiology	0	0	[1]—	[1]—	0	0	[1]—	[1]—
Paediatric dentistry	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Paediatric surgery	20	20	0	0	20	20	10	10
Paediatrics	100	80	30	30	110	100	40	30
Palliative medicine	10	10	0	0	10	10	0	0
Plastic surgery	10	10	0	0	20	20	0	0
Psychiatry of learning disability	10	10	0	0	10	10	0	0
Psychotherapy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Public health medicine	20	20	10	10	20	10	10	10
Rehabilitation medicine	10	10	0	0	10	10	0	0
Renal medicine	20	20	10	10	20	20	10	10
Respiratory medicine	30	20	10	10	30	30	10	10
Restorative dentistry	40	20	10	10	20	20	10	10
Rheumatology	20	10	10	0	20	10	0	0
Trauma and orthopaedic surgery	50	40	10	10	50	50	20	10
Urology	20	20	0	0	30	20	10	10

[1] Denotes zero

Notes:

1. "0" denotes less than 5.
2. Figures rounded to the nearest 10.

Source:

Department of Health 2000 medical and dental work force census

Air Ambulances

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on when the research commissioned into the contribution made by air ambulances in the care and transportation of seriously ill patients will be completed; [28977]

(2) what methodology is being employed in the research he has commissioned into air ambulance services; [28975]

(3) whether the research he has commissioned into air ambulance services will include obtaining information about which services receive *(a)* staffing and *(b)* funding support from NHS bodies. [28974]

Ms Blears: The Department is commissioning a wide-ranging piece of primary research that will examine the role and effectiveness of air ambulance services in a modern national health service. The first stage is already under way and will provide an up to date review of existing research evidence. It is intended that the new primary research will be completed by the end of 2003.

There are currently 12 charitably funded air ambulance services operating in England. Those air ambulances are called out to emergencies by NHS ambulance trusts and generally staffed by NHS staff. Some NHS ambulance trusts are already meeting the salary costs of these staff and, from 1 April 2002, all NHS staff costs will be met from NHS funds.

Resuscitation Policy

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will draw up a national Do not Resuscitate policy. [29394]

Yvette Cooper: We are committed to ensure best practice in resuscitation decision-making throughout the national health service. In 2000, the Department published new guidance "Resuscitation Policy (Health Service Circular 2000/28)" which reinforces patients' rights on resuscitation decisions and aims to ensure that patients are properly involved.

One of the basic principles of health care is that a competent patient has the right under common law to give or withhold consent to examination or treatment. In the case of patients who are not capable of consenting to treatment, and in the absence of a valid advance refusal of treatment, it is a doctor's duty to act in the best interests of the patient concerned. Decisions must be made on a case by case basis.

Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are being taken by his Department to offer cardiac screening for the condition hypertrophic cardiomyopathy to children about to take part in competitive sport. [29321]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The United Kingdom National Screening Committee (NSC) advises Ministers, the devolved National Assemblies and the Scottish Parliament on all aspects of screening policy. The NSC does not currently recommend screening for cardiomyopathy but is keeping its position under review.

Current policy is that the relatives of a family with a known high risk of contracting this disease should receive regular cardiovascular examinations.

The Department is working closely with the medical profession and voluntary organisations with a view to producing clear clinical guidance, which will play a very important part in raising awareness and improving diagnosis and testing of people at risk.

Herbal Remedies

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the oral statement of the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears), on 20 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 62–66WH, if he will provide references for the well-documented histories of traditional use of herbal remedies in Europe; and if he will list those herbal products which are able to demonstrate a history of 30 years on the market. [29521]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The European Commission's proposals for a directive on the registration of traditional herbal medicinal products include provision for a positive list of herbal substances, which will include any information necessary for their safe use. Where a traditional herbal medicine was within the parameters of that positive list it would not be necessary for applicants to demonstrate evidence of traditional use. Pending negotiations on the directive, the likely timetable for the development of such a list is not yet clear.

Alternatively, under the published proposals, applicants would be able to produce bibliographic or expert evidence of traditional use for herbal medicinal products. Such products have been used extensively in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in the European Union for many years, in the form both of individual remedies made up by herbalists and of manufactured products placed on the market by companies. There is a very wide range of possible sources which, taken together as necessary, potentially could provide the required evidence. These include: authoritative literature on herbalism; the practical evidence of numerous licensed or unlicensed manufactured products on the market in many EU member states; the long-standing lists of herbal medicines accepted as traditional by regulatory authorities in a number of member states; and the testimony of recognised experts on herbalism. This last source may be particularly helpful in confirming the patterns of usage of combinations of herbal ingredients.

Our aim on this issue would be to minimise the regulatory impact on applicants of demonstrating traditional use, consistent with complying with legal requirements. The Medicines Control Agency intends to hold dialogue with the herbal sector with a view to developing guidance or criteria which would help meet this objective. Until these discussions have taken place, we think it would be premature to attempt to define specific acceptable sources in more detail.

Personal Social Services (Coventry)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will increase the money for personal social services in Coventry to match the national average. [28886]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* Coventry's personal social services standard spending assessment increases in 2002–03 by about 4 per cent. compared to the national average increase of about 5 per cent. Coventry's increase is below the national average mainly because its population has decreased, whereas the national population has increased. Population size is a key factor in the SSA allocation formulae.

Digital Hearing Aids

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to ensure that digital hearing aids can be provided by every NHS trust in the UK; and when the United Lincolnshire Hospitals Trust will receive them; [30037]

(2) when he estimates that health authorities in all areas of England will be able to provide digital hearing aids. [29762]

Jacqui Smith: We announced on 24 December 2001 that a further £20 million would be made available in 2002–03 for the modernising hearing aid services project. This will mean that by April 2003 at least 50 NHS sites will be fitting digital hearing aids and at least a further 15 will have the necessary training and equipment in place to fit digital hearing aids from 2003–04. Decisions on which sites will become involved in the project next year will be made shortly.

The research evaluation of the modernising hearing aid services project is continuing and a final report is due at the end of this year. Decisions about further roll-out will be taken in the light of this evaluation.

First Aid

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what resources he allocates for the promotion of the importance of training for first aid. [30324]

Yvette Cooper: Within the safety criteria of the national healthy school standard (NHSS) schools are asked to provide opportunities for all pupils to develop health skills in relation to first aid. The healthy schools programme funds education and health partnerships covering all local education authorities to provide expertise and support to schools working to achieve the NHSS.

Additionally, the "Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation" White Paper of 1999 committed £2 million to install defibrillators (small portable electronic devices designed to save the lives of people who have suffered cardiac arrest) in "high traffic" public places such as busy railway stations, airports and large shopping complexes. Since April 2000 60 sites have had defibrillators installed under this initiative, and approximately 2,500 people have received training in basic life support and the use of a defibrillator.

NHS Dentists

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he plans to expand the number of dental access centres in Shropshire. [30405]

Yvette Cooper: Since 1999 we have invested over £1.5 million in the Shropshire dental access centre (DAC). The DAC currently operates from six sites. Two new sites are planned to open in the early months of this year.

Central funding has been approved to employ an extra dentist in the Oswestry site of the DAC from April 2002.

Solihull Hospital

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 152W, on Solihull Hospital, if he will make a further statement on the future status of accident and emergency facilities at Solihull Hospital. [29332]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* At this time the service review of the accident and emergency department at Solihull Hospital being conducted by the accident and emergency sub-group of the Solihull Modernisation Board is continuing.

This sub-group will be reporting back its findings to the newly established Solihull services review group project board in due course. It will be for the health authority, or its successor body after 31 March, to decide if there is to be any significant change to the service, and if so, this will need to be the subject of a formal consultation process.

Domiciliary Care

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultation is occurring with local authorities on the subject of charging policies for domiciliary care. [30303]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* Consultation on draft guidance, "Fairer Charging Policies for Home Care and other non-residential Social Services" took place between 3 January and 30 March 2001. Statutory guidance was issued on 23 November 2001.

Diabetes

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many diabetes sufferers within the Harwich constituency have taken advantage of the use of pen needles since they were made available free within the national health service. [30979]

Jacqui Smith: Free insulin pen needles and certain reusable insulin pens have been available to diabetes sufferers since they were added to the drug tariff with effect from 1 March 2000.

Nationally the number of prescription items for insulin pen needles dispensed in the community in England has increased from 78,000 in the period April 2000 to June 2000 to 154,000 in the period July 2001 to September 2001. Figures are not available centrally on a constituency basis.

NHS Eastern Region

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of *(a)* underspend and *(b)* overspend in the current financial year by each health authority in the NHS Eastern Region. [31363]

Mr. Hutton: By the end of this financial year we expect all health authorities to live within their agreed resource limits. Where they require support at year-end this will be provided principally through brokerage from elsewhere in the national health service. This is normal practice in managing the year end financial position of individual bodies and for the NHS overall.

GPs

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were in each general practitioner practice within the Hillingdon health authority in each of the last seven years. [31357]

Mr. Hutton: Under the terms of the Data Protection Act registration, we do not release data which identifies individual practices. As the main element of the general practitioner's remuneration is based on the number of patients on their list, it would be inappropriate to release the information requested.

Expectant Mothers

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many Nuchal folds tests have been undertaken on expectant mothers aged over 35 years in each of the last three years in *(a)* the national health service and *(b)* the private sector. [31546]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* Information about the number of Nuchal fold tests undertaken in the national health service or the private sector is not collected centrally.

Care Home Standards

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to support and inform care home owners during the introduction of national minimum standards. [32153]

Jacqui Smith: I have today launched a package of measures to help the smooth introduction of the national minimum standards. This comprises:

(i) Comprehensive statutory guidance from Ministers under section 6 of the Care Standards Act to the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) setting out the supportive way in which the standards should be applied. The guidance indicates that the standards should be used to help guide care homes on action they can take to improve their services. Time will be given to enable homes to meet the standards. Failure to meet standards will only be used as a reason to pursue de-registration in cases where services are a danger to vulnerable people.

(ii) An information pack will be distributed to all registered care providers during February explaining how the national minimum standards and regulations will be operated and how the NCSC will work.

(iii) A help line will be set up by the NCSC next month to answer questions from owners and managers of care homes about how the national minimum standards might apply to their service.

The NCSC has been set up to encourage the provision of good quality care in care homes, not to close them down. This package is designed to help the NCSC achieve that.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether responsibility to provide ambulances to return patients who need ambulance transport from hospital to their homes lies with the ambulance service *(a)* where the hospital is located and *(b)* where the patient lives. [28233]

Ms Blears: Arrangements for non-emergency patient transport are determined locally. Responsibility for arranging that transport usually lies with the hospital treating the patient. In general, if the patient is attending for an out-patient appointment then either a general practitioner or the hospital makes arrangements for the journey into and out of hospital. If the patient is being discharged from a hospital, responsibility for arranging transport usually lies with the hospital. The actual transport is provided either by a national health service ambulance trust or other organisation commissioned by the hospital for that purpose.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many patients, requiring ambulances to return from Hampshire hospitals to Dorset, were provided with them by *(a)* Hampshire ambulance service and *(b)* Dorset ambulance service in the last year for which information is available; [28232]

(2) how many patients, requiring ambulances to return from Hampshire hospitals to West Sussex, were provided with them by *(a)* Hampshire ambulance service and *(b)* West Sussex ambulance service in the last year for which information is available; [28230]

(3) how many patients, requiring ambulances to return from Hampshire hospitals to the Isle of Wight, were provided with them by *(a)* Hampshire ambulance service and *(b)* Isle of Wight ambulance service in the last year for which information is available; [28229]

(4) how many patients, requiring ambulances to return from Hampshire hospitals to Wiltshire, were provided with them by *(a)* Hampshire ambulance service and *(b)* Wiltshire ambulance service in the last year for which information is available. [28231]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not collected centrally. Information relating to ambulance service figures are available from the Chairman of the relevant ambulance service trusts.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS trusts he estimates will seek foundation status in the *(a)* current and *(b)* next financial year. [29656]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* We do not estimate that any trusts will seek foundation status in the current financial year. The number in the next financial year will be dependent on the outcome of the 2002 performance ratings and the number of three star trusts that choose to take that course.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the total takings from the sale or leasing of property by an NHS trust with foundation status will accrue exclusively to that trust. [29657]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* Consideration is being given to foundation trusts having the right to keep all the proceeds from the sale of property. National health service trusts can already keep all the income they receive from leasing property, and this freedom will apply to foundation trusts.

MMR Vaccine

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what screening took place of members of the working party of the Medical Research Council on links between MMR vaccine and autism to avoid potential conflicts of interest; [24315]

(2) if he will list members of the Medical Research Council working party on the MMR vaccine and autism; and what declarations of interest they have made. [24311]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* In March 2001 the Department commissioned the Medical Research Council to undertake a wide-ranging and inclusive review of the current understanding of the causes and epidemiology of autism. The measles, mumps and rubella vaccine was only one of many suggested causes that were considered and is a small part of the whole report.

The full report of the MRC review is available on the MRC's website www.mrc.ac.uk.

The scientific experts of the review group were drawn mostly from outside the field of autism or MMR research. A third of the members comprised a lay group drawn from organisations representing the interests of people and families with autism, together with some who had other broad consumer interests.

Along with its scientific assessment of the current knowledge of autism and recommendations for future research strategies, the MRC review included the code of conduct for the review groups, eligibility criteria for experts and lay members, and procedures for managing perceived and potential conflicts of interest. These were discussed and agreed by all members during the review process. Declarations of interest were sought early in the review from all members and from additional external advisers. They were kept up-to-date and a summary was provided at all review group meetings. Lists of members and the summary of their declarations of interest are published in the report at appendix 1, annex 3. The full declarations were available for scrutiny by members throughout the review.

We have full confidence in the integrity of the review process.

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many MMR vaccines have been given in each health region in the last 12 months. [31334]

Yvette Cooper: Information is not available for the number of measles, mumps and rubella vaccinations given. Information about coverage rates for children immunised against MMR by region is contained in the Statistical Bulletin "NHS Immunisation Statistics, England: 2000–01". A copy of the bulletin is in the Library and can also be found on the Department's website www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0121.htm.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 31 January 2002

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Ashford International Station

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received on the closure of Ashford International Station on the weekend of the France *v.* England rugby match in Paris; and if he will make a statement. [26888]

Mr. Spellar: My understanding is that the possible closure of Ashford over this weekend has yet to be confirmed, and that, currently, the station is scheduled to be open on Saturday 2 March, although possibly closed on the Friday and Sunday. These timings are provisional and therefore subject to change.

Although occasional weekend closures are an inevitable consequence of the essential work for the channel tunnel rail link (CTLR) currently being undertaken at and around Ashford, the timing of this particular closure, if confirmed, is particularly unfortunate. I therefore propose to raise the matter with the company building the link, Union Railways.

The CTLR project itself remains on time and on budget and when section 1 opens in 2003 the people of Kent will of course benefit from improved international rail services on a purpose-built high-speed line that will free up capacity on existing track.

Wind Power

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to simplify the process by which a wind turbine deployer may achieve planning consent in a commercially viable time-frame. [29284]

Ms Keeble: We already promote a positive approach to planning for all types of renewable energy projects. We have initiated the preparation of regional renewable energy assessments to encourage a more strategic approach to planning for renewable energy at regional and local levels, which will help to facilitate planning permission for individual proposals.

Our Planning Green Paper published on 12 December 2001 includes proposals to deliver faster and more responsive planning decisions across the board. One element of this approach is to encourage developers to discuss proposals with local people and local planning authorities before applications for planning permission are submitted. I strongly commend this to those seeking permission for wind turbines and other renewable energy projects.

Empty Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the *(a)* annual cost and *(b)* total value of the empty properties owned by (i) his Department, (ii) his agencies and (iii) other public bodies for which he has had responsibility in each of the last four years. [30072]

Dr. Whitehead: This information is available only at disproportionate cost.

Sustainable Development

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how the proposals in the Planning Green Paper will deliver sustainable development; and if he will make a statement. [29897]

Ms Keeble: The consultation document "Planning: delivering a fundamental change" states in paragraph 1.2

> "we need good planning to deliver development that is sustainable and which creates better places in which people can live and work".

The Green Paper proposes to create a better, faster and fairer planning system with sustainability at its heart.

Housing (Birmingham)

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the average change in annual revenue available for financing investment in Birmingham's housing revenue account as a result of the Government's rent restructuring proposals, based on *(a)* the continuation of the current subsidy system and *(b)* the abolition of the council tenant's tax. [30353]

Ms Keeble: Local authorities are responsible for setting their own rents and budgets—including the resources to be devoted to investment—based on local priorities and other factors. There is no council tenant's tax.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answers of 10 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 573W, on housing (Birmingham), what his definition of debt financing charges is. [30389]

Ms Keeble: The figures I provided in my previous answer related to the amount the Department made available to Birmingham in housing revenue account subsidy towards the administration costs of managing its debt finance. We do not have figures for the cost to Birmingham city council of servicing their housing attributable debt.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information he has collated on housing management costs per dwelling for *(a)* all local authority housing, *(b)* all RSL housing, *(c)* all metropolitan authority housing, *(d)* Birmingham city council housing and *(e)* RSL housing in Birmingham. [30391]

Ms Keeble: On the basis of the definition used for the purposes of best value and Audit Commission Performance Indicators for 2000–01, the average annual management cost per dwelling for all local authorities in England was £654. The average for all metropolitan authority housing was £496 and the average for Birmingham city council housing was £634. The Housing Corporation produces figures for the RSL sector. The average annual management cost per dwelling for the largest 400 English RSLs in 2000–01 was £536. No figures are available for all RSL housing in Birmingham.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the change in the annual cost to *(a)* Birmingham city council's non-HRA revenue budget and *(b)* the Exchequer of financing housing benefit for Birmingham tenants if transfer of the local authority housing stock to a registered social landlord goes ahead. [30350]

Ms Keeble: The estimated housing benefit cost over three years to be contributed from Birmingham city council's general fund is £17.14 million.

The estimated Exchequer contribution to housing benefit cost for Birmingham tenants if transfer of the local authority housing stock to registered social landlord goes ahead is £63.63 million over 30 years.

Housing (Loans)

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what information he has collated on the interest rates for loans taken out by registered social landlords in each of the last five years. [30352]

Ms Keeble: Information of this detail is held by the Housing Corporation only on a commercial in confidence basis.

Road Accidents

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the effect on the level of road accidents, broken down by type of *(a)* accident, *(b)* injury and *(c)* victim, of the operation of (i) mandatory and (ii) advisory 20 mph limits. [30326]

Mr. Jamieson: TRL research on urban speed management methods published in 1998 (TRL Report 363) found only an average 1 mph drop in speeds and no discernible accident reduction in accidents in 20 mph limits using only signs. Advisory speed limits are not normally approved in England and Wales. However, the more successful 20 mph zones that use self enforcing traffic calming features achieved average speed reductions of around 10 mph which produced a 70 per cent. reduction in child pedestrian accidents and a 48 per cent. reduction in child cyclist accidents.

Ordnance Survey Trading Fund

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what return *(a)* he has specified as a target for the Ordnance Survey Trading Fund over the period from 1999 to 2004 and *(b)* the Ordnance Survey Trading Fund has delivered in each accounting year from 1999 to date. [30298]

Ms Keeble: The Ordnance Survey Framework document states in a Treasury minute dated 29 March 1999, that the financial objective desirable of achievement by Ordnance Survey Trading Fund for the period 1 April 1999 to 31 March 2004 shall be to achieve a return averaged over the period as a whole of at least 9 per cent, in the form of a surplus on ordinary activities before interest expressed as a percentage of average capital employed.

The return on capital employed for each of the years in question is as follows:

	1999–2000	*2000–01*
Profit (£ million)	12.5	[1]27.3
Capital employed (£ million)	45.1	68.7
Return on capital employed (per cent.)	27.6	39.6

[1] Includes an exceptional payment of £19.25 million received from the Automobile Association (AA)

Over the two years, 1999–2000 and 2000–01, the average return on capital employed was 33.5 per cent., including the exceptional item in 2000–01.

Private Finance Initiative Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total external spend by his Department was on Private Finance Initiative consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PFI consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by his Department over this period; and if he will make a statement. [31041]

Dr. Whitehead: The specific information about the use of consultants to advise on PFI projects can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. I have placed in the Library a list of the consultancy firms employed by DTLR, its executive agencies and sponsored bodies.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what assessment he has made of the Housing Corporation's approved development programme for the number of affordable housing units in rural settlements; and if he will make a statement; [31160]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 10 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 975–76W, on affordable housing, what assessment he has made of the reasons for the underlying trend in the number of affordable housing units in rural settlements with a population of 3,000 or less; and if he will list them. [31245]

Ms Keeble: The amount of new affordable housing built in recent years has declined because of reductions suffered by the Housing Corporation's capital programme in the mid-1990s, and a rapid increase in scheme costs.

In the 2000 Spending Review we provided significant additional resources for housing: the Housing Corporation's approved development programme will almost double to over £1.2 billion by 2003–04; and we have doubled the Corporation's programme for affordable housing in small rural settlements (with less than 3,000 people) from 800 in 2000–01 to 1,600 homes a year by 2003–04, with 1,100 homes in 2001–02.

As announced in the Rural White Paper, we expect 9,000 affordable homes to be delivered annually in rural districts by 2003–04 through Housing Corporation and local authority funding and by judicious use of planning powers.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 10 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 975–76W, on affordable housing, if he will list the number of affordable housing units in rural settlements by region in each year since 1990. [31346]

Ms Keeble: I will write to the hon. Member with a regional breakdown for England of the number of affordable housing units in rural settlements (with a population of 3,000 or less) funded by the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme and through local authority social housing grant since 1991–92.

Information for 1990–91 is not available, and information about the number of affordable housing units completed through the planning system without public subsidy is not held centrally.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many affordable housing units were provided by local authorities through local authority funding in rural settlements in each year since 1990. [31159]

Ms Keeble: I will send the hon. Member a table showing affordable housing units in rural settlements in England with a population of 3,000 or less funded by local authorities through local authority social housing grant since 1991–92.

Information for 1990–91 is not available.

Safety Bill

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects his proposed safety Bill to be presented to the House. [31235]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) on 19 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1364W.

Railway Safety

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* warning letters and *(b)* enforcement notices have been given by the Health and Safety Executive to (i) Railtrack and (ii) train operating companies for each year since 1995–96; and if he will provide details of each such letter or notice. [31234]

Mr. Jamieson: The information on the number of warning letters could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

The number of enforcement notices (prohibition and improvement) issued on the railway industry by HSE are:

	Railtrack	*TOCs*
1995–96	17	7
1996–97	10	11
1997–98	7	22
1998–99	7	14
1999–2000	18	28
2000–01	25	26
2001–02[1]	40	34

[1] Up to 31 January 2002

Details of enforcement notices could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will list the prosecutions of train operating companies by the Health and Safety Executive for failure to meet targets for reducing the incidents of signals passed at danger in each year since 1995–96; [31197]

(2) if he will list the prosecutions of Railtrack by the Health and Safety Executive for failure to meet targets for improvements to signals to reduce incidents of signals passed at danger in each year since 1995–96. [31198]

Mr. Jamieson: There have been no such prosecutions for failure to meet such targets.

Organ Donation

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what action he is taking to encourage councils to include organ donor registration forms in their electoral registration form; [31350]

(2) how many councils include organ donor registration forms in their electoral registration form. [31351]

Dr. Whitehead: While it is the responsibility of each electoral registration officer (ERO) to decide what additional literature to include when issuing electoral registration forms, we asked the Association of Electoral Administrators, prior to the canvass in October 2000, to encourage EROs to include organ donation literature. Information about how many EROs do this is not collected.

Electoral Register

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps the Government are taking to allow local authorities to make the electoral register available for commercial purposes. [31216]

Dr. Whitehead: We intend to publish shortly a paper setting out the Government's intentions for regulations making provision, with effect from the 2002 canvass, about the sale of electoral registers to commercial organisations. Under current legislation, in the light of a recent High Court judgment, electoral registration officers must continue to sell registers, but when selling to commercial organisations must in general exclude the particulars of electors who have objected to their details being included in such cases.

Associated British Ports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for what reason a civil servant from his Department accompanied Associated British Ports to a meeting with the Tug Company Adstream UK Ltd. on 11 January. [31535]

Mr. Jamieson: An official from my Department was visiting the harbour authority on 11 January as part of the Department's monitoring to confirm the assurances which have been given by the harbour authority that the safe operation of the Humber ports will not be affected by the dispute with the Humber pilots. He found that the harbour master was due to attend a meeting with the tug company, tug skippers and crew representatives; and it was agreed by all the parties that his attendance would enable the Department to know first hand of any safety concerns relating to the tug operation.

Metropolitan Line

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many delays were caused by technical faults of *(a)* signals and points and *(b)* trains on the Metropolitan line in each of the last five years. [31370]

Mr. Jamieson: For the number of delays caused by signals and points failures on the Metropolitan line in each of the last five years, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) on 18 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 197W.

For the number of delays attributed to problems with rolling stock on the Metropolitan line over the same period, I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 570W.

School Crossing Patrols

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures he is undertaking to help local authorities recruit school crossing patrols; and if he will make a statement. [31368]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department is grant-aiding the update of the guidelines for local authorities on the management and operation of the school crossing patrols that was produced by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and the Local Authority Road Safety Officers' Association. I hope this will address any general problems associated with the recruitment and retention of people to provide this valued service.

School Run

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Education and Skills concerning the effect on traffic congestion of private car transport of pupils to and from school; and if he will make a statement. [31494]

Mr. Jamieson: My officials are in regular contact with officials from DfES in the context of the School Travel Advisory Group. The group was set up by the then Transport, Education and Health Ministers in December 1998 to advise on ways to reduce car use and improve safety for children on the journey to school. We have published guides and introduced a new programme of advice and support to assist local authorities and schools in promoting more sustainable school travel.

Road Safety (Commercial Drivers)

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions he has had with operators of commercial fleets and other bodies on the level of road crashes involving their vehicles; and if he will make a statement. [31484]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department meets and corresponds with representatives of operators of commercial fleets and others on a regular basis on a wide range of issues. The Work-related Road Safety Task Group consulted the industry and its representatives last year on at-work road safety issues. The task group's report was published on 22 November 2001 and the Government are now considering the recommendations.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent studies he has commissioned to establish the number of road crashes involving company driven vehicles; and if he will make a statement. [31482]

Mr. Jamieson: The Work-related Road Safety Task Group considered the nature and scale of at-work road traffic incidents. The group commissioned research by the Business Strategy Group and their report, published on 22 November 2001, summarises the findings of that and other related research projects. The report may be viewed on the Health and Safety Executive's website at www.house.gov.uk/road/content.traffic1/pdf. Details of the research are set out in Annexe 3.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make it a requirement for drivers of company cars and vans to undertake additional driver training; and if he will make a statement. [31493]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government support high quality training for all drivers and are working with the training industry to ensure that those offering the training have the right skills. We have no plans to introduce compulsory training for company car or van drivers.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will apply to drivers of company cars and vans the safety time limits for driving applied to heavy goods vehicles; and if he will make a statement. [31481]

Mr. Jamieson: There are no plans for legislation to restrict the number of driving hours by company car users. Drivers of goods vehicles under 3.5 tonnes operate under the UK domestic drivers' hours legislation as they are specifically exempted from European Union (EU) drivers' hours rules.

We announced plans in the Transport White Paper to consult on the possible repeal of the UK drivers' hours rules, in favour of the EU rules. Unfortunately these plans had to be put on hold pending the outcome of discussions on the draft EU directive extending working time limits to mobile workers in the road transport industry. While the terms of this directive have now been agreed and are expected to be published in April, there is now a draft European Commission proposal to amend the EU drivers' hours rules themselves on which we have just gone out to consultation.

Contracts (KPMG)

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what contracts his Department has with KPMG; and what the value is of each one. [31318]

Dr. Whitehead: There are currently seven contracts the Department has with KPMG, which are listed as follows; the total value is £2,970,759.00.

(1) The Next Generation Accounting System Project

(2) London Transport Statutory Audit

(3) London Transport Grant Audit

(4) Support for Business Improvement (Highways Agency)

(5) Assessing the Impact of the Housing Green Paper Rent Policies on Individual Housing Associations

(6) First Stage Review of English Partnerships

(7) Guidance on Commercial Conversions and the Re-use of Empty Houses.

I am unable to provide individual values for each contract, as the information is deemed commercially sensitive.

Marine Pollution (Shoreline Clean-ups)

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how much funding has been awarded by central Government to local authorities to cover the implementation of plans to undertake shoreline clean-ups following marine pollution incidents in each of the last 10 years; [31211]

(2) if he will make it his policy to introduce a statutory duty on coastal local authorities to *(a)* plan for and *(b)* undertake shoreline clean-ups following marine pollution incidents as part of the review of emergency planning legislation; and if he will make a statement; [31207]

(3) how much has been spent by local authorities in *(a)* setting up plans to undertake shoreline clean-ups following marine pollution incidents and *(b)* cleaning up shorelines following marine pollution incidents in each of the last 10 years; [31209]

(4) what representations he has received concerning the introduction of a statutory duty on coastal local authorities to *(a)* plan for and *(b)* undertake shoreline clean-ups following marine pollution incidents; and if he will make a statement; [31212]

(5) how many coastal local authorities have implemented a voluntary plan for undertaking shoreline clean-ups following marine pollution incidents; and if he will provide a list of those local authorities; [31208]

(6) how much funding has been requested by local authorities to cover the implementation of plans to undertake shoreline clean-ups following marine pollution incidents in each of the last 10 years. [31210]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department recognises the importance of the role of coastal local authorities in preparing and maintaining contingency plans for responding to shoreline pollution following marine pollution incidents, and in carrying out that response. Since the beginning of 1998, my Department has received representations concerning the introduction of a statutory duty on coastal local authorities to plan for or undertake shoreline clean-ups following marine pollution incidents from: Aberdeenshire council, Ceredigion county council, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, Devon county council, Dumfries and Galloway council, Dundee city council, Fife council, KIMO (Kommunenes Internasjonale Miljøorganisasjon), the Local Government Association, Pembrokeshire county council, Purbeck district council, Shetland Islands council, South Ayrshire council and the Tyne and Wear Emergency Planning Unit. This is a subject which falls within the scope of the Cabinet Office's ongoing review of "The Future of Emergency Planning in England and Wales", and specifically that review's proposal that existing emergency planning legislation be replaced with a new statutory duty for emergency planning, and my Department has made an input to that review. The result of the review is awaited.

The information requested about coastal local authorities which have implemented contingency plans on a voluntary basis has been placed in the Libraries of the House, in the form of a list compiled by my Department's Maritime and Coastguard Agency, using data collected in January 2001 (and which are being updated presently). Information about the amount of funding which local authorities have requested to cover the implementation of plans to undertake shoreline clean-ups following marine pollution incidents, and the amounts which local authorities have spent on setting up plans to undertake shoreline clean-ups following marine pollution incidents and on cleaning up shorelines following marine pollution incidents, is not held centrally. No specific grants have been made covering the implementation of shoreline clean-up plans following a marine pollution incident. My Department's Maritime and Coastguard Agency does, however, annually provide training courses for local authority officers on oil pollution contingency planning and response, and shorter courses on oil spill response, at no cost to the local authorities involved.

Aircraft Seats

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to introduce legislation requiring companies advertising airline flights to provide information about the size of the pitch of the aircraft's seats in their advertisements. [31567]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government have no plans at present to introduce such legislation.

The voluntary European Airline Passenger Service Commitment, to which all UK airlines operating long haul scheduled or charter services are signatories, includes a commitment to make information on seat pitch available to passengers on request. The European Airline Passenger Service Commitment will take effect from 14 February 2002.

To improve the information available to passengers my Department is working with the Civil Aviation Authority and the airlines to ensure a common public understanding of the phrase "seat pitch".

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the instances in which his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies failed to pay valid invoices within 30 days or after the agreed credit period in the financial year 2000–01. [32025]

Dr. Whitehead: The total number of invoices paid by my department and its agencies in 2000–01, and the numbers paid late, based on the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions structure in place at 31 March 2001, are shown in the table. Listings of individual invoices paid late, and information in respect of non-departmental public bodies, are not held centrally.

Invoices paid 2000–01	*Number of invoices paid*	*Number of invoices paid late*	*Percentage paid late*
DETR(C)	76,241	1,868	2.45
Driving Standards Agency	31,357	249	0.79
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	22,456	445	1.98
Vehicle Certification Agency	2,604	43	1.65
Vehicle Inspectorate	36,896	384	1.04
Highways Agency	100,288	4,383	4.37
Maritime and Coastguard Agency	30,863	132	0.43
Planning Inspectorate	9,349	350	3.74
QEII Conference Centre	3,208	7	0.22
The Rent Service	22,701	835	3.68
Total	335,965	8,696	2.59

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what additional security measures are planned by his Department to deter and detect theft and fraud. [31794]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department takes its responsibility to minimise losses due to theft or fraud very seriously. It has a fraud response plan, based on the Treasury model, which it keeps under regular review. It issues periodic reminders to staff about the plan and related matters.

All incidents are reviewed for lessons about improved control and investigations are initiated whenever appropriate.

No additional security measures are judged necessary at the present time.

St. Kevin's Playing Fields, Kirkby

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 62W, if new proposals for St. Kevin's Playing Fields in Kirkby which are *(a)* at variance with the local urban development plan, *(b)* at variance with the planning inspector's recommendations and *(c)* materially different in other substantial ways, will be treated as a wholly new application; and if he will make a statement. [32079]

Ms Keeble: It is for Knowsley metropolitan borough council as the responsible local planning authority for the area and in this case as applicant to decide whether their proposals for the site have changed to such an extent that a fresh planning application should be made.

Asylum Centre (Throckmorton)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what planning permissions will need to be granted by which authorities to permit the development of an asylum accommodation centre on Ministry of Defence land at Throckmorton, Worcestershire. [31725]

Ms Keeble: Development by the Crown, including Government Departments, does not require planning permission. Development is undertaken under the non-statutory arrangements set out in Part IV of the Memorandum attached to DOE Circular 18/84. The developing Department must serve a Notice of Proposed Development on the local planning authority. If the local planning authority objects to the proposal and the objections cannot be resolved by negotiation, the developing Department must refer the proposals to the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for his determination. To enable him to reach a decision the Secretary of State will either ask for written representations or institute a non-statutory public inquiry.

If a Government Department is proposing to dispose of land in anticipation of development of that land by another, non-Crown body, it may apply for planning permission under section 299 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. Development undertaken on Crown land by a private body requires planning permission in the normal way.

Local Authority Rents

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the level of council house rent rises was in each year since 1991 to 2001 in *(a)* real and *(b)* percentage terms, in each local authority in descending order. [30563]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* A table showing the annual change (actual and percentage) in the level of local authority weekly rents for each year from 1991–92 to 2001–02 has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

The local authorities are ranked in descending order, with the local authority with the biggest cumulative increase in council rent over the period 1990–91 to 2001–02—Barking and Dagenham—at the top.

It should be noted that between April 1990 and April 2001 the retail prices index rose by 38.4 per cent. Since only the last two local authorities in this table (Redbridge and Bournemouth) saw an overall rise in rents of less than 38.4 per cent, in all other authorities the "real" rise in council rents over the period 1990–91 to 2001–02 has been positive.

Note that the only local authorities shown in this table are those that existed both in 1990–91 and in 2001–02 and did not undergo any significant boundary changes during the intervening years.

Local authorities that existed in 1990–91 but have since transferred their stock to housing associations (registered social landlords) have been omitted.

Parliamentary Questions (PFI)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many written parliamentary questions regarding private finance initiatives have been tabled since 1 January 2000; and in how many of these information was not provided on the grounds of commercial confidentiality. [31966]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions was formed on 8 June 2001. In the period 8 June 2001 to 30 January 2002, my Department responded to 191 parliamentary questions tabled about private finance initiatives and similar public private partnerships. Of these, five responses did not provide information on grounds of commercial confidentiality.

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the hon. Member for West Chelmsford can expect a reply to the letter he sent on 4 September 2001 from Mr. R. Black of the Chelmsford Area Access Group. [31688]

Ms Keeble: I wrote to the hon. Member on 29 January.

Speeding Signs (Bredhurst)

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when his Department will grant authorisation for the installation of interactive speeding signs in Bredhurst village, near Sittingbourne, Kent. [31693]

Ms Keeble: Kent county council as the Highway Authority has responsibility for the main roads, Forge Lane and The Street, that flow through Bredhurst village. KCC took part in a pilot scheme with the Transport Research Laboratory for testing interactive speeding signs and a programme for installation of an extended pilot scheme covering a further 15 signs has been agreed on. Bredhurst is not included in that extension.

Public Services

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to ensure that district authorities have the flexibility to fund and deliver high quality public services to local people which the Government have called for. [31302]

Mr. Raynsford: I can confirm that, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley) on 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 137, we have improved the terms of the minimum grant increase for 2002–03 guaranteed to shire district councils.

We have done this by introducing an alternative baseline for 2001–02, which, in effect, adjusts only for the transfers of service for which shire districts are responsible. In order to guarantee a minimum 2.3 per cent. increase for shire districts, we will give each district whichever increase is greater: 2.3 per cent. on the original fully adjusted baseline, or 2.3 per cent. on the alternative.

Districts will also benefit from the package of measures announced in the Local Government White Paper and designed to enable all councils to deliver improvements in public services. In particular, there are proposals to assist district councils to build their corporate capacity, encouragement for greater county and district collaboration, including in local PSAs, and additional freedoms which will be available to high performing districts in due course. Districts will also benefit from the deregulation proposals, the streamlining of best value and the move to a more proportionate approach to inspection.

Local Government Finance

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to ensure that the new grant formula that will replace SSA will be fairer and simpler and address the needs of all classes of authority. [31303]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government are working closely with local government to develop simpler and fairer grant formulae. We will consider the cases of all classes of authority in taking decisions on the new system.

Highways Agency

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the Highways Agency's Annual Report and Accounts for 2000–01 will be published; and what results it will report. [32979]

Mr. Jamieson: The Highways Agency 2000–01 annual report will be published today under the Exchequer and Audit Departments Act 1921. In the year, the agency met all but one of its eight ministerial targets, missing the final target by only a very narrow margin. The agency also managed its expenditure within its budget, resulting in a very small underspend of 0.6 per cent. A copy of the report will be placed in the House Library.

Merseyrail

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement about the Merseyrail passenger franchise. [33078]

Mr. Spellar: The Merseyrail franchise operates on a network of lines which are almost entirely separate, physically and operationally, from the rest of the national rail network. The current franchise expires in February 2003. Merseytravel (the Merseyside Passenger Transport Executive and Passenger Transport Authority) has brought forward proposals to take Merseyrail services outside the franchising process operated by the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA), leaving the way open for Merseytravel to offer a local concession (in effect, similar to a franchise) for these services. Having discussed the proposals in detail with both the SRA and Merseytravel I have it in mind to support this approach which will provide local control over this unique local network and will help bring much needed improvements for passengers.

I accordingly intend, after consultation, to seek the House's approval to an Order under the Railways Act 1993, which will enable the new arrangements to be given effect. In the meantime the SRA will continue to work with Merseytravel on the future of these services.

Listed Buildings

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what powers *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* English Heritage and *(c)* other agencies have to require owners of listed buildings to maintain their exterior appearance. [27636]

Dr. Howells: I have been asked to reply.

Local authorities and the Secretary of State have powers under section 48 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to require owners of listed buildings to carry out works which are considered to be reasonably necessary for the proper preservation of a listed building. Under section 54 of the Act, local authorities have powers to execute works which appear to be urgently necessary for the preservation of unoccupied listed buildings. The Secretary of State also has powers under section 54 of the Act to authorise English Heritage to carry out such repairs on her behalf. No other agencies have statutory powers concerning listed buildings.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Rural Communities

11. **Mr. Cameron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to support village shops, pubs and post offices in rural communities. [29547]

Alun Michael: Ensuring that people in rural areas have access to essential services such as village shops, pubs and post offices is a key theme of the Government's Rural White Paper strategy. Since we published the White Paper a year ago we have implemented a range of measures and provided extra funding to boost these basic services to rural communities. The details are provided in "England's Rural Future", which I published in December and placed in the Library of the House.

12. **Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what support is given by the European Commission to rural communities in disadvantaged areas of the UK. [29548]

Alun Michael: There are many ways in which this Government help support disadvantaged rural communities. Not all of them are European funded, but the European Commission finance the following programmes, with additional match funding from the Government:

The England Rural Development Programme which supports schemes to help and encourage farming, forestry and other rural businesses and communities to adapt to changing circumstances and to create a productive and sustainable rural economy.

Structural Funds (Objective 1) funding is available in certain areas (Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, Merseyside and South Yorkshire) to promote similar measures to the ERDP. However, because these areas are defined by the Commission as being of greater need, the rates of grant are slightly higher.

Leader+ assists local action groups (which could include farmers, rural villages, rural businesses, local authorities, parish councils and voluntary organisations) in improving the quality of life and economic prosperity in their area through innovative approaches to sustainable rural development.

A more extensive list of sources of funding—both European and domestic—together with advice for rural businesses and communities can be found in Annexe 1 of the Rural White Paper—"Our Countryside: the future, a fair deal for rural England", a copy of which is in the House of Commons Library.

Foot and Mouth

13. **Mr. Pope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many live sheep were exported from the UK in the last year for which figures are available before the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. [29549]

Mr. Morley: According to our computer system used to issue export health certificates, 2,282 breeding sheep, 627,566 fattening sheep and 2,590 slaughter sheep were certified for export from the UK during 2000. The computer system also shows that during the period 1 January to 20 February 2001, seven breeding sheep, 86,900 fattening sheep and 703 slaughter sheep were certified for export from the UK. The figures for sheep exported from Northern Ireland to Ireland are not available.

These figures may be subject to updating and amendment.

33. **Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the losses incurred by farmers through the OTMS due to restrictions on movements during the foot and mouth epidemic. [29570]

Mr. Morley: The over-30-months scheme (OTMS) delivers some £240 million per annum in payments to beef and dairy farmers. Farmers will have incurred losses arising from additional costs of keeping cattle, delays in sales receipts and, any differences between prices actually received and those which would otherwise have been obtained. However, there are no statistics available to identify the number of cattle that entered the OTMS scheme as a result of movement restrictions and therefore it is not possible to quantify any losses.

Refrigerators and Freezers (Recycling)

14. **Mr. Randall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the recycling of refrigerators and freezers. [29550]

Mr. Meacher: There are number of options for dealing with waste fridges that are already in place, including re-use, export within Europe, high temperature incineration and storage. Investors are in the process of providing a network of new recycling facilities in the United Kingdom. I understand that the first new facilities are likely to be operational in the spring.

23. **Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the development of new recycling plants for refrigerators and freezers. [29559]

Mr. Meacher: Investors are in the process of providing a network of new recycling facilities in the United Kingdom. I understand that the first new facilities are likely to be operational in the spring.

River Severn

15. **Mr. Michael Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the implications of climate change upon the risk of flooding of the River Severn. [29551]

Mr. Morley: In 1995 MAFF sponsored research at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, which considered the impact of climate and land use change on the Severn and Thames river basins. This was used as the basis for subsequent national guidance published in 2000. The Environment Agency is currently carrying out further studies to develop a strategy for the Severn and a Catchment Flood Management Plan, both of which will give further consideration to the potential impacts of climate change.

Energy Efficiency

16. **John Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Government's plans for improving energy efficiency. [29552]

Mr. Meacher: The Government are committed to the importance of energy efficiency as a highly cost-effective way of achieving our climate change goals, for example through the climate change agreements, the energy efficiency commitment, our forthcoming CHP Strategy, and our support of the Carbon Trust and Energy Saving Trust. We recognise that a great unrealised potential still remains and the Department will develop new strategies for realising this in the future.

Recycling

17. **Mr. Lazarowicz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to promote Europea-wide measures to encourage recycling. [29553]

Mr. Meacher: The Government support the Common Position on the Sixth Environmental Action Programme, which calls on the Commission to develop thematic strategies on the sustainable use and management of resources and on waste recycling. This will include measures aimed at ensuring the collection and recycling of priority waste streams.

Air Quality

18. **Siobhain McDonagh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress has been made by her Department on improving air quality since 1997. [29554]

Mr. Meacher: Good progress has been made since 1997 in improving urban air quality in the UK, although we still need to do more if we are to achieve all of the objectives in our Air Quality Strategy. The improvements are, in large part, the result of the actions we have taken to reduce emissions from road transport and industry.

EU Enlargement (Poland)

19. **Joyce Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent contact she has had with her Polish counterparts regarding the agricultural chapter of Poland's EU enlargement application. [29555]

Margaret Beckett: I visited Poland on 13 and 14 January and had one-to-one meetings with the Agriculture Minister and the Environment Minister. I encouraged Poland to play an active and constructive part in preparing itself for EU membership, congratulated the Government on reaching a conclusion on the environment chapter and stressed the importance of maintaining the implementation and enforcement programme.

Combined Heat and Power

20. **Mr. Gareth R. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she is taking to encourage the development of new sources of CHP. [29556]

Mr. Meacher: The Department is developing, in close collaboration with DTI and other Departments, a draft CHP strategy, which will set out the measures needed to achieve the CHP target of at least 10,000 mega watts of Good Quality CHP by 2010. We aim to issue the Strategy for consultation shortly.

Rural Pubs

21. **Mr. Grogan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she is taking to support rural pubs. [29557]

Alun Michael: Public houses can act as important community assets in rural areas, sometimes offering a range of products and essential services to the local community. Since we published the Rural White Paper a year ago we have implemented a range of measures and provided extra funding to support rural pubs and other village services. Through the Countryside Agency we encourage mutual support between various services in rural areas—including post offices, village halls, local shops and pubs—to help improve their chances of remaining viable.

Live Animal Transport

22. **Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she proposes to take to reduce the length of journeys of livestock to slaughter. [29558]

Mr. Morley: This is a matter that will be considered when the European Commission produces its proposals for changes to the present EU rules on the protection of animals during transport.

Organic Food

24. **Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on Government policy towards the production of organic food for children. [29560]

Mr. Morley: We wish to secure the success of organic farming and will be looking at all aspects of the organic food market in the organics action plan which I have announced.

36. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the proportion of organically produced food consumed in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* other EU countries which is imported; and if she will make a statement. [29573]

Mr. Morley: UK producers' share of the organic market varies widely between different products but it is estimated that overall imports account for about 70 to 80 per cent. of the value of organic food sold in the UK. We do not have information on the position in other EU countries.

The relatively low overall share of the organic market supplied by UK producers is one of the issues to be addressed in the action plan for organic farming announced at the end of last year.

Albert Owen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will outline the subsidies available to encourage farmers to become organic farmers; and what subsidies are available in other EU member states. [29349]

Mr. Morley: Under the England Rural Development Programme, support is granted over five years at varying amounts depending on the type of land for conversion to organic farming. Total payments over five years range from £50 to £450 per hectare. In addition, farmers are offered three lump sum payments totally £600 towards the cost of training.

The Organic Conversion Information Service provides free on-farm advice to prospective organic farmers to assist them to evaluate suitability of their farms for organic production methods.

Information about support in other member states of the Community is available at www.organic-europe.net

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what *(a)* regional and *(b)* local strategies her Department is pursuing to inform consumers about the availability of organic produce; and if she will make a statement; [31074]

(2) what she is doing to promote the use of organic food produce among other Government Departments; and if she will make a statement. [31073]

Mr. Morley: We have already made considerable support available to encourage conversion to organic farming, which has increased the quantities of UK organic produce available. The Action Plan for organic farming, which we will be developing with stakeholders in the light of the recommendations of the Policy Commission, will address all aspects of the organic food market.

Genetically Modified Crops

25. **Joan Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures will be taken this year to consult local communities over the locations of farm scale evaluations of GM crops. [29561]

Mr. Meacher: The Department will announce the proposed sites for the spring 2002 farm scale evaluations six weeks before the first seeds will be sown, to allow people more time to find out about the FSEs in their area. Advice and information will be provided to all relevant councils. Farmers participating in the evaluations have been encouraged to discuss their plans with their neighbours.

Industrial Action

26. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the industrial action in her Department. [29562]

Mr. Morley: The current industrial action by staff in the Department who are members of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) began on 20 August 2001. Since that date 16,201 working days have been lost due to strike action.

A revised pay offer was made on 10 January 2002 and the PCS suspended all industrial action on 11 January. Negotiations are continuing with a view to an early settlement.

New Electricity Trading Arrangements

27. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received on the operations of NETA in relation to *(a)* CHP and *(b)* renewables. [29563]

Mr. Meacher: NETA is a matter for Ofgem and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. I have met the CHP industry, including the Combined Heat and Power Association on a number of occasions, and at these meetings have heard first hand the effect NETA is having on CHP generators. I have not received representations on the operation of NETA in relation to renewables.

Parrett Catchment Project

28. **Mr. Heath:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the Parrett Catchment Project. [29564]

Mr. Morley: I welcome the holistic view taken in this study which has involved creation of an effective local partnership and identified a number of options for future flood management. DEFRA stands ready to help in any way we can within the terms and conditions of the relevant support schemes. Funding has been allocated to the Environment Agency for the development of a Catchment Flood Management Plan (one of five national pilot plans) to determine the most effective approaches to flood risk management for this complex catchment.

Rural Post Offices

29. **Mr. Tyler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the state of sub-post offices in rural areas; and if she will make a statement. [29565]

Alun Michael: The Countryside Agency has investigated the provision of post offices in its triennial surveys of service provision in rural areas. The agency's

Rural Services Survey 2000 reported a continued decline in post offices. 93.5 per cent. of rural households live within 2 km (1.25 miles) of a post office, between 1997 and 2000 546 rural post offices closed. A range of initiatives have been introduced by Post Office Ltd. to prevent avoidable closures in rural areas, while initiatives from the Countryside Agency include encouraging mutual support between post office and other services to help improve their chances of remaining viable.

Landfill Tax

30. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what role her Department is playing in the review of the landfill tax credit scheme; and what her objectives are for the review. [29567]

Mr. Meacher: In the pre-Budget report the Government stated that they were attracted to replacing all or part of the LTCS with a public spending programme to direct resources towards Government priorities on sustainable waste management. The Government are soon to consult on the future of the scheme and the Department is one of those helping to develop that consultation paper.

Sellafield

31. **Mr. Stunell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on what assessments have been conducted of the potential *(a)* environmental, *(b)* economic and *(c)* social impacts of the manufacture of MOX fuel at Sellafield. [29568]

Margaret Beckett: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and I announced on 3 October 2001 that we had decided that the manufacture of MOX fuel is "justified" under the terms of the Euratom basic safety standards directive. The decision document which we issued on that day dealt with these and other relevant issues, and referred to earlier work in particular that undertaken by the Environment Agency, PA Consulting and A. D. Little.

A copy of the decision document is in the Library of the House.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

32. **Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what targets she has set for carbon dioxide reduction in the next five years. [29569]

Mr. Meacher: No targets have been set for carbon dioxide reduction over the next five years. Under the Kyoto Protocol, the UK has a target to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 12.5 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2008–12. The Government have an additional domestic goal to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 20 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010. The UK's climate change programme, published in November 2000, sets out a range of policies and measures that we estimate could reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 23 per cent. by 2010. The programme will be monitored and evaluated at regular intervals, including a formal review in 2004–05.

English Canal System

34. **Michael Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will next meet the board of British Waterways to discuss the extension of the English canal system; and if she will make a statement. [29571]

Mr. Morley: I have no plans at present to visit the board of British Waterways to discuss the extension of the canal system, but my noble Friend Lord Whitty has regular meetings with British Waterways. We are aware of a number of proposals in the pipeline and look forward to discussing them with British Waterways at the appropriate time.

Waste Management Strategy

35. **Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on progress towards meeting the targets of the Government's Waste Management Strategy (2000) and progress since the waste summit. [29572]

Mr. Meacher: Since launching the national waste strategy in May 2000, the Government have set demanding statutory targets for the recycling and composting of household waste for each local authority, increased the landfill tax and consulted on a system of tradable landfill permits in order to achieve the diversion from landfill required. It has also set up the Waste and Resources Action Programme to help create stable and efficient markets for recycled materials and products, with funding from the Government and the devolved Administrations of around £40 million over three years.

Following the waste summit held on 21 November, which considered what more needs to be done to ensure effective delivery of the strategy, the Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU) have begun their study to review Waste Strategy 2000. The study is assessing what extra instruments, changes to targets or regulations, or additional funding may be required to ensure that the strategy is delivered effectively and that we are able to develop more sustainable waste management.

The PIU will be consulting with key stakeholders through the study. Further details about the study are available on the PIU website at www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/innovation.

Electronic Livestock Markets

37. **Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessments she has made of the effect on animal welfare and transport costs of the use of electronic livestock markets during the foot and mouth epidemic. [29574]

Mr. Morley: We have no information on animals traded as a results of electronic livestock markets but the welfare of such animals and the related transport costs would be the responsibility of the parties involved. Electronic markets do have the potential to reduce animal movements with the benefits of welfare and cost.

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Farm Incomes

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on farm incomes. [33079]

Mr. Morley: Revised estimates of farm income, output and productivity of agriculture during 2001 were published on 31 January. These confirm the increase in farm incomes forecast last November and indicate a modest rise of 13 per cent. (11 per cent. in real terms).

This increase is due to improved prices leading to higher values of output for milk, potatoes and horticulture outweighing lower values of output for cereals and livestock. Incomes are forecast to show a further rise in 2002 as the volume of cereal production returns to more normal levels and the industry starts to recover from the effects of FMD.

Details have been placed in the Library of the House.

Bovine TB

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what additional control measures have been introduced to control the possible spread of bovine TB after the foot and mouth disease outbreak. [33076]

Mr. Morley: I am announcing today the introduction of TB movement restrictions on certain herds with overdue TB tests. The herds affected are those in annual test frequency parishes that have missed the six and 12 month tests carried out after the lifting of movement restrictions put in place after an earlier TB incident. A veterinary risk assessment has shown that these have been historically more at risk of being infected with TB than herds with other types of TB test. The measure is expected to affect up to 1,250 herds mainly in the south and west of England.

In addition we are introducing additional checks on herds that have been reformed after FMD. These herds will be TB tested at 12 and 24 months after the normal TB check test at three months after restocking.

Registration Fees (Merchants and Saddlers)

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the fees to be paid by merchants and saddlers for registration in 2002–03 with the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain under the Medicines (Exemptions for Merchants in Veterinary Drugs) Order 1998 have yet been determined. [33077]

Mr. Morley: Yes. With the consent of the Treasury, the schedule of fees for registration, retention and restoration have been determined. This is given in the table as follows:

Fees

£

Application in respect of each premises	*Previous*	*New*
Agricultural merchants		
1. For registration under Article 5	224	224
2. For retention of registration under Article 5	133	140
3. For restoration of registration under Article 5	190	190
Saddlers		
1. For registration under Article 5	127	127
2. For retention of registration under Article 5	78	76
3. For restoration of registration under Article 5	107	107

Rural Enterprise Scheme

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the annual administration costs of the Rural Enterprise Scheme are. [30647]

Margaret Beckett: The Rural Enterprise Scheme (RES) is one of the new grant schemes in the England Rural Development Programme which was launched in October 2000. It is delivered on a regional basis by DEFRA's Rural Development Service (RDS). Expenditure on the development and administration of the scheme in 2001–02 was forecast to be around £2 million. The final outturn figure is likely to be lower because a significant number of RDS staff were diverted temporarily on to foot and mouth disease work.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many bids have been received by the Rural Enterprise Scheme since it began; what *(a)* the aggregate value of bids, *(b)* the number of successful bids and *(c)* their aggregate value was; and if she will make a statement. [30648]

Margaret Beckett: Between October 2000, when the Rural Enterprise Scheme was launched, and the end of December 2001, 867 applications were received. The aggregate value of applications (ie grant sought) is some £54 million. Of the total number of applications received, 207 applications have been successful, with an aggregate value of £5.6 million in grant. A further 346 applications are currently being processed.

Zoos

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1171W, on zoos, how many zoos failed to meet required standards in *(a)* health and safety and *(b)* animal welfare requirements in each year since 1990 for which figures are available. [31967]

Mr. Morley: The information is not held centrally. The administration of both the Zoo Licensing Act 1981 and the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 falls to local authorities, and there is no requirement for them to report this information to central Government.

Environmental Appraisal

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many officials from her Department have attended the environmental appraisal and integration into policy training course run by the civil service college; [28993]

(2) when the last occasion was on which she requested an environmental appraisal before making a policy decision; [28990]

(3) how many environmental appraisals have been published by her Department since 1 January 2001; and if she will list the last four; [28989]

(4) what plans her Department has to appraise the environmental implications of its Spending Review submission to the Treasury; [28992]

(5) what procedures her Department has to ensure environmental appraisals are undertaken prior to *(a)* administrative and *(b)* policy decisions being made. [28991]

Margaret Beckett: As my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment indicated in his answer to the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) on 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 610W, my Department has published two free-standing environmental appraisals since its creation in June 2001. These are: an economic analysis to inform the review of the Air Quality Strategy Objectives for particles, September 2001, and the UK Emissions Trading Scheme, August 2001.

The need to show any significant costs and benefits to the environment of all major policy proposals is a Cabinet Committee requirement. To this end, my Department is responsible for the cross-Government guidance, "Policy Appraisal and the Environment", which gives advice to Departments on how and when to carry out environmental appraisal. This guidance is incorporated in the Policy Makers' Checklist published by the Cabinet Office to improve policy making within government and I would expect the requirements of environmental appraisal to have been met, as appropriate, by the time major policy proposals are put to me, or other DEFRA Ministers, for decision.

No officials from my Department attended the one environmental appraisal and integration into policy training course which the college has held since June 2001—although my officials regularly provide advice and speakers to the college for the course.

All the proposals that will make up the Department's Spending Review submission to the Treasury are being considered against the 15 headline indicators of sustainable development. Those proposals that are likely to have a significant impact in terms of sustainable development are being subjected to an integrated policy appraisal.

Water Services

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many invoices for the provision of water services have not been paid for over one year; what their total value is; what the same figures were in each of the last four years; and if she will make a statement. [30116]

Margaret Beckett: The Office of Water Services have centrally gathered data on debt from water and sewerage companies only in respect of the years since 1998–99, and only for households. The number of households in England and Wales who had debt outstanding for over a year and the total value of that debt was as follows:

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Number of households with debt outstanding for more than one year	1,308.176	1,409,497	1,581,620
Household debts outstanding for more than one year	[1]289	[1]326	[1]362

[1] £ million

Note:

2000–01 prices: excluding debt outstanding for more than 48 months

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what studies her Department has completed on the impact of cross-subsidy in the water industry; and what future studies are planned; [31510]

(2) what assessment she has made of the impact of the ending of the cross-subsidy on the delivery of water services for rural customers; [31508]

(3) what measures she plans to take to protect *(a)* rural customers and *(b)* those on low incomes from the impact of the ending of cross-subsidy in the water industry. [31504]

Mr. Meacher: Following my announcement to the House on 30 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 831W, the Department has been examining in further detail the scope for extending competition in the water industry. This work includes careful consideration of the implications for all customers, including those in rural areas and on low incomes, and the possible effects on existing cross subsidies. DEFRA will be publishing a consultation paper, setting out the issues and proposals later this year.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will list the *(a)* quantities, *(b)* radioactive components and *(c)* location of intermediate and high level waste in the UK in the last 12 months; [25887]

(2) if she will make a statement on her policy on the long-term management of the UK's nuclear waste. [25892]

Mr. Meacher: By the end of the century there will be half a million tonnes of radioactive waste. Some of it will be potentially dangerous for hundreds of thousands of years. Deciding the best way to manage it is one of the greatest environmental challenges we have ever faced. The Government and the devolved Administrations published the consultation paper "Managing radioactive waste safely" on 12 September. We propose a programme of national debate and research, leading to scientifically sound decisions on the long-term management of radioactive waste which inspire public confidence across the UK. In the meantime radioactive waste is safely stored, and rigorously controlled by regulators including the Health and Safety Executive and the Environment Agency.

I gave further details of our policy in oral evidence to the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs inquiry into radioactive waste management at its hearing on 17 December. The consultation closes on 12 March and we hope that people all over the UK will let us have their views.

Information on the quantity, radioactive components and location of high, intermediate and low level radioactive waste in the UK is published in the "United Kingdom radioactive waste inventory". A copy of the most recent inventory, for 1998, was placed in the Library of the House and I have sent a copy on CD to the hon. Member. The latest inventory, for 2001, is being completed by Electrowatt-Ekono (UK) under contract to my Department and to UK Nirex Ltd., and will be published later this year. I shall place a copy in the Library.

Data have not been collected in such a way as to give the quantities of intermediate and high level waste produced in the last 12 months. However, the 1998 inventory gives the total likely arising of the wastes (when expressed in conditioned form) over the 10-year period 2000–09 as 30,815 and 799 cubic metres respectively. Assuming a uniform rate of arising, then the arisings of high and intermediate level waste in the last 12 months would have been about 3,100 and 80 cubic metres respectively. Intermediate level waste is produced at locations too numerous to list; they are predominantly nuclear licensed sites but also include many hospitals and small users of radioactive sources. High level waste is only produced at Sellafield.

Parish and Town Councils

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the policy initiatives her Department, or its predecessor Departments have made since 1997 which affect parish and town councils. [27663]

Alun Michael: The Government set out a number of policy initiatives to support parish and town councils in the Rural White Paper, published in November 2000. The main measures to help parish and town councils develop a new role and give communities the opportunity to shape their future have now been put in place. These are:

the Community Service Grants scheme, providing £15 million (over three years) to help maintain or introduce services which are local priorities;

the £15 million (over three years) Parish Transport Grants scheme for small scale projects to meet local needs;

£5 million (over three years) to help up to 1,000 parishes draw up their own town or village plans to set out local needs and aspirations.

the national training and support strategy for parish and town councils published by the Countryside Agency and the National Association of Local Councils, to which we have allocated £2 million;

detailed proposals for putting the quality parish and town councils concept into practice, set out in a consultation paper published in November.

The Department is also responsible for the £32.5 million Leader+ European Community Initiative, which can be expected to benefit the parish and town councils involved in the 24 Local Action Groups approved by the Secretary of State.

In addition, the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions continues to take the lead on a number of policy areas and initiatives inherited from the former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, which directly affect parish and town councils. These include:

the creation of over 80 new parishes since 1997:

the local government White Paper "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services", published in December which contains a chapter on "the way forward for parishes". This sets out how the Government will work to make the financial arrangements for parishes more responsive to their needs and aspirations—and those who use and pay for the services they provide;

the inclusion of parish and town councils with annual budgeted income of over £500,000 (in the years 1997–98 to 1999–2000) within the Best Value regime:

a Statutory Instrument passed to increase the threshold above which a parish or town council is required to prepare income and expenditure accounts from £5,000 to £50,000; and

parish councils are also included within the new ethical framework—the main elements of which are now in place. This framework includes a code of conduct which all parish councillors must sign up to and a new independent body, the Standards Board, which will investigate breaches of this code.

Waste Composting

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to regulate emissions of bioaerosols arising from waste composting schemes. [29613]

Margaret Beckett: Waste composting activities, including the emissions of bioaerosols from waste composting schemes, are regulated by the controls contained in Part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Waste Management Licensing Regulations 1994. Waste composting activities must be licensed with the Environment Agency or operate under a registered exemption, and must be carried out in a way which does not harm the environment or human health. Under the 1990 Act, the Environment Agency are required to monitor waste sites, and carry out periodic inspections of waste composting schemes.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the role of waste composting schemes in meeting the Government's target for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. [29610]

Margaret Beckett: The Government have set out their policies for meeting their greenhouse gas reduction targets in the UK Climate Change Programme, copies of which are available in House Libraries. Waste disposal—principally landfill—is the second largest source of methane in the UK.

The EU landfill directive requires a progressive reduction in the amount of biodegradable municipal waste going to landfill. The Government and the National Assembly have set challenging targets in "Waste Strategy 2000" to recycle or compost at least 25 per cent. of household waste by 2005, rising to 33 per cent. by 2015. These measures—together with energy recovery schemes at landfill sites—are projected to reduce methane emissions from the waste disposal sector to 65 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if proposals for new waste composting schemes will require an environmental impact assessment. [29619]

Margaret Beckett: Waste composting schemes are not referred to specifically in the list of projects subject to environmental impact assessment, as set out in Directive 85/337/EEC as amended, but could be subject to EIA as part of a wider project. The position in relation to the EIA regulations would depend on the circumstances in each case and would be considered by local planning authorities where projects were subject to the planning legislation.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what studies have been undertaken by the Environment Agency into the dispersion and dispersion mechanisms of bioaerosols arising from the composting of waste; and if she will make a statement; [29612]

(2) what assessment she has made of the level of emissions of bioaerosols arising from the composting of waste; [29611]

(3) if she will list her targets for the composting of waste for *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* each of the next five years. [29614]

Margaret Beckett: The Government's waste strategy sets national targets to recycle or compost at least 25 per cent. of household waste by 2005, at least 30 per cent. by 2010 and at least 33 per cent. by 2015. Annual composting targets have not been set for 2002 or the following five years, but statutory performance standards for household waste recycling and composting have been set for each local authority under the Best Value process for 2003–04 and 2005–06. The achievement of these will deliver the first of the national targets in 2005.

Greenhouse Gases

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is towards reducing the level of methane emissions. [29620]

Margaret Beckett: The Government's policy for reducing methane emissions are set out in the UK's Climate Change Programme, copies of which are in the House Libraries. A range of policies has been introduced which is leading to reductions in methane emissions. A key policy is the increased collection of landfill gas for use as energy, an important aspect of the Waste Strategy and the EU landfill directive. Emissions are also falling from other sources including the agricultural sector, coal mines and the natural gas distribution network. Methane emissions are currently projected to fall by about 45 per cent. below 1990 levels in 2010.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage reduction target from the 1990 baseline she has set for each of the greenhouse gases. [29615]

Margaret Beckett: Under the Kyoto Protocol, the UK has a target to reduce emissions of a basket of six greenhouse gases by 12.5 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2008–12. The six gases are carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons and sulphur hexafluoride. The Government have an additional domestic goal to reduce their carbon dioxide emissions by 20 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010. Further targets have not been set for the other greenhouse gases. The UK's climate change programme, published in November 2000, sets out a range of policies and measures that we estimate could reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 23 per cent. by 2010.

Transported Food

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the average number of food miles travelled by food consumed in the UK. [29622]

Margaret Beckett: The Continuing Survey of Roads Goods Transport recorded that UK registered HGVs transported food, animal feed and drink (totalling 354 million tonnes) a total distance of 4,437 million kilometres within the UK at an average length of haul of 128 kilometres. Such vehicles account for around 95 per cent. of all freight moved by road. This includes the domestic part of any trips that start or end in a foreign country, and excludes food, feed and drink transported by foreign-registered HGVs. In terms of freight movement (ie weight of goods multiplied by distance travelled) this represents 45 billion tonne-kilometres.

There are no official statistics available on the distance travelled by imported food, feed and drink up to the point of entry into the UK. However an academic study[1] carried out in 1996 estimated that UK imports of food products and animal feed involved transportation by sea, air and road of around 83 billion tonne-kilometres.

[1] Cowell, S. And R. Clift, 1996. Farming for the Future: an environmental perspective. Paper presented at the Royal Agricultural Society of the Commonwealth, July 1996.

Domestic Game Industry

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department is taking to support the domestic game industry; and if she will make a statement. [31204]

Mr. Morley: The only sizeable farmed game industry in the UK is the deer (venison) industry. In the main, Government help for that industry has come in the form of funding R&D. The Government have funded deer related projects since 1988, the most recent being a three year project, costing £178,000, looking at low input systems for venison production. For the future, R&D in the deer sector is likely to concentrate on sustainability and the comparative environmental cost of farming deer.

Deer farming has also benefited from grants under the Agriculture Development Scheme, aimed mainly at developing assurance schemes in this sector.

Water Framework and Nitrates Directives

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the reasons for signing the Water Framework Directive. [31179]

Mr. Meacher: The UK played a leading role in drafting many aspects of the Water Framework Directive during and after its presidency of the European Union 1998. The directive will help ensure protection and improvement of our inland and coastal waters for the benefit of generations to come, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

The Directive introduces a common approach to environmental objectives for all groundwaters and surface waters within the Community as well as a common implementation method, based around the principle of river basin management.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the differences are between current methodology employed to map nitrate vulnerable zones and that used when nitrate vulnerable zones were designated in 1996. [31177]

Mr. Meacher: Identification of discrete area nitrate vulnerable zones as presented under Option 2 of the current consultation paper "How should England implement the 1991 Nitrates Directive?", published on 20 December 2001, has required assessments of the status of several different types of water bodies.

For surface waters, the primary differences between current and past methodology are that the proposed designations are the result of the application of a more robust statistical methodology used to assess nitrate concentrations, coupled with the use of a more extensive water quality sampling network. Following the European Court of Justice (ECJ) judgment in 2000 that we failed to fully implement the nitrates directive, we were required to cover all waters, not just those used for drinking water supplies. The entire Environment Agency GQA monitoring network is now used. Statistical assessments of nitrate concentrations have been based on a minimum of five years of data, compared to a single year of data in the past. For the first time, trend-analysis has also been used to cover the requirement to protect those waters which may be subject to unacceptably high nitrate pollution in the future.

For groundwaters, the 1996 designations of groundwater NVZs were based on monitoring data taken from Public Water Supply boreholes and delineated by groundwater catchments. Following the ECJ judgment, we were required to ensure that the new methodology identifies all groundwater vulnerable to agriculturally-derived nitrate and not just the catchments (zones of contribution) for Public Supply Wells. This was accomplished by combining a statistical assessment of groundwater data with a groundwater vulnerability model derived from an examination of the risk factors associated with land use, rainfall, soil and geological characteristics. The spatial distribution of nitrate values from the monitoring network was used in conjunction with the vulnerability map to define nitrate vulnerable zones.

The nitrates directive also requires designation of nitrate vulnerable zones draining into estuarine areas which have been adjudged to be eutrophic and where a significant proportion of nitrogen arises from diffuse agricultural sources. Such areas are identified in England under the proposals for Option 2 for the first time.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the overlap between the water framework and nitrates directives. [31180]

Mr. Meacher: Measures required under the nitrates directive are also "basic" measures which must be included in "programmes of measures" under article 11 of the water framework directive. These programmes of measures have to be published in draft by December 2008 as part of proposed comprehensive River Basin Management Plans.

Action required under the nitrates directive will also therefore contribute to meeting environmental objectives set by the water framework directive. These objectives are due to be met by 2015.

DEFRA published a consultation document on 20 December 2001 setting out options for implementing the nitrates directive, in order to comply with a European Court of Justice judgment issued in December 2000. These proposals would apply measures required under the nitrates directive in new areas from 19 December 2002.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason the methodology for mapping groundwaters in relation to proposed nitrate vulnerable zones has been changed from that applied on nitrate vulnerable zones designated in 1996. [31178]

Mr. Meacher: Identification and designation of groundwater nitrate vulnerable zones (NVZs) in 1996 was based on monitoring data from Public Water Supply boreholes. Following the European Court of Justice judgment that we have failed to fully implement the nitrates directive, we were required to extend the methodology to cover all groundwaters, not just drinking water supplies. The Environment Agency therefore used in addition to all available private borehole monitoring data and developed a modelling methodology, calibrated to best fit available borehole monitoring data, to identify vulnerable groundwaters. Further details are in Annexe A of the current consultation document "How should England implement the 1991 Nitrates Directive?" (PB6269) published on 20 December 2001.

Animal Movement Licences

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact on livestock farmers who have imminent markets for animals of her Department's changes to the procedure for the issuing of movement orders by trading standards office; for what reasons the change requiring movement orders to be despatched by post was made; and what consultations were made with farmers and representative organisations prior to the change being introduced. [31511]

Mr. Morley: Guidance issued by DEFRA to local authority trading standard departments has not changed. It has consistently advised that licences should only be issued in hard copy form with faxed copies only being used in exceptional circumstances.

Rural Payments

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with HM Treasury on match funding for European Union agri-environment scheme subsidies; what steps she has taken to press for the introduction of modulation of direct compensation payments to farmers as part of the 2003 mid-term review of the common agricultural policy; and if she will make a statement. [31513]

Alun Michael: The funding arrangements for the agri-environment schemes under the England Rural Development Programme, including the match funding for European Union funds, were confirmed under the

Spending Review 2000. Levels of funding will be considered as part of the Spending Review 2002. Part of the European Union funding is derived from modulation of direct compensation payments.

Government are currently engaged in informal discussions with like-minded member states on various aspects of the 2003 mid-term review of the Agenda 2000 common agricultural policy reforms. Those discussions include mechanisms for switching funds from the first to the second pillar of the common agricultural policy.

Cameraria Ohridella

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the spread of Cameraria ohridella in Europe; and if she has assessed the potential impact on the UK. [30955]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) on 25 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 362W.

Elvaston Landfill Site

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs further to her answer of 5 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 398W, on Elvaston landfill site, what actions the agency has taken on the operator's proposed plans; and what steps are being taken to inform residents of progress. [31065]

Mr. Meacher: A public meeting was held on 11 December 2001 where the proposals for work on the site were explained. The public had an opportunity to put questions to representatives of the various organisations with an interest in the activities at the site including Biffa, the Environment Agency and the local and county authorities. Newsletters are being sent to the residents and businesses in the area when new information regarding the site is available.

The Environment Agency continues to review and seek any necessary improvements to the operator's proposed plan for the site. The agency report that progress is being made on the site in working towards reducing leachate levels. 10 pumps are operational on site to remove leachate from the cells. This is either going via sewer, for the less concentrated sources, or via collection by tanker—for treatment at an appropriate facility—for the strong leachate. Improvements on the gas collection system and capping of the cell area which appeared to be causing many of the odour problems is progressing well and according to the operator should be complete by the end of February.

Eaga Partnership Ltd

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the number of complaints he has received about the operations of Eaga. [28287]

Mr. Meacher: The Government's main programme for tackling fuel poverty in the private sector in England is the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES), now marketed as The Warm Front Team. The scheme is administered by two scheme managers, TXU Warm Front Ltd. (eastern, east midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber) and Eaga Partnership Ltd. (the rest of England).

Over 250,000 householders have been assisted since the launch of the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES) on 1 June 2000. The number of complaints received by my Department since that date concerning Eaga Partnership's three regions is 330 or 0.1 per cent of work completed. A significant number of the complaints received relate to customer service issues and heating delays.

Industrial Action (IACS Payments)

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the industrial action being carried out by staff employed at her Department's regional offices; what assessment she has made of the impact of delays in IACS and ESA payments on individual farm cashflow; and if she will take measures to ensure that farm claimants receive interest on all payment amounts delayed by industrial action. [29088]

Mr. Morley: The RPA expects to be able to pay the vast majority of IACS and ESA claims within the regulatory timeframe. However, because of the processing time that has been lost due to industrial action (which was suspended on 11 January), it is likely that more claims than usual will be carried over into February. Every effort will be made to keep these to the absolute minimum. When she met the British Banking Association in November the Secretary of State sought their understanding for the effect which payment delays would have on the cash flow of their farming customers.

The extent to which any claimants might be entitled to compensation for delays in their payments will be considered in the light of the circumstances at the time.

Home Heating

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many applications for the installation of heating equipment have been made to the Eaga Partnership in each of the last three years; how many have been successful; what the average waiting time was; how many homes have had to wait more than nine months for such works to be undertaken; and if she will make a statement. [24956]

Mr. Meacher: The Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES), now marketed as The Warm Front Team, is administered in three of the four English regions by Eaga Partnership Ltd. (London and south-east; south-west and west midlands and north-west and north-east).

Heating was made available from the launch of the redesigned scheme on 1 June 2000. The previous scheme, which had run from 1991, provided one main insulation measure only. Hence the information provided in the table relates to the new scheme.

The package of heating and insulation measures to be installed is not known until a HEES surveyor has visited the client's home and an assessment has been made of the measures already in place.

	Number
Applications received	419,000
Eligible applications received	[1]336,000
Applications where gas central heating has been recommended	81,300
Successful applications for gas central heating	[2]79,500
Current average waiting time to install a new gas central heating system (days)	[3]180
Homes that have waited more than 9 months for a new gas central heating system	6,600

[1] It is not possible to identify the package of the measures to be installed in a client's home until the HEES surveyor has visited the property. This assessment takes into account the measures already installed.

[2] It is not possible to identify why the client decided not to proceed with the HEES surveyor's recommendations.

[3] Days measured from date of call with respect of telephone applications, from date of receipt in case of postal applications or from date of e-mail. There is usually a period of 1–8 weeks between the date of actual installation and the receipt of the invoice from installers.

Since the launch of the scheme on 1 June 2000 Eaga Partnership's contractors have installed 25,000 new gas-fired central heating systems. The majority of householders who have waited over nine months were those who applied to the scheme when it was first launched.

The national shortage of gas heating engineers has led to severe delays in some areas in the installation and repair of central heating systems. Over the last 12 months Eaga has increased its heating installer base from 30 to 130 companies. Already this is paying dividends with the number of installations rising to 1,000 in January 2001 compared to 3,500 in December 2001.

Special Advisers

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many complaints have been reported in her Department under paragraph 11 of the Civil Service Code since 13 May 1999, and how many of them related to special advisers. [25334]

Mr. Morley: The procedures for making complaints under the Civil Service Code are set in the Department's staff handbook. Civil servants are encouraged, in the first instance, to raise complaints made under paragraph 11 of the Civil Service Code with their line manager. If for any reason this is not felt to be possible, perhaps because the line manager is part of the complaint, individuals may take their complaint to a nominated official (or officials). It is not possible to provide a comprehensive figure for the number of complaints made within this Department under paragraph 11 of the code as there is no requirement for managers to report to the centre details of complaints made under the Civil Service Code which are resolved within the management line. However, no such complaints have been reported to the centre of the Department during the period in question.

Correspondence

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter of the hon. Member for West Derbyshire of 8 November concerning the actions of the Rural Payments Agency relating to a transfer of quota units. [30039]

Mr. Morley: A response to the hon. Member's letter of 8 November was sent on 9 January 2002.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many waste incineration plants there were in the Buckingham constituency in each of the last five years; [30051]

(2) how many landfill sites there were in the Buckingham constituency in each of the last five years. [30063]

Mr. Meacher: The information is as follows:

Landfill Sites

The following totals are for open and operational landfill sites in the Buckingham constituency.

	Number
1997	6
1998	6
1999	[1]6
2000	5
2001	5

[1] Five from May 1999 onwards

Waste Incineration

There were no waste incineration plants in the Buckingham constituency in each of the last five years.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Education

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent negotiations have taken place involving the World bank to increase the amount of aid going on education to help developing countries reach their "Education for All" goals; and if she will make a statement. [31145]

Clare Short: At its spring meeting in April the World bank will submit a paper on achieving the millennium development goal of universal primary education by 2015. This will analyse progress to date since the Dakar Forum and lessons learned, examine the costs of meeting this goal and make recommendations for obtaining the additional financing required. We are consulting the bank about the preparation of this paper.

The World bank has a critical role in supporting countries as they seek to give priority to education, and primary education in particular, within the overall context of their poverty reduction strategies. We have not yet seen increased bank funding in support of "Education for All" since Dakar. We hope that at the spring meeting, bank governors will deliver a strong message in support of greater bank effort in education. We believe the bank, together with other international development banks and development agencies, should increase the resources committed to helping reforming government deliver universal primary education.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action is being taken to encourage the provision of education in developing countries, and if she will make a statement. [31352]

Clare Short: The Government give priority to helping poor countries develop sustainable education systems to deliver high-quality primary education to all their children. DFID's education strategy paper, "The challenge of universal primary education", sets out our overall approach and three-fold strategy for delivering this goal. Our recent paper "Children out of School" identifies the different circumstances of children who are not in school and proposes an eight-point plan of international action for accelerating progress towards the target of universal primary education for all by 2015. Copies of both papers are available in the Library of the House.

International Development Foundation

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what funding her Department has provided to the International Development Foundation in the past five years; and how many times her Department has worked with the International Development Foundation in this period. [30401]

Clare Short: There are no records of DFID having either worked with or provided any support to the London-based International Development Foundation.

Child Slavery

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had on providing funding for refugees for those fleeing from child slavery; and if she will make a statement. [31460]

Clare Short: Children may be at risk from many forms of forced labour. Protection and rehabilitation in their former or new communities needs to be adapted to their particular circumstances, whether they are former bonded labourers, child soldiers or victims of trafficking.

Many programmes supported by my Department to end exploitative child labour and improve livelihood opportunities and access to education, health, justice and protection provide assistance to such children. We also support specifically targeted programmes such as UNICEF's work on the rehabilitation of child soldiers and other children affected by conflict.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has received about child slavery *(a)* in general and *(b)* in Gabon, Togo and Benin; and if she will make a statement. [31459]

Clare Short: Concern has been expressed about child trafficking and slavery in a number of regions, including Gabon, Togo and Benin and other parts of West Africa. The Government are strongly committed to the elimination of child slavery and all forms of abusive or exploitative child labour. We are supporting the efforts of governments, working with our European partners and international bodies such as UNICEF and the International Labour Organisation, and voluntary agencies such as Anti-Slavery International, to end these practices, both in domestic and export industries.

Children (Sexual Exploitation)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what aid is being given to combat sexual exploitation of children overseas; and if she will make a statement. [31146]

Clare Short: Combating sexual exploitation of children is part of a wider set of issues related to the vulnerability of poor people to the interests of the sex industry and national and international traffickers. It is an international problem requiring co-ordinated action. DFID's goal is to eliminate the poverty and social injustice that may lead to such abuses. Much of our focus is on reducing the risks of young people being recruited into the industry. With other Government Departments, we are supporting the efforts of Governments and international agencies to strengthen social protection policies and justice systems in line with the international treaty framework covering these issues.

Examples of Government assistance include:

funding the ILO's International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour;

training the police in Sri Lanka and the Philippines to identify, prevent and counsel victims of sexual abuse;

Supporting the Asia-Europe (ASEM) Resource Centre website which promotes agency co-operation, sharing of information and good practice;

funding NGOs working with tour operators on developing a code of practice for the travel industry to eliminate child sex tourism.

Contracts (KPMG)

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what contracts her Department has with KPMG; and what the value is of each one. [31321]

Clare Short: My Department currently has 18 contracts with KPMG. The table lists contracts and values.

International Development contracts with KPMG

File number	*Project title*	*Current contract value (£)*
20013326	Jamaica Performance Improvement Programme: Modernisation Vision and Strategy Paper for reform of Jamaican public service	59,185
20013102	Andhra Pradesh support for the Governance Support Programme	801,962
20012861	Assistance to E-Governance Sub Group for Stability Pact South Eastern Europe Initiative	92,075
20012520	Support for National Anti-Corruption Strategy	343,008
20012262	Results Orientated Management Implementation Support	165,468
20012312	Jamaica Performance Improvement Programme: Managing Consultancy to Provide a Programme of Support for the Ministry of Education and Cult	363,240
20012209	Improving Public Service through Provision of One Stop Shops	194,900
20012131	Business and Employment Centres (BEC): Independent Project Audit	6,000
20001628	Guyana Water Sector Programme: Phase 1—Lead Consultants	556,451
20001561	Vulnerable Children in Ekaterinburg and Sverdlovsk Oblast: External Audit of Accounts by Third Party	12,000
20001028	Contract Management Constabulary Reform and Modernisation Project	2,661,940
20000640	Performance Review of Ministry of Finance	696,084
20000139	Support to the Bulgarian Export Insurance Agency	609,473
19998996	Ministry for the Environment Natural Resources and Fish (SEMARNAP) Institutional Strengthening, Monitoring and Evaluation Project: Programme for Regional Sustainable Development (Proders)	617,350
19997355	Support for Improving Corporate Services and Management in the Rwanda Revenue Authority	2,461,845
19984694	Private Sector Infrastructure Development Project	5,032,976
MAL/72/01	BLM (Banja La M'Tsogola) Integrated Sexual Reproductive Health	1,704
DCP/PERW/WI	Personal Wages and Employment Review	38,868

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much each registered provider under the ILA scheme was owed by her Department when the scheme was *(a)* closed and *(b)* suspended. [28855]

John Healey *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* The amount of payment owed to individual providers is held as commercial in confidence. The ILA programme was closed on 23 November, not suspended. At the date of closure the total value of learning confirmed on the ILA Centre system was £14.8 million. Payment of £3.5 million for confirmed learning was made on 20 December to 1,383 learning providers, which is 91 per cent. of those who had confirmed learning up to 21 November. 136 provider claims with a total value of £11.3 million are held while complaints and concerns about the learning delivered are investigated.

We have as a matter of priority carried out work to finalise checks of providers' claims made between 21 and 23 November to enable further payments to be made. The total amount of these claims is £4.65 million, of which £2.23 million was paid to 1,241 learning providers last week. This represents 94 per cent. of those who had confirmed learning by 23 November. A further 84 provider claims with a total value of £2.42 million are held while complaints and concerns about the learning delivered are investigated.

Teacher Retention

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what initiatives she is undertaking to improve teacher retention rates in schools. [30527]

Mr. Timms: Retaining good teachers within the profession is key to continuing to raise standards in schools. Our research has consistently shown that workload is a significant factor in influencing teachers to leave the profession. That is why we have asked the School Teachers' Review Body to consider the findings of the recent PricewaterhouseCoopers study that we commissioned into reducing teachers' workloads. The STRB will report to us by the end of April this year and we have already announced the piloting of 30 school work force pathfinders to test out innovative solutions to reducing work load and bureaucracy in schools. In addition, we made £33 million available in 2001–02 directly to schools in those parts of the country where problems are greatest to fund local recruitment and retention initiatives. We have recently announced a further £44 million for 2002–03. More than 3,500 teachers will also receive assistance to purchase homes in areas of high price or demand as part of the Government's £250 million starter homes initiative. We have also announced our proposal to accept the STRB's recently announced recommendations, including a further above inflation pay increase of 3.5 per cent. for all teachers and that good, experienced, teachers should in future be able to receive a £2,148 pay increase on crossing the threshold after five years instead of seven. My right hon. Friend the

Secretary of State set out our longer term proposals for teachers and teaching in a pamphlet, "Professionalism and Trust", published in November 2001.

School Exclusions

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils were permanently excluded from school by region expressed as *(a)* a percentage of school population and *(b)* the total number, in descending order according to percentage figures in the latest year in which figures are available. [30601]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* The information requested is shown in the following table.

Number of permanent exclusions in schools[1] 1999–2000—Government office regions and local education authorities in England

	Number of permanent exclusions	*Percentage of the school population[2]*	*Percentage of all permanent exclusions[1]*
England	8,323	0.11	100.00
Government office regions			
North West	1,314	0.12	15.8
London	1,289	0.12	15.5
West Midlands	1.104	0.12	13.3
South East	1,251	0.11	15.0
North East	482	0.11	5.8
Yorkshire and The Humber	819	0.10	9.8
East Midlands	696	0.10	8.4
East of England	735	0.09	8.8
South West	633	0.09	7.6
Local education authorities			
City of London	1	0.45	0.01
Wandsworth	94	0.33	1.13
Sandwell	132	0.25	1.59
Doncaster	121	0.23	1.45
Kensington and Chelsea	24	0.23	0.29
Leicester	107	0.22	1.29
Liverpool	175	0.22	2.10
Salford	77	0.22	0.93
Westminster	39	0.22	0.47
Lewisham	75	0.21	0.90
Bristol, City of	104	0.21	1.25
Southwark	69	0.20	0.83
Reading	35	0.20	0.42
Telford and Wrekin	50	0.19	0.60
Bracknell Forest	29	0.19	0.35
Coventry	95	0.19	1.14
Newcastle upon Tyne	73	0.19	0.88
Croydon	87	0.18	1.05
Darlington	27	0.17	0.32
Manchester	114	0.17	1.37
Medway	75	0.17	0.90
Halton	35	0.16	0.42
Thurrock	36	0.16	0.43
Blackburn with Darwen	40	0.16	0.48
North Tyneside	50	0.16	0.60
Stoke-on-Trent	60	0.16	0.72
Birmingham	274	0.15	3.29
Enfield	73	0.15	0.88
Brent	57	0.15	0.68
North Lincolnshire	39	0.15	0.47
North Somerset	41	0.15	0.49
Waltham Forest	53	0.15	0.64
Brighton and Hove	45	0.15	0.54
Sheffield	111	0.15	1.33
Hounslow	52	0.14	0.62
Durham	114	0.14	1.37
Redcar and Cleveland	37	0.14	0.44
South Tyneside	36	0.14	0.43
North East Lincolnshire	38	0.13	0.46
Harrow	39	0.13	0.47
Worcestershire	109	0.13	1.31
Bury	39	0.13	0.47
Bradford	116	0.13	1.39
Windsor and Maidenhead	25	0.13	0.30
Nottingham	55	0.13	0.66
Peterborough	38	0.13	0.46
Richmond upon Thames	25	0.13	0.30
Hammersmith and Fulham	21	0.12	0.25
West Sussex	131	0.12	1.57
Derby	47	0.12	0.56
Oldham	51	0.12	0.61
Barnsley	43	0.12	0.52
Kent	253	0.12	3.04
Greenwich	43	0.12	0.52
Barnet	57	0.12	0.68
Rochdale	43	0.12	0.52
Hackney	31	0.12	0.37
Stockport	51	0.12	0.61
Sefton	56	0.12	0.67
Hillingdon	47	0.12	0.56
Lambeth	31	0.11	0.37
Herefordshire	27	0.11	0.32
Southend-on-Sea	29	0.11	0.35
Cheshire	119	0.11	1.43
Kirklees	72	0.11	0.87
Wakefield	59	0.11	0.71
East Sussex	72	0.11	0.87
Lincolnshire	107	0.11	1.29
Warwickshire	82	0.11	0.99
Bolton	50	0.11	0.60
Tameside	41	0.11	0.49
Gloucestershire	91	0.11	1.09
Barking and Dagenham	31	0.11	0.37
Wigan	53	0.10	0.64
Blackpool	21	0.10	0.25
Walsall	51	0.10	0.61
Hampshire	181	0.10	2.17
Bath and North East Somerset	26	0.10	0.31
Portsmouth	27	0.10	0.32
Milton Keynes	35	0.10	0.42
Hertfordshire	175	0.10	2.10
Northamptonshire	105	0.10	1.26
Suffolk	100	0.10	1.20
Solihull	37	0.10	0.44
Warrington	32	0.10	0.38
Camden	22	0.10	0.26
Merton	23	0.10	0.28
Surrey	133	0.10	1.60
Torbay	18	0.09	0.22
St. Helens	28	0.09	0.34
Lancashire	167	0.09	2.01
Havering	34	0.09	0.41
Essex	182	0.09	2.19
Oxfordshire	76	0.09	0.91
Sunderland	44	0.09	0.53
Bedfordshire	56	0.09	0.67
Somerset	62	0.09	0.74
Hartlepool	15	0.09	0.18
Tower Hamlets	31	0.09	0.37
Wirral	47	0.08	0.56
Leicestershire	80	0.08	0.96
Islington	20	0.08	0.24
Buckinghamshire	63	0.08	0.76
Nottinghamshire	102	0.08	1.23
Bexley	33	0.08	0.40
Devon	79	0.08	0.95
Stockton-on-Tees	27	0.08	0.32
Trafford	30	0.08	0.36
Northumberland	42	0.08	0.50
Wokingham	19	0.08	0.23
Cornwall	58	0.08	0.70
Derbyshire	91	0.08	1.09
Kingston upon Thames	16	0.08	0.19
Dudley	39	0.08	0.47
Staffordshire	99	0.07	1.19
Norfolk	84	0.07	1.01
Haringey	25	0.07	0.30
Rotherham	32	0.07	0.38
Kingston upon Hull, City of	30	0.07	0.36
Newham	33	0.07	0.40
Redbridge	29	0.07	0.35

Number of permanent exclusions in schools[1] 1999–2000—Government office regions and local education authorities in England

Number of permanent exclusions *Percentage of the school population[2]* *Percentage of all permanent exclusions[1]*

Number of permanent exclusions in schools[1] 1999–2000—Government office regions and local education authorities in England

	Number of permanent exclusions	*Percentage of the school population*[2]	*Percentage of all permanent exclusions*[3]
Swindon	20	0.07	0.24
Sutton	19	0.07	0.23
West Berkshire	16	0.07	0.19
Dorset	35	0.06	0.42
York	16	0.06	0.19
Wiltshire	41	0.06	0.49
Ealing	27	0.06	0.32
Wolverhampton	26	0.06	0.31
Bromley	28	0.06	0.34
Leeds	71	0.06	0.85
South Gloucestershire	23	0.06	0.28
Shropshire	23	0.06	0.28
Isle of Wight	11	0.06	0.13
Plymouth	23	0.06	0.28
Slough	10	0.05	0.12
Cumbria	39	0.05	0.47
Southampton	15	0.05	0.18
Luton	15	0.05	0.18
Gateshead	14	0.05	0.17
North Yorkshire	40	0.05	0.48
Rutland	2	0.04	0.02
East Riding of Yorkshire	20	0.04	0.24
Bournemouth	7	0.03	0.08
Calderdale	11	0.03	0.13
Cambridgeshire	20	0.03	0.24
Poole	5	0.03	0.06
Knowsley	6	0.02	0.07
Middlesbrough	3	0.01	0.04
Isles of Scilly	0	0.00	0.00

[1] Includes maintained primary and secondary schools and all special schools.

[2] The number of permanent exclusions expressed as a percentage of the number (headcount) of full and part-time pupils of all ages in primary, secondary and special schools, excluding dually registered pupils in special schools in January 2000.

[3] The number of permanent exclusions expressed as a percentage of the total number of exclusions.

Source:

Annual Schools Census

Examination Results

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils gained no GCSE above grade D by region, expressed as *(a)* a percentage of population and *(b)* the total number, in descending order according to percentage for the latest year for which figures are available. [30602]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* The percentage and number of 15-year-old pupils in schools in England in 2000–01 that gained no GCSE above grade D or the GNVQ equivalent are as follows:

	As a percentage of 15-year-old pupils	*Number gained no grade above D*
Yorkshire and the Humber	31.4	19,760
North East	31.3	10,422
East Midlands	27.8	14,339
West Midlands	27.6	18,753
North West	27.5	24,636
London	25.0	19,407
East of England	22.7	14,847
South West	22.6	13,312
South East	22.2	21,306
England	26.0	156,782

Local Education Authorities (Repair and Renewal Costs)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 17 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 446W, on local education authorities, if she will estimate the repair and renewal costs for each local education authority as a percentage of the education authority's annual budget for the latest available year; if she will rank them to show the highest to the lowest repair and renewal bill as a share of total LEA budget; and if she will make a statement. [31011]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* The table contains information relating to expenditure on repairs as a percentage of Net Current Expenditure after recharges:

LEA number	*LEA name*	*Percentage*
357	Tameside	15.12
305	Bromley	9.37
372	Rotherham	6.67
393	South Tyneside	6.34
861	Stoke on Trent	6.05
303	Bexley	5.87
916	Gloucestershire	5.40
302	Barnet	5.27
384	Wakefield	5.17
205	Hammersmith and Fulham	5.05
306	Croydon	4.97
877	Warrington	4.97
812	North East Lincolnshire	4.74
808	Stockton-on-Tees	4.65
301	Barking and Dagenham	4.64
330	Birmingham	4.19
851	Portsmouth	4.19
891	Nottinghamshire	4.13
826	Milton Keynes	4.12
894	Telford and Wrekin	4.11
333	Sandwell	4.09
883	Thurrock	4.04
212	Wandsworth	3.93
929	Northumberland	3.85
806	Middlesbrough	3.71
937	Warwickshire	3.68
810	City of Kingston Upon Hull	3.67
875	Cheshire	3.53
878	Devon	3.52
888	Lancashire	3.33
343	Sefton	3.31
815	North Yorkshire	3.27
871	Slough	3.24
805	Hartlepool	3.23
846	Brighton and Hove	3.17
342	St. Helens	3.13
311	Havering	3.11
837	Bournemouth	3.05
855	Leicestershire	3.03
803	South Gloucestershire	3.03
870	Reading	3.02
831	City of Derby	2.98
800	Bath and North East Somerset	2.97
884	Herefordshire	2.97
919	Hertfordshire	2.97
352	Manchester	2.96
882	Southend	2.95
344	Wirral	2.92
359	Wigan	2.90
928	Northamptonshire	2.88
210	Southwark	2.88
353	Oldham	2.86
925	Lincolnshire	2.83
876	Halton	2.82

LEA number	*LEA name*	*Percentage*
836	Poole	2.80
840	Durham	2.79
373	Sheffield	2.78
889	Blackburn with Darwen	2.77
319	Sutton	2.74
821	Luton	2.73
825	Buckinghamshire	2.73
304	Brent	2.70
935	Suffolk	2.68
203	Greenwich	2.67
908	Cornwall	2.67
926	Norfolk	2.66
850	Hampshire	2.65
811	East Riding of Yorkshire	2.64
802	North Somerset	2.63
358	Trafford	2.63
381	Calderdale	2.62
845	East Sussex	2.61
356	Stockport	2.60
874	City of Peterborough	2.60
213	City of Westminster	2.57
886	Kent	2.56
318	Richmond Upon Thames	2.56
307	Ealing	2.55
332	Dudley	2.53
380	Bradford	2.52
881	Essex	2.51
852	Southampton	2.49
938	West Sussex	2.48
873	Cambridgeshire	2.44
382	Kirklees	2.43
869	West Berkshire	2.42
892	City of Nottingham	2.39
208	Lambeth	2.39
857	Rutland	2.39
841	Darlington	2.38
390	Gateshead	2.38
909	Cumbria	2.38
313	Hounslow	2.36
816	York	2.36
921	Isle of Wight	2.36
865	Wiltshire	2.35
867	Bracknell Forest	2.35
201	City of London	2.32
308	Enfield	2.31
890	Blackpool	2.31
868	Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead	2.30
872	Wokingham	2.30
341	Liverpool	2.29
391	Newcastle Upon Tyne	2.28
887	Medway	2.27
336	Wolverhampton	2.26
315	Merton	2.25
371	Doncaster	2.24
370	Barnsley	2.24
314	Kingston Upon Thames	2.23
807	Redcar and Cleveland	2.21
355	Salford	2.19
312	Hillingdon	2.17
317	Redbridge	2.17
340	Knowsley	2.15
207	Kensington and Chelsea	2.12
354	Rochdale	2.09
351	Bury	2.07
893	Shropshire	2.06
801	City of Bristol	2.06
835	Dorset	2.04
310	Harrow	2.04
885	Worcestershire	2.03
879	City of Plymouth	2.01
936	Surrey	1.99
202	Camden	1.99
394	Sunderland	1.95
331	Coventry	1.93
211	Tower Hamlets	1.93
860	Staffordshire	1.92
316	Newham	1.81
856	Leicester City	1.81
206	Islington	1.75
880	Torbay	1.73
309	Haringey	1.72
209	Lewisham	1.68
813	North Lincolnshire	1.64
830	Derbyshire	1.58
334	Solihull	1.48
335	Walsall	1.47
350	Bolton	1.32
420	Isles of Scilly	1.26
933	Somerset	1.21
383	Leeds	1.17
866	Swindon	1.06
931	Oxfordshire	0.90
392	North Tyneside	0.75
204	Hackney	0.43
320	Waltham Forest	0.20
820	Bedfordshire	0.06

Note:

The information is taken from the 1990–2000 section 52 outturn statements completed by local education authorities and returned to the DfES. Total expenditure on non-capital building works (including repairs and maintenance of buildings, and non-capital expenditure on fixed plants and grounds) is a percentage of net current expenditure (NCE) after recharges.

Special Educational Needs

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will ensure that the total inclusion policy will not lead to the closure of special schools and nursery units by means of non-referral of pupils. [31247]

Mr. Timms: Decisions about the individual placement of children with special educational needs and the pattern of provision to provide for their needs are determined locally. In promoting the inclusion of children with special educational needs the Government have sought to ensure excellence and choice. Greater inclusion does not mean it will be harder for parents whose children have a statement to secure a place for their child in a special school. Where appropriate local education authorities should name a special school in a child's statement. The Government have underlined that there is a vital and continuing role for special schools. We are encouraging and supporting special schools to become outward looking centres of excellence, their staff working in partnership with their mainstream colleagues.

Schools and Admissions Forums

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many letters of *(a)* support and *(b)* opposition she has received to the Government's proposals on (i) schools forums, and (ii) admissions forums. [31385]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* Although our proposals for schools forums were first set out in the White Paper "Schools: Achieving Success", a full consultation exercise has not yet been held and only a minimal amount of correspondence has yet been received on this topic. The Department will be undertaking a formal consultation exercise in spring 2002 on the constitution and functions of schools forums. By 7 November 2001, our school admissions consultation had received 324 responses (78 per cent.) supporting our proposals for mandatory admissions forums, at least to some extent, and 79 replies from those who disagreed.

Class Sizes

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 15 January 2002, *Official report*, column 222W, on class sizes, if she will list the *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools in the Hillingdon local education authority with 31 pupils or more as at January 2001. [31453]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is as follows:

Maintained primary and secondary schools within Hillingdon local education authority with one or more classes of 31 or more pupils taught by one teacher—January 2001

Maintained Primary Schools:

Belmore Primary School
Bourne Primary School
Breakspear Junior School
Colham Manor Infant School
Coteford Infant School
Cowley Infant School
Deanesfield Primary School
Field End Junior School
Harefield Infant School
Harmondsworth Primary School
Lady Bankes Infant School
Minet Junior School
Newnham Junior School
Newnham Infant and Nursery School
Ryefield Primary School
William Byrd School
Hermitage Primary School
Brookside Primary School
Highfield Primary School
Rabbsfarm Primary School
Warrender Primary School
Cranford Park Primary School
Ruislip Gardens Primary School
Hillingdon Primary School
Wood End Park Community School
Cherry Lane Primary School
Holy Trinity CofE Primary School
St. Swithun Wells RC Primary School
Botwell House RC Primary School
Sacred Heart RC Primary School
Oak Farm Junior School
Grange Park Infant School
Hillside Infant School
Charville Primary School
Hayes Park School

Maintained Secondary Schools

Evelyns Community School
Bishop Ramsey CofE Voluntary Aided Secondary School
Bishopshalt School
Vyners School
Queensmead School
Uxbridge High School
The Hayes Manor School
The Douay Martyrs Roman Catholic School
Swakeleys School
Harlington Community School.

Teachers' Pay

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the ratio is between the average earnings of a secondary school head and the average house price in *(a)* Surrey, *(b)* London, *(c)* Yorkshire and *(d)* Tyne and Wear. [31500]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* The ratios between earnings and house prices based on the average salaries (provisional) of full-time secondary head teachers in the maintained schools sector in England in March 2000, are as follows:

Region	*Salary to house price[1] ratio*
Surrey	1: 3.1
Greater London	1: 3.6
Yorkshire	1: 1.2
Tyne and Wear	1: 1.2

[1] The house prices used are the average prices of semi-detached houses sold from January to March 2000.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the ratio is between the average earnings of a primary school head and the average house price in *(a)* Surrey, *(b)* London, *(c)* Yorkshire and *(d)* Tyne and Wear. [31553]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* The ratios between earnings and house prices based on the average salaries (provisional) of full-time primary head teachers in the maintained schools sector in England in March 2000, are as follows:

Region	*Salary to house price[1] ratio*
Surrey	1: 4.3
Greater London	1: 4.8
Yorkshire	1: 1.7
Tyne and Wear	1: 1.7

[1] The house prices used are the average prices of semi-detached houses sold from January to March 2000.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the ratio is between the average earnings of a teacher and the average house price in *(a)* Surrey, *(b)* London, *(c)* Yorkshire and *(d)* Tyne and Wear (i) three and (ii) 10 years after qualification. [31554]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* The ratios between earnings and house price, based on the average salaries (provisional) of full-time regular qualified teachers with three and ten years' service, who were in service in the maintained schools sector in England in March 2000, are as follows.

Region	Salary to house price[1] ratio Qualified in 1996, with three years' service by March 2000	Qualified in 1989, with ten years' service by March 2000
Surrey	1: 8.0	1: 5.8
Greater London	1: 8.6	1: 6.5
Yorkshire	1: 3.0	1: 2.2
Tyne and Wear	1: 3.1	1: 2.3

[1] The house prices used are the average prices of semi-detached houses sold from January to March 2000.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average earnings of a teacher are in *(a)* Surrey and *(b)* London. [31557]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* The average earnings (provisional) of full-time regular qualified teachers in the maintained schools sector in Surrey and London in March 2000 (latest available) were as follows.

	£
Surrey	24,700
Greater London	27,300

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the total external spend by his Department was on private finance initiative consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PFI consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by his Department over this period; and if he will make a statement. [31040]

Mr. MacShane: Over the last four years 10 consultancy firms have been engaged to support private finance initiative projects. Total expenditure has been as follows:

	£
1998–99	986,645
1999–2000	1,192,086
2000–01	356,640
2001–02	81,740

Detailed information about the average cost of each consultant could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Gibraltar

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the establishment of joint Anglo/Spanish bodies with responsibility for issues concerning Gibraltar will require the consent of the *(a)* Government of Gibraltar and *(b)* people of Gibraltar in a referendum. [30671]

Peter Hain: Discussions under the Brussels Process are aimed at overcoming all the differences between the UK and Spain over Gibraltar and at promoting co-operation on a mutually beneficial basis. The Government will stand by the commitment to the people of Gibraltar set out in the preamble of the 1969 Gibraltar Constitution.

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what talks have taken place under the Brussels Process regarding the possibility of joint Anglo/Spanish sharing of the policing of Gibraltar. [30627]

Peter Hain: None.

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the creation of a joint Anglo/Spanish body with responsibility for *(a)* Gibraltar's airport and *(b)* Gibraltar's foreign affairs will be discussed under the Brussels Process. [30669]

Peter Hain: Discussions under the Brussels Process will continue to include economic, cultural, touristic, aviation, environmental matters and the issue of sovereignty.

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans his Department has for the celebration for the 300th anniversary of British presence in Gibraltar. [30701]

Peter Hain: The 300th anniversary of the British presence in Gibraltar will fall in 2004. An announcement regarding celebrations will be made at the appropriate time.

Mr. Laxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if a referendum on a bilateral agreement between the UK and Spain under the terms of the Brussels Process will be called only with the consent of the Government of Gibraltar; and if a bilateral agreement between Britain and Spain under the terms of the Brussels Process will lapse if rejected by voters in Gibraltar in a referendum. [30623]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) on 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 853W.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to meet the Chief Minister of Gibraltar. [31056]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and I met the Chief Minister of Gibraltar most recently on 25 January. We discussed various proposals to meet his concerns, invited him to stay in close touch, and await his response.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consulting assistance the UK is providing to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Government in implementing democratic processes. [30859]

Mr. MacShane: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office currently funds 18 UK secondees to the OSCE Mission in Macedonia, one of whose main functions is to assist the Government of Macedonia with the implementation of the Framework Agreement signed in August 2001. Since February 2001 a separate two-year project under the auspices of the Department for International Development has been helping the Macedonian Government with a comprehensive programme of public administration reform. The scope of this project was extended in October 2001 to take into account the requirements of the Framework Agreement.

Visas

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of applications for visas to the UK Embassy in Prague, have been rejected in each year since 1 January 2000. [31575]

Mr. Bradshaw: The percentages of applications refused are as follows:

2000—4 per cent.

2001—4 per cent.[1]

[1] Still awaiting December statistics.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many persons have applied to the UK Embassy in Prague, for visas to *(a)* visit and *(b)* work in the UK in each year since 1 January 2000. [31576]

Mr. Bradshaw: The numbers of applications received are as follows:

	Visitors	*Work permit*
2000	1,386	63
2001[1]	301	24

[1] The figures for 2001 are for the period January to March 2001. We only collect statistics from Prague on an annual basis. Future statistics will be collected on a financial year basis and are due to be collected during April 2002.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many persons have applied to the UK embassy in Turkey for visas to *(a)* visit and *(b)* work in the UK in each year since 1 January 2000. [31577]

Mr. Bradshaw: The number of applications received at the embassy in Ankara and the consulate general in Istanbul are as follows:

	Visitors	*Work permit*
2000	52,553	423
2001[1]	10,970	164

[1] The figures for 2001 are for the period January to March 2001. We collect these statistics only on an annual basis. Future statistics will be on a financial year basis and are due to be collected during April 2002.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of applications for visas to the UK Embassy in Turkey have been refused in each year since 1 January 2000. [31574]

Mr. Bradshaw: The percentage of applications refused at the embassy in Ankara and the consulate general in Istanbul is as follows:

	Percentage
2000	3.4
2001	6

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many applications for entry visas for ministers of religion are being processed by the high commission in Nairobi; and what the status of these applications is. [31690]

Mr. Bradshaw: The high commission in Nairobi have received no new applications from ministers of religion so far this year. There is, however, one unresolved application from 2001.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the aims and objectives are of Her Majesty's Government's policies towards Zimbabwe. [31843]

Mr. Bradshaw: The United Kingdom aims to promote a stable, democratic and prosperous Zimbabwe.

Iraq

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the objectives are of Her Majesty's Government's policy on Iraq. [31844]

Mr. Bradshaw: Our objective is to secure full compliance by Iraq with its obligations under the relevant Security Council resolutions, so allowing its reintegration into the international community. While the Iraq regime continues to refuse to co-operate with the UN, our policy is and must remain based on the imperative of containing the very real threat posed by the Iraqi regime to its own people and to its neighbours.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 884–85W, on ministerial visits, what the size of his entourage was on each of the visits; if transport was provided by *(a)* the RAF and *(b)* a commercial carrier; and where applicable, what the chartering costs were. [31704]

Mr. Straw: Further to my answer of 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 884–5W, the following gives further information about my official visits overseas since 11 September 2001.

A detailed list of Cabinet Ministers' overseas visits for the period April 2001 to March 2002, including costs, will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year.

Dates	*Countries visited*	*Size of entourage (officials plus security)*	*Means of travel*
12 September	Belgium (Special GAC)	8	RAF HS12
18 September	Belgium	6	RAF HS12
21 September	Belgium (Extraordinary European Council)	[1]3	RAF BAe1

Dates	Countries visited	Size of entourage (officials plus security)	Means of travel
24–27 September	Jordan, Iran, Israel, Egypt	15	RAF BAe1
8 October	Luxembourg (GAC)	10	RAF HS12
17 October	Luxembourg (GAC)	8	RAF BAe1
17–18 October	Turkey	9	RAF BAe1
23–25 October	USA	10	Schedule flights
29 October	Luxembourg (GAC)	12	RAF HS12
30–31 October	Poland, Russia	12	RAF BAe1
9–14 October	USA (UNGA)	18	Schedule flights
19 November	Belgium (GAC)	9	RAF HS12
19–20 November	Spain	13	RAF HS12
21–23 November	Iran, Pakistan	14	RAF VC10
6–7 December	Belgium (NAC meeting)	11	RAF HS12
10 December	Belgium (GAC)	11	RAF HS12
13–15 December	Belgium (Laeken European Council)	[1]18	RAF BAe1
21–23 January	Democratic Repubic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda	[2,3]18	French Government Aircraft
28 January	Belgium (GAC)	12	RAF HS12

[1] FCO delegation
[2] UK delegation
[3] Joint visit with French Foreign Minister Vedrine

Special Envoys

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for special envoys to represent him on visits to *(a)* Latin America and *(b)* Asia. [31686]

Mr. Straw: I currently have a special envoy of Afghanistan, Mr. Robert Cooper.

I have no current plans to appoint other special envoys to represent me on visits to Latin America or Asia.

Immigration Appeals

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) under what *(a)* powers and *(b)* circumstances high commissions are able to delay the implementation of an appeal decision by an immigration adjudicator; [31691]

(2) under what *(a)* powers and *(b)* circumstances, high commissions can refuse to implement an appeal decision made by an immigration adjudicator. [31692]

Mr. Bradshaw: There are no powers or circumstances under which an Entry Clearance Officer may delay unnecessarily the implementation of an appeal decision made by an immigration adjudicator. However, there are a number of steps in the appeals procedure following an adjudication. Implementation is not instantaneous. There are circumstances in which an Entry Clearance Officer can refuse entry clearance subsequent to a decision by an immigration adjudicator to allow an appeal against refusal of entry clearance. I will write separately to the hon. Member giving a detailed explanation of relevant legislation and guidance.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Contracts (KPMG)

Mr. Watson: To ask the Solicitor-General what contracts her Department has with KPMG; and what the value is of each one. [31324]

The Solicitor-General: My own Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, the Treasury Solicitor's Department and Crown Prosecution Service have no current contracts with KPMG.

The Serious Fraud Office has one current contract with KPMG, the estimated value of which is £6,000.

DEFENCE

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what equipment has been stolen from his Department since 1 May 1997; and what the approximate value of each item was. [26839]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* Reported cases of stolen equipment are held centrally on a summary basis and relate only to suspected theft by Crown personnel and contractors of stores and equipment, usually recorded as multiples or combinations of small value items such as tools, items of clothing, foodstuffs etc. Full details relating to each item of equipment proven to have been stolen could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, a list of separately identified discrete items suspected of being stolen and with an estimated individual or collective loss value of 31,000 or more is given as follows:

	£
Laptop Computers (34)	76,688
Night Vision Goggles	1,600
Camcorder	1,260
Dental Gold	12,015
Propeller Blades	32,000
Notebook Computer	1,000
VHS Recorders (2)	1,000
Engines (2)	4,162
Weapon Sight	1,389
Outboard Motor	1,101
Thinkpad Computer	2,000
Land Rover Tyres (15)	1,537
Weapon Sight	1,736
Binoculars (3)	1,190
Land Rover and Tools	32,011

	£
Laptop Computer/CD Rom/Printer	3,485
Industrial Cleaner	1,551
Spare Wheels (10)	6,419
Land Rover FFR	30,000
Personal Computer	1,512
Computer/Mouse/Keyboard	1,400
Night Vision Scope	2,674
Common Weapon Sight	1,424
Land Rover Spare Wheels (10)	1,049
Litepro Projector	4,445
Litepro Projector and Computer	6,445
Laptop Computer and Printer	1,449
LCD Projector	4,274
Operational Ration Packs (4,000)	2,755
Night Goggles (2)	22,768
Trailer	3,698
Computer/Printer/Fax/TV/VCR	1,750
Mobile Phones (4)Laptop Computer	2,000
Camouflage Poles	3,500
Personal Computer/printer/power unit	3,000
Diesel Stove	2,918
Mobile Phone 'Top-Up' Cards (400)	13,300
Landrover	23,800
Vauxhall Astra	1,206
Motorcycle	1,915
Outboard Motors (3)	3,108
Electric Winch	1,772
Altimeters (14)	5,142
Compact Projector/VCR	1,921

Nimrod

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on spending within the budget on the Nimrod MRA4 programme; how much liquidated damages the MOD is seeking for the project's delay from BAE; what alternative means of delivering MRA4 capability are being considered; and how much longer the project is expected to be delayed. [30285]

Dr. Moonie: The budgetary data being sought by the hon. Member are contained in the Ministry of Defence's Major Road Project Report 2001 under section 2—"Project Costs", including information on the forecast receipt of liquidated damages. As to the question of further delay, the Major Project report also noted that the Department was engaged in discussions with BAE Systems over the incremental delivery of the MRA4 capability. These discussions are close to being finalised with the company. Until the negotiations have been completed, it will not be possible to be definitive about the impact, if any, on delivery.

There are no viable alternative means of delivery the MRA4 capability. Prior to selecting the MRA4 option, an investment appraisal was conducted that considered a full range of alternatives. The findings were conclusive and confirmed the requirement for MRA4. This view has not changed.

Army Attributable Pensions

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what grounds his Department dismissed the issue of retired officers or their widows who have continued to pay tax incorrectly on retired pay awarded since 1952 on the grounds of disability attributable to or aggravated by service in 1997. [31462]

Dr. Moonie: As I explained in my statement in the House on 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 891–902, with regard to tax exemption of Army attributable pensions, the error was uncovered by a retired Army pensioner, Major Perry. Our records show that Major Perry first raised the taxation of his service invaliding pension in December 1997. He then went through two stages of appeal at higher levels and at each his arguments were rejected. It was only when he made a further approach that the error was recognised. The issue turned on whether only Service Attributable Pensions were tax exempt or whether, as in Major Perry's case, Service Invaliding Pensions should also be exempt. At the initial appeal stages, the position with regard to the law was misinterpreted and the difference in practice between the Army on the one hand, and the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force on the other, had not become apparent. It was only in 1998 that the correct legal position was recognised and action to remedy the error put in hand. The point at issue was not straightforward. The error should, however, have been recognised when Major Perry first raised his concerns and I can only reiterate our apology to him and those other Army pensioners or their spouses affected.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on the investigations his Department has undertaken to ascertain the reasons for incorrect calculation of taxation under the relevant legislation of retired pay awarded to Army officers since 1952 on the grounds of disability attributable to or aggravated by service; [31463]

(2) what steps his Department is taking to identify retired officers and their widows who have continued to pay tax incorrectly on retired pay awarded since 1952 on the grounds of disability attributable to or aggravated by service; and if he will commission an independent inquiry on this issue. [31465]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has already reviewed the files of retired Army personnel and Army widows who had been in receipt of an invaliding pension; this involved some 20,000 files. When we identified the error in 1998, we provided information to ex-service and war widows' associations, who responded positively to our request to advertise the error to their members. We do not believe that there are many service personnel or their widows or widowers who have not been identified. None the less, we are keen to ensure that none has been missed. We have therefore provided details to help individuals identify if they might be affected on the MOD website. We intend to undertake national publicity shortly and we will use our service journals and other material which has a wide veterans' readership to ensure maximum coverage of this issue.

I do not intend to commission an independent inquiry on this matter.

The original error which allowed the taxation of Army attributable service invaliding pensions occurred in the early 1950s. At this distance, we would not expect all the relevant files to have been preserved and the Army personnel concerned will have retired and in many cases be deceased. Given the major changes to the way in which pensions are administered, over the period, I would also not expect there to be lessons of current relevance. I have, however, asked officials to assess whether there are any other pensions areas which may be similarly affected.

Asbestos

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether widows of those who have died from asbestos-related diseases will be allowed to claim relating to pre-1987 matters; how many claims he expects to be submitted; and if he will make a statement [31144]

Dr. Moonie: Claims from widows of former service men whose husbands died after being exposed to asbestos before 15 May 1987 would be barred from pursuing a claim by section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947. This legal restriction does not apply to widows of former civilian employees of the Department.

The legal standing of section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947 has been challenged in the High Court in the case of Matthew *v.* Ministry of Defence on the basis that section 10 is incompatible with the European convention on human rights. Judgment was handed down on 22 January 2002 in favour of the claimant, but the matter will now proceed to the Court of Appeal. Until such time as a higher authority has ruled upon the case, the Department's position concerning the settlement of claims predating the repeal on 15 May 1987 of section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947 remains unchanged. The Ministry of Defence is not able to predict how many claims may be submitted if a court of higher authority rules against the Department.

A war pension and associated benefits is however available for the widows of former service men whose death was attributable to their service. Such pensions are administered by the War Pensions Agency.

Gulf Veterans Illnesses

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with his US counterpart on *(a)* the identification and treatment of and *(b)* compensation for Gulf War illness; and if he will make a statement. [31485]

Dr. Moonie: Neither my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence nor any of his ministerial colleagues have had such discussions. However, the Ministry of Defence's Gulf Veterans' Illnesses Unit has a full time Gulf Health Liaison Officer based in Washington DC, working with the US Military Veterans Health Co-ordinating Board and its subcommittees. Both directly and through the liaison officer, the MOD maintains close links with the relevant US authorities, including the executive office of the President, the Department of Defense, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Veterans' Affairs on all issues surrounding the complex issue of Gulf veterans' illnesses.

No-fault compensations for UK service personnel disabled as a result of their service is provided through the War Pension Scheme (WPS). The WPS applies to all those who have served in the UK forces and is administered by the MOD's War Pensions Agency (WPA). As at 31 December 2001, the WPA had received 1,264 claims for war pension in respect of Gulf veterans' illnesses, of which 1,086 had resulted in an award. Veterans may also be eligible for an Armed Forces Pension Scheme occupational pension and, if they have been medically discharged, this is supplemented by attributable benefits linked to the degree of disability or non-attributable benefits linked to length of service, whichever is the greater.

The MOD has about 2,000 active notices from veterans and members of their families of their intention to claim common law compensation in respect of illness allegedly arising from the Gulf conflict. However, we have still yet to receive any writs or claims of sufficient detail to allow these cases to be taken forward.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of the cost of buildings refurbishment carried out by his Department in each of the last four years. [27968]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Medical Monitoring (Afghanistan)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures his Department has taken in order to improve medical monitoring of UK personnel deployed in and around Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [28496]

Mr. Ingram: The symptoms of all International Security Assistance Force personnel requiring medical attention are recorded and categorised. These data are then processed to enable the early identification of any possible health problems.

Devonport

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the latest estimated costs of construction for the Trident refit complex at Devonport Dockyard are; and if he will make a statement. [28808]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* The Trident refit complex forms part of the overall Project D154 works at Devonport, which will provide new and upgraded facilities for the refitting of the Royal Navy's SSNBs and SSNs. A revised incentivised cost-sharing arrangement has recently been agreed with the dockyard owner, DML, for the overall project. The Ministry of Defence's share of costs to completion are estimated to be in the region of £638 million to £659 million excluding VAT.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Trident refit complex at Devonport will be completely finished and certificated for use before the arrival of HMS Vanguard; and if he will make a statement. [28807]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* Not all the facilities within the Trident refit complex at Devonport are required to be available for the arrival of HMS Vanguard. There is an agreed programme in place to ensure that facilities will be brought on line as required within the overall Vanguard Class (Trident) submarine refitting programme. Each facility will be commissioned and the necessary approval obtained from the nuclear regulatory authorities to meet this programme. There is no question of a particular facility being used without the appropriate regulatory approval.

Tomahawk

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Royal Navy plans to purchase remanufactured Raytheon Tactile Tomahawk missiles; and if he will make a statement. [29803]

Dr. Moonie: The UK has already purchased some remanufactured Raytheon Tomahawk land attack missiles to replace those used during the Kosovo campaign. A further purchase of these missiles is planned and negotiations with the US Government are in progress. Joint UK/US studies have also established the feasibility of a horizontally launched version of the next generation of the missile, Tactical Tomahawk, although no decision on purchase of these missiles has yet been taken.

Submarines

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the technical difficulties are with the sonar upgrade to the Swiftsure and Trafalgar submarines; how much it will cost to complete the enhancement programme; and if he will make a statement. [30288]

Dr. Moonie: The technical difficulties associated with the sonar upgrade to the Swiftsure and Trafalgar submarines have centred on software engineering and associated signal data processing.

The total estimated cost of the enhancement programme is £687 million.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when Phase 2 of the Swiftsure and Trafalgar enhancement programme will be completed; and if he will make a statement. [30287]

Dr. Moonie: The final phase of the Swiftsure and Trafalgar update programme is in progress and enhancements are being incrementally incorporated into the latest Trafalgar class submarines. The first submarine installation of the final phase has been completed and has commenced sea trials. The final submarine upgrade fit is currently planned to be completed by 2009.

Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many bids are being considered for the Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft; which companies have submitted bids; what costings have been submitted; what time scales have been proposed; and if he will make a statement. [30289]

Dr. Moonie: Two consortia have submitted bids for this prospective PFI programme, in response to an Invitation to Negotiate. They are: Air Tanker Ltd. comprising Cobham, Thales, Halliburton, EADS and Rolls Royce; and the Tanker and Transport Service Company Ltd. consisting of BAE Systems, Boeing, Serco and Spectrum capital. We are now in the early stages of detailed contract negotiations. When these are complete, both consortia will be invited to confirm or revise their bids. I am withholding details of their bids in accordance with Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. We currently anticipate taking a formal investment decision in 2002, when we will select a preferred bidder if PFI remains the best value money solution. Contract award is scheduled for 2003 with the aim of providing the service from around 2007.

IT Software

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the compatibility of his Department's IT software with other Government agencies. [30831]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence uses a range of software, both embedded in Defence equipment and in the office environment. The majority of the software products used in the office environment are commercially available and therefore potentially compatible with those used by many other organisations both inside and outside Government. The MOD has a number of electronic connections with other Government Departments with which it conducts business, including via the Government secure intranet.

Tank Transporters

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the introduction of a fleet of tank transporters. [30832]

Dr. Moonie: The current fleet of tank transporters will be replaced with the Heavy Equipment Transport (HET) service being introduced under the private finance initiative. A full service, provided by 92 HET vehicles, will be introduced over a 12-month period beginning in 2003. In the interim the Service Demonstration phase, which commenced in December 2001, will provide assurance that all aspects of the Ministry of Defence's capability requirement have been satisfied.

Refuelling Aircraft

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the URC-138(V) communication system to be fitted to VC10 and Tri Star refuelling aircraft. [30824]

Dr. Moonie: The programme to fit tactical data link systems, including URC-138(V) terminals, to RAF refuelling aircraft is expected to be completed by the end of April 2002.

RAF Bases

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the time scale is for his review of the three RAF bases; and when he expects to announce a conclusion. [31450]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence began a Strategic Review of RAF Brize Norton, RAF Lyneham and RAF St. Mawgan in November 2001. The report is due to be completed by summer 2002, after which time, I expect to make an announcement.

Dartmoor

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Ministry of Defence notified the Dartmoor National Park Authority of plans to erect new military lookout huts on Dartmoor National Park. [31182]

Dr. Moonie: No new lookout huts are proposed at present. Two military structures were replaced on existing bases in September and December 2001. The replacements were taken in accordance with past guidance and practice, and the Dartmoor National Park Authority has confirmed that there has been no procedural failure.

The replacement of existing look out huts around the military training area on Dartmoor has taken place three times since 1994 using the 18/84 Planning Consultation Procedure. Programmed replacements are discussed with the appropriate planning authority as much as two years in advance of requirements, before submission of formal applications under this procedure. Information consultation also takes place through the Dartmoor Steering Group and its subsidiary working party.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the annual outlay of the Ministry of Defence for use of Duchy land on Dartmoor for military training was in the last 12 months. [31183]

Dr. Moonie: The annual outlay of the Ministry of Defence for the use of the Duchy land on Dartmoor for military training is made up of a number of items, including liabilities under the Duchy licence and payments to other landowners. These are deemed commercial in confidence and I am therefore withholding this information in accordance with Exemption 13 of Part II of the Government Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Other outlay of some £50,000 to £60,000 per year on general repairs and conservation cannot be apportioned between Duchy, MOD freehold and other owners land.

Contracts (KPMG)

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contracts his Department has with KPMG; and what the value is of each one. [31326]

Dr. Moonie: There are currently 29 extant contracts with KPMG. The values of individual contracts are withheld under Exemption 13 (third party's commercial confidences) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information; however, the total value of all of the extant contracts is around £59 million.

European Capabilities

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are for a central pot of European funding for the extra investment needed to achieve the Helsinki Headline Goal; and if he will make a statement. [31621]

Mr. Hoon: None. Achievement of the Headline Goal is based on the principle of intergovernmental co-operation and a voluntary approach. Member states have offered national capabilities for potential EU-led operations and are now working together within the European Capabilities Action Plan to address the remaining shortfalls. The funding for any initiatives emerging from this process will be a matter for the member states involved.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the relevance of the Helsinki Headline Goal in the post-11 September security environment; and if he will make a statement. [31617]

Mr. Hoon: The European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) aims to enhance the ability of European nations to perform crisis management operations. The potential need for such operations remains. Many of the capabilities required by the Headline Goal would also be highly relevant in a military response to international terrorism.

Light Anti-Armour Weapon

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what budget cuts have been made to the Next Generation Light Anti-Armour Weapon programme. [31102]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* As with other equipment, we keep under review the number of missiles for the Next Generation Light Anti-Armour Weapon to meet our requirement. Recent analysis suggests that we may be able to reduce numbers below current assumptions, but this is subject to further work. If resources were so released, we would use them elsewhere in the Defence programme to fund other high priority equipment.

Beyond Visual Range Air-to-Air Missile

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department intends to place in the Library the demonstration and manufacture contract for the Beyond Visual Range Air-to-Air missile with MBDA. [31104]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* The contract for the Beyond Visual Range Air-to-Air Missile is currently being negotiated. We do not expect it to be concluded before the summer. I do not plan to place a copy of the contract in the Library of the House as it will be a commercial agreement between the Ministry of Defence and the company MBDA, and will be withheld in accordance with Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. We do however intend publishing details of the contractual breakpoints in this contract, as stated by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence in his statement to the House on 16 May 2000.

A400M

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department intends to place in the Library the demonstration and manufacture contract for the A400M with Airbus Military Company. [31105]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* The A400M development and manufacture contract between OCCAR (acting as agent for the eight nations participating in the A400M programme) and Airbus Military was signed on 18 December 2001 but it will not be effective until German participation receives appropriate Bundestag approval. As the contract is a commercial arrangement, and involves relations with other governments, I plan to withhold it in accordance with Exemptions one and 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information which relate to international relations and third party's commercial confidences.

Afghanistan

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the oral statement given by the Secretary of

State for International Development on 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 21–36, if he will publish the terms of the Scoping Study on how to provide security across Afghanistan and begin the process of demobilisation and disarmament and the building and training of an Afghan army and police force; and if he will make a statement. [31811]

Mr. Hoon: In keeping with our role as current lead nation for the International Security Assistance Force in Kabul, the UK is committed to assisting the Afghan Interim Administration (AIA) as it begins the rebuilding of Afghanistan. The Department for International Development, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence are in the process of jointly commissioning a scoping study on security sector reform in Afghanistan, to be carried out in consultation with the AIA, the UN and other international partners. Its terms of reference are being finalised, and I will place a copy in the Library of the House in due course.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment was made of the provisions of articles 41 and 42 of the United Nations Charter before the military conflict in Afghanistan was begun. [31058]

Mr. MacShane: I have been asked to reply.

Following the terrorist outrages on 11 September 2001, the Security Council adopted Resolutions 1368 (2001) on 12 September 2001 and 1373 (2001) on 28 September 2001, which condemned international terrorism. The latter imposed a series of measures to combat international terrorism in accordance with Article 41 of the Charter.

Military operations against the al-Qaeda organisation and the Taliban regime which supported it were undertaken in the exercise of the inherent right of individual and collective self-defence, recognised in Article 51 of the Charter, to avert the continuing threat of attacks from that source. This right of self-defence was reaffirmed in Resolutions 1368 and 1373.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Disabled People

Mr. Gray: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what steps the Committee is taking to ensure that deafness and hearing loss are not barriers in contacting hon. Members. [31250]

Mrs. Roe: None. This is not the responsibility of the Administration Committee. However during the last Parliament the Committee considered a report of an audit by the RNID disability consultancy on the services and facilities provided in the Palace for deaf and hard of hearing people. Following that review a number of improvements were made. The House of Commons Information Office also advertises the fact that it welcomes calls via Typetalk.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what training the Committee has initiated for hon. Members and their staff in sign language and lip speaking. [31252]

Mrs. Roe: None. However I understand that in the past both the House authorities and voluntary organisations have offered seminars on providing services to constituents with disabilities. The Employers' Forum on Disability, to which the House authorities subscribe, has produced a publication called the MPs' Guide on Disability. This includes brief guidance on communicating with lip readers and communicating via an interpreter with a sign language user. Copies are available from the Department of Finance and Administration.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what plans the Committee has for providing *(a)* Braille translation facilities, *(b)* Braille typing facilities, *(c)* text phone availability and *(d)* text answer phone supply for hon. Members. [31249]

Mrs. Roe: None. This is not strictly a matter for the Committee. I understand that in the past Members with certain disabilities have benefited from additional facilities and equipment. Following the Resolutions of the House of 5 July 2001, a proportion of the new General Services Budget is available to meet certain extra costs incurred in making adjustments to the working conditions of Members with disabilities, or in providing special equipment. This could include the provision of special telephone equipment or Braille equipment, and training in its use.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what steps the Committee is taking to make methods of contacting hon. Members available to those people who are hard of hearing or visually impaired, known to these communities. [31253]

Mrs. Roe: None, this is not the responsibility of the Administration Committee. However the Department of Finance and Administration is able to advise on disability issues including methods of communication, and individual Members may publicise their willingness to receive BT TextDirect and RNID Typetalk calls.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what plans the Committee has for promoting the RNID Typetalk service with hon. Members. [31251]

Mrs. Roe: None. RNID Typetalk is a free service which relays conversations between people who use textphones and people who use voice telephones; Members do not need a dedicated telephone number in order to receive Typetalk calls.

Passes

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee when she will publish rules on the criteria by which individuals may hold 28A Lobby, other Press Gallery, and other House of Commons passes. [30813]

Mrs. Roe *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* Authorisation and control of House of Commons passes is the responsibility of the Sergeant at Arms who I understand intends to carry out a review of the qualifications associated with the various pass categories. Once the review is completed, I expect the Serjeant at Arms to report to the committee, and to publish details of any changes to the criteria for entitlement that are made as a result of the review.

The committee continues to endorse the recommendations of the Second Report of the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services), 1987–88, "Access to the Precincts of the House" (HC580), which contains guidelines on the availability of passes.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Insolvency

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with the target on the unit cost of administering bankruptcy and compulsory liquidation cases. [23164]

Miss Melanie Johnson: As at the end of the last financial year, 31 March 2001, the unit cost of case administration by the Insolvency Service had increased by 9 per cent. This was principally the result of the direct costs of a new IT system implemented in 1999–2000, which accounted for 5.1 per cent. and the costs of implementing major IT change; the consequent training programme contributed significantly to the remainder.

Fireworks

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to record the number of incidents and nature of damage to property caused by different types of fireworks. [26666]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* We have no plans. Damage to property is a matter for the Home Office.

Enron

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will suspend Arthur Andersen accountants from Government contracts until the US Senate Committee investigation into Enron is completed. [28520]

Mr. Wilson: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 23 January 2002, *Official Report,* columns 913–14W.

Household Products

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to control the levels of toxicity used in household products; and if she will make a statement. [29703]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) on 22 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 744W.

Regulations

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has received regarding the impact of regulations on smaller businesses. [30164]

Nigel Griffiths: I regularly discuss the impact of regulation with SMEs and their representative bodies, including the Federation of Small Businesses and the Forum of Private Business.

During a visit to Brussels next month, I am hosting a small business:europe event to champion the cause of SMEs in the fight against red tape. In light of this, I have written to all Small Business Council members (who advise on small business policy) and other SME stakeholders seeking their assistance in compiling a strong case with which to press their case with Commissioners and MEPs.

Furthermore, the DTI review has strengthened the fight against red tape by giving regulatory responsibility to the chair of the Small Business Council.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the extra costs to pension funds of draft regulations on fixed term workers. [31838]

Alan Johnson: A regulatory impact assessment (RIA), detailing the costs and benefits of the draft Fixed Term Employees' (Prevention of less favourable treatment) Regulations, was published on 21 January this year and a copy is in the Library of the House. The RIA estimates the benefits to employees and costs to employers of preventing discrimination against fixed term employees as regards access to occupational pension schemes at £33–97 million, with some additional administration costs that it has not been possible to estimate. This figure does not take into account that, in some cases, employers will be able to objectively justify excluding fixed term employees from occupational pension schemes where they are unlikely to benefit.

Rural Post Offices

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to grant additional funds to keep open rural sub-post offices threatened with closure under Consignia's strategic plan; and if she will make a statement. [29992]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* Consignia has submitted no such strategic plan. In addition to the £2 million fund to support volunteer and community initiatives to maintain or re-open post office facilities in rural areas where traditional services would otherwise close, the Government are committed to providing transitional financial assistance to rural post offices. Advice received at the end of last year from the Postal Services Commission on transitional financial assistance to the rural network is currently under consideration.

BCCI

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how much was incurred in costs by the English liquidators' staff, and what the legal fees were for the trial of the stigma issue involving the former employees of BCCI; [31051]

(2) how much was made in loan recoveries by the English liquidators from the former employees during 2000 and 2001; and what the costs incurred by the liquidators' staff and their solicitors in the same period were in relation to such loan recoveries and litigation of employees' claims. [31050]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department does not hold such information. These are matters for the liquidators of the company.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the creditors of BCCI will receive the next dividend payment. [31048]

Miss Melanie Johnson: This is a matter for the liquidators of the company.

Enterprise Bill

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she plans to introduce the Enterprise Bill. [31697]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Proposals for an enterprise Bill were included in the Queen's Speech at the start of this parliamentary Session. The Government's proposals were then set out in two White Papers "Productivity and Enterprise: A World Class Competition Regime" and "Productivity and Enterprise: Insolvency—A Second Chance", published on 31 July 2001.

The Government will introduce a Bill as soon as parliamentary time permits.

South West RDA

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much money the south-west RDA spent on advertising the South West in *(a)* 1998–99 and *(b)* 2000–01. [31828]

Alan Johnson: The first year of operation for the south-west RDA was 1999–2000. In 2000–01 the RDA spent approximately £30,000 on advertising the south-west. In that year the RDA also spent approximately £93,000 on inward investment promotion and publicity, targeted at attracting foreign-owned businesses to the south-west.

European Competition Investigations

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many investigations have been launched by the European competition authorities into companies headquartered in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* France and *(c)* Germany in the past five years. [31387]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* This information is not available in the form requested.

Energy Generation

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress towards more environmentally friendly energy generation. [29566]

Mr. Wilson: The Cabinet Office's Performance and Innovation Unit have recently undertaken a strategic review of the UK's energy policy including the longer-term role for renewable energy. The Government's work on developing environmentally friendly energy generation has continued throughout this period with several new initiatives being implemented to ensure the development of renewable sources of energy and cleaner coal technology.

Subject to parliamentary approval, we shall shortly be implementing the Renewables Obligation. In addition, renewables generated electricity has been exempted from the climate change levy and existing Non Fossil Fuel Obligation (NFFO) contracts have been protected. These measures will create a long-term market incentive for renewables worth over £1 billion per year by 2010.

We are underpinning the obligation with direct Government funding for renewables worth over £260 million between 2001 and 2004 and within this, we are setting up an extensive capital grants programme for offshore wind and energy crops projects, initiating a major photovoltaics demonstration programme, and boosting research and development.

We recently implemented an order to allow locational flexibility for NFFO 3, 4 and 5 projects that have not yet been commissioned. This will allow more appropriate locations to be found in order to overcome problems in securing planning permission.

We have initiated studies of each UK region's capacity to generate electricity from renewable sources. Once all these assessments are completed, it is expected that specific regional targets for renewable energy will be adopted across the UK.

The Government are also exploring the scope for upgrading the electricity distribution system to enable the UK's huge renewable energy resources to be exploited to the full. For example, we have commissioned an initial study of the feasibility of an underwater cable to connect parts of the Western seaboard of the UK directly to the National Grid.

In the Cleaner Coal technologies arena, the Government are already investing £12 million over the three-year period 2000–01 to 2002–03 on research and development. We will also be publishing in the very near future the findings of the review of the case for Government support for Clean Coal Technology power plant.

TREASURY

Mental Health Statistics

Chris Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people suffered mental health problems by region, expressed as *(a)* a percentage and *(b)* the total number, ranked in descending order according to percentage figures for the latest year in which figures are available. [30589]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Chris Ruane, dated 30 January 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question about how many people suffered mental health problems by region. (30589)

Estimates of the total number of people suffering from mental health problems in different regions are not available from current statistical sources. However, estimates of the percentage of adults aged 16 to 74 years living in private households who were suffering from a range of mental health problems can be obtained from the results of a survey carried out in 2000. This survey of psychiatric morbidity among adults in private households was carried by the Office for National Statistics on behalf of the Department of Health, the Scottish Executive and the National Assembly for Wales.

Approximately 8,800 people from all parts of Great Britain participated in the survey that involved personal interviews, which provided assessments of a range of mental disorders. An overview of the results of the survey was published last year in the report "Psychiatric morbidity among adults Living in Private Households, 2000" by Singleton et al., which is available from The Stationery Office or can be downloaded from the National Statistics website (www.statistics.gov.uk). The report presents estimates of the proportion of people suffering from neurotic disorders (such as anxiety and depression), psychotic disorders (for example, schizophrenia and manic depression) and alcohol and drug dependence, by NHS Regional Office area in England and in Scotland and Wales.

It should be noted that, because the assessment instruments used covered different time periods and people may have more than one disorder, it is not possible to add the figures together to give a total number of people with a mental health problem.

Inland Revenue

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to outsource distraint from the Inland Revenue to the private sector. [31393]

Dawn Primarolo: Proposals for any change in relation to distraint action by the Inland Revenue are still under consideration.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans there are to outsource information and advice on payments from the Inland Revenue to the private sector; and if he will make a statement. [31395]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue has no plans to outsource the provision of information and advice on payments to the private sector.

Debt Collection

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures will be introduced to ensure that private companies collecting debts from taxpayers are monitored. [31394]

Dawn Primarolo: The details of any proposals to outsource Inland Revenue distraint action are still under consideration.

Public Sector Salaries

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average public sector salary is in *(a)* London and the south-east and *(b)* the north-east. [31388]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The average public sector salaries (gross weekly earnings) in London, the south-east and the north-east are as follows:

London:	£486
South-east (excluding London):	£414
North-east:	£371.

The figures are for April 2000 from the New Earnings Survey.

Figures for April 2001 will be published on 28 February 2002.

NATS

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will provide additional public funding to enable the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions to provide financial assistance to NATS; [31649]

(2) when he was advised of the concerns expressed by the CAA about the ability of the Airlines Group business plan for NATS to withstand a major incident. [31650]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him today by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

Tax Law Rewrite

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received relating to the Tax Law Rewrite Project. [31628]

Dawn Primarolo: I am pleased to say the work of the Tax Law Rewrite Project continues to enjoy widespread support. In particular, the project's first Bill, on capital allowances, which received Royal Assent last March, has been well received by the tax community as a great improvement in clarity and accessibility.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many pages of tax law have been published since the inception of the Tax Law Rewrite Project; and of that number, how many have been drafted as part of the Tax Rewrite Project. [31625]

Dawn Primarolo: The Tax Law Rewrite Project began work in 1997 on rewriting direct tax legislation. Since that time approximately 2000 pages of Finance Act legislation has been enacted, covering both direct and indirect taxes, some of which incorporate the rewrite approach. In addition, the project's first Bill, on capital allowances, which received Royal Assent last March, runs to 333 pages. The aim is that the project's second Bill, concerning employment, pension and social security income, will be published in draft later this year.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many pages of tax law were in existence following the Finance Acts of *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1990 and *(c)* 2000; and what the projected total is for (i) 2010, (ii) 2020 and (iii) 2030. [31624]

Dawn Primarolo: Tax law is enacted in annual Finance Acts. Periodically, consolidated acts are also prepared. Copies of Finance Acts and consolidated acts are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many parliamentary draftsmen are employed on the Tax Law Rewrite Project; how many are on secondment from other Government departments; and what the standard period of secondment is. [31626]

Dawn Primarolo: There are currently six parliamentary draftsmen on secondment to the Tax Law Rewrite Project. The usual period of secondment is around two years. There are currently no draftsmen on secondment to the project from other Government Departments.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff are employed in the Office of Parliamentary Counsel; on average how many are employed to deal with tax matters; and how many are trained in the Tax Rewrite Project. [31623]

Dawn Primarolo: I understand that there are 43 draftsmen employed in the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel and 21 administrative staff. Draftsmen are trained to be able to work on Bills covering any area, not specifically tax matters. The Office of the Parliamentary Counsel has a total of 10 draftsmen with experience of working for the Tax Law Rewrite Project.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans the Government have for *(a)* simplifying tax law and *(b)* reducing the volume of tax law. [31627]

Dawn Primarolo: The information is as follows:

(a) The Government keep the whole tax system under review, acting where possible to change tax rules to minimise burdens on business while still meeting the Government's objectives for a fair and efficient tax system. We are currently consulting on a number of measures to simplify and modernise the tax system.

(b) Simply focusing on the volume of legislation is misguided—the length of legislation is not directly related to complexity. Where we introduce new regulations we offer business and individuals practical help and support and have already introduced a substantial package of measures to help businesses, particularly small businesses, deal with Government.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what time scale was originally set for the Tax Law Rewrite Project; and if this time scale will be met. [31622]

Dawn Primarolo: The original estimate was that it would take about five years to rewrite the main primary legislation on direct tax. However, as the work of the project progressed, it became clear that it would take longer to do the job to the necessary standard, and there is general agreement that it is more important for the work to be done properly rather than quickly.

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Wray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was paid to the Treasury in inheritance tax in actual terms in the latest year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement on inheritance tax and plans he has for reform. [30755]

Dawn Primarolo: The yield from inheritance tax in the year 2000–01 was £2.2 billion. As to the future of the tax, I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget statement.

Tax Credits (Fraud)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give a breakdown of the type of sentences imposed on persons convicted of working families tax credit and disabled person's tax credit fraud. [25023]

Dawn Primarolo: From the introduction of tax credits in October 1999 up until 31 December 2001, 28 people have been prosecuted for making incorrect applications for working families tax credit. The table lists the type and number of different sentences imposed on those people. Some prosecutions involved people having more than one sentence imposed upon them. To date, no prosecutions have been brought against anyone applying for disabled person's tax credit.

Type of sentence imposed	*Number of sentences imposed*
Fines	12
Conditional discharge	7
Community Service	6
Rehabilitation Order	1
Community Punishment Orders	1
Trial Continues	2
In custody awaiting sentence	1
Custodial Sentence	7
Total	37

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many prosecutions of working families tax credit and disabled persons tax credit fraud have led to *(a)* summary trial and *(b)* trial on indictment in each year since the WFTC and DPTC commenced. [25021]

Dawn Primarolo: The table shows the number of working families tax credit (WFTC) prosecutions since its introduction in October 1999. To date, there have not been any prosecutions for disabled person's tax credit. Of the 28 WFTC prosecutions heard up to 31 December 2001, 26 were summary prosecutions and two were trials on indictment. Both trials on indictment were heard in 2001.

Period	*Number of prosecutions (WFTC)*
October 1999 to March 2000	0
April 2000 to March 2001	12
April 2001 to December 2001	16

Benefits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many households are in receipt of housing benefit or working families tax credit; and what the estimated annual saving to the Exchequer in payment of housing benefit and WFTC would be from a 1 per cent. cut in the basic rate of tax. [26216]

Dawn Primarolo: It is estimated that at May 2000 there were about five million recipients of housing benefit (HB) or working families tax credit (WFTC) in the United Kingdom.

It is estimated that, in a full year, a 1 per cent. cut in the basic rate of income tax lead to a direct reduction of about £40 million in expenditure on HB and WFTC.

Railtrack

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the gross receipts to the Treasury were of the windfall tax levied on Railtrack in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 1998. [27653]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* As provided for under Exemption 15 (Statutory and other restrictions) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, the Inland Revenue does not disclose the tax paid by an individual or corporate taxpayer.

Equitable Life

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what timetable is envisaged for the completion and publication of the Penrose investigation into the origins of the problems surrounding Equitable Life. [31813]

Ruth Kelly: The timetable for the completion of the Penrose inquiry is a matter for Lord Penrose. The scope of the inquiry is broad and there is a large amount of evidence to gather and consider.

Correspondence

Mr. Gale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will reply to the letter sent to him by the hon. Member for North Thanet on 7 January concerning the right to buy tobacco and alcohol abroad in the EU; what response his Department has made to the letter of formal notice sent by the EU Commission to the Government of the United Kingdom commencing infringement proceedings under Article 226 of the relevant EU directive; and if he will place a copy of that response in the Library. [31882]

Mr. Boateng: I wrote to the hon. Gentleman on 30 January.

Community Sport

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to announce the conclusion of the consultation 'Promoting Sport in the Community'; and if he will make a statement. [31168]

Mr. Boateng: Responses to the 'Promoting Sport in the Community' consultation document have been requested by 1 February 2002. Decisions will be made as part of the normal Budget process.

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received supporting the option of a separate package of Inland Revenue tax relief for community amateur sports clubs; and if he will make a statement. [31167]

Mr. Boateng: A number of responses to the "Promoting Sport in the Community" consultation document have been received and consultation continues until 1 February 2002.

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport about the consultation document "Promoting Sport in the Community". [31171]

Mr. Boateng: The Treasury is in regular dialogue with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans the Government have to change the tax position of community amateur sports clubs; and if he will make a statement. [31170]

Mr. Boateng: A consultation document "Promoting Sport in the Community" was launched on 30 November 2001. It seeks views on the best way to support community amateur sports clubs that make a positive contribution to their local communities.

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the financial support from Government to community amateur sports clubs in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02; what he estimates it will be in (i) 2002–03 and (ii) 2003–04; and if he will make a statement. [31169]

Mr. Boateng: The Government recognise the positive contribution community amateur sports clubs (CASCs) make to their local communities. The consultation document "Promoting Sport in the Community" seeks views from interested parties before finalising decisions on the best way to support CASCs. Copies of the consultation document can be found in the House Library.

Drug Trafficking

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of staffing levels of customs officials at major airports, with particular reference to cases where immigration staff report suspected drug trafficking. [31148]

Mr. Boateng: Major airports are resourced by Customs in line with identified risks. Referrals from immigration are always acted upon by Customs, where there are sufficient grounds.

Government Assets

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate [illegible] has made of the proportion of assets that have been sold by *(a)* Customs and Excise, *(b)* the Inland Revenue and *(c)* National Savings in each year since 1998; and if he will make a statement. [31150]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The National Asset Register (July 2001, Cm 5318) provides a list of all significant asset disposals by central Government Departments and their sponsored bodies between April 1997 and March 2000.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the basis is for the statement in paragraph 6.23 of Cm 5318 that the National Asset Register for the first time provides a complete list of the main assets held by central Government and their value; and if he will make a statement. [31184]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Reality—this is the first time a comprehensive list with asset values has been published.

Rent Rebate Subsidy Expenditure (Scotland)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what formula is in place to vary the level of the Scottish Consolidated Fund to account for additional housing benefit costs as a result of disproportionate variances in rent levels by local authorities; what adjustments have been made to the Scottish Consolidated Fund and the Scottish Block Grant in each of the past five years in respect of this formula; what discussions have taken place with the Scottish Executive on this matter; and what was the outcome of these discussions. [31497]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Statement of Funding Policy, published by the Treasury in July 2000, states that if in Scotland the actual cost of rent rebate subsidy expenditure changes at a disproportionate rate relative to changes in England, then appropriate balancing adjustments are made to the Scottish departmental expenditure limit. Details of such adjustments will be given in announcements of changes to the Scottish DEL made from time to time by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland. Discussions are taking place between the Treasury and the Scottish Executive on this issue.

Parliamentary Questions (PFI)

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many written parliamentary questions regarding private finance initiatives have been tabled since 1 January 2000; and in answer to how many of these information has not been provided on the ground of commercial confidentiality. [31854]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Treasury Ministers have answered 27 parliamentary questions relating to private finance initiative in the period concerned. In no case was information withheld on the ground of commercial confidentiality.

Customs Fraud

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to paragraph 21 of the judgment of the Court of Appeal (Criminal Division) Regina *v.* Patel Villiers, Sewell, Hutchinson and Ford, Cases 2000 02566, 2000 02589, 2000 02591, 2001 02259 and 2001 03772, for what reason Customs and Excise did not take action earlier to protect public revenue. [31532]

Mr. Boateng: A key approach of the Customs National Investigation Service (NIS) to tackling diversion frauds between 1995 and 1998 was to allow fraudsters to move goods from excise warehouses while under observation. When enough evidence was obtained the perpetrators would be arrested. However, an unavoidable consequence of this investigative method was that unrecoverable arrears of duty could build up during the course of the investigation.

In their report on "Losses to the Revenue from Frauds on Alcohol Duty", published on 19 July 2001, NAO noted that

> "Even with the benefit of hindsight, it is difficult to determine whether a policy of greater disruption of alcohol diversion frauds between 1995 and 1998 would have led to a lower level of revenue loss".

The handling of alcohol duty loss cases has been the subject of an independent investigation, commissioned by the Paymaster General. This was headed by John Roques, an ex senior partner of Deloitte and Touche. The report contained 65 recommendations to improve controls and the way that fraud is tackled in Customs. Mr. Roques concluded that there are circumstances where it is constructive and useful to observe the fraudulent movement of goods.

In some cases the NIS conducted retrospective investigations ie after the fraud had been stopped. The Villiers case was a retrospective investigation

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Judgment of the Court of Appeal (Criminal Division) in Regina *v.* Patel, Villiers, Sewell, Hutchinson and Ford, if it is the intention of HM Customs and Excise prosecutors to seek a retrial of the appellants; what the policy of HM Customs and Excise is on the disclosure of evidence; what procedures are in place to discipline those officers who failed to disclose evidence; what the total cost to public funds to date of the criminal proceedings is; and if he will make a statement. [31530]

Mr. Boateng: It is the intention of HM Customs and Excise to seek a retrial of the appellants in the case of Villiers and others. The Villiers judgment spoke of a failure on the part of the Crown to disclose material (para 54 of the Judgment of the Court of Appeal in Regina *v.* Patel, Villiers, Sewell, Hutchinson and Ford) as opposed to any failings on the part of individual officers. There is no suggestion in the judgment that individual officers wrongly withheld material from prosecution lawyers or prosecution Counsel.

The total cost incurred by the Solicitor's Office of HM Customs and Excise (including the costs of the prosecution lawyers involved, prosecution Counsel and general office costs) is estimated to be £450,000. It is not known what costs have been incurred by the defence teams or the courts.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what procedures he has in place to ensure that HM Customs and Excise register and handle informants in accordance with Government guidelines. [31565]

Mr. Boateng: Informants are dealt with by specifically trained officers and HM Customs and Excise are subject to the same legislation and guidelines as police forces in their handling informants.

In addition, reviews of the way the Department carries out these activities are closely monitored by the Office of Surveillance Commissioners, National Audit Office and the Department's own internal audit division.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to paragraph 6, part (2) of the judgment of the Court of Appeal (Criminal Division) in Regina 24 *v.* Patel, Villiers, Sewell, Hutchinson and Ford, what measures he took to monitor the activities of HM Customs and Excise officers and prosecutors in relation to London City Bond; on what date he was first informed that Customs and Excise had been involved in the losses incurred by London City Bond; and how much public funds were lost. [31528]

Mr. Boateng: In line with standing arrangements between the solicitor's office of HM Customs and Excise and the Attorney-General, a monthly schedule of 'sensitive' cases was generated within the solicitor's office and sent to the Attorney General's office on 14 March 2001. A number of cases which involved London City Bond were included as entries in this schedule. The Attorney-General wrote to the solicitor's office on 5 April 2001 asking for fuller details of these cases. A comprehensive note was prepared and sent to the Attorney-General on 27 April 2001. Since then, the Solicitor's Office has continued to keep the Attorney-General abreast of current developments in these cases by way of updates to the aforementioned monthly schedule.

The Chancellor was first informed of the issues resulting from excise diversion fraud in June 2000. The Paymaster General announced an independent inquiry later that month and the full details of the losses were then published in July 2001 in the Roques report.

HM Customs and Excise Trust Statement for 1999–2000, published in February 2001, was certified by the Comptroller and Auditor-General and provided details of the estimated revenue losses due to excise diversion fraud of £668 million with further losses of £216 million involving goods diverted onto overseas markets where duty would have been due. Notes 9 and 10 to the Trust Statement, which was published with Customs annual report 1999–2000 (CM 5064), gave further details.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many National Investigation Service investigations into fraudulent consignments of goods have been carried out in the last 10 years; how many such investigations are in progress; and what estimate has been made of the amount of excise duty lost to HM Customs and Excise as a result of decisions not to prosecute informers during investigations in each case. [31533]

Mr. Boateng: Figures for the last 10 years are not available. Outward diversion fraud resulted from Single Market changes, which were only introduced from 1 January 1993. Customs investigated around 130 cases of outward diversion fraud between 1994 and 1998. After 1998 as a result of enhanced controls and the subsequent introduction of a strategic approach to countering fraud, patterns of fraud changed. It would not be in the public interest to reveal how many investigations into this type of fraud are in progress as this would assist fraudsters in evaluating the risk of perpetrating such frauds.

It is not the policy of Customs to either confirm or deny the involvement of an informant in any case.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his policy is on the *(a)* awarding and *(b)* level of financial inducements to potential informants to Customs and Excise. [31566]

Mr. Boateng: Section 165 of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979, provides that the Commissioners of Customs and Excise may, at their discretion, pay rewards in respect of any service which appears to merit it. It is not Customs' policy to disclose information about the amounts paid to informants on the grounds that this could undermine the effectiveness of law enforcement.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to paragraph 6, part (2) of the judgment of the Court of Appeal (Criminal Division) in Regina *v.* Patel, Villiers, Sewell, Hutchinson and Ford, what the policy is of HM Customs and Excise with regard to permitting warehouse owners to allow goods to leave without the payment of duty; and if he will define the reference by HM Customs and Excise in the judgment to bigger fry. [31531]

Mr. Boateng: A key approach of the Customs National Investigation Service (NIS) to tackling diversion frauds between 1995 and 1998 was to allow fraudsters to move goods from excise warehouses while under observation. When enough evidence was obtained the perpetrators would be arrested. The co-operation of warehousekeepers with Customs' investigators was an essential part in this approach. As they could have become liable for duty on these consignments, some of these warehousekeepers were given either explicit or implicit indemnities against liability for the duty evaded. In some cases the NIS conducted retrospective investigations, ie after the fraud had been stopped. The Villiers case was a retrospective investigation.

This investigative approach was examined by John Roques in his report on the Collection of Excise Duties in HM Customs and Excise. Mr. Roques concluded that there are circumstances where it is constructive and useful to observe the fraudulent movement of goods but made a three part recommendation on the subject of indemnities (Recommendation 30). This was accepted by Customs. Clearly defined authority levels for risking revenue were introduced in November 2000. A copy of the Roques report which includes the Government's response has been laid in the parliamentary Library.

Hauliers played a key role in a number of diversion frauds. In some cases the hauliers were the principals behind the fraud, in others they played a lesser though still essential role. Where the haulier was not the principal, Customs would attempt to identify the principals in order to put as complete a case as possible before the courts. It is ultimately for the courts to determine, on the evidence presented, the respective roles of the defendants.

Taxpayer Confidentiality

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the guidelines and rules regarding the confidentiality of individuals' tax returns and tax affairs. [31222]

Dawn Primarolo: The position under successive Governments has been that the law on taxpayer confidentiality prevents the Inland Revenue from disclosing any information relating to the tax affairs of an individual taxpayer except where that disclosure is permitted by law or where the individual involved has consented to disclosure.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what access *(a)* civil servants outside the Inland Revenue and *(b)* Ministers have to the details of the tax affairs of individual citizens. [31451]

Dawn Primarolo: The position under successive Governments has been that the law on taxpayer confidentiality prevents the Inland Revenue from disclosing any information relating to the tax affairs of an individual taxpayer except where that disclosure is permitted by law or where the individual involved has consented to disclosure. These rules apply to civil servants outside the Inland Revenue and Ministers in the same way as to other third parties.

Gibraltar

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* people resident and *(b)* businesses users operating in Gibraltar have UK tax liabilities. [31931]

Dawn Primarolo: The requested information is not available.

Footballers

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the criteria used to determine whether proceeds from footballers' testimonial events are regarded as taxable income; and if he will extend the criteria to increase the tax liability on this revenue for full-time professional footballers. [31852]

Dawn Primarolo: If proceeds from a testimonial match are connected with the termination of a footballers' employment they are taxable if they exceed a £30,000 exemption limit.

And if a footballer becomes entitled to a testimonial after a specific period of service to a club, or under an agreement made with the club on signing, the proceeds may be taxable in full as income from his employment.

But if no such entitlement exists and a testimonial match is organised by a testimonial committee on the individual's behalf, rather than by the employer, the proceeds do not come from his employment, but from individuals marking their esteem for the individual's personal qualities or general contributions to the game. These payments are of a personal nature and are not therefore taxable in the same way that other gifts are not taxable.

We have no current plans to change the tax treatment of footballers' testimonial payments. However, we keep all aspects of the tax system, including this one, under regular review.

Pension Credit

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 14 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 770W, on pension credit, (1) how many representations he has received *(a)* supporting and *(b)* opposing the marginal tax rate in the pension credit; [32072]

(2) how many representations he has received *(a)* supporting and *(b)* opposing the pension credit savings limit. [32071]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer to the reply I gave on 14 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 770W, and have nothing further to add.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prison Service

Syd Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish the Prison Service's corporate plan for 2002–03 to 2004–05 and business plan and key performance indicators for 2002–03. [32769]

Beverley Hughes: The Prison Service corporate plan for 2002–03 to 2004–05 and business plan for 2002–03, which includes the key performance indicators agreed so far, has been published today and copies have been placed in the Library.

Terrorism Act 2000

Syd Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will lay before Parliament a report on the working of the Terrorism Act 2000. [32770]

Mr. Blunkett: I am pleased to say that Lord Carlile of Berriew QC has completed the report on part VII of the Act, which relates solely to Northern Ireland, which will be laid before Parliament today. A full report will be published later this year.

Lewes Prison (Drug Testing)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Stinchcombe) of 10 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1008–12W, if he will make a statement on the percentage of prisoners tested positive in random mandatory drug tests at HMP Lewes. [28707]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The rate of positive random mandatory drug tests (MDT) at Lewes prison for each of the months given in the answer of 10 January 2002 is shown in the table:

2001	*Average population*	*Rate of positive MDT (%)*
January	411	27.3
February	414	18.1
March	445	10.0
April	446	30.4
May	435	40.0
June	443	36.4
July	471	37.5
August	478	30.0
September	471	25.0
October	468	24.0
November	467	32.0
December	474	33.3

MDT data from September 2001 are provisional and subject to validation.

Court Proceedings

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* criminal prosecutions, *(b)* either-way case prosecutions, *(c)* summary only prosecutions and *(d)* indictment only prosecutions there were in each of the last 10 years. [29646]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The following table provides the available information, extracted from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database, which relates to the number of defendants proceeded against in each of the years 1991 to 2000 in England and Wales.

Statistics for 2001 are not yet available.

Defendants proceeded against for various categories of offences, England and Wales, 1991 to 2000

Year	Total defendants proceeded against	*Defendants proceeded against for:*		
		Triable either way offences	Summary offences	Indictable only offences
1991	1,955,917	462,362	1,466,860	26,695
1992	2,029,910	462,000	1,539,633	28,277
1993	1,956,271	449,632	1,477,463	29,176
1994	1,947,165	466,772	1,449,839	30,554
1995	1,836,307	434,091	1,372,786	29,430
1996	1,919,494	432,558	1,454,817	32,119
1997	1,855,333	454,432	1,368,632	32,269
1998	1,951,915	477,465	1,441,418	33,032
1999	1,881,765	479,917	1,369,072	32,776
2000	1,904,677	457,203	1,412,855	34,619

Convictions

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what percentage of criminal cases in *(a)* Crown court on indictment, *(b)* Crown court either-way case, *(c)* magistrates court either-way case, *(d)* magistrates court summary only and *(e)* in total, resulted in a conviction in the last five years for which figures are available. [29643]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The following table provides the available information, extracted from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database, which relates to the number of defendants proceeded against in each of the years 1996 to 2000 in England and Wales.

Number and percentage[1] of defendants convicted for the various categories of offences, England and Wales, 1996 to 2000

	Number	Percentage
1996		
Defendants convicted at the Crown court for indictable only offences	11,438	73
Defendants convicted at the Crown court for triable either-way offences	55,288	81
Defendants convicted at magistrates courts for triable either-way offences	231,896	54
Defendants convicted at magistrates courts for summary offences	1,135,088	78
Total defendants convicted[2]	1,433,710	75
1997		
Defendants convicted at the Crown court for indictable only offences	11,456	73
Defendants convicted at the Crown court for triable either-way offences	59,425	81
Defendants convicted at magistrates courts for triable either-way offences	247,351	54
Defendants convicted at magistrates courts for summary offences	1,063,308	78
Total defendants convicted[2]	1,381,540	74
1998		
Defendants convicted at the Crown court for indictable only offences	11,642	70
Defendants convicted at the Crown court for triable either-way offences	47,814	77
Defendants convicted at magistrates courts for triable either-way offences	280,524	59
Defendants convicted at magistrates courts for summary offences	1,125,505	78
Total defendants convicted[2]	1,465,485	75
1999		
Defendants convicted at the Crown court for indictable only offences	11,561	69
Defendants convicted at the Crown court for triable either-way offences	43,300	75
Defendants convicted at magistrates courts for triable either-way offences	285,524	59
Defendants convicted at magistrates courts for summary offences	1,064,111	78
Total defendants convicted[2]	1,404,496	75
2000		
Defendants convicted at the Crown court for indictable only offences	11,312	67
Defendants convicted at the Crown court for triable either-way offences	42,578	74
Defendants convicted at magistrates courts for triable either-way offences	269,867	59
Defendants convicted at magistrates courts for summary offences	1,095,680	78
Total defendants convicted[2]	1,419,437	75

[1] Percentage of those proceeded against at magistrates courts or of those for trial at the Crown court.

[2] Excludes juveniles convicted of indictable offences at magistrates courts and defendants convicted of summary offences at the Crown court.

Note:

Statistics for 2001 are not yet available.

Either-way Offences

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the 20 most common triable either-way offences in the past year; and if he will make a statement. [29645]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The following list provides the twenty most common triable either-way offences based on the number of defendants proceeded against in England and Wales in 2000 (statistics for 2001 are not yet available) extracted from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database. They relate to the principal offence for which a person was proceeded against, if dealt with for more than one offence at the same time.

Triable either-way offence

Theft from shops and stalls
Absconding by person released on bail
Assault occasioning actual bodily harm
Other theft (not separately classified)
Possession of cannabis
Non-aggravated burglary in a dwelling
Non-aggravated burglary other than in a dwelling

Affray

Receiving stolen goods

Obtaining property by deception

Criminal damage not endangering life

Theft from the person of another

Possession of offensive weapon without lawful authority or reasonable excuse

Wounding or inflicting grievous bodily harm

Theft from motor vehicle

Dangerous driving

Possession of heroin

Aggravated vehicle taking (excluding death)

Undertaking or assisting in the retention, removal, disposal or realisation of stolen goods, or arranging to do so

Violent disorder.

Sex Offences

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to take action to make it an offence for an adult to deceive minors into exposing themselves; and if he will make a statement. [29639]

Mr. Keith Bradley: This whole area is one which we are looking at very carefully as part of our consideration of the recommendations for new sexual offences proposed in "Setting the Boundaries", the report of the Sex Offences Review. The review proposed a new offence of adult sexual abuse of a child, including

"inciting or compelling a child to carry out a sexual act".

We are currently considering the large number of responses to the public consultation process on the Review document.

We view with serious concern those who seek to use children for their own gratification and tackling this abhorrent behaviour is a top priority for this Government. We will ensure any gap is filled.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish proposals for sex offence law reform; and if he will make a statement. [29642]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We are currently considering how to change existing sex offences in light of the recommendations made to Government in "Setting the Boundaries" and the more than 700 responses that were received during the consultation period. We will be bringing forward legislation when parliamentary time allows and will publish a summary of our proposals in the Library as soon as possible.

Holocaust Memorial Day

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about plans for the Holocaust Memorial Day 2002. [30283]

Angela Eagle: A national event was held in Manchester on the evening of Sunday 27 January attended by a wide audience including senior public figures, Holocaust survivors, community representatives and students.

A wide range of activities took place around the country organised by local authorities and community groups. They were encouraged to put details of their activities on the dedicated website www.holocaustmemorialday.gov.uk.

Many schools used the new Holocaust education resource pack in the week leading up to Holocaust Memorial Day to mark the day in appropriate ways.

Media coverage of the day and the related events was extensive and mainly positive.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how local authorities are marking Holocaust Memorial Day. [30862]

Angela Eagle: A wide range of activities took place around the country organised by local authorities and community groups. They were encouraged to put details of their activities on the dedicated website www.holocaustmemorialday.gov.uk. There were over 160 known events, involving at least 80 local authorities.

Departmental Expenditure (Publications)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the expenditure of his Department on newspapers, magazines and periodicals in each of the last four years. [30089]

Angela Eagle: The cost of newspapers, magazines and periodicals purchased centrally was as follows:

	£
1998–99	161,108
1999–2000	187,685
2000–01	151,865
2001–02	138,527

Estimates of purchases within individual business units of the Home Office are not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Suicides (Young Offenders)

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many suicides were attempted in each young offenders institution in each year since 1996. [29477]

Beverley Hughes: Available data are shown in the table. Figures are collected in respect of self-harm (which covers all acts of self-injury, however serious) and self-inflicted deaths: there is no separate definition of "attempted suicide". Figures in respect of self-injury from 1998 and in respect of self-inflicted deaths for the entire period are age related rather than location based because many young offenders are not located in Young Offender Institutions (YOIs). The definition of self-harm and recording practices are under review.

Self-harm incidents recorded in YOI establishments

	Number
1996	99
1997	114

Self-harm incidents reported in establishments in England and Wales by age category between 1 January 1998 and 30 November 2001

Year	Juveniles (15–17)	Young Offenders (18–21)	Total
1998	252	746	998
1999	205	825	1,030
2000	288	1,069	1,357
2001[1]	366	1,201	1,567
Total	1,111	3,841	4,952

[1] Year 2001 figures up to 30 November 2001

Self-inflicted deaths

	Juveniles (15–17)	Young Offenders (18–21)	Total
1996	1	11	12
1997	0	9	9
1998	3	11	14
1999	1	13	14
2000	3	13	16
2001	3	10	13
Totals	11	67	78

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reduce the number of attempted suicides in young offenders' institutions. [29465]

Beverley Hughes: A proactive strategy is in place to reduce suicide and self-harm in prison and make prisons safer for all who live and work there. The strategy target areas of greatest risk, recognising that prisoners under 21 years of age are especially vulnerable, whether or not located in Young Offender Institutions (YOIs). Feltham YOI and Eastwood Park, which holds young women offenders, are among five prisons selected as pilot sites for the installation of safer cells, first night support centres, crisis suites and cells that enable staff to monitor at risk prisoners. Other initiatives, which focus on the early period in custody, include physical improvements to reception and induction areas and removal of ligature points.

The Prison Service is bidding for funds to provide an extra 860 safer cells in 16 YOIs. The under 18 age group will additionally benefit from the Prison Service's joint working with the Youth Justice Board, which is investing £1 million this financial year on safer cells. Work is also in hand on developing an effective cell sharing assessment tool; developing peer and outside support schemes suitable for young people; reducing violence and bullying; and improving identification and assessment of at risk young people and their care plans.

Immigration

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average waiting time has been in the last 12 months for which figures are available for decisions to be made on immigration applications from *(a)* work permit holders, *(b)* people with UK ancestry, *(c)* EEA nationals and their families, *(d)* spouses, *(e)* fiancés and fiancées and *(f)* asylum seekers; and if he will make a statement. [30994]

Angela Eagle: The table provides the information requested on asylum seekers for the period of October 2000 to September 2001, inclusive. The average decision times have been calculated using all initial decisions made for which data are available, including a minimal number of cases decided under the backlog criteria, as well as new cases. These data are subject to revision following quality checking.

Average time to initial decision[1,2], initial decisions made October 2000 to September 2001

	Months[3,4,5]
October 2000 to September 2001	14

[1] The average length of time (in months) is calculated from date application is lodged to the date of initial decision, and relates to the month in which the decisions were made.

[2] Figures are estimates based on cases for which information is recorded.

[3] Based on data from A-CID (Asylum Cases Information Database).

[4] Excluding dependants.

[5] Provisional figures.

We do not routinely publish processing times for individual types of general and settlement applications. We aim to decide all straightforward applications within three weeks, although at present it is taking up to eight weeks. This is due to the exceptionally high number of applications received in 2001, especially in recent months, and process changes which are being introduced to improve our longer term performance. We are working to reduce this to three weeks as soon as possible.

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what target waiting times for immigration applications are used in respect of *(a)* work permit holders, *(b)* people with UK ancestry, *(c)* EEA nationals and their spouses, *(d)* fiancés and fianceés, *(e)* spouses and *(f)* asylum seekers; what proportion of cases have met the waiting time targets in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [30997]

Angela Eagle: We aim to decide 70 per cent. of all new general and settlement application within three weeks, and met this for the first half of 2001. We do not generally prioritise specific categories of application other than for European Economic Area (EEA) nationals where, under European Community (EC) legislation, we have to deal with any application for a residence permit within six months. During 2001 such cases were on average dealt within three-four months. Regrettably at present it is taking up to eight weeks to decide new straightforward applications due to the exceptionally high number of new applications received during 2001, especially in recent months; and process changes that are being introduced to improve our longer term performance. We are working to reduce this timescale to three weeks or less as soon as possible.

The asylum decision target for 2001–02 is to make 60 per cent. of initial decisions in new substantive cases within two months of the date of application. We intend to publish provisional figures indicating progress over the first half of the year with the quarterly asylum statistics bulletin on 28 February 2002.

Women Prisoners (Wales)

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 786W, on women prisoners, *(a)* for what crimes the 169 female prisoners were committed to prison in Wales, *(b)* how many had reoffended, *(c)* in what prisons they were placed and *(d)* how many spoke Welsh as their first language. [30847]

Beverley Hughes: The table of the 169 women committed by courts in Wales and who were in the prison population on 30 November 2001, shows a breakdown by *(a)* offence and *(b)* establishment. Data on whether or not these women have been imprisoned after a reconviction are collected, but would take a few weeks to process. I shall therefore write to my hon. Friend with the information. Data on the languages spoken by prisoners are not collected centrally, and so cannot be provided.

Females committed in Wales to prison by offence type and establishment

	Number committed
Offence type	
Drug offences	32
Other thefts	22
Wounding	21
Robbery	17
Burglary	14
Arson	9
Handling stolen goods	7
Murder	6
Offence not recorded	6
Manslaughter	5
Other motoring offences	5
Frauds	5
Other criminal offences	4
Assaults	4
Cruelty to children	4
Other homicide or attempted homicide	2
Threat/disorderly behaviour	1
Criminal damage	1
In charge or driving under the influence of drink or drugs	1
Perjury/libel/perverting the course of justice	1
Affray	1
Other offences of violence against the person	1
Total	169
Establishment	
Foston Hall	11
Durham	3
Eastwood Park	66
Brickhill	2
Winchester	2
Bullwood Hall	4
Highpoint	14
Styal	28
Send	2
Drake Hall	17
Downview	4
East Sutton Park	1
Morton Hall	3
Low Newton	2
New Hall	7
Askham Grange	2
Cookham Wood	1
Total	169

Work Permits (Shortage Occupations)

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applicants, broken down by category, have been admitted under the fast track scheme for shortage occupations in information technology since 1 October 1999. [30998]

Angela Eagle: The number of work permits approved under the shortage occupation category for information technology occupations since 21 January 2000 is 20,292. This is the date that information technology occupations were first included on the work permit shortage occupation list.

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what basis Oracle database administration was included on the list of shortage occupations for the purposes of the fast track work permit scheme. [30999]

Angela Eagle: Oracle database administrator was included on the work permit shortage occupation list following consultation with representatives from the information technology communications and electronics sector and other Government Departments.

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to ensure that the employment market data used to inform the fast track work permit scheme for shortage occupations is *(a)* accurate and *(b)* up to date. [31000]

Angela Eagle: The Home Department consults regularly on relevant and current labour market issues with other Government Departments and representatives from those sectors of industry that are included on the work permit shortage occupation list.

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what data were used to compile the list of shortage occupations in information technology for the purposes of the fast track work permit system. [31001]

Angela Eagle: Regular consultation with a panel of representatives from the information technology communications and electronics sector and other Government Departments provides up-to-date information on the information technology labour market. This allows the Department to make informed decisions about the compilation of the work permit shortage occupation list.

Keith Hellawell

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the responsibilities and salary of Mr. Keith Hellawell. [16890]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Mr. Hellawell has been engaged to work part-time, initially to support the work being undertaken to assist the European Union (EU) applicant countries prepare the necessary drug strategies and related infrastructure to meet drug-related requirements of EU membership.

Details of individual special adviser salaries below £90,000 are not disclosed to protect the individual.

People Trafficking

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been *(a)* prosecuted and *(b)* convicted for people smuggling offences in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [29641]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The available information, from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database, relating to England and Wales for the years 1996 to 2000, is shown in the table. These data cover proceedings under the Immigration Act 1971 sec. 25(1) (a), (b) and (c) as amended by the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 Sec.5.

Statistics for 2001 are not yet available.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has already indicated his intention to increase the maximum penalty for these offences to 14 years, and a range of further measures are under consideration.

Persons proceeded against and convicted at all courts for offences under the Immigration Act 1974 sec. 25 (1) (a), (b) and (c)
England and Wales 1996 to 2000

Offence description	*Principal statute*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*[2]
Proceeded against[1]						
Knowingly concerned in making or carrying out arrangements for securing or facilitating the entry into the UK of anyone whom he knows or has reasonable cause for believing to be an illegal entrant	Immigration Act 1974 sec. 25(1)(a) as amended by Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 s.5	153	173	193	233	199
Knowingly concerned in making or carry out arrangements for securing or facilitating the entry into the UK of anyone whom he knows or has reasonable cause for believing to be an asylum claimant	Immigration Act 1974 sec. 25(1)(b) as added by Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 s.5	[3]—	4	4	20	11
Knowingly concerned in making or carrying out arrangements for securing or facilitating the obtaining by anyone of leave to remain in the UK by means which he knows or has reasonable cause for believing to include deception	Immigration Act 1974 sec. 25(1)(c) as added by Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 s.5	[3]—	4	13	11	12
Total		153	181	210	264	222
Found guilty[1]						
Knowingly concerned in making or carrying out arrangements for securing or facilitating the entry into the UK of anyone whom he knows or has reasonable cause for believing to be an illegal entrant	Immigration Act 1974 sec. 25(1)(a) as amended by Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 s.5	123	130	115	150	145
Knowingly concerned in making or carry out arrangements for securing or facilitating the entry into the UK of anyone whom he knows or has reasonable cause for believing to be an asylum claimant	Immigration Act 1974 sec. 25(1)(b) as added by Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 s.5	[3]—	—	3	6	3
Knowingly concerned in making or carrying out arrangements for securing or facilitating the obtaining by anyone of leave to remain in the UK by means which he knows or has reasonable cause for believing to include deception	Immigration Act 1974 sec. 25(1)(c) as added by Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 s.5	[3]—	1	5	6	11
Total		123	131	123	162	159

[1] Figures provided are on the principal immigration offence basis

[2] Staffordshire police force were only able to submit sample data for persons proceeded against and convicted in the magistrates courts for the year 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data these data are not robust at a detailed level and have been excluded from this table.

[3] Not applicable.

Firearms Consultative Committee

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will extend the life of the Firearms Consultative Committee. [32768]

Mr. Denham: The life of the Firearms Consultative Committee will be extended for a further period of two years from 1 February 2002.

Student Visas

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average period of time taken to process a visa application from a person seeking to study in the UK was in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [31223]

Mr. Bradshaw: I have been asked to reply.

We do not record separate statistics on processing times for visa applications received from students. They are included in the visitors category.

Straightforward applications from students and other visitors would normally be processed within 24 hours. During 2001 on average 94 per cent. of straightforward applications received were processed within 24 hours.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many visa applications made by those hoping to study here have been turned down in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [31224]

Mr. Bradshaw: I have been asked to reply.

The number of student visa application refused are as follows:

	Number
1997	9,309
1998	9,654
1999	11,503
2000	20,105
2001	[1]6,005

[1] The figures for 2001 are for January–March 2001. We collect these statistics only on an annual basis. Future statistics will be on a financial year basis and are due to be collected during April 2002.

Indefinite Leave to Remain

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications from wives of United Kingdom citizens to obtain indefinite leave to remain in the United Kingdom have been waiting over the target time of three weeks at the latest date for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [31141]

Angela Eagle: We aim to decide 70 per cent. of all new general and settlement cases within three weeks and met this for the first half of 2001. Information on the number of applications from wives of United Kingdom citizens for indefinite leave to remain which were not decided within this time scale is not available.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Norman Baker: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the senior appointments made by his Department to executive and advisory NDPBs in 2001 and give their *(a)* name, *(b)* previous job, *(c)* political affiliation, *(d)* sex and *(e)* ethnic origin. [30471]

Mr. Leslie: The names of women and men serving as chair and deputy chair of all non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) are set out in the annual publication "Public Bodies", copies of which can be found in the Libraries of the House; other personal data are not disclosed except for ethnicity and then only in summary form.

During 2001 only one senior appointment was made by a Cabinet Office Minister to a non-departmental public body sponsored by Cabinet Office. In February 2001, Mr. John Sheldon was appointed by the Parliamentary Secretary as deputy chair of the Civil Service Appeal Board.

In addition, the Minister for the Cabinet Office, in his capacity as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, made the following senior appointments:

Advisory Committees on Justices of the Peace in Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside

Mr. Michael Cresswell JP—Chair

Mr. E. Gordon Hubert—Chair

Mrs. Anne Sykes JP—Chair

Mrs. Joanne Brown JP—Chair.

Civil Defence Grants

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what increase in civil defence grants has been made following the events of 11 September. [31241]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller), on 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 891W.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Soames: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the visits he has made abroad on behalf of Her Majesty's Government since August 2001; what the objective of each visit was; and if he will make a statement on the outcome of each trip. [32042]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) on 14 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 36W.

People's Panel

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what decision has been made with regard to the People's Panel following the expiry of the contract with MORI. [32895]

Mr. Leslie: We believe that the People's Panel has been influential in demonstrating the value of establishing the views of citizens and the users of public services in policy-making and service delivery.

Since the People's Panel was set up in 1998, Government Departments and agencies have improved greatly in their efforts to consult with their customers, and to assess satisfaction with the services they provide.

Therefore, we have taken the decision that there is no longer a need for the Cabinet Office to carry out this function centrally, when it can be done more effectively by Departments, agencies and local services as part of their mainstream policy development and service delivery.

Social Exclusion

Harry Cohen: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he intends to take to enhance the delivery of Government measures to tackle social exclusion in deprived and low-income areas; and if he will make a statement. [31255]

Ms Keeble: I have been asked to reply.

The Prime Minister launched "A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal National Strategy Action Plan" in January 2001. The national strategy is a long-term initiative which aims to deliver neighbourhood renewal—the process of delivering real change to England's most deprived neighbourhoods. The Government's vision is reflected in their long-term goal: to narrow the gap between deprived neighbourhoods and the rest, so that within 10 to 20 years, no-one should be seriously disadvantaged by where they live. It aims to deliver this by enhancing the delivery of economic prosperity, safe communities, high quality schools, decent housing, and better health to the poorest parts of the country.

The national strategy requires a change in the way we approach main Government programmes to ensure they focus on deprived areas. The strategy is being spearheaded by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, a cross-cutting unit based in DTLR and staffed by officials from across Whitehall and the public sector, with secondees from the private and voluntary sectors.

PRIME MINISTER

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 14 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 87–89W, on ministerial visits, what the size of his entourage was on each of the visits; if transport was provided by *(a)* the RAF and *(b)* a commercial carrier; and where applicable, what the chartering costs were. [31703]

The Prime Minister: The information requested is included in the detailed list of Cabinet Ministers' visits overseas and information on expenditure by all Ministers on travel overseas. The list for the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Pensions

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the *(a)* cost and *(b)* effectiveness of the Department's advertising campaign on pension awareness. [31839]

Mr. McCartney: The pensions education campaign promotes the Government's aim to combat poverty and promote security and independence in retirement for future pensioners. The campaign encourages future pensioners to save for their retirement where they can afford to, and provides impartial information on their pension options to help them make informed decisions.

Changing attitudes towards planning for retirement is not a straightforward task and will take time. We are planning to continue pensions education activity.

However, results so far are encouraging. The campaign has provoked almost 900,000 responses and almost 1.2 million information guides have been sent out. Awareness of the campaign is increasing.

The cost for the campaign from April 2000 to December 2001 is approximately £9.3 million. This cost includes campaign development; press, cinema and TV advertising; research and evaluation; the costs of running our information order line; website development; printing leaflets and other campaign materials.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the implied annual uplift is in gross state retirement pensions for qualifying deferment of payment *(a)* under present arrangements and *(b)* under future planned modifications of the system; what current annuity rates are; and if he will make a statement. [31305]

Mr. McCartney: Entitlement to Retirement Pension arises when a person attains pensionable age but to be entitled they have to make a claim. They can put off claiming their pension to earn increments. When they claim, each part of the pension is increased by about 7.5 per cent. for each full year of deferral.

Currently the maximum period for deferral is five years but from April 2010 there will be no time limit and the incremental rate will increase to about 10.4 per cent. for each full year.

Annuity rates vary according to the individual's circumstances and are not directly comparable to the increment rates for state pension purposes.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what actions he is taking to improve access to financial advice tailored to the needs of individuals contemplating taking out stakeholder pensions. [31840]

Mr. McCartney: Stakeholder pensions are a straightforward, good value, flexible product which need to adhere to certain minimum standards. These minimum standards mean that for many people less advice is necessary than that needed for personal pensions. For example the minimum standards will mean all stakeholder schemes should offer a good basic deal, and the simplification of tax rules means a single tax regime for all defined contribution pension schemes.

As a part of the minimum standards, all stakeholder pension scheme providers are required to provide, within the charge limit, information about the scheme and additional explanatory material. This will help individuals to decide whether a stakeholder scheme would be a good option for them.

We recognise that some people will need further advice. The Financial Services Authority (FSA), which regulates promotion and advice, has produced 'decision trees' to help individuals work through key questions on whether or not to join a stakeholder scheme, without necessarily requiring full individual advice. It has issued a consultation paper this month explaining how it proposes to keep them accurate and up-to-date.

In some cases there may be a need for individual-specific advice. Scheme providers may give this advice within the charge. It is also open to scheme providers to charge an additional fee for individual advice, or for individuals to seek advice, for a charge, from an independent financial adviser.

Employer Direct

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 22 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 43W, on call centre services, what the expected cost is of the Employer Direct modernisation programme in years *(a)* six, *(b)* seven and *(c)* eight of the eight year contract. [30128]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Employer Direct is part of the overall investment in modernisation and service improvement by the employment service. The different elements are all interdependent and it is not therefore possible to separate the cost of Employer Direct. The modernisation programme is being delivered under an eight-year contract costing £816 million in total and

£346 million over years six, seven and eight of the contract. These costs include the existing services already provided to the employment service by the contractor.

StepUp Programme

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the StepUp Programme announced on 28 November 2001; what progress it has made; and what plans there are to extend it to the whole of the United Kingdom. [29842]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* StepUp, which will be launched in April, builds on the llNew Deals by providing transitional jobs to act as a stepping stone for long-term unemployed people moving from benefits into work.

Officials are currently working on the detail of the pilots in readiness for the April launch. The first six StepUp pilots will start in April in parts of Cardiff, East Ayrshire, Lambeth, Oldham, Sheffield and Sunderland. A further 14 pilots, including one in Coventry, South, will start throughout the rest of the year. We will thoroughly evaluate the pilots before any decision is taken about a national roll-out of StepUp.

Disabled People

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent measures he has taken to increase opportunities for disabled persons seeking employment. [28923]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We have introduced a range of measures to help people with disabilities secure work where they are ready and able to do so.

Our new deal for disabled people pilots helped over 8,200 disabled people into work. Building on that success we now have in place a national network of job brokers.

We are making work possible for people with disabilities by removing benefit barriers and allowing people to take part in work trials and work placements. We are making work pay through the disabled person's tax credit and the national minimum wage.

Jobcentre Plus offers disabled people making new or repeat claims to benefit work-focused meetings with a personal adviser so as to ensure they are aware of the help and opportunities available to them.

From autumn this year we are introducing the job retention and rehabilitation pilot. It will test how making better co-ordinated, earlier health or employment interventions can help people stay in work and off benefits.

Jobcentre Plus

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent discussions he has had on developing an environment less conducive to confrontation in Jobcentre Plus offices; what provision for staff safety has been made other than the presence of security guards; and if he will make a statement. [28136]

Mr. Nicholas Brown [holding answer 24 January 2002]: The process of designing the new Jobcentre Plus service has focused on creating an environment that offers improved customer services, more pleasant working conditions and enhanced staff safety.

In designing both office layout and the service experienced by customers, the emphasis has been on eliminating the waiting times, queueing and referrals between offices, which can cause customer frustration and, very occasionally, confrontation. Evidence from the ONE pilots and from other countries suggests that such an approach has a direct and positive bearing on levels of disruptive customer behaviour.

The new model of service being delivered in Jobcentre Plus offices involves increased telephone contact facilities, booked appointments, dedicated floor managers in every office, nominated personal advisers, swifter benefit assessment while customers look for work and a major investment in IT to help in the jobsearch process.

Full risk assessments have been carried out in every Jobcentre Plus office and all of their individual recommendations implemented. In addition to security guards, where these have been recommended, safety measures implemented as a result of risk assessments include installation of closed circuit TV cameras and monitors, provision of discrete safety alarm systems, controlled segregation of staff areas via coded door locks and design of office layout to maximise safety.

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to review staff safety issues at Jobcentre Plus offices; and if he will make a statement. [28135]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The importance of ensuring staff safety has underpinned the development of Jobcentre Plus at every stage. The improved customer services and environment of the new offices are both designed to reduce frustration among the small number of potentially aggressive customers. This has been underpinned by substantial investment in enhanced security measures such as CCTV, safety alarms and an improved security guard specification.

Full risk assessments were carried out in every office before the service opened to the public in October. Enhanced security measures identified as necessary by those assessments were implemented without exception.

All of the initial risk assessments are now being individually reviewed to take into account each office's experience of delivering the new service in practice and any additional recommendations will be implemented in full.

Performance Standards

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what performance standards he has set his Department and its agencies for 2002–03. [27763]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Performance Standards for 2002–03 will be announced shortly.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many persons convicted of benefit offences have received *(a)* custodial sentences, *(b)* community sentences and *(c)* other sentences since 1997. [27692]

Malcolm Wicks: The requested information is not available in respect of housing benefit fraud.

The available information is in the table.

Sentences on successful prosecution following investigations by the Benefit Fraud Investigation Service and Benefits Agency Security Investigation Service

	Custodial sentences[1]	*Community sentences*[2]	*Other sentences*[3]	*Deportation*	*Total sentences*
1997–98	363	2,505	8,832	—	11,700
1998–99	448	2,259	7,531	—	10,238
1999–2000	458	2,178	6,469	19	9,124
2000–01	526	2,667	8,210	—	11,403

Notes:

1. Imprisonment, Young Offenders Institute, Custodial and Fine
2. Community Service
3. Conditional Discharge, Compensation only, Admonishment, Fined, Probation, Supervision Order, Imprisonment suspended, Attendance Centre, Custodial (suspended) and fine, Other

Urban Regeneration

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what schemes targeting urban regeneration needs are managed by his Department; how much each scheme has available to invest nationally; what issues each scheme aims to tackle; and how much has been spent annually since 1997 *(a)* nationally, *(b)* in Teesside, *(c)* in Redcar and Cleveland and Middlesbrough councils and *(d)* in the Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency. [25475]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: All the programmes run by the Department contribute to the Government's overarching commitment to provide employment opportunity for all, to tackle social exclusion and poverty and to improve economic growth in urban and other areas. Action Teams for Jobs and Employment Zones are two specific initiatives that operate in predominantly urban areas of high unemployment. For information about these initiatives, nationally, in Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, and in the Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency, I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to him on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 359W.

There is also an Action Team in Stockton-on-Tees. This started work in October 2000 and in its first year of operation engaged 799 clients and helped 457 of them into work. The team is now operating in the following wards in the Stockton-on-Tees local authority area: Charltons; Grange; Hardwick; Marsh House; Mile House; Newtown; Northfield; Parkfield; Portrack and Tilery; Roseworth; St. Aidan's; St. Cuthbert's and Wolviston. It has been allocated £1.475 million for the period October 2001-March 2004.

Benefits Agencies

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on proposals to remove protective screens from Benefits Agencies in the Teesside area; what consultation was carried out with Benefits Agency staff in Teesside about proposals to remove protective screens from Benefits Agencies; if he will make a statement on *(a)* recent and *(b)* possible future strike action taken by Benefits Agency staff in Teesside in protest at the removal of screens from benefits agencies; and what precautions will be taken to protect the safety of Benefits Agency staff concerned about dealing with violent or disturbed customers in the event that protective screens are removed from Benefits Agencies. [25443]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Benefits Agency and Employment Service will cease operations from 1 April 2002. They will be replaced by two new organisations—Jobcentre Plus (for people of working age) and the Pension Service. There are no plans to remove protective screens from Benefits Agency offices in Teesside, during the remaining life of the Benefits Agency.

There are 56 Pathfinder offices for Jobcentre Plus already in operation, operating within 16 clusters. None are in the Teesside area. These new-style Pathfinder Jobcentre Plus offices are predominantly unscreened though each cluster of Pathfinder offices retains at least one screened area or office to handle transactions or customers known to present a significant risk. The reaction of staff and customers to the new offices has been overwhelmingly positive and the level of recorded incidents of unacceptable behaviour extremely low. New-style Jobcentre Plus offices will be rolled out nationwide over the next four years though no decisions have yet been taken as to when offices in Teesside will be redesigned. As part of the implementation of the new style Jobcentre Plus offices, trade unions and staff will be consulted on delivery plans and safety arrangements and full risk assessments will be undertaken in each office as has been the case in the Pathfinder offices which are already open.

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union has regrettably taken strike action against plans to deliver Jobcentre Plus services from a predominantly unscreened environment. PCS asked their members in the Benefits Agency field organisation and the Employment Service to take strike action on 12 and 13 December 2001. In Teesside all Benefits Agency and Employment Service offices remained open to the public on these days.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the number of man-hours his Department has lost as a result of the industrial action by the PCS Union. [25228]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Of our 100,000 staff, some 28,000 took strike action for two days in December. In the Pathfinder offices some 28 per cent. are on strike (on 85 per cent. strike pay).

As a result, approximately 1.1 million staff hours have been lost up to and including 17 December 2001. The staff hours lost represents some 2.2 per cent. of the total hours expected to be worked.

New Deal (Publicity Costs)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the breakdown of the costs of the publicity campaign for the new deal for lone parents. [18979]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: A breakdown of costs is available only for the last financial year 2000–01 which was £2,292,000 advertising and media and £295,000 other costs.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how much his Department has spent in the last 12 months on *(a)* television advertisements, *(b)* radio advertisements, *(c)* newspaper advertisements, *(d)* internet advertisements and *(e)* leaflets or pamphlets relating to the promotion of the 50-plus; [18052]

(2) how much his Department has spent on *(a)* television advertisements, *(b)* radio advertisements, *(c)* newspaper advertisements, *(d)* internet advertisements and *(e)* leaflets or pamphlets relating to the promotion of the new deal for disabled people in each year since its inception; [18051]

(3) how much his Department has spent on *(a)* television advertisements, *(b)* radio advertisements, *(c)* newspaper advertisements, *(d)* internet advertisements and *(e)* leaflets or pamphlets relating to the promotion of the new deal for young people in each year since its inception; [18048]

(4) how much his Department has spent on *(a)* television advertisements, *(b)* radio advertisements, *(c)* newspaper advertisements, *(d)* internet advertisements and *(e)* leaflets or pamphlets relating to the promotion of the new deal for lone parents in each year since its inception; [18050]

(5) how much his Department has spent on *(a)* television advertisements, *(b)* radio advertisements, *(c)* newspaper advertisements, *(d)* internet advertisements and *(e)* leaflets or pamphlets relating to the promotion of the new deal for the long-term unemployed in each year since its inception; [18049]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Information is not available in the format requested and it would involve disproportionate cost to answer.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much of his Department's budget for the next 12 months has been allocated to promotion of *(a)* the new deal 50-plus, *(b)* the new deal for disabled people, *(c)* the new deal for lone parents, *(d)* the new deal for the long-term unemployed and *(e)* the new deal for young people. [18039]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: In the current financial year the following sums have been allocated to the new deal programmes.

Programme	*Allocation (£ million)*
New deal 50-plus	1
New deal for disabled people	1.12
New deal 25 plus	0.938
New deal 18–24	2
New deal for lone parents	2.03

Allocations for the financial year 2002–03 have not yet been made.

Departmental Spending

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the total expenditure was on *(a)* advertising, *(b)* polling, *(c)* focus groups, *(d)* design consultants, *(e)* caterers, *(f)* production of departmental publications and *(g)* photographs/photographers by his Department for each year since 1995 in (i) cash and (ii) real terms; what was (A) the annual percentage increase in spending on each category and (B) spending on each category as a percentage of the total departmental running costs; and if he will make a statement. [6918]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Debt Recovery

Mr. MacDonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement about the centralisation of debt recovery within his Department. [33184]

Malcolm Wicks: As part of our modernisation programme, we will be creating 10 centres across the country dedicated to the management and recovery of all overpayments. This will enable the current work, processed at 127 sites across the country, to be consolidated. Approximately 1,800 staff in total will be trained and dedicated to this complex but important area of work, providing an enhanced service for both claimants and the taxpayer.

The centres, which will use existing DWP staff an infrastructure where possible, will be based in Chorlton, Porth, Stornoway, Nuneaton, Ashton in Makerfield, Corby, Glasgow, Dearne Valley, Bradford and Salford.

The first debt centre will be operational from March 2002 at Chorlton, Manchester. The remainder will be on stream over the period to March 2005.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Listed Buildings

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to strengthen the role of English Heritage in protecting listed buildings; and if she will make a statement. [25965]

Dr. Howells: As stated in the Government's recent policy statement "The Historic Environment: A Force for Our Future" (December 2001) the Government remain firmly committed to the maintenance of an effective framework of statutory protection for all elements of the historic environment. As part of the review of the planning system proposed in the Government's Green Paper, "Planning: Delivering a Fundamental Change", the Government will consider the role that English Heritage plays in advising local planning authorities on matters affecting listed buildings.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many listed buildings there are in *(a)* the Buckingham constituency and *(b)* Buckinghamshire; if she will list them; and how much funding has been provided to assist in their conservation in each of the last five years. [30047]

Dr. Howells: No information is held centrally on the number of buildings of special architectural or historic interest on the statutory list broken down by county or parliamentary constituency. The statutory list for the five districts of Buckinghamshire, including Aylesbury Vale (the area of the former borough of Buckingham), is available for inspection at my Department, at the National Monuments Record Library, and at each of the relevant local authorities.

The following table shows the grants which English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund have allocated to Buckinghamshire in each of the last five years for the conservation of listed buildings in that county.

£000

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*Total*
English Heritage (Secular)	374	195	580	486	145	1780
English Heritage (Places of Worship)	127	199	109	422	276	1133
English Heritage (Conservation Partnership Schemes/ Heritage Economic Regeneration Schemes)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sub-total (English Heritage)	501	394	689	908	421	2913
Heritage Lottery Fund	8	0	5,028	346	353	5735
Total	509	394	5,717	1,254	774	8648

Note:

Figures rounded up to nearest £1,000

Comparable figures for English Heritage grants in the Buckingham constituency alone are not readily available and their accrual would be possible only at disproportionate cost. Heritage Lottery Grant figures for the Buckingham constituency are available, however, and are shown in the table.

£000

	Heritage lottery fund
1996–97	8
1997–98	0
1998–99	5,028
1999–2000	0
2000–01	78
Total	5,114

Note:

Figures rounded up to nearest £1,000

Television Licences (Prosecutions)

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many prosecution statements were taken in relation to television licence fee evasion and how many prosecutions there were for television licence evasion in each of the last four years. [27691]

Dr. Howells: The number of prosecution statements taken and prosecutions heard for television licence fee evasion in the United Kingdom in the last four years was:

Thousand

Year	*Prosecution statements taken*	*Prosecutions heard*
1998–99	374	98
1999–2000	320	89
2000–01	366	151
2001–02[1]	268	104

[1] To December 2001

Places of Worship Grant Scheme

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport from what sources the *(a)* administrative and *(b)* other costs of the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme will be met. [30783]

Dr. Howells: The Listed Places of Worship (LPW) Grant Scheme is largely being funded by the Treasury. This Department has been asked to make a small contribution to the costs of the scheme. We have asked English Heritage to help us meet this commitment, which they have chosen to do through the redirection of £2 million in grant in aid from the Joint Places of Worship (JPOW) Scheme. Initial estimates are that the LPW scheme could be worth up to £30 million per year. There is no cap on the scheme; all listed places of worship that meet the criteria will receive a grant.

English Heritage (Grants)

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what effect shifting English Heritage grant schemes towards maintenance will have on current sources of grant aid. [30857]

Dr. Howells: Government grant in aid to English Heritage will be increased by £5 million in 2002–03 and £11 million in 2003–04 to £115.5 million and £121.4 million respectively.

It is for English Heritage to decide what priority to give expenditure on their grant schemes from the overall resources available to it from Government grant in aid, as well as from its own fund raising activities.

Sport

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions she has had with the New Opportunities Fund about the planned investment in school sport; and if she will make a statement. [31173]

Mr. Caborn: I regularly meet representatives of the New Opportunities Fund to discuss their full range of programmes, including the new opportunities for PE and sport programme and will continue to do so to ensure their successful delivery.

Libraries (Hillingdon)

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many libraries in the London Borough of Hillingdon are *(a)* internet-connected and *(b)* linked to National Grid for Learning. [31358]

Dr. Howells: All public libraries connected to the internet have access to the National Grid for Learning. In the London borough of Hillingdon all 17 libraries have public internet access and therefore are linked to the National Grid for Learning.

Contracts (KPMG)

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what contracts her Department has with KPMG; and what the value is of each one. [31325]

Dr. Howells: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has no current contracts with KPMG.

Free TV Licences (Cathcart)

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many pensioner households in Glasgow, Cathcart are benefiting from free television licences. [31215]

Dr. Howells: TV Licensing, which administers for the BBC as Licensing Authority the free television licence concession for the over-75s, is not able to provide geographical breakdowns of the number of free licences issued. However, estimates based on the 1991 Census indicate that there were approximately 5,000 people aged 75 or over living in the Glasgow, Cathcart constituency.

Public Bodies

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what was *(a)* the total bill for salaries and expenses for board members, *(b)* the administrative operating costs and *(c)* the total annual budget in the latest year for which figures are available for each regional arts board in England. [30198]

Dr. Howells: Information about salaries of board members to public bodies is included in the Cabinet Office's annual report, "Public Bodies". Copies of this are placed in the Library of the House and the report is published on the Cabinet Office's internet website. The next edition of "Public Bodies", which will include numbers of appointments at 31 March 2001, is shortly to be published.

The table, supplied by the Arts Council of England on behalf of the regional arts boards contains the information requested by the hon. Member:

All RABs 2000–01	*EEA*	*EMA*	*LA*	*NA*	*NWA*	*SA*	*SEA*	*SWA*	*WMA*	*YA*	*Total*
Income											
Total ACE funding (incl.)	9,718,024	9,682,517	32,014,120	11,714,473	18,016,684	11,192,305	6,999,710	9,133,900	13,598,401	12,458,582	134,528,716
Total Other public funding	463,201	504,501	0	1,170,225	1,032,724	583,693	451,610	285,322	543,121	487,244	5,521,641
Total Other income	372 480	139,473	218,115	1,002,746	1,618,562	209,921	148,699	196,246	79,096	202,257	4,187,595
Total income	10,553,705	10,326,491	32,232,235	13,887,444	20,667,970	11,985,919	7,600,019	9,615,468	14,220,618	13,148,083	144,237,952
Total Admin and Overheads	1,650,559	1,689,075	3,411,655	1,509,698	1,905,629	1,495,355	1,606,140	1,461,385	1,574,264	1,548,786	17,852,546
Board members' expenses	2,510	3,804	1,422	7,204	—	6,368	—	1,564	—	—	22,872
Board members' salaries	0	0	0	0	—	0	—	0	0	—	0

Notes:

1. Figures for LA, NWA, SA, SEA, WMA and YA are taken from their published report and accounts for 2000–01.
2. Figures for EEA, EMA, NA and SWA are taken from their audited accounts for 2000–01
3. Figures for board members' expenses are given only when they are specifically detailed as such within the accounts. A nil figure is given only for Board members' salaries when this is stated in the accounts.

Board members' expenses/salaries

4. NA's figure is referred to as travel and committee costs in respect of the reimbursement of travel expenses incurred by seven trustees/directors. NWA make no reference to directors or board members in their R&A.
5. SEA make no reference to directors or board members in their R&A.
6. SWA's list as £4,021 as Board Expenses—it has been assumed that this means expenses related to board meetings, as they detail a separate amount of £1,564 as Directors' Reimbursed Expenses.
7. WMA give a figure of £11,667 as Company Expenses, but do not detail amounts reimbursed to board members.
8. YA's give a figure of £45,630 as Company Expenses, but make no reference to, nor give figures related to, directors or board members in their R&A.

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what additional security measures are planned by her Department to deter and detect theft and fraud. [31799]

Dr. Howells: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport have had no incidents of fraud to report in recent years but systems in place are constantly reviewed. Two recent thefts have been investigated by the police and physical security and other measures have been taken to either prevent a repeat or detect and apprehend the perpetrator. Security cover at departmental premises is 24 hours, seven days a week with closed circuit television surveillance in place. Security staff patrolling and CCTV unit placement is under review. Security risk assessments are standard practice, as is the vetting of prospective recruits. In common with other Departments, staff are encouraged to report any suspicions they may have that fraud and/or theft is taking place in the workplace.

HEALTH

Nursing Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer, of 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 942–43W, on nursing care, when the evaluation of the implementation will be published. [31383]

Jacqui Smith: A report of the evaluation of the implementation of free nursing care will be available in autumn 2002.

Earnings/House Price Ratio

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the ratio is between the average earnings of a newly qualified doctor and the average house price in *(a)* Surrey, *(b)* London, *(c)* Yorkshire and *(d)* Tyne and Wear; [31560]

(2) what are the average earnings of a nurse in *(a)* Surrey and *(b)* London; [31558]

(3) what the ratio is between the average earnings of a nurse with 10 years' experience and the average house price in *(a)* Surrey, *(b)* London, *(c)* Yorkshire and *(d)* Tyne and Wear; [31561]

(4) what the ratio is between the average earnings of a newly qualified nurse and the average house price in *(a)* Surrey, *(b)* London, *(c)* Yorkshire and *(d)* Tyne and Wear. [31562]

Mr. Hutton: The information is not available in the format requested.

The estimated average earnings of a full time (a) newly qualified grade D nurse (b) experienced grade F nurse and (c) newly qualified doctor employed in the national health service in 2001–2 is set out in the table.

£

	London region	*Fringe zone*[1]	*Northern and Yorkshire Region*[2]
Newly qualified grade D nurse	20,800	19,300	17,900
An experienced grade F nurse	30,000	28,600	26,300
Newly qualified doctor			
Pre registration house officer (junior doctor)	25,800	24,600	24,600
Senior house officer	31,900	30,800	30,500

[1] Fringe is derived from all staff in the earnings survey sample who receive a fringe area payment, taken to be typical of Surrey

[2] Includes Tyne and Wear

Source:

Department of Health's August 2000 NHS earnings survey

Newly qualified pre-registration house officers (junior doctors) are provided with free accommodation for their pre-registration year only.

The Department does not collect information about average house prices.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the ratio is between the average earnings of a GP and the average house price in *(a)* Surrey, *(b)* London, *(c)* Yorkshire and *(d)* Tyne and Wear. [31559]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* For 2000–01 the intended average net income for a full-time general practitioner principal delivering general medical services is £60,655.

The Department does not collect information about average house prices.

Violet Hardy

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the report on the death of Violet Hardy will be made public; and if he will make a statement. [31291]

Jacqui Smith: The work being undertaken by Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham health authority and Lambeth social services department on the report on the circumstances of the death of Violet Hardy is nearing completion. It is expected that the report will be published in the spring.

Home Helps

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the total number of pensioners receiving a visit from a local authority home help in each of the past 10 years. [30566]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the number of pensioners receiving home help is not collected. The table shows the total number of households receiving home help/home care during a survey week from 1992 to 2000 and the number of contact hours provided to those households. Information relating to the age of the oldest member of the household was collected between 1992 and 1998 and is also given in the table. Households may have received more than one visit during the week.

Households receiving home help or home care, 1992 to 2000, England

Survey week during september — *Rounded numbers*

	Total number of households[1]	*Contact hours*[2]	*Households where the oldest person was aged 65 or over*
1992	528,500	1,687,000	476,200
1993	514,600	1,780,800	463,200
1994	538,900	2,215,100	453,100
1995	513,600	2,395,700	451,300
1996	491,100	2,486,700	427,000
1997	479,100	2,607,500	410,500
1998	447,200	2,607,400	378,100
1999	424,000	2,678.400	[3]—
2000[4]	379,800	2,791,400	[3]—

[1] Total number of households receiving home help or home care during the survey week.

[2] Information on contact hours relates to all households and is not available by age.

[3] Not collected

[4] The method of collecting this information changed in 2000 so figures for this year are not strictly comparable with previous years.

Source:

DH annual return HH1

Cancelled Operations

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations were cancelled in each of the last 10 years *(a)* as a total figure and *(b)* as a percentage of all patients treated. [30576]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table. Data on operations cancelled (for non medical reasons) on the day of admission, or on day of surgery, were not collected prior to 1994–95.

Number of operations cancelled (for non medical reasons) on the day of admission, or on day of surgery, as a percentage of all elective admissions

	Number of cancelled operations	Number of elective admissions	Cancellations as a percentage of admissions
2000–01	77,818	5,474,550	1.42
1999–2000	60,242	5,376,761	1.12
1998–99	56,150	5,306,320	1.06
1997–98	50,505	4,849,995	1.04
1996–97	52,047	4,820,671	1.08
1995–96	54,483	4,787,348	1.14
1994–95	48,129	4,537,272	1.06

Note:

Number of elective admissions are general and acute first finished consultant episodes.

Source:

Patients Charter returns, Common Information Core

Mental Health

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients received *(a)* in-patient and *(b)* out-patient care in the mental health sector of the NHS in each of the last 10 years. [30575]

Jacqui Smith: The table relating to in-patient hospital care shows the estimated number of finished consultant episodes under mental illness and learning disability specialties, in England, for 1991–92 to 2000–01.

The consultant out-patient table shows the estimated number of first out-patient attendances under mental illness and learning disability specialties, in England, for 1991–92 to 2000–01.

Finished consultant episodes in NHS hospitals, under mental illness and learning disability specialties, England, 1991–92 to 2000–01

	Mental illness	Learning disabilities
1991–92	225,950	54,370
1992–93	234,170	56,960
1993–94	237,620	56,400
1994–95	238,220	56,880
1995–96	241,800	55,710
1996–97	237,370	56,690
1997–98	236,000	57,690
1998–99	216,110	38,710
1999–2000	214,880	36,340
2000–01	206,950	36,370

Notes:

1. Data for 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01 have not been grossed for coverage and have a provisional status.
2. Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10.

Source:

HES

Consultant out-patient first attendances, under mental illness and learning disability specialties, England, 1991–92 to 2000–01

	Mental illness	Learning disabilities
1991–92	155,150	3,050
1992–93	166,690	3,880
1993–94	167,780	5,230
1994–95	171,380	4,660
1995–96	176,150	5,500
1996–97	188,110	5,630
1997–98	186,910	6,270
1998–99	183,250	6,490
1999–2000	179,100	6,990
2000–01	183,530	7,500

Note:

Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10.

Source:

Department of Health form KH09

Coronary Care Units (Access)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the maximum distance is a patient might be expected to travel to a coronary care unit in *(a)* miles and *(b)* minutes. [31646]

Yvette Cooper: There is no specified maximum time or distance that patients might be expected to travel to a coronary care unit. Our aim is that in time the national health service should be able to offer all heart patients fair access to the surgical and other specialist services they need in a local unit and within an acceptable time. This is why we have developed a national strategy to expand the capacity to perform heart operations.

This capital investment programme means that we are investing £230 million in 12 schemes to provide new and bigger heart surgery facilities.

In addition we have announced the patient choice scheme which means that from July appropriate patients who would otherwise have to wait more than six months will be able to choose to be treated in a different hospital so that they get treatment more quickly. This may involve travelling further, but only if the patient decides that is what they want to do.

Neurology

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to announce the *(a)* scope and *(b)* content of the National Service Framework on neurological conditions. [31880]

Jacqui Smith: The scoping event held in November with a wide cross section of stakeholders provided some very helpful material, relevant both to the scope of the National Service Framework for Long-term Conditions (NSF) and to considerations about how to develop it. The NSF project team will advise Ministers shortly about refining the scope of the NSF and identifying the specific conditions to be included. The Department expects to announce details of the scope and content of the NSF later this year.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out for each NHS *(a)* region, *(b)* health authority and *(c)* trust the (i) mean, (ii) mode and (iii) median waiting time for a first appointment to see a neurologist in each quarter for the last four years. [31877]

Mr. Hutton: The data requested are being prepared by the Department and will be published in full shortly. Waiting times data are available on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/waitingtimes.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many neurologists there were in England, broken down by region, in the last five years; and how many he estimates there will be in post in the next five years. [31878]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Our current supply projections expect an increase of around 75 trained specialists to be available to take up consultant posts in neurology by 2005, an increase of 23 per cent.

Hospital medical staff within the neurology specialty by region

As at 30 September *Number*

	1996		*1997*		*1998*		*1999*		*2000*	
	All staff	*Consultant*	*All staff*	*Consultant*	*All staff*	*Consultant*	*All staff*	*Consultant*	*All staff*	*Consultant*
England	620	260	640	280	640	300	660	300	690	330
Northern and Yorkshire	80	30	80	30	70	30	70	30	70	40
Trent	40	20	50	20	50	20	50	20	60	20
West Midlands	50	20	50	30	60	30	70	30	70	30
North West	70	30	70	30	70	30	80	40	80	40
Eastern	50	20	50	20	50	20	60	30	60	30
London	220	90	230	100	220	100	200	100	210	100
South East	90	40	90	40	100	50	100	50	110	60
South Western	40	20	40	20	40	20	40	20	50	20

Note:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
2. Where regions are shown, staff holding appointments in more than one region are included separately in each region. The sum of regional totals therefore differs slightly from the England total and a direct comparison between England totals and regional totals is not advised.

Source:

Department of Health medical and dental work force census

Acquired Brain Injury

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department is taking to improve community-based rehabilitation services for those with an acquired brain injury. [16820]

Ms Blears: In February 2001, the Department announced a National Service Framework for long-term conditions would be developed, with a particular focus on the needs of people with neurological disease and brain and spinal injury. The NSF will try to encompass all aspects of care including rehabilitation, and ensure fair and appropriate access to these across the country.

The Health Select Committee report on head injury rehabilitation, and the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) clinical guideline for the initial assessment, management and first referral of patients with head injury are likely to inform the development of the NSF.

In-patient Treatment (Bedfordshire)

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give *(a)* the number and *(b)* the percentage of patients in Bedfordshire waiting over 12 months for in-patient treatment in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2001. [19737]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 3 December 2001]*: The information requested is shown in the table.

	Quarter 2	
	1997–98	*2001–02*
Total patients waiting for in-patient treatment	12,267	10,304
12+ waiters	641	779
Percentage of 12+ waiters	5.23	7.56

Source:

KH07 quarterly return/monthly returns

NHS Dentistry (Braintree)

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists were providing NHS treatment in the Braintree district in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1989, *(c)* 1997 and *(d)* 2001. [21755]

Ms Blears: The total number of general dental service dentists who carry out the majority of their work in North Essex health authority area which includes the Braintree district is shown in the table for 30 September in the years 1997 and 2001.

Comparable data for 1979 and 1989 are not available. Before April 1990, Essex Family Practitioner Committee covered the areas of North Essex and South Essex health authorities. Data for this area are given for 1979 and 1989 and also for the later years for comparison.

General dental service: number of dentists in North Essex HA and Essex HAs at 30 September[1]

Year	*North Essex HA*	*North and South Essex HAs*[2]
1979	n/a	319
1989	n/a	430
1997	285	496
2001	319	566

[1] Dentists who do the majority of their work in the area. Excludes dentists who do most of their work in other areas.

[2] Before April 1990, Essex Family Practitioner Committee (FPC) covered the areas of North Essex and South Essex health authorities.

Public Relations Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* bodies for which it is responsible on external public relations consultants in each of the last four years. [27394]

Ms Blears: The information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the cost of buildings refurbishment carried out by his Department in each of the last four years. [27962]

Ms Blears: The estimate of the cost of buildings refurbishment carried out by the Department, its executive agencies and executive non-departmental public bodies in each of the past four complete financial years is shown in the table.

	£000
1997–98	2,290
1998–99	2,023
1999–2000	5,778
2000–01	5,002

This does not include refurbishment work carried out within the national health service nor the cost of fitting-out of any new properties prior to occupation.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average number of *(a)* emergency and *(b)* non-emergency calls per year handled by each ambulance service was in (i) England, (ii) South-west England and (iii) South-east England; and what is the number per thousand population in the last 12 months. [28227]

Ms Blears: Information for all ambulance national health service trusts, by regional office area, about the number of emergency calls received in 2000–01 that resulted in an emergency response arriving at the scene of the incident is shown in the table. The rate per thousand population is also included. Information about non-emergency calls is not available in the form requested.

	Emergency calls resulting in an emergency response arriving at the scene of the incident[1]	
Ambulance NHS Trust	*Thousand*	*Rate per thousand population*
England	3,558	71
Northern and Yorkshire	476	68
West Yorkshire Metropolitan Ambulance NHS Trust	172	81
Tees, East and North Yorkshire Ambulance NHS Trust	132	47
Cumbria Ambulance NHS Trust	24	38
North East Ambulance NHS Trust	148	105
Trent	334	69
South Yorkshire Metropolitan Ambulance NHS Trust	80	61
Lincolnshire Ambulance NHS Trust	59	93
East Midlands Ambulance NHS Trust	195	67
Eastern	328	60
Essex Ambulance NHS Trust	115	70
East Anglian Ambulance NHS Trust	114	52
Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Ambulance NHS Trust	99	61
London	700	95
London Ambulance NHS Trust	700	95
South East	523	60
Royal Berkshire Ambulance NHS Trust	47	58
Hampshire Ambulance NHS Trust	83	50
Isle of Wight Ambulance Service (NHS Trust)[2]	8	59
Kent Ambulance NHS Trust	97	61
Oxfordshire Ambulance NHS Trust	27	43
Surrey Ambulance NHS Trust	78	72
Sussex Ambulance NHS Trust	115	76
The Two Shires Ambulance NHS Trust	68	52
South West	291	59
Avon Ambulance NHS Trust	60	59
Dorset Ambulance NHS Trust	54	77
Gloucestershire Ambulance NHS Trust	27	48
West Country Ambulance NHS Trust	122	58
Wiltshire Ambulance NHS Trust	29	47
West Midlands	365	68
Hereford and Worcester Ambulance NHS Trust	34	48
Shropshire Ambulance Service (NHS Trust)[2]	22	50
Staffordshire Ambulance NHS Trust	64	61
Warwickshire Ambulance NHS Trust	27	34
West Midlands Metropolitan Ambulance NHS Trust	218	94
North-west	540	86
Lancashire Ambulance NHS Trust	112	87

Ambulance NHS Trust	Emergency calls resulting in an emergency response arriving at the scene of the incident[1] Thousand	Rate per thousand population
Mersey Regional Ambulance NHS Trust	193	81
Greater Manchester Ambulance NHS Trust	235	90

[1] Excludes duplicate calls to the same incidents.

[2] Part of a community Trust

Source:

Office for National Statistics mid-year population estimates for 2000

Department of Health KA34 return, Statistics Division SD2B

Information about non emergency patient journeys and other requests for transport, together with more detailed information about response times to Government targets for all NHS ambulance trusts are contained in the Department of Health Statistical Bulletin "Ambulance Services, England 2000–01". A copy is in the Library and available on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0115.htm.

Essex Health Authority

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the cost of implementing the management changes associated with the creation of the Essex health authority. [28498]

Ms Blears: The creation of Essex health authority from 1 April 2002 is part of the national programme of implementing shifting the balance of power encompassing changes to the national health service at national, regional and local level. Taken together these changes will release £100 million of savings from reducing bureaucracy.

NHS Asset Sales

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the disposal of land and buildings and other assets deemed surplus to requirements by three star NHS trusts in England will require the consent or approval of other bodies. [28673]

Mr. Hutton: When the national health service performance ratings for acute national health service trusts were published in September 2001, a number of earned autonomy freedoms were announced for the top performing hospitals. Three star trusts are able to retain £5 million, instead of the current £1 million, of the receipt from land sales without the need for a business case.

In accordance with the Department's Estatecode these NHS trusts are still required to refer proposed disposals to NHS Estates who will provide an informed client overview of those disposals.

Health Cost Claim Form

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has plans to simplify form HC1, entitled Claim for Help with Health Costs. [28972]

Ms Blears: Form HC1 has been designed to collect the information necessary to calculate a person's entitlement to help with health costs. We have no plans to amend it.

Nurses (Buckinghamshire)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many nurses are employed in each of the hospitals located in Buckinghamshire health authority; [30057]

(2) how many nursing vacancies there are in the Buckinghamshire health authority area; and what the average figure is for each hospital trust. [30038]

Ms Blears: Information on nursing staff in the Buckinghamshire health authority area is currently only available for 2000, this is shown in the table.

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS): Nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff by organisation and qualification within the Buckinghamshire health authority area as at 30 September 2000

	Whole-time equivalents	Headcount
All nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	3,550	5,390
Qualified	2,680	3,830
Unqualified	870	1,560
Aylesbury Vale Community Healthcare NHS Trust	660	1,120
Qualified	380	610
Unqualified	280	510
Buckinghamshire HA		
Qualified	[1]—	[1]—
Milton Keynes Community Health NHS Trust	400	520
Qualified	300	360
Unqualified	110	150
Milton Keynes General Hospital NHS Trust	660	1,100
Qualified	530	800
Unqualified	130	300
South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust	1,140	1,720
Qualified	890	1,270
Unqualified	250	450
Stoke Mandeville Hospital NHS Trust	640	880
Qualified	540	720
Unqualified	100	160
Two Shires—Northampton and Bucks Ambulance NHS Trust		
Qualified	40	50

[1] Five or less and greater than zero

Notes:

1. Figures exclude learners and agency staff
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest ten
3. Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts

Source:

Department of Health non-medical work force census

Data at 30 September 2001 will be available shortly.

For the number of vacancies, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 4 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 182–83W.

Christmas-day Working

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS staff were required to work on Christmas day 2001 as a percentage of the normal staffing levels. [30939]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the number of national health service staff working or required to work on Christmas day is not collected centrally.

The Department's work force censuses collect the number of staff working for the national health service in England, once a year at 30 September[1].

[1] The Department of Health General and Personal Medical Service (GPMS) Statistics collected the number of staff working in general and personal medical services as at 1 October between 1997 and 1999. The 2000 census and subsequent collections are as at 30 September.

Pay Beds

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will estimate the *(a)* gross income to the national health service provided by pay beds and *(b)* income net of the cost to NHS capacity of the provision of pay beds in each of the last five financial years for which figures are available; [30990]

(2) what recent estimate he has made of the extent to which the fee covers the cost of treatment in NHS hospital pay beds, with special reference to use of *(a)* NHS salaried staff and *(b)* other NHS facilities; [30991]

(3) how many pay beds there were in the national health service in each year since 1977; [30992]

(4) what percentage of beds in NHS hospitals are denoted as for private patients, broken down by *(a)* NHS trust *(b)* region and *(c)* for the whole of England. [30993]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not hold information centrally on the number of pay beds in the national health service. Laing and Buisson, who publish reviews on the independent healthcare sector, estimate that as of mid-June 2001 there were approximately 3,000 pay beds in the NHS, around 1,400 of which were in dedicated private patient units (PPUs). The remaining 1,600 beds were in ordinary NHS wards.

There are no national estimates on the income and related costs of pay beds in the national health service. Each NHS trust is responsible for ensuring that the income received for pay beds covers the direct costs involved plus a contribution towards overheads.

Figures for gross and net income solely for pay beds is not collected centrally. The Department does collect gross income information under the headings of 'non-NHS private patients' and 'non-NHS other'. No information is available on a net basis. 'Non-NHS patients' includes all income received and receivable for patient care services from private patients. 'Non-NHS other' includes a number of sources such as prescription charges in trusts, Road Traffic Act income (1996–97 only), amenity bed charges, income from overseas patients which are not covered by reciprocal agreements and income from the capital hip care Centre (from 1998–99).

Totals of the gross income for these two categories for the last five financial years are shown in the table.

£000

Year	*Non-NHS patients*	*Non-NHS other*
1996–97	235,733	153,384
1997–98	273,232	169,566
1998–99	290,840	216,677
1999–2000	304,826	224,187
2000–01	316,627	265,953

Source:

NHS Trust Summarisation Schedules 1996–97 to 2000–01.

Multiple Sclerosis Drugs

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent discussions he has had with the drug companies about the cost of beta interferon; [31195]

(2) what progress he has made with trials to extend the availability of beta interferon to people with MS; and if he will make a statement. [31194]

Ms Blears: Discussions are continuing with the manufacturers of the four disease modifying drugs for multiple sclerosis. These discussions are dependent upon the final guidance about these drugs from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what discussions his Department has had with the *(a)* MS Society, *(b)* manufacturers and *(c)* neurologists, about options for continuing the availability of beta interferon and glatiramer within the NHS; when he expects those discussions to be concluded; and if he will make a statement concerning the timing of a trial; [13108]

(2) by what date everyone with MS who is eligible for beta interferon will have received these drugs under the proposed prescription plus monitoring scheme; [29267]

(3) what assessment he has made of how consultant *(a)* neurologists and *(b)* specialist nurses in post will cope with implementing the prescription plus monitoring scheme for beta interferon; and whether any further resources will be made available to facilitate the scheme; [29282]

(4) when he plans to issue the first prescriptions for beta interferon under the proposed prescription plus monitoring scheme; and if he will make an announcement on this. [29268]

Ms Blears: Discussions are continuing with the manufacturers of the four disease modifying drugs for multiple sclerosis. These discussions are dependent upon the final guidance about these drugs from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence.

Patient Confidentiality

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what access *(a)* civil servants outside the national health service and *(b)* Ministers have to the private medical records of individuals. [31317]

Ms Blears: Neither Ministers nor civil servants outside of the national health service have access to the private medical records of individuals. Disclosures of information contained in medical records to Ministers and civil servants must comply with data protection, common law and human rights requirements.

Private Finance Initiative

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 26 June 2001 to the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Paul Holmes), *Official Report*, column 69W, what recent studies his Department has commissioned, undertaken and reviewed concerning the use of private finance within the national health service; and whether these demonstrate that the private finance option is better value for money when compared to the publicly funded alternative. [31458]

Mr. Hutton: The Department internally reviews all private finance initiative projects through the business case approval system as laid out in the Department's capital investment manual. To be approved, the business case must demonstrate that, overall, the private finance option is value for money when compared to the publicly funded alternative, the public sector comparator, and that it provides improved facilities for the national health service. NHS trusts are required to monitor performance throughout the lifetime of the PFI contract.

Because of PFI, eight major new hospitals have opened and another 15 are under construction, representing capital investment in the NHS of over £2 billion.

The Department has commissioned no external studies into the use of PFI in the NHS.

GP Prescribing Budget

Andy Burnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health authorities have advised general practitioners to suspend temporarily the prescribing of statins in order to reduce the expected overspend on the general practitioners prescribing budget. [31108]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* We are not aware of any health authorities offering such advice to their general practitioners. GPs should continue to prescribe medicines considered appropriate to meet the clinical needs of patients.

Gluteraldehyde

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which NHS hospitals in England and Wales use *(a)* Cidex and *(b)* Gluteraldehyde as a disinfecting agent; what assessment he has made of the safety implications for staff and patients of its continued use; and if he will make a statement. [30879]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* It is common practice within national health service hospitals to use chemicals to disinfect medical devices such as flexible endoscopes, and some surgical instruments where the device cannot be decontaminated by conventional methods which employ steam at high temperature. The most common chemical used is Gluteraldehyde, of which Cidex is a brand name. Information on which chemicals are used at individual hospitals in England is not collected centrally.

Gluteraldehyde falls under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations and is subject to strict control and continuous monitoring at local level. An annual risk assessment is required of how this substance is being used in the clinical setting. Where operating procedures suggest that exposure risk from inhalation is high, there is a requirement under the Health and Safety at Work Act to undertake environmental monitoring of the area. Monitoring is carried out by a qualified person with immediate corrective action being taken where necessary. This is included in the Controls Assurance Standards.

Whittington Hospital

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he took to ensure that no information containing sensitive personal data relating to patients at Whittington hospital, Mrs. Rose Addis, Mr. J. Scott-Faulkner and Mr. S. Hockley was processed, beyond that deliberately made public by the patients themselves. [31379]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* Responsibility for the processing of data relating to patients at the Whittington hospital rests with the hospital, subject to guidance issued by the Department. Guidance issued in March 1996 made it clear that patient consent should be sought prior to disclosing confidential information to the media and that even where patients themselves make details public, national health service bodies remain bound by patient confidentiality.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who *(a)* inside and *(b)* outside the NHS has had access to the patient records of Mrs. Rose Addis, Mr. S. Hockley and Mr. J. Scott-Faulkner since 20 January; whether such access was for medical purposes; and if the explicit consent of the data subject was obtained for such access. [31382]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* The operational procedures of the Whittington hospital are the responsibility of the hospital. Guidance issued by the Department makes it clear that all national health service bodies are expected to comply with all relevant legal requirements, including those relating to data protection and patient confidentiality.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who the Caldicott Guardians and data protection officers are in respect of patient records at the Whittington hospital for patients Mrs. Rose Addis, Mr. J. Scott-Faulkner and Mr. S. Hockley. [31378]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* Dr. Norman Parker, medical director at the Whittington hospital national health service trust is the Caldicott Guardian. Mr. Leo Bremner is the data protection officer.

SNOMED

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that the SNOMED clinical coding system is implemented within the NHS. [31545]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* The SNOMED clinical terms first release is due at the end of January 2002 and, in the national health service, will be for implementation testing only. An evaluation and refinement programme has been funded which will examine implementation issues in both the primary care sector (the ADVENT project) and across a broad range of clinical specialities (multi-professional quality assurance—MPQA). In parallel, an implementation scoping study will address issues around costs, migration from read codes, supplier involvement, and education and training requirements in the service. This will lead to the development of a costed implementation plan for roll-out of SNOMED CT across the NHS.

Non-executive Posts (Epsom and Ewell)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the proportion of non-executive posts filled by people living in the Epsom and Ewell constituency in health authorities and trusts covering the constituency *(a)* in 1997 and *(b)* at the latest available date. [31384]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* The information requested is given in the table:

Non-executive posts on national health service boards serving the Epsom and Ewell constituency occupied by people living in Epsom and Ewell

	1997 (April)	*2002 (January)*
East Surrey health authority	1 (6)	0 (5)
Epsom and St. Helier NHS trust	1 (6)	1 (6)
Surrey Ambulance NHS trust	1 (6)	1 (6)
Surrey Oaklands NHS Trust	1 (6)	1 (5)
Total	4 (24)	3 (22)

Note:

Figures in brackets give total number of non-executives on board.

Winter Deaths

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many winter excess deaths there were, by region, in each of the last 10 years *(a)* in total number and *(b)* as a percentage of the elderly population; and what recent measures the Government have taken to reduce the number of winter excess deaths. [30611]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

The information is not available as a percentage of the elderly population.

The causes of excess winter deaths are complex but cold weather and illnesses such as influenza play an important part.

We have introduced a programme of measures, outlined in the United Kingdom fuel poverty strategy, aimed at ensuring people, especially older people, are able to keep adequately warm at reasonable cost.

Health professionals have been encouraged to identify cold/health related issues and raise awareness of help available.

A "Keep Warm, Keep Well" campaign operates in England each winter which provides free booklets for the public and special literature for health professionals; a telephone helpline, and advice on how those most in need may apply for grants (such as the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme—a scheme providing grants for comprehensive packages of insulation and heating improvements for those most vulnerable to cold-related ill health); advice on benefit payments; as well as the health benefits of keeping warm.

Influenza vaccine is offered free to everybody aged 65 and over and to those of any age who are in at risk groups, for example with conditions where their health would be at particular risk if they caught influenza. At risk groups are those with chronic heart disease; chronic respiratory disease (including asthma); renal disease,; diabetes mellitus; and immunosuppression due to disease or treatment and also to residents of long-stay residential homes or care facilities.

In 2000–01, 65 per cent. of those aged 65 and over were immunised (the target was a minimum of at least 60 per cent., it was also the first time a target had been set).

Final monitoring figures at the end of December 2001, show that 68 per cent. of those aged 65 and over were immunised this winter. This is 3 percentage points higher than the 65 per cent. target set at the start of the campaign.

Excess winter deaths[1] by age-group and Government office region of usual residence, 1991–92 to 1999–2000, and 2000–01[2]

Age group	*1991–92[3]*	*1992–93[3]*	*1993–94[3]*	*1994–95[3]*	*1995–96[3]*	*1996–97[3]*	*1997–98[3]*	*1998–99[3]*	*1999–2000[3]*	*2000–01[4]*
England, Wales and elsewhere										
0–64	2,740	2,120	2,120	2,200	2,900	3,040	1,700	3,100	3,770	2,300
65–74	6,360	4,710	4,160	5,490	7,070	6,970	4,200	6,950	7,440	3,300
75–84	13,500	9,330	9,290	9,700	14,370	17,540	7,870	16,340	16,840	8,400
85+	12,250	9,490	10,330	9,910	15,850	20,140	9,130	20,450	20,390	11,000
All ages	34,850	25,650	25,900	27,290	40,190	47,690	22,900	46,840	48,440	25,000
North-east										
0–64	260	160	210	130	250	130	110	90	280	100
65–74	510	280	340	270	520	500	360	470	480	300
75–84	930	550	630	400	650	920	530	890	1,030	600
85+	560	420	440	420	650	680	550	920	880	500
All ages	2,260	1,410	1,610	1,210	2,080	2,230	1,550	2,370	2,680	1,500
North-west										
0–64	430	530	330	230	630	510	280	630	420	200
65–74	1,050	740	510	960	1,000	1,070	500	1,230	1,090	600
75–84	2,020	1,310	1,050	1,410	2,060	2,260	980	2,600	2,060	1,300
85+	1,480	1,320	1,080	1,190	1,940	2,520	1,010	2,880	2,520	1,600
All ages	4,980	3,880	2,980	3,790	5,630	6,360	2,770	7,350	6,090	3,800
Yorkshire and the Humber										
0–64	340	40	190	120	250	240	210	260	350	200
65–74	800	500	620	520	820	700	480	810	680	500
75–84	1,520	870	1,170	1,030	1,440	1,810	860	1,800	1,690	800
85+	1,320	1,060	1,120	1,100	1,530	1,800	910	1,890	1,900	1,000
All ages	3,970	2,470	3,110	2,780	4,030	4,540	2,460	4,760	4,620	2,600

Excess winter deaths[1] by age-group and Government office region of usual residence, 1991–92 to 1999–2000, and 2000–01[2]

Age group	*1991–92*[3]	*1992–93*[3]	*1993–94*[3]	*1994–95*[3]	*1995–96*[3]	*1996–97*[3]	*1997–98*[3]	*1998–99*[3]	*1999–2000*[3]	*2000–01*[4]
East midlands										
0–64	260	230	240	240	170	250	130	310	350	200
65–74	640	460	350	580	500	470	360	550	590	300
75–84	1,150	700	900	850	1,110	1,280	700	1,560	1,270	800
85+	1,090	790	980	660	1,140	1,540	820	1,680	1,620	1,000
All ages	3,140	2,180	2,470	2,330	2,930	3,540	2,000	4,090	3,820	2,200
West midlands										
0–64	380	270	280	250	250	410	250	470	440	300
65–74	670	520	320	600	880	740	510	750	950	400
75–84	1,260	970	860	700	1,580	1,650	800	1,730	1,810	1,000
85+	1,060	830	950	760	1,460	1,740	900	1,920	2,090	900
All ages	3,370	2,590	2,400	2,310	4,160	4,530	2,460	4,860	5,290	2,600
East										
0–64	150	180	170	240	180	240	170	130	330	100
65–74	560	400	550	560	480	710	410	640	670	200
75–84	1,180	850	1,010	1,110	1,380	1,720	930	1,590	1,800	1,000
85+	1,240	940	1,220	1,090	1,830	2,320	1,030	2,440	2,070	1,200
All ages	3,130	2,360	2,940	3,000	3,870	5,000	2,540	4,800	4,880	2,400
London										
0–64	300	310	290	380	440	430	150	420	470	300
65–74	720	560	490	530	860	870	320	670	930	300
75–84	1,690	1,220	1,130	1,370	1,680	2,240	930	1,690	2,050	800
85+	1,540	1,260	1,240	1,230	1,840	2,390	1,120	2,160	2,430	1,400
All ages	4,240	3,360	3,150	3,500	4,830	5,940	2,520	4,940	5,870	2,800
South east										
0–64	360	160	90	220	310	420	250	370	630	300
65–74	660	840	530	690	940	870	570	890	1,050	200
75–84	1,790	1,360	1,340	1,330	2,230	2,770	990	2,190	2,470	1,000
85+	1,760	1,400	1,780	1,750	2,670	3,600	1,410	3,260	3,530	1,600
All ages	4,560	3,770	3,750	3,990	6,150	7,650	3,210	6,710	7,680	3,200
South-west										
0–64	110	120	310	280	250	300	120	230	310	300
65–74	440	220	330	550	690	600	400	420	620	200
75–84	1,380	850	810	920	1,320	1,830	700	1,380	1,580	500
85+	1,420	990	1,150	1,100	1,880	2,320	1,020	2,100	2,220	1,200
All ages	3,350	2,180	2,600	2,850	4,140	5,060	2,240	4,130	4,730	2,300
Wales										
0–64	240	200	50	200	180	120	90	230	220	200
65–74	360	260	180	270	420	490	360	540	420	200
75–84	610	670	420	570	920	1,050	480	930	1,090	600
85+	780	490	370	600	910	1,220	350	1,200	1,150	600
All ages	1,980	1,610	1,010	1,650	2,440	2,880	1,290	2,900	2,880	1,700
England										
0–64	2,590	2,010	2,100	2,090	2,720	2,930	1,660	2,900	3,570	2,100
65–74	6,050	4,510	4,050	5,250	6,690	6,520	3,890	6,430	7,070	3,100
75–84	12,900	8,670	8,900	9,110	13,450	16,490	7,410	15,430	15,770	7,800
85+	11,470	9,000	9,960	9,300	14,940	18,910	8,770	19,250	19,250	10,400
All ages	33,010	24,190	25,020	25,750	37,810	44,850	21,740	44,010	45,650	23,400
England and Wales										
0–64	2,820	2,210	2,150	2,290	2,910	3,050	1,760	3,130	3,790	2,300
65–74	6,410	4,770	4,230	5,520	7,120	7,010	4,260	6,970	7,490	3,300
75–84	13,520	9,340	9,320	9,690	14,380	17,540	7,890	16,360	16,850	8,400
85+	12,250	9,490	10,330	9,900	15,850	20,130	9,120	20,450	20,400	11,000
All ages	35,000	25,810	26,030	27,400	40,250	47,730	23,030	46,900	48,520	25,000

[1] Excess winter deaths are defined by the Office for National Statistics as the difference between the number of deaths during the four winter months (December to March) and the average number of deaths during the preceding autumn (August to November) and the following summer (April to July).

[2] Provisional.

[3] Rounded to the nearest 10.

[4] Provisional, rounded to the nearest 100.

Obesity

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many adults aged over 25 years were classified as obese broken down by region, expressed as *(a)* a percentage of population and *(b)* the total number, ranked in descending order according to percentage figures for the latest year in which figures are available. [30582]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* The available information is given in the table. The figures are taken from the results of the Health Survey for England for 2000, the latest year for which figures are available, in which 6,201 adults aged over 25 were interviewed. The Health Survey for England provides estimates of the underlying population figures but because of small sample size it is not possible to represent the figures as a number of the total population.

Levels of obesity (body mass index over 30) of persons aged 25 years or over by region and sex

Percentage

Regional Office area	*Men*	*Women*	*All persons*
Trent	24	27	26
Northern and Yorkshire	25	22	24
West Midlands	21	26	24
North West	21	24	22
North Thames	22	22	22
South Thames	22	22	22
South and West	23	20	21
Anglia and Oxford	21	20	21

Source:
Health Survey for England 2000

Community Hospital, Lymington

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assistance *(a)* the southern NHS region and *(b)* the Southampton and South West Hampshire health authority are providing to New Forest primary care trust in preparing a business case for a new community hospital in Lymington; [31134]

(2) how many times representatives of *(a)* Southampton and South West Hampshire health authority and *(b)* the southern region of the NHS have met representatives of New Forest primary care trust to discuss the business case for a new community hospital since the beginning of November 2001; and if he will make a statement; [31133]

(3) how he will ensure that funding commitments given by *(a)* the southern region of the NHS and *(b)* Southampton and South West Hampshire health authority regarding a new community hospital in Lymington, are met once the region and authority are abolished. [31135]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* Officials from the south-east regional office have attended project board meetings on the new community hospital at New Forest primary care trust on four occasions between November 2001 and January 2002. Representatives of the health authority attended on three occasions during the same period. Representatives of the primary care trust also attended the health authority board meeting in December 2001 where the new hospital was discussed.

Formal commitment to revenue funding from primary care trusts is a mandatory part of the outline business case (OBC) and full business case submissions. These will not be approved unless it is included. The current Lymington Project has not yet had its OBC approved, although the levels of revenue funding agreed with Southampton and South West Hampshire health authority for the earlier project are included within primary care trust's commitments.

All appropriate guidance and support will be provided to the New Forest primary care trust throughout this process.

Waiting Times (Somerset)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in Somerset health authority area were waiting more than *(a)* three months, *(b)* six months, *(c)* nine months, *(d)* 12 months, *(e)* 15 months, *(f)* 18 months and *(g)* 24 months for (i) heart operations, (ii) cancer treatment and (iii) hip replacements in each year since 1997; what are the latest available figures for waiting times for such operations; and if he will make a statement. [31306]

Ms Blears: The information requested is given in the table. The latest available information is for the year 2000–01. Current waiting times for these operations will vary according to the hospital and consultant the patient is being treated by and the clinical priority of the patient.

Somerset health authority and local NHS trusts have action plans in place to ensure that the maximum waiting time for operations is reduced to 15 months by 31 March 2002.

Waiting times for waiting list and booked admissions for selected operations/diagnoses

Patients resident in Somerset health authority, and treated in NHS Hospitals in England 1997–98 to 2000–01

	0–3 months	*3–6 months*	*6–9 months*	*9–12 months*	*12–15 months*	*15–18 months*	*18–24 months*	*Over 24 months*	*Not known*
1997–98									
Coronary artery bypass graft	47	48	28	28	9	4	1	0	1
Percutaneous transluminal coronary angioplasty	18	11	5	3	0	0	0	0	1
Hip replacement	193	123	100	76	16	6	2	1	18
Cancer	2,921	105	13	2	1	0	0	1	390
1998–99									
Coronary artery bypass graft	56	36	41	15	6	0	1	0	6
Percutaneous transluminal coronary angioplasty	27	24	2	2	0	0	0	0	1
Hip replacement	187	110	146	122	32	8	2	2	22
Cancer	2,741	100	11	9	3	0	0	1	442
1999–2000									
Coronary Artery Bypass Graft	19	7	16	11	7	9	0	0	108
Percutaneous Transluminal Coronary Angioplasty	24	24	3	0	0	0	0	0	1
Hip replacement	147	93	119	104	56	24	7	3	6
Cancer	3,100	204	27	8	3	0	0	0	204

Waiting times for waiting list and booked admissions for selected operations/diagnoses
Patients resident in Somerset health authority, and treated in NHS Hospitals in England 1997–98 to 2000–01

	0–3 months	*3–6 months*	*6–9 months*	*9–12 months*	*12–15 months*	*15–18 months*	*18–24 months*	*Over 24 months*	*Not known*
2000–01									
Coronary Artery Bypass Graft	78	20	19	15	12	42	3	0	17
Percutaneous Transluminal Coronary Angioplasty	8	9	10	0	0	1	1	0	0
Hip replacement	144	94	104	129	111	34	15	1	4
Cancer	2,912	185	21	3	7	1	0	0	204

Notes:

Operation/diagnosis codes used are as follows:

"Operations (OPCS4R codes)"

Coronary artery bypass graft: K40-K46

Percutaneous transluminal coronary angioplasty: K49-K50

Hip replacement: W37-W39, W46-W48

"Diagnoses (ICD-10 codes)"

Cancer—C00-C97 (malignant neoplasms)

Waiting time statistics from HES are not the same as the published waiting list statistics. HES provides counts and waiting times for all patients admitted to hospital within a given period whereas the published waiting list statistics count those waiting for treatment at a given point in time and how long they have been on the waiting list. Also, HES calculates the waiting time as the difference between the admission and decision to admit dates. Unlike published waiting list statistics, this is not adjusted for self-deferrals or periods of medical/social suspension.

Data for 1997–98 are adjusted for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data; 1998–99 to 2000–01 figures are not yet adjusted for shortfalls.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

Correspondence

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he will answer the letters sent to him by Mr. and Ms Phillips of Fareham on 21 August and 1 October; [19194]

(2) when he will answer the question tabled by the hon. Member for Fareham on 29 November 2001, concerning the letters sent to him by Mr. and Ms Phillips of Fareham on 21 August and 1 October 2001. [31689]

Ms Blears: A reply was sent on 29 November 2001.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Lester Report

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will publish a copy of the Lester report, referred to in paragraph 21 of the judgment of the Court of Appeal (Criminal Division) in Regina v. Patel, Villiers, Sewell, Hutchinson and Ford Cases 2000 02566, 2000 02589, 2000 02591, 2001 02259 and 2001 03772. [31529]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

This internal review was made available to—and was overtaken by—the independent investigation carried out by John Roques into the collection of excise duties (the results of which were published in July 2001 as CM 5239). As a consequence there are no plans to publish it.

Northern Ireland Court Service

Barbara Follett: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when she will publish the bilateral concordat between the Northern Ireland Court Service and the Northern Ireland devolved Administration. [33080]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I am pleased to announce that the First Minister, Deputy First Minister and my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor have agreed the text of the concordat between the Northern Ireland Court Service and the Northern Ireland Executive Committee. Copies of the concordat have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses and the text will be available on the Northern Ireland Court Service website.

I hope that the concordat will assist in the continued development of the fruitful and co-operative working relationship between the Northern Ireland Court Service and the Northern Ireland devolved Administration.

Defamation

Helen Southworth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he intends to consult on perceived abuses of defamation procedures. [33183]

Mr. Wills: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor has today written to the Law Commission asking them to undertake a scoping study to consider whether there are any problems arising from the use of intimidatory tactics, such as gagging writs and gagging letters. A copy of the terms of reference for this work has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The Law Commission will produce a short paper by the end of March 2002. It will also undertake some preliminary work with a view to a possible further scoping study on defamation and other issues arising from publication on the internet.

Concerns over gagging writs were originally raised during the passage of the Defamation Act 1996. The Government subsequently announced that they intended to consult publicly on the perceived abuses of defamation procedures. We have since reconsidered the scope of the project, in the light of the rapidly developing case law in the field, to ensure that it deals aptly with all relevant areas of concern, including those raised by advances in electronic communication.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 1 February 2002

PRIME MINISTER

Public Relations Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister how much was spent by his office on external public relations consultants in each of the last four years. [27404]

The Prime Minister: No expenditure has been made by my office on external public relations consultants in each of the last four years.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has for special envoys to represent him on visits to *(a)* Latin America and *(b)* Asia. [31685]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to send special envoys to Latin America or Asia at the moment.

Deputy Prime Minister

Mr. Soames: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement defining the duties of the Deputy Prime Minister. [31846]

The Prime Minister: As First Secretary of State the Deputy Prime Minister continues to deputise for me as required, drawing on the resources of other parts of the Cabinet Office as necessary. He oversees the work of the Social Exclusion Unit, which reports to me through him. He is also responsible for the Regional Co-ordination Unit and the nine Government Offices for the Regions. I have also asked him to be responsible for a White Paper on Regional Governance, in close liaison with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and in co-operation with other Cabinet colleagues.

On international matters the Deputy Prime Minister supports me. He continues to play a role in international climate change discussions and negotiations on my behalf. More recently, I have also asked the Deputy Prime Minister to take on a similar role in preparation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) to be held in Johannesburg in September 2002. In addition he sees visiting dignitaries and undertakes overseas visits on my behalf; and oversees the work of the International Public Service Group. He also carries ministerial responsibility for the British-Irish Council and will deputise for me as necessary at meetings of the Council.

The Deputy Prime Minister chairs Cabinet Committees on domestic affairs and on the nations and regions; and Sub-Committees on social exclusion and regeneration and on energy policy. He also chairs the newly established Ministerial Group (MISC18) on WSSD and continues to chair the Committee on the environment.

RMT

Mr. Soames: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's relationship with the RMT union. [32062]

The Prime Minister: The relevant Ministers and officials meet stakeholders in the railway industry, including the RMT, as appropriate. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code and the Civil Service Code.

Lords-lieutenant

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Prime Minister what criteria he uses to appoint *(a)* lords-lieutenant and *(b)* deputy lords-lieutenant; if he will list the names of deputy lords-lieutenant for each county; and what his estimate is of the average number of official engagements per week of (i) lords-lieutenant and (ii) deputy lords-lieutenant undertaken for each county. [32581]

The Prime Minister: In England, consultations which help to inform the appointment area are carried out by the Prime Minister's Secretary for Appointments. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland consultations are carried out by the relevant Administration or Department. Those appointed as lords-lieutenant are people of standing in their local communities, most frequently on account of their record of voluntary activity for the good of the community.

Deputy lieutenants are appointed by the lord-lieutenant at his or her discretion, subject only to Her Majesty not disapproving of the grant of the commission. As of July 2001 there were approximately 2,720 deputy lieutenants

It is not possible to estimate the number of official engagements for each lord-lieutenant or deputy lieutenant, which will reflect such matters as the size and population of the county or area concerned, the demand for such engagements, and the views and judgment of the lords-lieutenant themselves.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Prime Minister how many lords-lieutenant he has appointed for each county since assuming this responsibility. [32575]

The Prime Minister: Lords-lieutenant are appointed under current legislation by Her Majesty the Queen on the advice of the Prime Minister of the day. In the case of Scotland and Wales the Prime Minister is himself advised by the relevant First Minister and in Northern Ireland by the Secretary of State. Since 2 May 1997 31 lords-lieutenant have been appointed.

Commissioner for Public Appointments

David Cairns: To ask the Prime Minister whether the Commissioner for Public Appointments is to be reappointed at the end of her term. [33651]

The Prime Minister: I am pleased to be able to announce that Dame Rennie Fritchie has been reappointed for a further term of three years when her current appointment comes to an end on 28 February. Dame Rennie has fulfilled her role as regulator of the public appointments system in a resolute and distinguished manner over the last three years. She has made a major contribution to raising standards in this area and I am sure that this will continue during her second term. She will continue to serve as a Civil Service Commissioner.

Performance and Innovation Unit

Ian Stewart: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish the remit given to the Performance and Innovation Unit to make a study of the Government's sport strategy. [33650]

The Prime Minister: I have asked the Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU) to carry out a joint study with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport examining long-term sports policy. The project team will consider the roles and responsibilities of Government, and the private and voluntary sectors in helping sport better achieve the objectives of increased grassroots participation in sport and elite sporting excellence. The project team will clarify the roles and responsibilities and interventions of Government to help sport better achieve its own objectives. They will develop an overall strategy for guiding Government's decisions on sports policy (including major events), and review the existing institutional and financial arrangements, in the context of Government's own wider objectives. The initial scoping note for the project is available on the PIU website http:///www.piu.gov.uk/2001/sport/scope.shtml. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport will be the Sponsor Minister for the project. The unit aims to complete its study by summer 2002.

WALES

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the total external spend by his Department was on Private Finance Initiative consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PFI consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by his Department over this period; and if he will make a statement. [31034]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Since the Wales Office came into being in July 1999 it has incurred no such expenditure.

In the period from April 1998 to July 1999 the former Welsh Office spent some £770,000 on consultancies relating to the PFI aspect of the A55 road in North Wales; there were also two secondees into the Welsh Office during that period advising on PFI matters.

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit in 2001–02 will be accounted for by salary costs and pension contributions. [32017]

Mr. Paul Murphy: At present I estimate that some 42 per cent. of the Wales Office Departmental Expenditure Limit for 2001–02 is being spent on pay and pensions.

National Assembly

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has *(a)* to help promote the National Assembly for Wales, *(b)* to help improve communications between the National Assembly for Wales and Whitehall Departments and *(c)* to make the National Assembly for Wales work more effectively and efficiently; and if he will make a statement. [32412]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the Wales Office's Departmental Report (Cm 5121) in respect of parts *(a)* and *(b)* of his question; and to the Assembly's Performance Report in respect of part (c).

Departmental Leave Entitlement

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the average annual leave entitlement of staff in his Department in each of the last four years. [31748]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Until August 2000 the leave entitlement for Welsh Office or National Assembly for Wales staff (including those seconded to my Department) was a minimum of 22 days a year rising to a maximum of 30 days. Since August 2000 it has been a minimum of 25 days rising to the same maximum of 30 days.

My Department also contains a small number of secondees from other Government Departments and local government; these staff retain the leave entitlement of their parent organisation.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the public service agreement target for bench marking a single unit cost measure for operational work to establish an interim figure by April 2001 was achieved. [21284]

Angela Eagle: The Public Service Agreement was launched in April 2001.

The Home Office does not have a Public Service Agreement (PSA) target for benchmarking a single unit cost measure for operational work to establish an interim figure in April 2001.

Video Recordings (Criminal Prosecutions)

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what use is made of video recordings made on public transport vehicles in the prosecution of criminal offences including traffic offences by the Metropolitan police; if he plans an extension of such use; and if he will make statement. [30329]

Mr. Denham: Images from closed circuit television (CCTV) cameras on public transport vehicles are used primarily to tackle crime on the vehicles themselves. I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that CCTV is a key element of Operation Seneca which is currently targeted at reducing crime on selected bus routes. It has led to a number of arrests for crimes such as robbery, disorder, drugs possession and weapons offences, and has also resulted in a considerable decrease in reported crime on the routes concerned.

CCTV cameras are also used to identify bus lane infringements, although these are not criminal offences. Traffic offences are enforced by means of speeding and red light cameras.

Any plans to extend the use of CCTV on public transport vehicles in London would be an operational matter for the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis.

Community Group Funding

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what initiatives the Government have taken to *(a)* reorganise and *(b)* simplify access to state funded competitive grant schemes for (i) community and (ii) voluntary groups; [29930]

(2) whether a particular Minister has been given specific responsibility for rationalising and simplifying access to state funding for voluntary and community organisations; [29925]

(3) how the Government will measure the success of their initiatives to simplify access to state funding for voluntary and community organisations; and how progress will be monitored and reported; [29924]

(4) what research the Government have conducted into the administrative requirements on voluntary and community organisations making applications to the system of state funded competitive grant schemes. [29926]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* In drawing up the Compact on Relations between Government and the voluntary and community sector in England, Funding Code, the Home Office took note of the report of the Commission on the future of the voluntary sector, published in June 1996, entitled "Meeting the challenge of change: voluntary action into the 21st Century", and provided funding to the National Council for Voluntary Organisations to conduct an extensive consultation with the voluntary and community sector and Government Departments.

The study currently being undertaken by the Regional Co-ordination Unit (RCU) into improving access to regeneration and community funding consulted over 100 bodies and individuals, examined examples of differing administrative requirements imposed on funded bodies; and considered relevant previous research.

The recommendations arising from the RCU's study of regeneration funding are designed directly to simplify access to state funded competitive grant schemes for voluntary and community groups. In addition, my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, is also currently reviewing the scope for improving the co-ordination and delivery of state funded grant schemes for the community and voluntary sectors.

The success of these various initiatives will be measured by the numbers and quality of applications received for individual programmes, a reduction in the number of ineligible applications, success in reaching targeted groups, such as marginalised and minority ethnic groups, and in the use made of the website. Monitoring will be undertaken by the departments managing individual programmes. The Active Community Unit is currently devising a common evaluation framework by which the success of simplification of small grants will be measured.

There is no one Minister with specific responsibility for the rationalising and simplification of access to state funding for the voluntary and community sector, although I have responsibility for the Active Community Unit and will be taking a particular interest in this issue.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders have been issued in each London borough in each three month period since their introduction. [29364]

Mr. Denham: Antisocial Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) are community-based civil orders, which can be applied for by the police or local authority, in consultation with each other against an individual or several individuals whose behaviour is antisocial. Applications are to the magistrates court acting in its civil capacity.

Information held centrally on the number of Antisocial Behaviour Orders issued up to 31 May 2000 is by police force area. Up to that date there were nine ASBOs issued within the Metropolitan Police area (including City of London).

From 1 June 2000 official statistics on the number of ASBOs issued are based on quarterly returns from Magistrates Courts Committees (MCCs) and are presently designed not to give figures below MCC level. A review of these statistics identified an undercount and my Department therefore undertook an exercise with the police to obtain more reliable figures. As a result of this reconciliation exercise the total number of ASBOs issued within England and Wales up to the end of September this year was 466, 184 more than previously reported. Within this total the quarterly figures for the Greater London Magistrates' Courts Authority are:

Period	*Total*
June 2000	0
Quarter ending September 2000	10
Quarter ending December 2000	9
Quarter ending March 2001	4
Quarter ending June 2001	4
Quarter ending September 2001	4
Total	31

Mobile Phone Theft

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will compel mobile telephony companies to register the user's home address, e-mail and landline telephone number on their SIM cards. [28951]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* The Government believe that valid registration can help combat mobile phone theft by identifying the customer with his or her phone in order to authorise the blacklisting of stolen SIM cards or, where technically possible, the disabling of the stolen handset itself. It is already the case that contract phone users are required by all mobile phone operators to register their details and that the Subscriber Identification Module (SIM) card inside each mobile phone identifies the user with a full name, address and landline number (if available).

Registration of pre-pay mobile phones is not at present compulsory. This is partly due to the European Community Communications Data Protection Directive 97/66 which encourages the development of telecommunications service options which allow anonymous or strictly private access, and also because compulsory registration may disadvantage low income users, who may be of no fixed abode. Orange is the only operator to require registration details from its pre-pay customers. We are encouraging the other major operators, which all have voluntary registration schemes for pre-pay customers, to enhance take-up of these schemes. We will keep the need for legislation under review on this and other measures.

Police Firearms

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the terms of reference of the Review of Police Use of Firearms being undertaken by the Police Complaints Authority will enable its members to consider *(a)* international norms for the use of lethal force set out by the United Nations, *(b)* the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights on 4 May 2001 in Shanaghan *v.* UK and other cases finding procedural shortcomings in police investigations and *(c)* experience gained by the Police Ombudsman in Northern Ireland. [29733]

Mr. Denham: To address the terms of reference of the review of recent firearms incidents, the Police Complaints Authority (PCA) will consider the key issues in the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials (1990) with particular attention to paragraphs 10, 22 and 23, and the key conclusions from the Shanaghan case. The PCA has also written to the Police Ombudsman in Northern Ireland requesting information on relevant cases and general conclusions from their experience to date.

Fireworks

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people were charged with offences relating to the misuse of fireworks in the last six months; [30269]

(2) how many complaints were received by each police force in the UK relating to firework incidents during the Christmas and new year period. [30268]

Mr. Denham: The available information, from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database, relating to England and Wales for 2000 is shown in the table. These data show persons proceeded against for offences where it is possible to identify specific firework misuse. Statistics for 2001 are not yet available.

Information held centrally does not enable offences involving personal injury or damage to property from fireworks to be identified, as the circumstances behind any offence are not collected.

No information is collected centrally on complaints received by police forces relating to firework incidents.

Persons proceeded against for offences relating to the misuse of fireworks England and Wales 2000[1,2]

Statute/offence description	*Proceeded against*
Explosives Act 1875, sec. 80	
Throwing, casting or firing any fireworks in or into any highway, street etc. public place	61
Sporting Events (Control of Alcohol, etc.) Act 1985, sec. 2A(1)	
Being in possession of fireworks etc., in or when entering a designated sports ground	3
Total	64

[1] These data are on a principal offence basis.

[2] Staffordshire police force were only able to submit sample data for persons proceeded against and convicted in the magistrates courts for the year 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data these data are not robust at a detailed level and have been excluded from this table.

Police Pay

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the proposed introduction of *(a)* threshold payments, *(b)* special priority payments and *(c)* bonus payments to police officers; and what representations he has received from the Police Federation about the additional payments element of the Police Reform Programme. [30112]

Mr. Denham: The Police Negotiating Board (PNB), on which both the Secretary of State and the Police Federation are represented, reached agreement in principle on 27 December 2001 on a package of changes to police pay and conditions of service. The changes are set out in the Heads of Agreement.

The changes include a new competence-related payment of £1,002 at the top of each of the federated ranks' pay scales. It is expected that at least 75 per cent. of those eligible—that is, those who have spent at least a year at the top of the scale—will receive the payment.

Under the new special priority payments scheme, officers could qualify for one-off payments of between £500 and £5,000 a year. Chief officers and police authorities will draw up a local scheme of payments, in consultation with local staff associations, having regard to national criteria and to guidance from the Secretary of State. The national criteria are that posts carry a significantly higher responsibility than the norm for the rank; or are particularly difficult to fill; or have specially arduous working conditions. All parties in PNB recognise that there are a number of specialist posts where long hours are a necessary and integral part of the officers' role rather than due to management failure.

In addition, chief constables will be able to award bonuses of between £50 and £500 for occasional work of an outstandingly demanding, unpleasant or important nature, such as hostage negotiation, or fingerprinting and searching badly decomposed bodies.

The Police Federation was party to the negotiations in PNB when it had the opportunity to make representations on all the proposed new payments.

The Heads of Agreement have to be ratified by the end of February.

Speeding Fines

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total sum obtained from speeding fines in the last year for which figures are available was; and what the figures were in each of the previous 10 years. [27010]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* Information on the revenue raised from speeding fines is not available.

However, the table shows the total number and amount (£) of fines ordered to be paid following conviction for speeding offences within England and Wales from 1991 to 2000. As the majority of such offences are dealt with by the issue of a fixed penalty, the table also shows the total amount of fixed penalties ordered to be paid.

Not all fines and fixed penalties will have been paid.

All fixed penalty fine revenue is passed to Her Majesty's Treasury. However, in April 2000, eight partnership areas, comprising local police forces, local authorities, highways authorities and magistrates courts, piloted a new 'netting-off' scheme. This allows a proportion of the fixed penalty fine revenue from speed and red-light cameras to be re-invested to fund camera enforcement. Fine revenue is used to meet each of the partners' costs in relation to the administration, purchase, installation, operation and maintenance of the cameras.

Fines and fixed penalties data for speeding offences, England and Wales, 1990–2000

	Court proceedings			*Fixed penalties*	
	Number of fines	*Total amount of fine (£)*	*Average fine (£)*	*Number of tickets*	*Estimated revenue (£)*[1]
1991	155,300	13,198,000	85	449,200	14,374,000
1992	146,800	12,697,000	87	460,100	17,485,000
1993	98,200	12,475,000	127	394,800	15,790,000
1994	103,100	11,676,000	113	472,500	18,899,000
1995	117,000	12,512,000	107	530,200	21,207,000
1996	127,900	12,904,000	101	595,100	23,802,000
1997	130,600	15,523,000	119	712,800	28,510,000
1998	151,400	20,369,000	135	781,000	31,240,000
1999	151,200	19,978,000	132	825,300	33,011,000
2000	139,200	18,098,000	130	1,023,500	44,351,000

[1] 'Estimate' based on the following fixed penalty charges—£32 up to 31 March 1992, £40 up to 31 October 2000 and £60 as from 1 November 2000

Gerald Mutketiwa

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has received on the treatment of Zimbabwean citizen, Mr. Gerald Mutketiwa, subsequent to his deportation of 16 December; and if he will make a statement. [26120]

Angela Eagle: I have written to my hon. Friend today.

CCTV (Uxbridge)

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many CCTV schemes are operating in the Uxbridge constituency. [28489]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office only holds information about schemes we fund. To date the Home Office has not funded any closed circuit television (CCTV) schemes in the Uxbridge area.

However, the Hillingdon Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership have been allocated funding under the Communities Against Drugs (CAD) Initiative, in order to tackle drugs markets and drugs related crime and disorder. CAD money can be used to fund a variety of interventions including CCTV where appropriate.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Parliamentary Questions

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many answers to parliamentary questions have not been answered by her Department under exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information in each year since 1994. [29415]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* Questions that have not been answered under exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information are detailed in the Reports on Ministerial Accountability and Parliamentary Questions published by the Select Committee on Public Administration (formerly the Public Service Select Committee). The most recent report covers the parliamentary Session 2000–01.

I understand that copies of these reports are available in the Library of the House and on the House of Commons website at www.publication.parliament.uk/pa.

Departmental Secondments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many staff in her Department have been seconded to jobs in the *(a)* private and *(b)* public sector in each of the last four years. [31781]

Dr. Howells: The information is shown in the table.

	Private sector	*Public sector*
1998	4	14
1999	3	16
2000	3	14
2001	2	22

In answering this we have quoted the number of secondments which commenced, were continuing or completed in the given year.

Departmental Salary Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit in 2001–02 will be accounted for by salary costs and pension contributions. [32011]

Dr. Howells: On the basis of the Department's current expenditure limit for 2001–02, salary costs and pension contributions are forecast to account for 1.26 per cent. of the Department's departmental expenditure limit in 2001–02.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Autism

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to review *(a)* disability living allowance and *(b)* carer's allowance for sufferers of autism and their families. [31883]

Maria Eagle: We keep the operation of disability living allowance (DLA) and invalid care allowance (ICA), like other social security benefits, under review. Last autumn we announced a package, worth £500 million over three years, to enhance the current social security provision for carers and improve their financial security. For DLA, we have recently made significant improvements to the claim form, we are currently revising all the forms used to obtain relevant information from doctors, health care professionals and others involved in the care of claimants, and in consultation with organisations representing disabled people, are testing an alternative system for extra-costs disability benefits based on activities for managing life. There are no plans to carry out a review of these benefits specifically directed towards people with autism and their families.

Post Office Card Accounts

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will allow all pensioners and benefit recipients automatic entitlement to a post office card account on conversion to automated credit transfer, with an opt-out for those who choose a bank account. [32730]

Malcolm Wicks: No. As my hon. Friend the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness explained in his reply on 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 119–20W, the emphasis of the automated credit transfer migration and marketing strategy will be to ensure that each customer has the best account for his or her circumstances.

If customers do not have a bank account, we will provide them with information on the types of accounts available, including standard and basic bank accounts and post office card accounts, and help them make the best choice for their circumstances.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Remuneration

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will estimate the number of individuals in her *(a)* Department, *(b)* related agencies and *(c)* related non-departmental public bodies whose annual remuneration including benefits in kind exceeded (i) £100,000 and (ii) £200,000 in each of the last four years. [26320]

Clare Short: For the four years in question the figures are as follows:

(a) As at 1 April 1998

One individual had an annual salary in excess of £100,000. No individual had an annual salary in excess of £200,000.

As at 1 April 1999

one individual had an annual salary in excess of £100,000. No individual had an annual salary in excess of £200,000.

As at 1 April 2000

One individual had a salary in excess of £100,000. Another whose salary was less than £100,000, but who was serving overseas, received a remuneration package which included relocation expenses, a tax free cost of living addition for serving overseas, hardship allowance, and education expenses for children in the UK, which meant their total remuneration exceeded £100,000. No individual had an annual salary in excess of £200,000.

As at 1 April 2001

Three individuals had a salary in excess of £100,000. Another whose salary was less than £100,000, but who was serving overseas, received a remuneration package which included a tax free cost of living addition for serving overseas and a hardship allowance, which mean their total remuneration exceeded £100,000. No individual had an annual salary in excess of £200,000.

(b) DFID has no related agencies.

(c) I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, on 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 253W.

Anti-personnel Mines

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent steps her Department has taken to promote the convention on the prohibition of the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel mines. [31281]

Clare Short: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office leads on promoting the Ottawa Convention. It does so by playing a full role in the follow-up process, including taking suitable opportunities to lobby States non-party to the convention about the desirability of ratification or accession.

DFID helps developing countries implement their obligations under the Ottawa Convention. We do this by undertaking programmes of humanitarian mine action, in particular mine clearance, stockpile destruction, raising mines awareness and strengthening indigenous capacity.

My Department also works to strengthen the international community's capacity, particularly that of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)—to provide a more coherent, timely and cost-effective response.

In the current financial year DFID expects to spend approximately £10 million in pursuit of these objectives.

Tanzania

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what work her Department is undertaking to help improve the standard of school facilities in Tanzania. [31671]

Clare Short: DFID funded a pilot project to help the Government of Tanzania trial a decentralised system for primary classroom construction. This system has now been adapted and is being used as the mechanism for the major construction programme now being undertaken in Tanzania (15,000 new classrooms a year).

DFID is now providing support to the education sector in Tanzania directly through the budget. This means that we are assisting the Government of Tanzania to provide additional resources into the education sector, which is then spent on priority activities designed to improve the quality of education in Tanzania. The first success is evident in the dramatic increases in enrolment to the first grade of primary school in January this year.

Departmental Salary Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit in 2001–02 will be accounted for by salary costs and pension contributions. [32016]

Clare Short: Our current forecasts show that salary costs and pension contributions will account for approximately 1.4 per cent. of DFID's departmental expenditure limit for 2001–02.

Afghanistan

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether there are United Kingdom-sponsored aid workers operating in areas of Afghanistan subject to recent attacks with cluster bombs; and what guidance has been issued by her Department to aid workers on safety in relation to unexploded sub-munitions. [31637]

Clare Short: There are agencies receiving DFID support that are working in areas of Afghanistan where cluster bombs have been dropped. We are aware of the particular dangers that threaten the security of aid workers in Afghanistan, including the threat posed by unexploded ordnance. We are actively supporting our partner agencies in joint efforts to improve the security of their programmes and safety of their staff. This is being done through sharing information available on particular threats—including the location of areas where cluster bombs have been dropped—and by supporting field security training and practical security arrangements.

In addition, we are supporting the Office of the UN's Security Co-ordinator (UNSECOORD) to enhance the security framework for aid personnel in the region. We are also supporting the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) programme in Afghanistan. This includes both the clearance of mines and unexploded ordnance, and an expanded programme of mine awareness initiatives in collaboration with UNICEF and NGOs.

Departmental Leave Entitlements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what has been the average annual leave entitlement of staff in her Department in each of the last four years. [31749]

Clare Short: It would involve disproportionate cost to the Department to calculate the average leave entitlement of staff for the last four years. The list sets out the leave allowances of staff by grade:

Grade	*Annual leave*
Senior civil service	30 working days
Band A	30 working days
Band B	22 working days rising to 25 days after one year and 30 days after 10 years total service
Band C	22 working days rising to 25 days after one year and 30 days after 10 years total service

These allowances have not changed over the last four years.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the President of the Council whether the Government intend to improve the explanatory material supplied with statutory instruments. [32387]

Mr. Robin Cook: I am pleased to announce that, with effect from 1 March, all affirmative statutory instruments laid before the House will be accompanied by an explanatory memorandum, which will be a fuller document than the existing explanatory note. This is intended to assist Parliament in considering the instrument. The new memoranda will be in addition to the explanatory notes, which will continue to be printed with statutory instruments.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Rolling Stock

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on progress in the replacement of slam-door rolling stock on the railways. [26310]

Mr. Jamieson: Orders have already been placed for a total of 1,235 new vehicles to replace Mark 1 slam door stock. We expect a further order to be placed shortly. All these vehicles are due to enter service before 2005.

New Train Routes

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many proposals for new train routes have been presented to his officials from London local authorities in the last five years. [27705]

Mr. Jamieson: Ministers have received a wide range of representations, especially in relation to Crossrail extensions to the East London line and rail links to London airports. Precise information is not held centrally.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what investment in new train lines is planned in each of the next five years within London. [27703]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority's Strategic Plan sets out for the first time the committed projects which are being taken forward network-wide over the next 10 years. Copies of the plan have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Rail Passenger Partnership

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how much new money has been allocated to the rail passenger partnership in the SRA strategic plan; [28539]

(2) what proportion of the money announced for the rail passenger partnership scheme has been allocated; [28575]

Mr. Jamieson: At December 2001, £45 million had been committed. The rail passenger partnership has now been enlarged with an increased budget of £430 million.

Rail Investment

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much investment took place in the railways in each year between 1991 and 1997; and how much was met by public funds. [28736]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to Table 4.2 of the strategic rail authority's quarterly national rail trends bulletin for an historic series of investment in the rail industry. Government support to the rail industry is shown in Table 4.1 of the same bulletin.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total level of private investment, less public expenditure supporting private investment, was in the railways for each year 2001–02 to 2010–11 as *(a)* allocated in the 10 year transport plan of July 2000 and *(b)* allocated in the strategic rail authority's plan of January 2002 at (i) outturn prices and (ii) 2000–01 prices. [31202]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to Table A3 of the 10 year plan for transport and to the written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) on 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 177–78W.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what is the total spending on the railways each year between 2001–02 to 2010–11 as *(a)* allocated in the 10-year transport plan of July 2000 and *(b)* allocated in the Strategic Rail Authority's plan of January 2002, at (i) outturn prices and (ii) 2000–01 prices. [31201]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answers given to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) on 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 871–72W, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) on 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 177–78W.

Channel Tunnel Freight Services

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many freight services used the channel tunnel in each month since January 2000. [29584]

Mr. Jamieson: The figures for the number of trains are in the following table provided by EWSI, the UK operator of these services:

	2000	*2001*
January	522	615
February	632	621
March	688	657
April	616	395
May	633	672
June	656	676
July	671	637
August	464	503
September	595	586
October	618	594
November	661	291
December	551	255

Train Operating Companies

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps his Department has taken to ensure that money received in payments from train operating companies is reinvested directly into the railways; and if he will make a statement. [30346]

Mr. Jamieson: All additional receipts received so far from performance regimes will be used to contribute to expenditure within the SRA budget, allowing greater activity to be undertaken than would otherwise be the case.

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether he has received representations from parties other than Railtrack about the funding provision for Control Period 2. [30252]

Mr. Jamieson: Rail funding provision for the first two years of Control Period 2 (CP2) was set in Spending Review 2000 and in the 2 April 2001 agreement between the Government and Railtrack. That for the last three years of CP2 will be set in Spending Review 2002, for which I have received representations from the Strategic Rail Authority who have, in turn, received representations from various rail industry interests.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 784W, on minimum track standards, what proportion of track did not meet the minimum required standard for the *(a)* 35mm rail top profile and *(b)* 70mm rail top profile (i) in each year since 1994 and (ii) predicted for each year up to 2011, as illustrated in Figure 26 of the Railtrack Network Management Statement 2000. [31595]

Mr. Jamieson: Railtrack's progress in improving track geometry is measured against the target agreed with the Rail Regulator as part of the periodic review for the second control period, which came into effect on 1 April 2001. The measured values reported at the end of the last financial year to enable comparison with the agreed target improvement programme are given in Table 3.2 of Railtrack's 2001 Network Management Statement Part One.

Train Drivers

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many drivers were employed on the railways *(a)* immediately before privatisation and *(b)* at the most recent date for which figures are available. [30244]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) on 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 54W.

Crossrail

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what parts of Crossrail he estimates can be implemented while Railtrack is in administration. [31026]

Mr. Jamieson: The Crossrail project definition work currently being undertaken jointly by the Strategic Rail Authority and Transport for London will continue on the same basis as before Railtrack administration. It has always been expected that a special purpose vehicle would be set up to take forward any scheme which might be developed as a result of the project definition work.

Rail 10-year Plan

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list those projects in the SRA 10-year plan that he estimates can be implemented while Railtrack is in administration. [31025]

Mr. Spellar: There is no reason in principle why any proposal contained in the Strategic Plan should not be capable of being implemented while Railtrack is in administration.

Leominster Station

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he plans to install disabled access to the southbound platform at Leominster station. [30976]

Mr. Jamieson: While the northbound platform at Leominister station is accessible I am not aware of any current plans to make the southbound platform accessible to those with disabilities. The SRA makes available funding to ensure train operating companies are resourced, where necessary, to implement the requirement of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 on access to stations.

Rail Safety

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the legislation which allows the prosecution of *(a)* train operating companies, *(b)* train drivers and *(c)* Railtrack in relation to passing signals at danger. [31196]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety law allowing prosecution following a signal passed at danger (SPAD) is as follows:

	Legislation allowing prosecution of:		
	Railtrack	*Train operators*	*Drivers*
Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974	Yes	Yes	Yes
Railways (Safety Case) Regulations 2000	Yes	Yes	No
Railways (Safety Critical Work) Regulations 1994	Yes	Yes	No
Railway Safety (Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations 1997	Yes	Yes	No
Railway Safety Regulations 1999	Yes	Yes	No

In addition the Crown Prosecution Service can prosecute drivers and employers of drivers for manslaughter, and drivers for being under the influence of alcohol and drugs.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the *(a)* date, *(b)* location and *(c)* level of penalty of all incidents of signals passed at danger that have resulted in prosecution of (i) train operating companies and (ii) Railtrack in each year since 1995–96. [31200]

Mr. Jamieson: Great Western Train Co Ltd. was fined £1.5 million at the Old Bailey on 27 July 1999 following a collision due to a signal passed at danger at Southall on 19 September 1997.

There have been no prosecutions of Railtrack.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 586W, on rail safety, whether the supervision of rail signal boxes will be monitored by the Health and Safety Executive. [31589]

Mr. Jamieson: The supervision of rail signal boxes is a matter for Railtrack.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Health and Safety Executive have taken to reduce the total number of signals passed at danger within categories three to eight in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [31199]

Mr. Jamieson: Details of actions being taken by the rail industry to reduce the total number of SPADs, including serious SPADs, are reported in the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE's) monthly SPAD reports which are held in the House of Commons Library and are published on the HSE website http://www.house.gov.uk/railway/spad/index.htm.

On 23 January HSE also published three reports which set out the steps being taken to reduce SPADs: Report on the assessment of Railtrack's response to an Improvement Notice covering the "Top 22" signals passed most often at danger (for the period 1990–98); Report on the assessment of Railtrack's management of multi-SPAD signals; and HMRI's inspection of driver management in train operating companies.

Railway Policy

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the roles are of each member of staff within his Department with *(a)* total or *(b)* partial responsibility for policy on the railways, (i) as of June 1997, (ii) as of May 2001 and (iii) as of January 2002. [31524]

Mr. Jamieson: It is neither customary nor practicable to publish individual civil servants' job descriptions.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what changes (1) have taken place since June 2001 in the *(a)* role, *(b)* organisation, *(c)* structures and *(d)* staff numbers and roles of the Railway Directorate within his Department; and if he will make a statement; [31526]

(2) in the *(a)* role and *(b)* terms of reference of the Railway Directorate within his Department have taken place since May 1997; what changes are planned; and what consultations on changes (i) have taken place since June 2001 and (ii) are planned. [31527]

Mr. Jamieson: In October 2001, the Department's Railways Directorate was divided into two units: the Rail Delivery Directorate and the Railways Restructuring Directorate. The division reflected the increase and refocusing of work following the placing of Railtrack plc into administration on 7 October. There was no public consultation on the change.

In June 2001, 57 people worked in the Railways Directorate. Seventy-nine people now work in the two directorates.

Automatic Train Protection Systems

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many trains were fitted with automatic train protection systems in *(a)* January 2001, *(b)* July 2001 and *(c)* January 2002. [31354]

Mr. Jamieson: Although figures are not available for the precise months requested, the Health and Safety Executive advises that the Train Protection and Warning System (TPWS) has been retro-fitted to existing stock on the following basis: 427 trains by May 2001, 1,117 trains by August 2001, 1,993 trains by November 2001 and 2,259 trains by January 2002. All new trains are being delivered with TPWS fitted. British Rail Automatic Train Protection (BR-ATP) is fitted on all First Great Western, Chiltern Line and Heathrow Express trains.

London Underground

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many meetings he had with London Underground in December 2001. [31369]

Mr. Jamieson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions meets bodies with an interest in London Underground on a regular basis.

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when Transport for London is expected to take over the running of London Underground. [31495]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government's intention is that London Underground Ltd. will be transferred to Transport for London after the competitions to modernise the underground's infrastructure have been completed.

Transport Projects (Uxbridge)

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what transport infrastructure projects have been given formal approval since 1997 which affect the Uxbridge constituency; and if he will estimate the cost of each project. [31371]

Mr. Jamieson: Comprehensive information is not held centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, the following information may be helpful.

Bus Projects

Ruislip station: refurbishment of bus stands—£100,000—February 2002.

Mount Vernon hospital: refurbishment of bus stands—£220,000—April 2001.

"Countdown" real-time information displays at bus shelters have also been provided at 30 stops in the borough since 1997.

Source:

London Buses

Road related works: London borough of Hillingdon

£000

	Maintenance of principal roads	*Other: Including safety, local works, traffic signals, 20 mph zones, safer routes to school*	*Uxbridge town centre*
1997–98	393	623	244
1998–99	353	631	375
1999–2000	294	558	350
2000–01	342	613	—
2001–02	380	756	—
Total	1,762	3,181	969

Road projects within partnerships and London—wide schemes

Hillingdon would also have benefited from works funded either on a London-wide or sub-regional basis.

Source:

Transport for London Borough Team.

SRB Funding

The information we have available indicates that in addition there was SRB funding of the following schemes.

Hayes Transport Hub—Hayes Hub East/West routes £2.1 million for projects and infrastructure.

Key Corridors—£1.5 million.

Source:

London Development Agency

Railways (Speed Restrictions)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many speed restrictions were in place on the rail network in each week since 23 October 2000 in *(a)* Great Britain and *(b)* each Railtrack operating zone (i) in total and (ii) caused by gauge corner cracking. [31585]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 12 December 2001, *Official Report,* columns 869–70W. At the end of December 2001 there were 644 temporary speed restrictions on the network.

Central Heating

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many households were without central heating by region expressed as an *(a)* percentage and *(b)* total number, ranked in descending order according to percentage figures in the latest year for which figures are available. [30585]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* The information requested is provided in the following table.

Whether household has central heating: 2000–01

Thousand

Region	*In all living rooms and bedrooms*	*In some rooms but not all*	*No*	*Total*
Yorkshire and the Humber	1,701	134	320	2,154
North-west	2,229	163	400	2,792
South-west	1,637	182	259	2,078
West midlands	1,692	153	260	2,106
London	2,612	135	288	3,035
South-east	2,874	217	271	3,362
East midlands	1,531	116	121	1,768
East	1,940	177	137	2,255
North-east	1,013	54	41	1,107
England	17,229	1,330	2,098	20,658

Whether household has central heating: 2000–01

Percentage

Region	*In all living rooms and bedrooms*	*In some rooms but not all*	*No*	*Total*
Yorkshire and the Humber	79	6	15	100
North-west	80	6	14	100
South-west	79	9	12	100
West midlands	80	7	12	100
London	86	4	9	100
South-east	85	6	8	100
East midlands	87	7	7	100
East	86	8	6	100
North-east	91	5	4	100
England	83	6	10	100

Source:

Survey of English Housing, DTLR

Ministerial Transport

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 29 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 181W, if he will list the occasions he used the railway service in connection with his official duties prior to 16 November 2001; what station he left from and what the destination was; and when he next expects to use the railway in his official capacity. [32605]

Mr. Byers: My arrangements for official travel are made in line with guidance set out in Chapter 7 of the Ministerial Code and the accompanying guidance document travel by Ministers, using the most efficient and cost effective mode of transport, and bearing in mind security considerations. Future travel arrangements will be in accordance with the Ministerial Code.

The occasions I travelled by train on official duties since my appointment as Secretary of State are as follows:

16 November 2001: London St. Pancras to Derby

9 November 2001: Leeds to Newcastle

8 November 2001: London Kings Cross to Leeds

6 November 2001: London Euston to Birmingham New Street

Birmingham to London Euston

26 October 2001: London Paddington to Exeter St. Davids

Exeter St. Davids to London Paddington

19 October 2001: London Kings Cross to Cambridge

14 September 2001: London Waterloo to Brussels (returning on 15 September)

1 August 2001: London Victoria to Mitcham

Mitcham to London Victoria

6 July 2001: London Kings Cross to York

4 July 2001: London Kings Cross to York

Harrogate to London Kings Cross

19 June 2001: London Victoria to Brighton

Brighton to London Victoria.

I also travel by train regularly when not on official business, most recently on 28 January when travelling from Newcastle to London.

Widford Bridge (Chelmsford)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his reply of 24 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1046W, on Widford Bridge, if he will increase the width to make it easier for larger cars and vehicles of under three tonnes weight to travel over the bridge. [31694]

Mr. Jamieson: The 6ft 6in width restriction imposed on Widford Bridge is required for safety reasons to prevent vehicles of over three tonnes in weight from using the bridge. The Highways Agency would not wish to see any increase in the width of the restriction, as it would increase the likelihood of over weight vehicles attempting to use the bridge.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Iran

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received from the Iranian Government in relation to the UK's proposed new appointment for ambassador to Iran. [32140]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer which I gave on 14 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 4W.

Brussels Process

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 37W, on the Brussels Process, if he will place the minutes of meetings under the Brussels Process in the Library. [32729]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Crausby) on 31 January (UIN 30671).

Talks under the Brussels Process are confidential. We have made clear the aims and timetable of the Brussels Process. We placed the communiqué from the last Brussels Process ministerial in the Library of the House. We have kept the House fully informed at every stage, most recently in the Government Adjournment debate on 31 January, and we will continue to do so.

Ministerial Responsibilities

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the responsibilities of Ministers in his Department. [33647]

Mr. Straw: Following the appointment of the Minister for Europe, my right hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) as the Government Representative on the Convention on the Future of Europe, I have reallocated responsibilities as follows:

Peter Hain

European Union, Central Europe, Southern Europe.

Baroness Symons (also a Minister in the Department of Trade and Industry)

British trade promotion and policy, North America, Britain Abroad Task Force, inward investment.

Ben Bradshaw

Middle east, North Africa, South Asia, South-East Asia, former Soviet Union, international security, non-proliferation and security policy issues, counter-terrorism, visas.

Denis MacShane

Latin America, North-East Asia, China and Hong Kong, South-East Europe, drugs and international crime environmental policy, United Nations, human rights, aviation, maritime and energy, science and technology, public diplomacy, cultural relations, central administration and resources.

Baroness Amos

Africa, Commonwealth, Caribbean, overseas territories, consular issues, personnel.

Ben Bradshaw covers for Baroness Amos' portfolio in the Commons (with the exception of Africa). Denis MacShane covers Baroness Symons' portfolio in the Commons (and also Africa).

Gibraltar

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many times Spanish fishing vessels have infringed upon Gibraltar's fishing waters; how many times action has been taken against Spanish fishermen in each of the last five years for infringing upon Gibraltar's fishing waters; what action has been taken; and what discussions have taken place regarding fishing rights in Gibraltar under the Brussels Process. [31534]

Peter Hain: The Government resumed talks with Spain under the Brussels Process in July 2001: these talks continue. In accordance with the terms of the Brussels Communiqué of November 1984, the talks are aimed at overcoming all the differences between the UK and Spain over Gibraltar and at promoting co-operation on a mutually beneficial basis. The numbers of incursions into Gibraltar's waters by Spanish fishing vessels over the last five years were as follows:

1997: 54

1998: 520

1999: 440, of which 195 were breaches of the 1999 Fishing Agreement between the Government of Gibraltar and the Spanish Fisherman's Association, which permits small numbers of Spanish fishing boats to fish in Gibraltar's waters.

2000: 196, of which 92 were breaches.

2001: 196, of which 118 breaches.

On most occasions when Spanish vessels are advised that they are in breach of the Fishing Agreement and requested to leave, they do so. However, the Gibraltar authorities have taken court action against the crews of Spanish fishing vessels on four occasions.

DEFENCE

Service Pay

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the proportion of *(a)* non-pensionable specialist pay and *(b)* basic pay is as a proportion of total remuneration for all service men and women. [29236]

Mr. Ingram: The cost of these types of pay shown as a proportion of the total remuneration for all regular and reserve service men and women is as follows:

(a) non-pensionable specialist pay: 1.6 per cent.

(b) basic pay: 82.5 per cent.

The remaining 15.9 per cent. of the total remuneration is attributable to other forms of non-specialist pay and compensatory allowances. These figures are based on estimates for financial year 2001–02.

Empty Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of the *(a)* annual cost and *(b)* total value of the empty properties owned by (i) his Department, (ii) his agencies and (iii) other public bodies for which he has had responsibility in each of the last four years. [30068]

Dr. Moonie: The following figures relate to surplus property on the Defence Estate earmarked for disposal in each of the last three years; (figures for 1997–98 are not available).

£ million

Year	Value	Cost
1998–99	[1]—	21.4
1999–2000	214	21.9
2000–01	273	21.4

[1] Not available

The costs identified include the cost of works undertaken to prepare empty sites for sale and the marketing costs in addition to the routine upkeep of the empty property awaiting disposal.

The cost and values of other empty property, including that in the course of refurbishment or redevelopment, are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Armed Forces (Marital Status)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of *(a)* the Army, *(b)* the Royal Air Force and *(c)* the Royal Navy have changed from Maristat One in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) 2001–02 into marital category (1) decree absolute, (2) separated and (3) annulled; what proportion of each service strength this represents in each year; what proportion of each service married strength this represents in each year; and if he will make a statement. [27675]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* Information on marital status is held on a different system for each service. It is not possible to answer the question exactly as phrased, as the categories specified cannot be isolated in every case. The available information is as follows.

Table 1: Total strength of Army and the numbers who have changed from "married" to other marital status in financial years

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*[1]
Strength as at 1 April	109,722	110,052	109,531
Married strength as at 1 April	53,473	51,983	50,786
Decree absolute	947	905	634
Annulment	3	2	3
Widow/er	22	17	10
Total	972	924	647
Proportion change from strength (%)	0.9	0.8	0.6
Proportion change from married strength (%)	1.8	1.8	1.3

[1] Data for 2001–02 are to 1 December 2001

Table 2: Total strength of RAF and the numbers who have changed from "married" to other marital status in financial years

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*[1]
Strength as at 1 April	55,213	54,715	53,699
Married strength as at 1 April	33,318	31,915	30,670
Divorced absolute	3	11	6
Divorced nisi	1	10	5
Widow/er	16	26	10
Separated	1,153	1,036	717
Annulled	0	1	0
Total	1,173	1,084	738
Proportion change from strength (%)	2.1	2.0	1.4
Proportion change from married strength (%)	3.5	3.4	2.4

[1] Data for 2001–02 are to 24 January 2002

Table 3: Total strength of Naval Service and the numbers who have changed from "married" to other marital status in financial years

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*[1]
Strength as at 1 April	43,701	42,849	42,421
Married strength as at 1 April	21,441	19,094	18,438
Widowed, divorced or separated and providing			
care for children living with them	30	19	12
voluntary maintenance/child support	430	387	239
maintenance/child support by court order	2	4	1
Other	272	249	127
Total	734	659	379
Proportion change from strength (%)	1.7	1.5	0.9
Proportion change from married strength (%)	3.4	3.5	2.0

[1] Data for 2001–02 are to 15 January 2002

Warships

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the ability of the Royal Navy to meet its commitments when HMS Sheffield goes into reserve in 2003. [30788]

Mr. Ingram: The placing of HMS Sheffield at extended readiness will not prevent the Royal Navy from meeting its commitments.

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to replace HMS Coventry. [30790]

Mr. Ingram: The decision to withdraw the Batch 2 Type 22 frigate HMS Coventry from service on 31 December 2001 was part of the reduction in overall numbers of frigates and destroyers presaged by the Strategic Defence Review. There are no plans for a direct replacement, but HMS St. Albans, the final Type 23 frigate, which has considerably superior general purpose capabilities, has been accepted from the builders and is currently conducting sea trials as she prepares for full operational service later this year.

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason the fleet has been reduced to 31 ships. [30789]

Mr. Ingram: The fleet has not been reduced to 31 ships. There are currently 36 major surface ships in service with the Royal Navy. This figure excludes submarines, mine counter-measures vessels, survey ships, patrol craft and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary.

Service Numbers

Mr. Francois: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* establishment and *(b)* current strength is of (i) 1 East of England Regiment, (ii) the Royal Marine Reserve, (iii) the RNR/RNVR, (iv) the Royal Auxiliary Air Force and (v) the Honourable Artillery Company. [31610]

Dr. Moonie: The figures are as follows:

	Establishment	*Strength*
1 East of England Regiment	549	[1]590
Royal Marine Reserve	1,070	[2]921
Royal Naval Reserve	3,850	[2]3,215
Royal Auxiliary Air Force	2,156	[2]1,607
Honourable Artillery Company	408	[1]524

[1] As at 28 January 2002

[2] As at 1 January 2002

Note:

The RNVR no longer exists

Asbestos

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many compensation claims from his Department's ex-service personnel for asbestos-related diseases contracted before 1987 have been refused *(a)* in each year since 1987 and *(b)* since 1972; and if he will make a statement. [31203]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence does not hold the information requested by the hon. Member as claims for compensation from service or ex-service personnel involving asbestos related diseases have not traditionally been recorded separately. The Ministry of Defence does produce a Claims Annual Report, a copy of which is placed in the Library of the House. This document contains additional information on all aspects of common-law compensation claims against the Ministry of Defence, including asbestos-related claims.

Recruitment and Wastage

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the numbers of servicemen who have left at each stage after initial recruitment and before being added to trained strength in each of the last five years. [31483]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Those details which are available are set out in the following table. This shows the actual numbers who left during initial recruitment training and this number as a percentage of those who started training. The wastage rates quoted include voluntary withdrawal, medical discharge, discharge by purchase and discharge Services No Longer Required.

For the Royal Air Force, the IST wastage rates in the table refer to Officers in the ground branches and do not take into account pilots, navigators and aircrew. Training for these groups can take many years and so final wastage rates for these years are not readily available. I will write to the hon. Member with full details of RAF Officer IST wastage rates and I will place a copy in the Library of the House.

	1997–98		*1998–99*		*1999–2000*		*2000–01*		*2001–02*[1]	
Service	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Royal Navy[2]*—Wastage rates*										
Officers										
Overall	—	19	—	19	—	16	—	13	—	—
Phase 1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	12	4.5
Phase 2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	18	10
Ratings										
Overall	—	26	—	25	—	30	—	27	—	—
Phase 1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	551	23
Phase 2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	245	14
Royal Marines—Wastage rates										
Officers[3]										
Phase 1	15	37	7	16	11	28	17	38	3	5
ORs[4]										
Overall	534	57	511	49	567	53	528	48	455	49
Army—Wastage rates										
Officers										
Overall	—	—	117	16	57	14	99	15	59	14
Soldiers										
Phase 1	—	—	—	—	—	28	2,586	21	2,111	17
Phase 2	—	—	—	—	—	4	270	3	180	3
Royal Air Force—wastage rates										
Officers[6]										
(IOT)	27	5	28	5	22	4	10	2	n/a	n/a
IST[7]	—	11	—	14	—	6	—	9	n/a	n/a
Airmen[8]										
Phase 1	—	10	—	13	—	8	—	10	—	8
Phase 2	—	5	—	8	—	11	—	10	—	4

[1] All figures for 2001–02 cover the period up to 31 December 2001.

Royal Navy

[2] RN recruits join the trained strength after completing Phase 1 and Phase 2 training. Phase 1 training is one year for officers and eight weeks for ratings. Phase 2 training averages around 18 months for officers (but up to five years for Aircrew), three years for Artificer Apprentices and eight months for non-technical ratings.

Royal Marines

[3] The figures for RM Officers show the wastage rates while undergoing Phase 1 training at CTCRM Lympstone. No figures are available for failures in Phase 2 training; failures during this nine months phase are rare.

[4] The majority of the RM Other Ranks training wastage consists of those who voluntarily withdraw (historically approximately 65 per cent. of the wastage figure) the remainder being split between those who are unsuitable and those who are medically discharged.

Army

[5] Army Officers are considered to have joined the trained strength after leaving Sandhurst when they become part of the UK Trained Army Personnel. Consolidated figures are available only from 1998–99. Soldiers join the trained strength on completion of their Phase 2 trade training. Full details of the number of soldiers who left during initial training are available only from 2000–01.

Royal Air Force

[6] RAF Officers, on completion of Initial Officer Training (IOT) which last for 24 weeks, go on to Initial Specialist Training (IST). No IOT or IST wastage rates figures are available yet for 2001–02.

[7] The OST wastage rates in the table refer to Officers in the ground branches and do not take into account pilots, navigators and aircrew. Training for these groups can take many years and so final wastage rates for these years are not readily available.

[8] Airmen/airwomen join the trained strength after completion of both recruit training (Phase 1) and trade training (Phase 2). Recruit training is seven weeks. Trade training averages around 40 weeks and can last anything up to two years for specific trades. The percentage figures quoted for trade training wastage in years 2000–01 and 2001–02 give the position as at 31 December 2001; at this date there were still 755 to complete training started in 2000–01 and 1,832 airmen/airwomen who have started in 2001–02.

Cluster Munitions

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what studies have been carried out by his Department into alternatives to cluster munitions for replacement of the BL 755 when it reaches the end of its service life. [31633]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence keeps under continuous review its capability requirements in this area. To date, studies have concluded that the roles currently met by BL 755 are likely to be carried out by a range of different weapons in the future. Some of the roles will be met by existing or planned systems such as Maverick and Brimstone. This work has also concluded that cluster bombs will still retain some utility, particularly against area targets such as storage depots and concentrations of lighter armoured vehicles. No other weapon is currently available to meet the same military objectives. To fulfil the same role as cluster bombs with unitary bombs would require a far greater weight of explosives, which would risk far greater damage than using cluster bombs.

Afghanistan

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether guidance on the handling of prisoners in Afghanistan is issued by each coalition member for its own armed forces; and what standardisation has taken place. [31636]

Mr. Hoon: Guidance on the handling of prisoners is properly a matter for the individual detaining power. There has therefore been no standardisation of guidance within the coalition.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guidance has been given to HM forces on the status to be given to any persons they capture and detain in Afghanistan. [32295]

Mr. Hoon: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave on 17 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 392, to my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen).

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the guidance on the handling of prisoners in Afghanistan issued by his Department takes into account the 1977 Additional Protocols to the 1949 Geneva Conventions. [31635]

Mr. Hoon: Yes.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether members of Her Majesty's armed forces are operating in areas of Afghanistan subject to recent attacks with cluster bombs; and what guidance has been issued to personnel on safety in relation to unexploded submunitions. [31632]

Mr. Ingram: Years of conflict have left a wide variety of unexploded ordnance in Afghanistan. Before deployment, members of the armed forces are routinely given advice about the types of munitions they may encounter.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether guidance on the handling of prisoners in Afghanistan was updated after the uprising at Qala-I-Jhangi fort. [31634]

Mr. Hoon: No.

ASRAAM

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what extra expenditure has been incurred by his Department as a result of the failure of the advanced short-range air-to-air missile to achieve its original in-service date; and if he intends to claim back the extra expenditure from the manufacturer; [31099]

(2) what the new in-service date for the advanced short-range air-to-air missile is; and if he will make a statement. [31098]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* The Advanced Short Range Air-to-Air Missile (ASRAAM) entered service in January 2002. As a result of a delay in the In Service Date, the Ministry of Defence has incurred additional costs of approximately £7 million. These include extra intramural expenditure and costs arising from the need to maintain Sidewinder missiles in service.

During the period in question we have also been without the additional capability provided by the ASRAAM missile. Liquidated damages associated with the late delivery of the missiles are being claimed from the manufacturer. Overall, the total procurement cost of ASRAAM remains less than the original approved cost.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much the series of improved software releases to enhance MBDA's advanced short-range air-to-air missile will cost; when the final improved software releases are expected to be completed; and if he will make a statement. [32156]

Dr. Moonie: The cost of the additional software releases to achieve ASRAAM's Full Operational Capability will be borne by the contractor, MBDA UK Ltd. (formerly Matra BAe Dynamics), and is a matter for them.

The company's aim is to deliver the required missile performance by the end of 2003. If that is not achieved, our agreement with MBDA Uk allows for a further software release.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the UK owns nuclear weapons other than the SLBMs. [31707]

Mr. Hoon: No. As the 1998 Strategic Defence Review (Cm 3999) made clear, Trident is our only nuclear weapons system.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what US nuclear weapons are in the United Kingdom. [31708]

Mr. Hoon: Some US nuclear weapons remain based in the UK in accordance with long-standing NATO policy. Nuclear forces based in Europe and committed to NATO provide an essential political and military link between the European and North American members of the Alliance. I am withholding any further details under Exemption 1 (Defence, Security and International Relations) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of a replacement to the Trident deterrent when it goes out of service. [31709]

Mr. Hoon: We have no current plans for a replacement for Trident, and no decision on any possible successor system is yet needed.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many SLBMs the UK owns; and how many warheads are contained in each missile. [31705]

Mr. Hoon: The 1998 Strategic Defence Review concluded that the 58 Trident missile bodies already purchased from the USA would be sufficient to maintain a credible nuclear deterrent posture. While I am withholding information on the number of warheads deployed on each missile under Exemption 1 (Defence, Security and International Relations) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, I can confirm that, when on deterrence patrol, Trident submarines carry 48 nuclear warheads.

National Missile Defence

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent meetings he has had with European colleagues regarding US National Missile Defence. [31762]

Mr. Hoon: I met with many of my European counterparts at the NATO ministerial meetings in December last year. We discussed a range of issues, including missile defence.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the US National Missile Defence. [31761]

Mr. Hoon: I refer my hon. Friend to the remarks made by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces on 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 137–42WH.

NCOs (Premature Voluntary Release)

Mr. Francois: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many NCOs who had applied for premature voluntary release had not left the Army as at 1 December 2001. [31801]

Mr. Ingram: Thirty-two Non-Commissioned Officers are recorded as having applied for premature voluntary release and had not been discharged from the Army or transferred to the Reserve prior to 1 December 2001.

Astute Class Submarines

Mr. Francois: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the projected in-service dates of the new Astute Class of fleet attack submarines for the Royal Navy are. [31806]

Dr. Moonie: The first Astute Class submarine is due to enter into service in June 2005. The remaining two submarines of the Class currently on order will follow at approximately two year intervals.

Armoured Vehicles

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* Challenger II tanks, *(b)* Warrior, *(c)* Saxon, *(d)* FV430, *(e)* Sabre, *(f)* Scimitar, *(g)* Striker, *(h)* Spartan, *(i)* Sultan, *(j)* Samson, *(k)* Samaritan armoured vehicles, *(l)* Challenger recovery vehicles, *(m)* Stormer, *(n)* Shielder, *(o)* Fuchs NBC vehicle, *(p)* AS 90, *(q)* MLRS and *(r)* M578 were fully operational in (i) the quarter ending 31 December 2001, (ii) the first three quarters of 2001, (iii) each quarter of 2000 and (iv) each quarter of 1999; what percentage of fleet size this represents; and if he will make a statement. [29844]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 31 January 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Iraq

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions since 1 January 2001 British aircraft have been involved in air to ground action over Iraq. [31845]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 31 January 2002]:* Between 1 January 2001 and 23 January 2002 UK aircraft patrolling the No Fly Zones released ordnance in self-defence against military targets in the Iraqi Integrated Air Defence System on 15 occasions.

I regret that due to an error in our records, an incorrect figure of 14 was given in response to a previous question on 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 314W.

War Widows

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to change arrangements which enable war widows to visit the graves of their husbands overseas; and if he will make a statement. [32064]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 31 January 2002]:* Since 1985, the Government have operated the War Widows Pilgrimage Scheme to help those War Widows who lost their husbands overseas between 1914 and 1967 to make one visit to their husband's grave, provided they have not done so before, at public expense. It is administered on behalf of the Ministry of Defence by The Royal British Legion and the MOD contributes seven-eighths of the costs of a visit. Over the past 17 years, this scheme has enabled over 4,000 widows to make this very special journey and there are no plans to change the arrangements.

Computer Theft

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what work his Department has undertaken to explain the reasons for the change in the level of computer theft over the past five years. [31881]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 31 January 2002]:* Between 1995 and 1999, there were 594 reported thefts of all types of Ministry of Defence computer equipment, including items such as processor boards, keyboards and printers. A total of 267 items were reported stolen in 2000, and 312 items in 2001.

Our first priority has been to concentrate on reducing the risk of further computer theft and losses, and of enhancing computer security to limit the damage should they occur. From an initial review of the available historical data we assess that there are two main reasons for this increase in the number of reported incidents:

> since 1995 there has been a substantial and sustained growth in the numbers of all types of computer equipment used in support of Defence activity, reflecting a similar trend across Government and in society at large; and
>
> there has also been a significant increase in the MOD's use of portable computers, which, by their nature, are particularly vulnerable to theft.

Naval Incident (24 January)

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the incident involving a Spanish Government vessel and a British naval vessel on 24 January. [31807]

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the incident involving a Spanish Government vessel and a British naval vessel on 24 January. [31808]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 31 January 2002]:* On 24 January two Spanish Navy patrol vessels entered British Gibraltar territorial waters during an operation by the Royal Navy to tow a suspected unexploded World War 2 bomb into deep water, following its discovery by the Mine Countermeasures Vessel HMS Grimsby during a routine survey. One of the Spanish vessels withdrew once the operation had been completed. The second remained in Gibraltar waters overnight, closely monitoring HMS Grimsby which continued her survey operation. Following contacts between the British Embassy in Madrid and the Spanish Government, this vessel left Gibraltar waters the following morning.

Combat Effectiveness Gender Study

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will publish the outcome of the Gender Study; and if he will make a statement. [32063]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 31 January 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 1 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 767W.

International Security Assistance Force

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what terms of engagement the International Security Assistance Force will operate under; and if he will make a statement. [32132]

Mr. Hoon: We never comment on the Rules of Engagement for UK forces. However, I can say that they will be robust and consistent with our obligations under national and international law, as will those of the forces of other contributing countries.

Aircraft

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the cost of transporting two Tornados to the Falklands by *(a)* Antonov 124 and *(b)* C-17; what assessment he has made of the cost of using the (i) Antonov 124 and (ii) C-17 in operations in Afghanistan; and how many times the Antonov 124 has been leased by the RAF since the operational use of C-17s began. [32146]

Mr. Ingram: A full assessment has been made of the transportation of Tornado aircraft from the UK to the Falkland Islands. This included options for air-to-air refuelling, airlift charter, ship and C-17. Given all of the constraints, the C-17 was deemed to be the most suitable operational option and the one that gave the best value for money and best value for effort.

Until mid-January 2002, the threat assessment presented by surface-to-air missiles, specifically to identifiable military aircraft, limited our use of RAF aircraft operating into Afghanistan. The use of civilian Antonovs was less restricted. We therefore, chartered Antonovs for the essential operational movement of vehicles, equipment and supplies. While the C-17 is now being used for airlift to Afghanistan, the size of the task necessitates the continued charter of Antonov aircraft.

The Antonov has been chartered by MOD on 35 occasions since the delivery of the C-17 in May 2001. All of the tasks have been in support of operations. The C-17 has been used extensively for Operation Bessimer in Macedonia, Exercise Saif Sareea II and other operational tasks associated with Operation Veritas.

It is not, therefore, a question of a simple cost comparison between the use of C-17 or Antonovs. Both were needed to support operations.

Defence Evaluation and Research Agency

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what the staff budget is for DERA in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* Scotland; what the value of DERA's total assets is; and what percentage of the assets are in Scotland; [32458]

(2) how many people are employed by DERA; and how many of these are based in Scotland. [32448]

Dr. Moonie: As part of the public-private partnership for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA), the DERA Trading Fund Agency was disestablished on 1 July 2001. From its constituent parts two new organisations were created: QinetiQ plc, a wholly Government owned company, and the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl), an agency of the MOD.

At 1 January 2002, Dstl employed 3,037 staff in total. Of these, 54 were employed in Scotland. Dstl's current staff budget is £102.7 million of which £1.2 million relates to Scotland. The total value of Dstl assets at end of January 2002 amounted to some £257 million, with just over £0.5 million of this in Scotland, which represents some 0.2 per cent. of the total Dstl assets.

Procurement Expenditure

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total expenditure is for procurement for each of the services; and how much of the procurement budget for each is spent in Scotland. [32461]

Dr. Moonie: Figures for the amount the Ministry of Defence spends on defence equipment and non-equipment for the years 1998–99 to 2001–02 are published by the Defence Analytical Services Agency in UK Defence Statistics (available in the Library of the House). These data, which are given in the table, are broadly split by type ie whether it is air, land, sea or 'other' equipment for the years where this information is available. The 'other' category refers to equipment not specific to a particular environment. This division (air, land, sea and other) does not necessarily match the particular end destination of the equipment (ie RAF, Army and Navy). For example, not aerospace equipment is used by the RAF.

During 1999–2000, we estimate that the MOD spent some £600 million on defence equipment directly with contractors based in Scotland. A breakdown of this into air, land, sea and 'other' is not available.

1.3 principal headings of the Defence budget[1,2,3]

VAT-inclusive at current prices (£ million)

	1998–99	*Outturn 1999–2000*	*Estimate 2000–01*
Total expenditure/budget	22,475	22,549	23,538r
Expenditure on personnel[4]	8,553	8,509	8,754r
of the armed forces	6,286	6,257	6,500r
of the retired armed forces[4]	*	*	*
of civilian staff	2,267	2,252	2,255r
Expenditure on equipment	9,889	9,715r	10,008r
Sea	2,319	—	—
Land	1,665	—	—
Air	4,572	—	—
Other	1,333	—	—
Other expenditure	4,000	4,325r	4,775r
Works, buildings and land	1,759	1,799	1,918
Miscellaneous stores and services	2,274	2,526r	2,857r
Adjusted defence budget[6]	22,475	22,649	23,538r
at 2000–01 prices[6,7]	23,419	22,973	23,538r
Expenditure on personnel[4]	[8]38.1	[8]37.7	[8]37.2r
of the armed forces	[8]28	[8]27.7	[8]27.6r
of the retired armed forces[4]	[8]*	[8]*	[8]*
of civilian staff	[8]10.1	[8]10	[8]9.6r
Expenditure on equipment	[8]44.0	[8]43.1r	[8]42.5r
Sea	[8]10.3	[8]—	[8]—
Land	[8]7.4	[8]—	[8]—
Air	[8]20.3	[8]—	[8]—
Other	[8]5.9	[8]—	[8]—
Other expenditure	[8]17.9	[8]19.2r	[8]20.3r
Works, buildings and land	[8]7.8	[8]8.0r	[8]8.2r
Miscellaneous stores and services	[8]10.1	[8]11.2r	[8]12.1r

[1] Over the last 20 years the coverage of the defence budget has changed in that:
from 1983–84, it has included accommodation (maintenance and rental) and home publicity;
from 1990–91, it has included rates on the Defence portion of the UK Civil Estate included in the defence budget;
from 1991–92, it has included services provided by the Treasury Solicitor and the Inland Revenue;
from 1993–94, it has included provision for charges for pension cover for currently serving service and civilian personnel but excluded pension payments to retired service personnel; and
from 1994–95, it has excluded provision for the Security and Intelligence Services.

[2] All figures in table 1.1 and estimates in table 1.3 were derived from the Supply Estimates for each year. Estimates are 'latest agreed' at time of going to press.

[3] Figures for 1999–2000 onwards, do not include the air, land sea split for equipment expenditure due to a change in accounting practice.

[4] From 1990–91 to 1994–95, includes financial assistance to pre-1973 war widows.

[5] From 1995–96, military aid to overseas countries has been excluded from the NATO definitions.

[6] The 'Adjusted Defence Budget' takes account of major definitional changes in defence spending and of major transfers of responsibility to and from Government Departments. It therefore provides a more consistent and reliable guide to trends. This is the basis upon which defence spending figures are present in the MOD Departmental Report, the Statement on the Defence Estimates and certain Treasury publications. Totals for 1999–2000 represent final outturn and for 2000–01 estimated outturn. Figures in this line also exclude the element of receipts from the sale of the Married Quarters Estate that were appropriated onto Defence Votes.

[7] These constant price totals have been calculated using the GDP deflator.

[8] Percentage of total expenditure/budget.

Notes:

1. Defence votes differed from defence budgets:
by excluding the funding of major works on the Civilian Estate until 1988–89;
by Appropriations-in-Aid and expenditure not classified as public expenditure; and
from 1993–94 charges for pensions cover for serving service personnel are Appropriations-in-Aid of Defence Vote 4, (Defence Vote 2 from 1999–2000) and reflected in the 'other adjustments' line of Table 1.1.

2. Expenditure are based on current market prices; the Defence figure in 1990–91 is net of contributions (about £2.1 billion) from abroad in respect of UK defence activities in the Gulf war.

3. Figures for 1996–97 and 1997–98 include the element of receipts (£304 million and £700 million respectively) from the sale of the Married Quarters Estate that were appropriated on to defence votes.

Source:

MOD Corporate Financial Controller (Corporate Financial Management).

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was spent in defence procurement in the last year for which figures are available in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* Scotland. [32454]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is contained in the document "Defence Statistics 2001", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. Table 1.9 contains data on defence expenditure on equipment by region and nation of the UK.

Pensions

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements have been made with Paymaster to ensure that all recipients of armed forces pensions can receive benefits in cash from April 2000. [32555]

Dr. Moonie: No arrangements exist for pensioners to receive benefits in cash under the Armed Forces Pension Scheme. From April 2002, however, the weekly Payable Order Book method of payment applicable to some 2 per cent. of all pensioners, will cease. Under the new arrangements they will have the option of having their pension credited to a bank of building society account, or by a voucher sent to their home address encashable through a bank or building society. Both options allow payments to be made on a weekly or monthly basis.

Defence Agencies (Assets)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list defence agencies and *(a)* the total value of their fixed assets and *(b)* the value of their fixed assets in Scotland. [32453]

Dr. Moonie: Information on Defence Agencies and their fixed assets is contained in the Ministry of Defence (Section 7) of the National Asset Register, published by HM Treasury in July 2001. The region and location of assets is shown where this is relevant. A copy is available in the Library of the House.

Atomic Weapons Establishments

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are employed at each of the atomic weapons establishments in the UK. [32442]

Dr. Moonie: As at 31 December 2001, the number of people employed at each of AWE's sites in the UK was as follows:

	Number
AWE Aldermaston	3,320
AWE Burghfield	369
AWE Cardiff	4
Total	3,693

The figures quoted are staff employed by AWE plc. They do not include contractors, Ministry of Defence staff or the MOD Police.

HMNB Clyde

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* civil and *(b)* military personnel are employed at HMNB Clyde. [32438]

Dr. Moonie: The number of civilian and military personnel employed at HMNB Clyde is as follows:

Civilian: 3,700

Military: 1,119.

Defence Industry (Employment)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how his Department calculates the number of people employed *(a)* in and *(b)* by defence and defence-related industries in the regions of the UK; what multiplier is used; and what the regional totals are. [32447]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 766W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Ann McKechin). We are currently reviewing our methodology on the estimation of employment figures dependent on UK defence expenditure and exports. An outline of the existing methodology was provided in Defence Statistics Bulletin No. 3. I am arranging for a copy of this publication to be placed in the Library of the House.

The latest available direct regional employment figures (which are subject to review) for the Ministry of Defence equipment contracts have been estimated to be:

Thousand

	1998–99
United Kingdom	81
England	73
North-east	3
Yorkshire and Humberside	5
East midlands	3
Eastern	2
London and South-east	31
South-west	14
West midlands	5
North-west	11
Scotland	6
Wales	1
Northern Ireland	1

Source:

UK Defence Statistics 2000

"Direct" employment refers to that occurring directly from equipment contracts placed with UK contractors by MOD. It does not include employment, which is created in sub contractors, and others who supply the main contractor; this is referred to as "indirect" employment.

The minor differences (shown in the table) between "regions totals" and the "UK total" are due to rounding anomalies.

Royal Dockyards

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* civilian and *(b)* military personnel are employed at (i) the Royal Dockyard, Rosyth and (ii) the Royal Dockyard, Devonport. [32441]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 13 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 968–69W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Baillieston (Mr. Wray) detailing numbers of people employed by the privately owned Royal Dockyards at Rosyth and Devonport. Some 183 Ministry of Defence civilian employees and 15 military are also based at Rosyth Dockyard. In addition, 1,546 civilian and 2,000 military personnel are based at the Devonport Naval Base, which is adjacent to Devonport Dockyard. These figures exclude naval personnel serving on ships and submarines, visiting them or undergoing maintenance at these facilities.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Religious/Sectarian Hate Crime

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures he has taken to consult on how best to tackle religious hate crime and sectarian hatred as an aggravating factor in a range of criminal offences; and what steps he will take to ensure an independent and lay dimension to his review. [29942]

Mr. Browne: I intend to consult shortly on how best to tackle the problems of offending motivated either by racial or religious hatred in Northern Ireland. I understand that an evaluation of the provisions in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which created categories of racially aggravated offences, is soon to be published, and would like participants in the consultation exercise to be able to draw on the findings in that evaluation when considering their responses. In order to ensure the broadest scope of opinions for consideration, the consultation exercise will include as wide a range of participants as possible, including organisations and individuals working in the statutory, non-statutory and voluntary sectors.

Police/Defence Lawyers Directive

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress the Chief Constable has made in circulating a new directive to cover the role of police and defence lawyers based on the UN Declaration on the role of lawyers; how many copies have been printed; by what means the directive has been distributed; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [29781]

Jane Kennedy: The Police Service of Northern Ireland have been engaged in a consultative process on a new direction covering the role of police and defence lawyers. The direction will draw on a range of sources including the Police and Criminal Evidence (NI) Order 1989, Codes of Practice created under the Order, the Human Rights Act 2000 and the UN Declaration.

It is hoped to issue the direction in the near future. A decision will be made at that time about the extent of publication.

Code of Ethics (Police Service)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made by the Chief Constable towards the publication of a Code of Ethics for the Police Service of Northern Ireland; and if he will place a copy of the draft Code in the Library. [29779]

Jane Kennedy: As required by section 52(3) of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000, the Chief Constable submitted a draft of the Code of Ethics to the Northern Ireland Policing Board, on 31 December 2001. As the Act makes clear, publication of the Code of Ethics is a matter for the Policing Board.

Before issuing or revising the code the Board must consult the Police Association, the Secretary of State, the ombudsman, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and any other person or body appearing to the Board to have an interest in the matter. I understand that the Board began the formal consultation process on 24 January and that the closing date is 1 April. The Board have kindly permitted me to lay a copy of the draft Code in the Library.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Departmental Salary Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit in 2001–02 will be accounted for by salary costs and pension contributions. [32003]

Mr. Leslie: Approximately 40 per cent. of the Cabinet Office departmental expenditure limit (DEL) for 2001–02 (resource and capital) announced on 28 November is budgeted salary costs and pension contributions.

This estimate of the proportion of 2001–02 DEL accounted for by salary costs and pension contributions could change. Further details of DEL and staff costs for 2001–02 will be published in the forthcoming spring Supplementary Estimate. Actual outturn on staff costs will be published in the forthcoming spring Supplementary Estimate. Actual outturn on staff costs will be published in the Resource Accounts for 2001–02.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the loss of interest on notional capital required to cover Export Credits Guarantee Department claims was in each of the years 1997 to 2001. [27217]

Ms Hewitt: ECGD did not employ the concept of notional capital for these years. However from records available, notional interest required to fund claims under ECGD's Account 2 can be calculated as shown in the table.

£ million

Year	*Notional Interest*
1991–92	0
1992–93	0.02
1993–94	0.02
1994–95	1.98
1995–96	2.28
1996–97	3.46
1997–98	3.96
1998–99	5.96

Year	Notional Interest *£ million*
1999–2000	16.09
2000–01	30.29
2001–02[1]	30.71

[1] First nine months.

South East Euro Awareness Forum

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will list the publications issued by South East Euro Awareness Forum, indicating *(a)* the number of copies produced and *(b)* the cost to public funds for each item; [27796]

(2) what the total cost to public funds was of the South East Euro Awareness Forum in each year since its establishment; [27792]

(3) what the total cost to public funds is of creating and maintaining the South East Euro Awareness Forum website; [27798]

(4) how many events the South East Euro Awareness Forum has organised *(a)* in total and *(b)* in Buckinghamshire; how many participants there were (i) in total and (ii) from companies based in Buckinghamshire at each event; and what the cost to public funds was of each event; [27794]

(5) how many calls the Euro Help Line set up by the South East Euro Awareness Forum has received *(a)* in total and *(b)* from individuals and companies based in Buckinghamshire since its establishment; and what the total cost to public funds of creating and maintaining the service is; [27797]

(6) how many staff are *(a)* employed by and *(b)* on secondment to the South East Euro Awareness Forum, indicating the company seconding staff in each case; [27793]

(7) how many businesses are listed on the South East Euro Awareness Forum database as intending to trade in euros; and what the cost to public funds of creating and maintaining the database is. [27795]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The South East Euro Awareness Forum (SEEAF) is one of 12 Regional Euro Fora across the UK. The Regional Euro Fora are led by senior local business people and include representatives from business, national and local government bodies, as well as key business support bodies such as Chambers of Commerce, Trade Partners UK and Business Links.

The Fora were formed to increase the level of preparations by SME's for the introduction of the euro in the euro area and to advise about the possible impact on UK business.

Since its formation in 1998, £222,000 has been allocated to SEEAF.

The Forum has:

produced seven editions of their newsletter, with distribution of each issue increasing from 1000 to 75,000, at a cost of £17,600;

produced 10,000 flyers for insertion into other publications at a cost of £2,215;

created and maintained a website. Since September 2001 it has received about 46,000 visits;

organised and attended 40 events for local businesses between September 2001 and 31 March 2002—nearly 600 people have attended events to date; and managed a helpline that has received 320 calls between June 2001 and the end of December;

engaged the services of a part-time self-employed co-ordinator.

Information is not available on the number of businesses from Buckinghamshire attending events or contacting the helpline.

SEEAF does not have a database listing those businesses that intend to trade in euro.

Sub-post Offices

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to boost trade in sub-post offices following the decision to remove the ceiling on the number of post offices card accounts; and what capacity there will be for extending the range of services available, with particular reference to passport forms. [28681]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 18 January 2002]:* On the matter of the number of Post Office Card Accounts, there has been no ceiling. I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Phil Sawford) on 17 December 2001, *Official Report,* columns 119–20W.

Post Office Ltd. continually seeks opportunities to widen the network's client base in order to develop new products and services which will benefit customers and to ensure a viable future for the post office network. The horizon automated platform which computerised the whole of the post office network, should help this expansion.

Post Office Ltd. is already an agent for the United Kingdom Passport Agency.

Crown Post Offices

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the Crown Post Offices in the United Kingdom, identifying those that are running at a loss. [27650]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* I understand from Post Office Ltd. that the Crown office network is operated in accounting terms as a single entity, as income is collected centrally from Government and commercial clients.

Second Class Post

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to abolish the requirement for second class post; and if she will make a statement. [26698]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* Under the terms of the licence issued by the Postal Services Commission to Consignia the company is required to deliver second class post. Any changes to the terms of the licence would have to be authorised by the Postal Services Commission. Consignia has no proposals to withdraw the service and the Commission has no plans to change the licence.

Rural Post Offices

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many rural post offices are barred from handling *(a)* driving licence and *(b)* passport applications. [29390]

Mr. Alexander: Acting as an agent, Post Office Ltd. is dependent on the level of service required through post offices by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) and the United Kingdom Passport Agency (UKPA). Currently the UKPA service which checks and dispatches completed passport applications is offered at 2,000 offices and motor vehicle licensing (MVL) services are offered at 4,091 offices. Currently figures indicate that 90 per cent. of people are within one mile of a post office outlet which offers these MVL services.

Manufacturing Research Centres

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many Government sponsored Innovative Manufacturing Research Centres there are in Scotland; and what is the level of funding for each. [29579]

Mr. Wilson: The Innovative Manufacturing Research Centres (IMRCs) are funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council as part of their Innovative Manufacturing Programme. The first 12 IMRCs were announced in November 2001 and were awarded on the basis of national excellence in manufacturing research. Although none of the 12 initial centres is located in Scotland a tranche 2 IMRC involving Glasgow, Cardiff, Cambridge and Surrey universities has been approved for funding. The start date is currently under negotiation, and Glasgow university are expected to be awarded more than £1 million. Another tranche 2 centre at Heriot-Watt university in the area of Photonics is currently under review.

Parliamentary Questions

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many answers to parliamentary questions have not been answered by her Department under exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information in each year since 1994. [29426]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The information cannot be readily obtained from the Department's database and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Digital Television

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of television sets installed in the UK are able to receive digital signals; and what percentage the Government regard as a minimum requirement as an installed base before switch-off of analogue transmissions can be effected. [30151]

Ms Hewitt: All television sets installed in the UK are capable of receiving digital signals provided that they have an external set top box or an integrated digital tuner.

The Government have set three conditions which must be met before the analogue signal is fully switched to digital. These are availability, affordability and accessibility. The availability condition requires that everyone who can currently receive analogue transmissions (99.4 per cent. of the UK population) will be able to receive the equivalent digital signal. The affordability test requires that consumers do not face unacceptable switching costs when converting to digital services. As a target indicator of affordability, 95 per cent. of consumers should have access to digital equipment before switchover is completed.

When we first announced these criteria in September 1999 we said that digital switchover could start to happen as early as 2006 and be completed by 2010. We remain convinced that this timing is realistic.

The Digital Television Action Plan, which was issued on 20 December 2001, contains a commitment to review progress towards digital switchover, with particular reference to the accessibility, availability and affordability tests. A first report is due by the end of March 2002.

Steel Industry

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many jobs were dependent upon the steel industry in *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* 1997; what measures the Government have introduced since 1997 to help the steel industry; and if she will make a statement. [30757]

Mr. Wilson: The number of jobs directly dependent on the steel industry in 1997 was 35,200 and in 2000, the latest year for which figures are available, was 25,500[1]. The UK steel industry has experienced difficult trading conditions in recent years and many jobs have been lost as a result of restructuring. The Government work closely with representatives of the industry and within the restrictions of the Steel Aid Code, which restricts the provision of aid to the industry, have since 1997, supported a number of measures designed to improve the competitiveness of the sector. In February 2000 Ministers approved £1.6 million to help steel industry representatives to develop the Metals Industry Competitive Enterprise which is designed to introduce lean manufacturing techniques.

[1] Source:

Iron and Steel Statistics Bureau

Miners' Compensation

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry further to her answers of 26 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 681W, and 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 866W, on miners' compensation, if she will list the issues impeding responses to mineworkers' claims for compensation for respiratory disease which are not yet resolved; and in each case if she will set out the progress made towards resolving how to make progress with claims affected by these issues. [31067]

Mr. Wilson: The previous answers related to compensation for surface workers in dusty jobs. The Department is seeking to persuade the Claimants' Solicitors' Coordinating Group to put to our respective medical experts the outcome of the surface dust study we have jointly undertaken. The Department hopes that decisions on liability and compensation can be taken quickly in the light of the experts' opinion. Offers of compensation are already being made to mixed workers who worked both underground and in surface dusty occupations.

Sunday Trading

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what premium pay rates shopworkers received for Sunday working in *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 2000. [30941]

Miss Melanie Johnson: No known data sources exist which give premium rates of pay on an annual basis for Sunday shopworkers. However in 1996, a one-off independent survey was conducted on behalf of my Department to study the impact of the 1994 Sunday Trading Act. Based on a sample of about 300 shops, the following findings were given in relation to the payment of premium rates for shopworkers:

> 92 per cent. of shops which opened on Sundays before the 1994 Act, paid employees a premium rate. There was no evidence that any shops had stopped paying premium rates after the introduction of the act.
>
> At the time of the survey in 1996, 50 per cent. of shops paid the premium rate at 'double' time or 'time and three quarters,' 41 per cent. at 'time and a half' or 'time and a quarter' and 7 per cent. received an extra 'flat rate'. Larger shops tended to pay the higher premium rates.
>
> Following the introduction of the 1994 Sunday Trading Act, 18 per cent. of all shops increased the premium rate, 57 per cent. left the rate unchanged and 25 per cent. reduced the rate.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many shops in Scotland opened on Sunday in *(a)* 1990 and *(b)* 1998. [30978]

Miss Melanie Johnson: This is a devolved matter for the Scottish Executive.

Christmas Day Trading

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many shop employees worked on Christmas day 2001 in England and Wales. [30947]

Alan Johnson: The number of employees working on individual bank holidays can be estimated for the past 12 months from the autumn quarter of the Labour Force Survey. Results for Christmas day 2001 will be available in January 2003 when the autumn 2002 Labour Force Survey results are published.

It is estimated that 13,000 shop employees worked on Christmas day, Monday 25 December 2000. This is 0.8 per cent. of the total number of shop employees in England and Wales.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total external spend by her Department was on Private Finance Initiative consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PFI consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by her Department over this period; and if she will make a statement. [31033]

Ms Hewitt: The Departments and its agencies have spent the following sums on PFI consultants in the last four years.

	£
1998–99	2,274,139
1999–2000	1,059,932
2000–01	1,272,451
2001–02	687,017

A total of 26 consultants has been used. Other information on consultancy costs can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Contracts (KPMG)

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what contracts her Department has with KPMG; and what the value is of each one. [31327]

Ms Hewitt: DTI has two contracts with KPMG: one for Security Standards accreditation at £19[illegible]00 and another for a secondee to assist on Company Law issues at £77,000.

No-strike Agreements

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to negotiate no-strike agreements in the public sector. [31356]

Ms Hewitt: My Department has no powers to negotiate such agreements, except in relation to its own staff.

I have no plans to negotiate agreements of this nature in relation to DTI staff.

End of Life Vehicles Directive

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what role she *(a)* has played and *(b)* will play in the implementation of the EU end of life vehicles directive;, and if she will make a statement. [31232]

Mr. Wilson: The Department of Trade and Industry led on negotiation of the directive and continues to lead on transposition and implementations of its requirements. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry continues to be closely involved.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what actions she has taken with respect to the EU end of life vehicles directive; and if she will make a statement. [31231]

Mr. Wilson: Our consultation paper on options for implementing the directive stimulated 116 responses. These are being assessed, along with the conclusions and recommendations of the Trade and Industry Committee, with a view to adopting the approach which best suits the UK's circumstances. Our policy is to implement with a light regulatory touch, achieving the environmental objectives of the directive without putting UK business at a competitive disadvantage.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will state the date by which she plans to make a decision on where the obligation for the costs of recycling vehicles under the EU end of life vehicles directive will lie; and if she will make a statement. [31230]

Mr. Wilson: Under the directive, producers are required to pay all or a significant part of the costs of take-back and treatment from 1 January 2007 onwards. A decision on who will pay before this date will be made shortly. The directive requires member states to take measures to ensure that economic operators attain certain reuse and recovery, including recycling, targets by specified dates, the first of which is 1 January 2006. Economic operators are defined in the directive as producers, distributors, collectors, motor vehicle insurance companies, dismantlers, shredders, recoverers, recyclers and other end-of-life vehicle treatment operators.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment has been made of the state of the vehicle treatment industry with respect to the standards required under the EU end of life vehicles directive; and if she will make a statement. [31229]

Mr. Wilson: There are approximately 2,500 shredders, dismantlers and scrapyards currently operating under waste management licences and exemptions. The continuing ability of this UK infrastructure to deal with end-of-life vehicles will be of fundamental importance when implementing legislation is written.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from *(a)* car manufacturers, *(b)* car manufacturer associations, *(c)* car importers and *(d)* other NGOs with regard to the EU end of life vehicles directive; and if she will make a statement. [31228]

Mr. Wilson: Numerous representations have been received from car manufacturers, car manufacturer associations, car importers, and other NGOs during the years since the European Commission first published its proposal for a directive, most recently in response to the Department's consultation paper on options for implementing the directive, and subsequently. A summary of the responses to the consultation paper has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to address the financial effects of the end of life vehicles directive on local authorities in the United Kingdom. [31687]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 31 January 2002]:* Local Authority Associations and individual local authorities were among the respondents to the DTI consultation paper on options for implementing the end of life vehicles directive. A number outlined the possible financial consequences of the implementation options proposed. We are taking these views into account in developing the final implementation options, including the financial implications for all stakeholders.

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what additional security measures are planned by her Department to deter and detect theft and fraud. [31785]

Ms Hewitt: DTI has a range of various crime prevention measures in place. These include:

a regime of pass-wearing and escorting visitors;

security guarded buildings;

asset marking;

regular auditing;

seeking and acting upon crime prevention advice from the police;

measures to raise staff awareness on crime prevention;

improved record keeping and investigating the theft of valuable items to see if theft prevention practices can be improved.

The Department's Fraud Policy and Guidance on Fraud Risks and Prevention are available to all staff and are regularly updated. These make plain the responsibilities of all concerned in relation to fraud as well as the consequences of such misconduct. A "whistleblowing" system is in operation to enable staff to safely report suspected misconduct including fraud or theft. The contact details of the Departmental Fraud Officer are available to all staff should they wish advice on any fraud related issues.

There are no immediate plans to introduce additional security measures to deter theft or fraud but the situation is kept under regular review and further action could be initiated should circumstances change.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what the current minimum wage level is; and what plans she has to increase this amount; [32535]

(2) what the minimum wage is for employees under the age of *(a)* 21 and *(b)* 16 years; [32534]

(3) what account she has taken of regional differences in pay in setting the minimum wage; and what plans she has for setting different minimum wages for separate regions. [32536]

Alan Johnson: The current minimum wage rates are £4.10 per hour for workers aged 22 or above and £3.50 per hour for workers aged 18–21 inclusive. The Government have agreed that, subject to economic conditions, these rates should increase on 1 October 2002 to £4.20 and £3.60 per hour respectively.

Workers below the age of 18 do not qualify for the national minimum wage. There are no plans to set different minimum wage rates for different regions.

BNFL

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what independent review of BNFL's liabilities she commissioned prior to her announcement to the House on 28 November 2001. [32235]

Mr. Wilson: The Department received independent advice on many aspects of BNFL's business, including its liabilities, as part of the work it has undertaken on the company's future strategy.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 10 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 153W, on BNFL, if she will list the meetings with ministerial colleagues in which the insolvency of BNFL was discussed. [32419]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry meets her ministerial colleagues in the Department regularly to discuss a range of matters.

Gas-fired Power Stations

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry who in her Department told the United States embassy in London that the moratorium on gas-fired power stations was due to be discussed at the Cabinet meeting of 4 June 1998; and if she will make a statement. [32557]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has no knowledge of any such contact.

Board Appointments

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will outline the procedure by which independent members will be appointed to sit on her Department's *(a)* new Strategy Board and *(b)* other boards as announced in November following the outcome of the Department's internal reviews. [33649]

Ms Hewitt: The procedure for appointing the independent members to the Strategy Board will be open and transparent with appointments made on the basis of merit. While the appointments do not fall within the remit of the Commissioner for Public Appointments, the procedures follow the principles and best practice laid down in the Commissioner's Code. I have employed search consultants to help us with the process.

The appointments will be advertised on the Department's website which will include an information pack containing details of the full procedure, job and person specification, and how to apply. This information will also explain the process for appointing independent members to an Executive Board, chaired by the Permanent Secretary, and to other Boards across the Department. Analogous procedures to those outlined above will be adopted for all these appointments.

I see this as an unprecedented opportunity for the Department to benefit from fresh thinking. Candidates will be drawn from a wide range of fields and backgrounds. Their role will not be to represent any particular interest; rather we are looking for people to help us improve internal processes, service delivery and change management. They will not take decisions, but will have an important challenging and advisory role. I will announce the appointments during May.

In addition, we will shortly be advertising for the posts of Chief Economic Adviser and Director General, Science, Technology and Innovation. Both are Senior Civil Service appointments.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Rural Payments Agency

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place a copy of the revised business case for the Rural Payments Agency in the Library. [24982]

Mr. Morley: I am arranging for a copy of the revised Business Case for the Rural Payments Agency to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many mistakes were made in calculating farming subsidy claims in 2001 by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* applicants. [28364]

Mr. Morley: This information has not previously been collected. However the Rural Payments Agency, which has a target to pay 98.5 per cent. of all claims accurately, will be carrying out an analysis of its performance during the financial year ending 31 March 2002 using statistical sampling techniques. The results, which will not be available until mid 2002 will be published in the RPA Annual Report.

Rhizomania

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress has been made in the review of the UK's protected zone status for rhizomania; and if she will make a statement. [27724]

Mr. Morley: The period for the consultation on the future of the protected zone has now finished and on the basis of replies received and in consultation with officials in the devolved Administrations we have concluded that we should ask the Standing Committee on Plant Health to end rhizomania protected zone status in Great Britain.

Officials will discuss the implications of this change in status with industry representatives.

Responses to the consultation will be made available in the DEFRA library at 3–8 Whitehall Place, London, SW1 and a summary placed on the DEFRA website http://www.defra.gov. uk/.

Correspondence

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish figures showing the volume of correspondence received by Ministers in her Department throughout 2001, indicating the target times set for replies and the number of replies sent within those target times. [28282]

Mr. Morley: Information on the volume of correspondence from Members of Parliament received by all ministerial agency chief executives, and Departments and agencies and performance in handling them is published annually by the Cabinet Office. The most recent report covering 2000, was announced by the then Minister for the Cabinet Office on 6 April 2001, *Official Report,* column 324–27W. The report on 2001 correspondence handling figures will be published within the next few months.

Waste Composting

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what plans she has to monitor emissions of methane from waste composting schemes; [29618]

(2) what assessment she has made of the suitability of methane produced by waste composting schemes for use in combined heat and power plants; [29609]

(3) what assessment she has made of the level of methane emissions arising from *(a)* existing and *(b)* new waste composting schemes; and if she will make a statement. [29617]

Margaret Beckett: Composting is an aerobic biodegradation process which produces carbon dioxide, and appropriately managed processes will not emit methane. The Environment Agency is currently developing technical guidance on composting operations, which will inform their monitoring of these operations.

Methane can be obtained from the anaerobic digestion of biodegradable materials (usually in the form of a slurry) and has previously been employed to treat single stream biomass wastes, such as sewage sludge, with energy recovery. However, the indications are that the process is less effective for mixed wastes (such as the organic fraction of municipal solid waste) and is unlikely with the present state of development to be widely applicable to wastes.

The Department of Trade and Industry is undertaking a project to investigate the sustainability of using methane from waste in small turbines in CHP plants.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many letters her Department has received from residents of the Buckingham constituency *(a)* in favour of and *(b)* opposed to (1) landfill sites in the last year; [30040]

(2) waste incineration in the last year. [30045]

Mr. Morley: Correspondence received from members of the public is not recorded by parliamentary constituency. However, a trawl of the Department's records has not revealed any letters relating to landfill sites received from a Buckingham address in the last twelve months.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of *(a)* progress with CAP reform ahead of the mid-term review and *(b)* political and public opinion within EU member states vis-à-vis CAP reform; and if she will make a statement. [29990]

Mr. Morley: The successful outcome of the Doha trade discussions and the statement on agriculture and the recent reforms agreed to the sheepmeat regime represent important steps towards CAP reform.

We are engaged in informal discussions with the Commission and bilaterally with member states on the possible modalities of changes to the Common Agricultural Policy in the lead up to the mid-term review. It is clear that there are a range of views and equally clear that some key member states have elections in the coming months which may well have an important bearing on the positions taken by those member states in future negotiations.

Meat Imports

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received on *(a)* the prevention of illegal imports of meat and food and *(b)* investment in animal disease research; and if she will make a statement. [30712]

Mr. Morley: We have received a number of representations on the prevention of illegal imports of meat and food from a wide variety of sources, including Members of Parliament, the farming industry and the public. We have introduced a number of new measures aimed at combating illegal imports and will be taking into account the views expressed as we consider what further measures may be appropriate.

DEFRA receives many approaches about investment in research of all kinds and this information is available to the public via documents and the website. The funding per annum on the Animal Health and Welfare research programme is approximately £37.4 million. This is being kept under review in the light of the FMD outbreak and any inquiry recommendations.

Dairy Products

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has made to the EU Commission to obtain a further increase in export refunds in respect of dairy products. [30419]

Mr. Morley: We have continued to remind the Commission of the importance of international trade in dairy products, particularly for Northern Irish producers, and the currently depressed state of the market. As a result, export refunds for skimmed milk powder, whole milk powder and butter were raised again at the Milk Management Committee on 24 January.

Modulation Scheme

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to introduce new sources of funding for the modulation scheme; and if she will make a statement. [31161]

Mr. Morley: The Policy Commission on the future of farming and food made ambitious recommendations for a significant increase in the rate of modulation as a vehicle to transfer further CAP moneys out of production subsidies to deliver broader land management and environmental outputs. The Government accept we should now consider this option very carefully indeed. We will also look to secure agreement in the CAP mid term reviews to broaden the scope of what funds generated by modulation can be spent on. Subject to discussions with the devolved Administrations and with European Commission, securing that increased flexibility on modulation will be the Government's objective.

Sustainable Agriculture

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her Department's policy for the development of sustainable agriculture within the United Kingdom; if she will list the elements comprising the policy; and on what time scale she expects changes to be enacted within the agricultural industry. [31457]

Mr. Morley: The independent Policy Commission, which was asked to advise Government on how we can create a sustainable, competitive and diverse farming and food sector in England, delivered its report yesterday. Their ideas will make a substantial contribution towards a new Government strategy for sustainable, modern and adaptable farming, which we intend to launch in the summer.

While responsibility for European and international aspects of policy rests with the UK Government, agriculture policy in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is devolved. The devolved Administrations have their own strategies for the development of their farming industries in their countries.

Copies of the Report have been placed in the House Libraries and the Vote Office.

Oilseed

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the European Commission's decision to cut oilseed support commensurate with Agenda 2000; and if she will make a statement on her Department's policy on the levels of protein imported in the European Union. [31519]

Mr. Morley: The progressive alignment of EU area payment rates for oilseeds with those for cereals is provided for in Council Regulation 1251/99, which implements the decisions on CAP reform taken by the European Council in March 1999, as part of the Agenda 2000 agreement.

Article 10.2 of the regulation requires the European Commission to submit a report to the Council by 30 June 2002 on the development of the oilseeds market in the light of those decisions. This assessment will therefore form part of the mid-term review of Agenda 2000 later this year.

In addition, in response to a request from the Agriculture Council in December 2000, the European Commission has already produced a report on the options for increasing EU plant protein production following the Council's decision to ban meat and bone meal (MBM) from animal rations. The report notes that there is a plentiful supply of plant proteins on the world market and that EU is already the world's largest importer of oilmeals. In the light of this, it concludes that the most cost effective and least trade distorting solution is to look to the world market to make-up the gap left by the MBM ban, rather than to subsidise additional EU plant protein production. The Government agree with the Commission's analysis and fully supports the conclusions reached.

Hunting

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the registered figures are for each hunt outing this year in respect of *(a)* riders and *(b)* followers under the post foot and mouth reporting rules. [31858]

Alun Michael: The information is not available. However, a list of the hunts that have satisfied Divisional Veterinary Managers that they can comply with disease control permit conditions is listed on the DEFRA website on www.defra/gov.uk/footandmouth/rural/hunting/permits.asp.

HEALTH

Stroke Research

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for financing research into strokes in the next three financial years; and if he will make a statement. [14197]

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what priority will be accorded to his Department's policy research and the NHS Research and Development Programme to deal with strokes; and if he will make a statement. [14028]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 14 November 2001]:* The National Service Framework (NSF) for older people, published in March 2001, outlines a programme of action for the national health service to reduce the incidence of stroke in the population and to ensure that those who have had a stroke have prompt access to integrated care services. A programme of research to underpin the implementation of the NSF is currently being planned by the Department. Funders forums have been established in cardiovascular disease research and in older people's research; research into stroke is likely to be of interest to both.

The Department's main national programmes of research which includes the NHS research and development programmes and the policy research programme, are currently funding a number of research projects into stroke. These include many projects with forward commitments over the next three years. Details of projects are available on the national research register at www.doh.gov.uk/research/nrr.htm.

The NHS research and development programme on service delivery and organisation has recently funded a five-year project on "Continuity of care in stroke and its relation to outcomes". A call for proposals has recently been advertised for the NHS research and development programme on the new and emerging applications of technology, which includes stroke as one of the priority areas. Funding will be dependent on the quality of proposals.

In addition to funding specific projects, the Department also provides and will continue to provide support for research commissioned by charities and the research councils that takes place in the NHS. Much of this will include research on strokes.

The main Government agency for research into the causes of and treatments for disease is the Medical Research Council (MRC) which receives its funding via the Department of Trade and Industry. The MRC operates in response mode, and it is therefore difficult to predict expenditure over the coming years. However the MRC spent £3.4 million on stroke research in 2000–01 and does not anticipate a major change to this level of support.

Chief Medical Officer (Annual Reports)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the dates of publication of the annual report of the chief medical officer for the past five years. [16859]

Ms Blears: Sir Kenneth Calman, the then chief medical officer, published his annual report on 25 September 1996, 30 September 1997 and 9 September 1998. Since then no similar reports have been published. Although the previous format served its purpose well in the past, the practice of the report containing descriptions of a wide range of Government policies added to the detailed nature of the reports and such information is well covered in other reports and is freely available on the internet.

When Professor Donaldson took up the post of chief medical officer in September 1998, he took stock of the publications issued by the chief medical officer and introduced a number of changes. One of these changes was to introduce a new style of report which is shorter, more focused and more accessible. The first use of this new format for his annual report was in December 2001.

Since his term of office Professor Donaldson has produced a number of major reports including: "An organisation with a memory: report of an expert group on learning from adverse events in the National Health Service"; "Supporting Doctors, Protecting Patients"; "Stem Cell Research: Medical Progress with Responsibility"; "Building a safer NHS for patients" and "The Removal, Retention and Use of Human Organs and Tissue from Post-mortem Examination".

Personal Social Services

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the level of *(a)* personal social services SSA per resident over 65 and *(b)* personal social services SSA per resident below 18 is for (i) Buckinghamshire, (ii) Milton Keynes and (iii) England. [19313]

Ms Blears:*[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* The level of personal social services standard spending assessments (SSA) per resident over 65 and per resident under 18 for Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and England in 2001–02 is as follows:

£

	SSA per capita aged 65 and over	*SSA per capita aged under 18*
Buckinghamshire	552	88
Milton Keynes	715	145
England	673	172

Community Pharmacists

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his decision to reduce the dispensing fees paid to community pharmacists. [25127]

Ms Blears: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) on 8 January 2002, *Official Report,* columns 611–12W.

ERDIP

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the timetable for ERDIP sites to submit proposals under the Modernisation Enabling Project; and what plans he has to invite tenders from outside the Electronic Record Development and Implementation Programme on electronic access to patient records. [25321]

Ms Blears: The modernisation enabling projects identify gaps within the electronic record development and implementation programme (ERDIP). These pieces of work will be for a short timescale and with a minimum amount of funding as a major investment has already been made within the ERDIP programme. These sites have already received various amounts of funding over and above health authority allocations. The Department is currently considering a small number of sites that can do additional work linked to NHS Plan priorities that can be delivered by the 5 April 2002.

ERDIP is a national co-ordination programme, which seeks to develop solutions to national problems. The purpose of setting up the demonstrator communities was to: demonstrate the achievements in improving health and healthcare through making faster progress in their plans to modernise care, and demonstrating robust techniques and good practice reproducible on a national basis; act as a focus for the identification, definition and testing of standards and good practice; raise awareness of what is possible, and the health and healthcare benefits that can be achieved; and provide learning and feedback for the wider National Health Service community. The two patient access sites at Bury Knowle and Hadfield are an integral part of this programme.

A key element of the information management and technology strategy is to enable health communities to make decisions on procurement of software and hardware based on existing systems and reflecting local circumstances. The Government are supporting the NHS in this by ensuring that the additional money allocated for the implementation of the targets in 'Information for Health, Building the Information Core' and the NHS Plan reaches the level at which the decisions are taken. A majority of the money therefore goes out as part of health authority allocations.

Care Homes

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of (1) the cumulative percentage increases in age-standardised projected demand for care home places for older people from 2001 levels, in *(a)* England and *(b)* each local authority providing social services, in each year from 2001 to 2011; [26519]

(2) age-standardised demand for care home places for older people *(a)* in England and *(b)* in each local authority responsible for social services in each year from 2001 to 2011. [26523]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* The Performance Assessment Framework Indicator C26 shows the usage of residential and nursing care homes by each local council in England for people aged 65 and over and indicator C32 the usage of home care. Copies of the 'Social Services Performance Assessment Framework Indicators, 2000–01' are available in the Library.

Recent work by the Personal Social Services Research Unit (PSSRU) at the London School of Economics, commissioned by the Department, suggests that, in England, residential care places for older people will need to increase by 7.2 per cent. over the period 2000 to 2010 and that nursing care places for older people will need to increase by 7.7 per cent. The research also suggests that home care hours for older people will need to increase by 7.5 per cent. over the same period. These projections assume current patterns of care. The pressures may change as a result of government policies. Projections are not available for each council with social services responsibility or for individual years.

Further information on these projections and the model on which they are based can be found in the recent report by the PSSRU on "Demand for Long Term Care for Older People in England", published in Health Statistics Quarterly 12, Winter 2001, a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will require the new strategic health authorities to incorporate in their eligibility criteria the words of Lord Woolf in R *v.* North and East Devon health authority ex-parte Coughlan on the limits to the powers of social service departments to pay for nursing home places. [31206]

Jacqui Smith: The new strategic health authorities (SHAs) will be required to compile eligibility criteria that reflect the guidance issued in June 2001 (Health Service Circular 2001/015:Local Authority Circular (2001)18).

The guidance itself reflects very closely the Court of Appeal judgment ex-parte Coughlan.

Paragraph 20 of the guidance makes clear both the limits of the powers of social services departments to pay for nursing home places, and that the content is drawn from the Judgment:

> "The Judgment stated that a local council could provide nursing care under section 21 of the National Assistance Act only where:
>
> the services are merely incidental or ancillary to the provision of the accommodation a local authority is under duty to provide to those whom section 21 refers;
>
> and is of a nature which it can be expected to be provided by a council whose primary responsibility is to provide social services."

The two indents in paragraph 20 of the guidance very closely reflect the words of the judgment at page 12, paragraph 30 (e). It will be for each SHA to determine the wording of their eligibility criteria in light of the guidance.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that no patient receiving free continuing care will be reassessed as falling outside the criteria for continuing care as a result of new eligibility criteria being drawn up for April 2002 by the new strategic health authorities. [31238]

Jacqui Smith: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will ensure that new eligibility criteria are drawn up in line with the continuing care guidance issued in June 2001 (Health Service Circular 2001/015:Local Authority Circular (2001)18). It is not envisaged that patients whose needs are of a nature, complexity, intensity or unpredictability that they currently require fully funded continuing national health service health care will cease to receive that care as a result of the new eligibility criteria being drawn up by strategic health authorities.

Free Continuing Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he intends to issue to the new strategic health authorities about eligibility criteria for free continuing care from April 2002. [31152]

Jacqui Smith: It is not our intention to issue new guidance to strategic health authorities regarding eligibility criteria for free continuing care. The guidance issued in June 2001 (Health Service Circular 2001/015:Local Authority Circular (2001)18) reflects the legal position outlined in ex-parte Coughlan. The legal position has not changed since the guidance was issued.

It was made clear at paragraph 15 of the guidance that as health authorities are replaced by SHAs they should align their inherited continuing and ensure only one set of criteria exist across each SHA.

Lost/Stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those items valued at more than £50 which have been stolen or lost from his Department in each of the last four years. [27990]

Ms Blears: The information requested is in the table:

Losses and thefts 2001–02

Item(s)	*Number*	*Total amount (£)*
Nokia 8210 mobile phone	1	241.70
Texas Instruments Extensa Series Laptop	1	1,500.00
Compaq E500 Laptop	1	1,761.20
Motorola Pager	1	146.88
64 Mb DIMM memory chip	1	61.60
Compaq Armada M700 Laptop	1	2,321.80
Siemens C35 mobile phone	1	156.66
Scriptor Pager	1	176.25
Compaq Armada 1110 Laptop	1	2,321.80
Compaq Armada Laptop	1	1,915.25
Compaq M700 Laptop	1	2,321.80
Compaq Spacesaver 866 base unit. keyboard and mouse	3	821.33
Palm Pilot 3	1	158.63
Compaq Armada M700 Laptop	1	2,184.33
Compaq Laptop	1	2,184.33
Compaq Armada 1750 Laptop	1	2,184.33
Compaq Armada 1592 Laptop	1	1,684.33
Nokia Mobile phone	1	115.15
Psion MX5 and Vodaphone mobile phone	2	165.68
HP Colour Laser jet 4550 Printer	1	1,800.10
Compaq Armada M700 Laptop	1	1,995.15
Compaq Laptop	1	1,995.15
Siemens C35i mobile phone	1	179.66
Compaq Laptop and Psion 5MX series	2	2,367.05
Compaq Armada E500 Laptop	1	1,835.94
Compaq Armada E500 Laptop	1	1,835.94
Compaq Armada 1120 Laptop	1	1,835.94
Pager	1	176.25
Nokia mobile phone	1	50.00
Siemens Lifebook Laptop	1	1,630.20
Total to date for 2001–02	34	38,124.43

Bed Blocking

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the problem of bed blocking in hospitals located in the Buckinghamshire health authority. [30055]

Jacqui Smith: On 9 October 2001 we announced additional funding of £300 million to tackle delayed discharges this year and next. Buckinghamshire was recognised as a local authority in need of extra help and was allocated £713,000 of additional funding this year and will receive £1.5 million in 2002–03.

Quarterly information for Buckinghamshire health authority, on delayed discharges for patients aged 75 and over has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Speech Therapy (Autism)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what measures he is taking to increase the provision of speech therapists dealing with children and adults with autism; [31884]

(2) whether he will consider introducing ring-fenced funding to promote the greater provision of speech therapists dealing with people with autism; [31885]

(3) how many speech therapists are available to deal with people with autism in each health authority in England and Wales. [31886]

Mr. Hutton: Speech and language therapists have a broad range of responsibilities and autism is one of the many important disorders with which they can help. The proportion of their time devoted to treatment of people with autism varies according to local needs assessment. So it is not possible to quantify the amount of speech and language therapy that is used to specifically treat autism. As at September 2000 there were 5,343 (headcount) speech and language therapists working in the national health service with 4,070 whole-time equivalents.

Between 1997 and 2000 the number of speech and language therapists working in the national health service has increased by 560 (11 per cent.) and the number of training places available for students has increased by over a hundred since 1998. There will be further increases in the number of students entering training as a result of the NHS Plan commitment to provide 4,450 more training places each year for therapists and other health professionals by 2004. The increased investment in training, work to make the national health service a better employer and investment in return to practice initiatives will result in a continuing increase in the number of speech therapists available to work in the national health service.

It is for health authorities in partnership with primary care groups/trusts and other local stakeholders to determine how best to use their funds to meet national and local priorities for improving health, tackling health inequalities and modernising services.

Complaints Investigation

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will announce the names of the chair and panel members for the independent investigation into the handling of complaints against Dr. Kerr and Mr. Haslam. [33722]

Mr. Milburn: I am pleased to announce that Mr. Nigel Pleming QC has agreed to chair this investigation. Mr. Pleming has considerable experience in health law, including mental health law.

I am also pleased to announce that Ms Ruth Lesirge and Ms Ros Alstead have agreed to be Panel members. Ms Lesirge is Chief Executive of the Mental Health Foundation. Ms Alstead is Director of Quality and Operations and Nursing at the South Birmingham Mental Health NHS Trust.

Mr. Pleming and the inquiry panel will start work shortly. They will be holding early meetings with those involved to discuss the issues to be covered in the investigation.

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the cost of buildings refurbishment carried out by his Department in each of the last four years. [27962]

Ms Blears: The estimate of the cost of buildings refurbishment carried out by the Department, its executive agencies and executive non-departmental public bodies in each of the past four complete financial years is shown in the table.

	£000
1997–98	2,290
1998–99	2,023
1999–2000	5,778
2000–01	5,002

This does not include refurbishment work carried out within the national health service nor the cost of fitting out of any new properties prior to occupation.

Emergency Calls

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average number of *(a)* emergency and *(b)* non-emergency calls per year handled by each ambulance service was in (i) England, (ii) South-west England and (iii) South-east England; and what is the number per thousand population in the last 12 months. [28227]

Ms Blears: Information for all ambulance national health service trusts, by regional office area, about the number of emergency calls received in 2000–01 that resulted in an emergency response arriving at the scene of the incident is shown in the table. The rate per thousand population is also included. Information about non-emergency calls is not available in the form requested.

	Emergency calls resulting in an emergency response arriving at the scene of the incident[1]	
Ambulance NHS Trust	*Number*	*Rate per thousand population*
England	3,558	71
Northern and Yorkshire	476	68
West Yorkshire Metropolitan Ambulance NHS Trust	172	81
Tees, East and North Yorkshire Ambulance NHS Trust	132	47
Cumbria Ambulance NHS Trust	24	38
North East Ambulance NHS Trust	148	105
Trent	334	69

Ambulance NHS Trust	*Emergency calls resulting in an emergency response arriving at the scene of the incident*[1] *Number*	*Rate per thousand population*
South Yorkshire Metropolitan Ambulance NHS Trust	80	61
Lincolnshire Ambulance NHS Trust	59	93
East Midlands Ambulance NHS Trust	195	67
Eastern	328	60
Essex Ambulance NHS Trust	115	70
East Anglian Ambulance NHS Trust	114	52
Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Ambulance NHS Trust	99	61
London	700	95
London Ambulance NHS Trust	700	95
South-east	523	60
Royal Berkshire Ambulance NHS Trust	47	58
Hampshire Ambulance NHS Trust	83	50
Isle of Wight Ambulance Service (NHS Trust)[2]	8	59
Kent Ambulance NHS Trust	97	61
Oxfordshire Ambulance NHS Trust	27	43
Surrey Ambulance NHS Trust	78	72
Sussex Ambulance NHS Trust	115	76
The Two Shires Ambulance NHS Trust	68	52
South West	291	59
Avon Ambulance NHS Trust	60	59
Dorset Ambulance NHS Trust	54	77
Gloucestershire Ambulance NHS Trust	27	48
West Country Ambulance NHS Trust	122	58
Wiltshire Ambulance NHS Trust	29	47
West Midlands	365	68
Hereford and Worcester Ambulance NHS Trust	34	48
Shropshire Ambulance Service (NHS Trust)[2]	22	50
Staffordshire Ambulance NHS Trust	64	61
Warwickshire Ambulance NHS Trust	27	34
West Midlands Metropolitan Ambulance NHS Trust	218	94
North West	540	86
Lancashire Ambulance NHS Trust	112	87
Mersey Regional Ambulance NHS Trust	193	81
Greater Manchester Ambulance NHS Trust	235	90

[1] Excludes duplicate calls to the same incidents

[2] Part of a community trust

Source:

Office for National Statistics mid-year population estimates for 2000

Information about non-emergency patient journeys and other requests for transport, together with more detailed information about response times to Government targets for all NHS ambulance trusts are contained in the Department of Health Statistical Bulletin "Ambulance Services, England 2000–01". A copy is in the Library and available on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0115.htm.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Pre-school Education

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many three-year-olds attended Government-funded pre-school education in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999 and *(d)* 2000 in the Falmouth and Camborne constituency. [26200]

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many three-year-olds attended Government-funded pre-school education in Chesham and Amersham in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999 and *(d)* 2000. [27122]

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many three-year-olds attended Government-funded pre-school education in the Uxbridge constituency in each of the last four years. [27266]

Margaret Hodge: The information is not available in the form requested. Figures for other maintained[1] and private, voluntary and independent providers are not collected at parliamentary constituency level.

The available information on children taking up free early education places at:

(1) maintained nursery and primary schools, and

(2) other maintained and private, voluntary and independent providers.

In each local education authority area in England in each year from 1997 to 2001 is shown in a table on the Department's statistical website. The table "Numbers of 3 and 4-year-olds taking up free early education places: 1997–2001" can be found at www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics/DB/SBU/b0300/index.html.

[1] Includes some local authority providers (other than schools) that are registered to receive nursery education grant e.g. local authority day nurseries.

Learning and Skills Council

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in which town each local learning and skills council is headquartered; and what are its estimated accommodation costs in the first year. [28853]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* The information requested is provided in the table:

Local Learning and Skills Council	*Headquarters*	*Estimated accommodation costs 2001–02 (£)*
Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire	Abingdon	323,002
Berkshire	Reading	838,510
Surrey	Woking	277,595
Kent and Medway	West Malling	568,594
Sussex	Brighton	512,319
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	Fareham (with a satellite office at Newport)	315,627
Cumbria	Workington	113,457
Lancashire	Preston	206,244
Greater Manchester	Manchester	653,217
Greater Merseyside	Liverpool	459,512
Cheshire and Warrington	Middlewich	174,698
Shropshire	Telford	79,725
Staffordshire	Stoke-on-Trent	191,818
The Black Country	Oldbury	243,183
Birmingham and Solihull	Birmingham	343,077
Coventry and Warwickshire	Coventry	411,763
Herefordshire and Worcestershire	Worcester	218,681
Gloucestershire	Gloucester	191,996
Wiltshire and Swindon	Swindon	346,451
West of England	Bristol	389,939
Somerset	Taunton	156,667
Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole	Bournemouth	235,090
Devon and Cornwall	Plymouth (with a satellite office at Truro)	401,508
Northumberland	Cramlington	102,649
Tyne and Wear	Gateshead	246,110
County Durham	Newton Aycliffe	108,536
Tees Valley	Middlesbrough	226,700
North Yorkshire	York	166,638
West Yorkshire	Bradford	497,038
South Yorkshire	Sheffield	294,884
Humberside	Hull	222,278
Derbyshire	Derby	183,933
Nottinghamshire	Nottingham	228,112
Lincolnshire	Lincoln	139,598
Leicestershire	Leicester	275,107
Northamptonshire	Northampton	300,122
Norfolk	Norwich	299,536
Cambridgeshire	Peterborough	253,971
Suffolk	Ipswich	155,001
Bedfordshire and Luton	Bedford	153,928
Hertfordshire	St. Albans	1,046,283
Essex	Chelmsford	433,871
London West	Hounslow	806,022
London Central	London	785,035
London North	Palmers Green	500,260
London East	Stratford	751,167
London South	Croydon	374,542

Note:

Accommodation costs include annual rent and rates (including rate rebates), annual service charge and property insurance. In some cases final information is not yet available and costs have been estimated.

Source:

Learning and Skills Council

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total external spend by her Department was on Private Finance Initiative consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PFI consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by her Department over this period; and if she will make a statement. [31032]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The following table details the external spend by the Department on Private Finance Initiative Consultants in each of the last four years.

£

	23 January 1998 to 24 January 1999	*23 January 1999 to 24 January 2000*	*23 January 2000 to 24 January 2001*	*23 January 2001 to 24 January 2002*
Total spend on consultants	0	0	752,631.97	759,565.05
Full-time equivalent	0	0	2.23	2.49
Billed consultancy days	0	0	580.8	647.9
Average cost per consultant	0	0	1,295.85	1,172.35
Number of consultancy firms	0	0	4	4

University Students

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students attend each university in England. [31054]

Margaret Hodge: The available information on the numbers of students in each university in England is contained in "Students in Higher Education Institutions, 1999–2000" published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), a copy of which is available from the House Library.

School Census

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she expects to publish the results of the Annual Schools' Census of 17 January 2002. [31367]

Mr. Timms: The first data to be published from the Annual School Census of 17 January 2002 will be in the statistical first releases, "Class Sizes in Maintained Schools in England: January 2002 (Provisional)" and "Pupil:Teacher Ratios in Maintained Schools in England: January 2002 (Provisional)". These are due to be published in April 2002.

The exact publication date will depend on the quality, completeness and timeliness of the data returned by schools.

Details of publications over the next few months can be found in the statistical first release, "Schedule for the Publication of Statistics". Copies are placed in the House of Commons Library, or can be found on the DfES statistical website, www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics

Student Hardship

Dr. Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on student hardship in higher education. [R] [31469]

Margaret Hodge: The latest Student Income and Expenditure Survey (SIES) showed that in 1998–99 most students could meet all their essential expenditure from the student loan, which has since been raised annually in line with inflation. The SIES and other surveys suggest that students are meeting additional costs of entertainment and consumer goods from family income, commercial credit and part-time working.

Our system of student support is designed so that those with the greatest need get the most support. 50 per cent. of full-time students entering HE in 2001–02 do not pay anything towards their tuition fees. We have introduced a number of measures including the Childcare Grant package to meet the needs of student parents, and there is other targeted support for disabled students and young people most in need.

In our current review of student support we are looking at ways to simplify the system, especially in the area of hardship support; to provide more up-front support for students from less well-off backgrounds; to ensure that all students have access to sufficient financial support throughout their years in higher education; and to tackle the problem of debt and the perception of debt.

Excellence in Cities

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students in 2001–02 received Opportunity Bursaries under the Excellence in Cities programme; and in which regions and local education authority areas they were resident. [31472]

Margaret Hodge: There were 6,580 Opportunity Bursaries available in England for institutions to award to students who were entering higher education for the first time in 2001–02, and who met the criteria. The number of bursaries awarded so far is 6,129. Of these 84 per cent. (5,125) went to students from Excellence in Cities areas and Education Action Zones, and 16 per cent. (1,004) to students from elsewhere.

Institutions were not asked to submit information about students with bursaries, according to individual education authority areas.

Higher Education

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the purpose is of her review of the postcode premium in higher education; and if she will make a statement. [31976]

Margaret Hodge: The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) is currently reviewing the postcode premium and will be consulting on widening participation, including the focus of the premium, later in the spring.

Departmental Salary Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit in 2001–02 will be accounted for by salary costs and pension contributions. [32013]

Estelle Morris: Salary costs and pension contributions account for 0.72 per cent. of the total resource budget departmental expenditure limit for the Department for Education and Skills for 2001–02.

Autism

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what plans she has to increase the training of teachers and classroom assistants dealing with children with autism in mainstream schools; [31888]

(2) what plans she has to launch an advertising campaign to promote the recruitment of specialist teachers to teach autistic children in primary and secondary schools. [31889]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: In order to acquire qualified teacher status (QTS), all trainee teachers must, as part of their initial teacher training, demonstrate that they can identify pupils with special educational needs (SEN). This includes those who may have autistic spectrum disorders.

The Government have made a significant investment in support of SEN. Through the Department's standards fund 2001–02, we are supporting local expenditure of £82 million on SEN. One of the expenditure headings is in-service training and development of teachers, and other staff, including learning support assistants. In 2002–03, we are increasing this investment to £91 million. Training will again be a major component, extended to cover training in disability, as well as SEN, in order to help schools and local education authorities prepare for their responsibilities under the Special Education Needs and Disability Act 2001, and the implementation of the new SEN Code of Practice.

In addition, the Department has also introduced in 2002–03 two new funding streams specifically to support the creation of new training opportunities and resources for teachers, and other staff, linked to a number of key priorities. One of these is supporting those who work with pupils with learning difficulties, including pupils with autistic spectrum disorders. Competitive bids have been invited from voluntary organisations, as part of the Department's SEN small programmes fund, and from higher education institutions, under the new SEN training and development fund. £2 million will able available under these initiatives.

With regard to advertising campaigns, the Government have introduced a significant number of recruitment measures to help schools to recruit the teachers they need. The grant that my Department provides the Teacher Training Agency to enable it to discharge its functions includes funding to cover advertising costs. The standards fund support I have referred to assists teachers to acquire specialist knowledge.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what she is doing to promote Autism Awareness year. [31890]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Secretary of State welcomes initiatives which aim to improve our knowledge and understanding of autism and raise awareness of the condition. Better outcomes for children with autism are encouraged by early identification and intervention to meet their special educational needs. In 2002, the Department for Education and Skills will be publishing guidance for schools, local education authorities and others which will include pointers to good practice on provision for children with autism, including early identification. The Department will continue to work with the National Autistic Society and other interested parties to raise awareness of autism and improve provision for children with the condition.

Hardship Loans

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what arrangements are in place to ensure that higher education students' eligibility for hardship loans is consistent between institutions. [32734]

Margaret Hodge: My Department produces guidance for institutions on hardship loans each year. The guidance is intended to help administrators target the support effectively. It also helps to ensure that institutions deal with applications on a broadly consistent basis, while giving them the flexibility to meet individual students' needs.

TREASURY

Compliance Costs

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the one year projects on taxes and duties other than VAT or corporation tax, referred to in the HM Customs and Excise website as planned for inclusion in the compliance costs programme of research. [21785]

Mr. Boateng: Customs and Excise planned to follow their study on VAT with studies into the compliance costs of Customs procedures for international trade and of Excise duties. The Revenue planned to follow the first year's study on corporation tax with a follow-up study, drawing on the earlier findings.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the dates on which the Inland Revenue and HM Customs and Excise awarded the contracts for studies of the compliance costs to UK businesses of *(a)* corporation tax and *(b)* VAT. [21769]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Paymaster General to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) on 1 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 514W.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will publish *(a)* the emerging findings report and *(b)* the final reports of (i) the VAT compliance cost project and (ii) the corporation tax compliance cost project. [21771]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Paymaster General to the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Edward Davey) on 26 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 631W.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) which organisation has been awarded the contract from the Inland Revenue for a study of the compliance costs of corporation tax for UK businesses; what is the cost to public funds of that contract; and if he will make a statement; [21772]

(2) which organisation has been awarded the contract by Customs and Excise for a research study of the compliance costs of VAT for UK businesses; what is the cost to public funds of that contract; and if he will make a statement. [21773]

Mr. Boateng: The contracts were awarded to the social research division of BMRB International Ltd. in September 2000. Information on the costs of individual contracts is Commercial-in-Confidence.

VAT

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will state for the VAT inspections control programme for 2000–01 *(a)* the number of staff years used, *(b)* the running costs, *(c)* the additional tax discovered and *(d)* the unit cost ratio of cost to revenue. [24795]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested for the VAT inspections control programme 2000–01 is as follows:

(a) Total VAT staff years used figure is 5,162, including support staff.

(b) Running costs were £130 million, in terms of salary and expenses.

(c) Net additional tax of £2.3 billion discovered.

(d) The unit cost ratio is £1 cost: £17.69 net additional revenue.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many VAT-registered companies and individuals became insolvent following action by HM Customs and Excise in each year since 1997; how much outstanding VAT was recovered from these concerns after formal insolvency occurred; what was the cost to Customs and Excise of pursuing those investigations; and how many VAT registrations were effected after guarantees were sought because of previous insolvency action against persons in the new venture. [24806]

Mr. Boateng: The information is as follows:

1. Number of companies and individuals insolvent following Customs' action

Year ended 31 March	*Customs bankruptcy/ winding up orders*
1998	4,333
1999	4,891
2000	5,162
2001	4,313

2. Outstanding VAT recovered after formal insolvency occurred

£ million

Period	*Amount recovered*
Year ended 31 December 1998	42
Year ended 31 December 1999	43
15 months ended 31 March 2000	64
Year ended 31 March 2001	56

3. Customs do not hold information specific to the cost of pursuing bankruptcy and winding-up orders and post-insolvency recovery. It is not cost effective to produce this information.

4. Customs do not maintain information on requirements of security explicitly due to a history of insolvency. The table that follows details the number of cases where security was obtained from traders considered to present a risk to the revenue. This includes instances of persons involved in previous insolvencies.

Year ended 31 March	*Total number of cases where security was obtained*
1998	722
1999	741
2000	808
2001	481

Tax Receipts

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the annual receipts derived from payment of income tax, capital gains tax, national insurance and VAT paid by the top *(a)* one per cent., *(b)* five per cent. and *(c)* 10 per cent. of earners and the bottom (i) one per cent., (ii) five per cent. and (iii) 10 per cent. of earners. [26239]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The available information is given in the table. The bottom 1 per cent., 5 per cent., and 10 per cent. of earners do not pay income tax on their earnings. The bottom decile of earners could be liable to capital gains tax and income tax (if they have significant investment income); however, it is not possible to provide reliable estimates. It is also not possible to estimate amounts of VAT paid by individuals in different parts of the earnings distribution.

Tax and national insurance contributions by percentiles of the earnings distribution in 2001–02

£ billion

	Income tax	*Capital gains tax*	*National insurance contributions*
Top 1 per cent.	20.7	1.0	0.6
Top 5 per cent.	38.2	1.4	3.1
Top 10 per cent.	48.2	1.6	6.3

Fuel Duty (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much duty was raised at each Northern Ireland duty point in respect of all types of fuel and diesel in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000 and *(c)* 2000–01; and how much duty was raised in the UK in respect of all types of fuel and diesel in the same three periods. [28178]

Mr. Boateng: Revenue receipts from all types of fuel duties in the relevant financial years were: *(a)* £21.6 billion; *(b)* £22.5 billion; and *(c)* £23 billion. Estimates of the receipts collected at different duty points are not available. There are no duty points currently located in Northern Ireland.

Aggregates Levy

Mr. Weir: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact on the manufacturers of added value aggregate products of the introduction of the Aggregates Levy. [31573]

Mr. Boateng: The higher price of primary aggregate will provide an incentive to all users, including the producers of value added products, to make more efficient use of aggregates and better use of alternative materials. The impact on the actual costs to the end user will be dependent on the commercial decisions of aggregates suppliers.

Company Car Drivers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of how many incorrect tax codes have been sent to company car drivers as a result of the introduction of the carbon dioxide emissions-based system; and if he will make a statement on the implications for the Exchequer. [31961]

Mr. Boateng: For the majority of company car drivers the Inland Revenue have had to estimate the value of company car benefit for 2002–03 because they do not hold the necessary information required to calculate the figure under the new rules. In about 280,000 cases the provisional amount of benefit included in the coding notices may not have been calculated on the basis of information already supplied by employers. In those cases the Inland Revenue have made it clear that revised coding notices will be issued before the start of the new tax year.

Fuel Contracts

Tom Brake: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what fuel contracts Government Departments have with Exxon Mobil/Esso. [31833]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Government Departments are responsible for their own contracts, however OGCbuying.solutions offer framework contracts that are available to the whole of central Government. There are three contracts in place with Esso covering heating oils and motor fuels. Specific details cannot be disclosed in accordance with Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Debt Relief

Tony Baldry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has made to ensure that the first 23 countries to receive debt relief spend less on debt and more on education. [31670]

Mr. Boateng: The UK Government have been at the forefront internationally of pressing to ensure that savings on debt relief are linked to the development of comprehensive national poverty reduction strategies. Education is a key feature of these plans.

Countries receiving HIPC debt relief have benefited from increased social spending of $1.7 billion in 2001–02, equivalent to 1.2 per cent. of their GDP. Education spending has accounted for 40 per cent. of the savings made on debt, equivalent to nearly $700 million in 2001–02. The World bank and the IMF are currently preparing a report, to be presented to the board, to further track the spending of HIPC finance.

Aggregates Tax

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 8W, on aggregates tax, whether the discussions the Government have held regarding the implementation of the aggregates tax in Scotland with a wide range of organisations within Government include discussions with the Scotland Office. [32303]

Mr. Boateng: It would not be appropriate to provide specific information on the extent and nature of discussions within Government on matters of policy, as Exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information provides.

Internet Service Providers

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) on what basis VAT is calculated for *(a)* UK-based and *(b)* non-UK-based internet service providers; [32148]

(2) what discussions he has had with *(a)* UK-based internet service providers and *(b)* Customs and Excise about the appropriate VAT charges for flat-rate unmetered internet access charges on non-UK-based ISPs; [32149]

(3) what steps he is taking to ensure non-UK-based internet service providers account for value added tax on the same basis as UK-based ISPs. [32147]

Mr. Boateng: This is a complex area of EC VAT law, centring on the interpretation and application of the rules that govern the 'place of taxation' of services. The Government currently have the treatment of internet access packages under review, and have held discussions with a range of interested bodies. The Government are also negotiating for relevant changes to be made to EC VAT law in order to provide lasting clarity and certainty in this area.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 4 February 2002

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Women's Unit

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Minister for Women what budgetary provision has been made for the cost of the Women's Unit in the first financial year of its existence. [33057]

Ms Hewitt: The Women's Unit was created in 1998. Its budget for the first financial year of its existence (1998–99) was £1,111,897. The unit was renamed the Women and Equality Unit following last year's general election in order to recognise its new policy responsibilities across the United Kingdom for gender equality, co-ordination of sexual orientation policy and its sponsorship of the Equal Opportunities commission.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Minister for Women if she will make a statement on how the responsibilities of the Women's Unit differ from the responsibilities of the departmental Ministers for Women. [33122]

Ms Hewitt: In my role as Minister for Women and supported by the Women and Equality Unit, I work closely with Cabinet colleagues, other Government Departments and Number 10 in order to ensure that the Government can bring about practical improvements to women's lives that benefit society as a whole. There are no Ministers for Women assigned to individual Government Departments.

Carers

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Minister for Women what plans she has to make representations to the Department for Work and Pensions to secure improved arrangements for carers. [30870]

Ms Hewitt: In autumn 2000 the Government announced a package of measures to enhance the current social security provision for carers, worth more than £500 million over a three year period. Two of the measures were implemented in April last year. The invalid care allowance (ICA) earnings limit was increased from £50 to £72 per week and the carer premium paid through the income related benefits was increased from £14.15 to £24.40.

On 17 December 2001, the Department for Work and Pensions laid a draft regulatory reform order before Parliament. If accepted, this will give those aged over 65 the right to claim invalid care allowance for the first time; will provide for the extension of entitlement to ICA for up to eight weeks after the death of the person being cared for; and will change the name of the benefit to carer's allowance.

I have no plans to make any representations for further change.

Devolved Responsibilities

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Minister for Women which matters devolved to the Scottish Parliament her office has involvement in. [33119]

Ms Hewitt: The Women and Equality Unit supports the Ministers for Women in helping to deliver the Government's key priorities. Its aim is to bring about measurable improvements in the position of women which benefit society across the United Kingdom. It works on specific issues on a project basis alongside Number 10 and central Government Departments. Current priorities include helping women to balance their lives at home and work, closing the pay gap, developing policies which help women who want to return to work and the delivery of high quality health and education public services for women. It also has responsibility across the UK for policy and legislation on gender equality and sexual orientation and sponsors the Equal Opportunities Commission as well as ensuring the United Kingdom fulfils its international obligations and raises the profile of women's issues in the EU.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Empty Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her estimate is of the *(a)* annual cost and *(b)* total value of the empty properties owned by (i) her Department, (ii) her agencies and (iii) other public bodies for which she has had responsibility in each of the last four years. [30079]

Ms Hewitt: The Department of Trade and Industry and its agencies have not had any empty freehold properties in any of the last four years. However, the estimated annual costs and total value of empty freehold properties owned by DTI non-departmental public bodies and public corporations for the same period are shown in the tables:

Status/year	*Empty freehold properties*	*Running costs (£)*	*Estimated market value (£)*
NDPBs[1]			
1998	59	54,461.78	2,583,366.00
1999	29	25,106.50	1,290,675.00
2000	24	50,874.52	2,338,000.00
2001	20	45,655.83	1,210,000.00
Other public bodies			
Consignia plc[2]	—	—	—
BNFL plc			
1998	0	0	0
1999	2	35,000.00	1,100,000.00
2000	3	55,000.00	2,100,000.00
2001	3	55,000.00	2,100,000.00

[1] Regional development agencies (RDAs) are included under NDPBs. RDAs own significant property estates as part of its role as a regeneration agency. The land will be released and sold over a period of many years. RDAs do not own any other non-operational land and buildings.

[2] Consignia do not maintain central records of the number and costs of empty properties for the last four years. To provide the information requested would be at disproportionate cost. However, as of September 2000 there was a total estate of 2,775 properties of which 3.38 per cent. was vacant by number, and 1.5 per cent. vacant by value. In December 2001 there was a total estate of 2,741 of which 2.44 per cent. was vacant by number, and 1.62 per cent. vacant by value.

Departmental Expenditure (Publications)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her estimate is of the expenditure of her Department on newspapers, magazines and periodicals in each of the last four years. [30092]

Ms Hewitt: My Department's expenditure on newspapers, magazines and periodicals for the years requested was as follows:

	£
1997–98	518,700
1998–99	647,233
1999–2000	581,044
2000–01	626,862

This includes expenditure on national daily and Sunday newspapers, regional newspapers, mass circulation magazines and journals, and academic periodicals. It also includes expenditure on annual publications, in particular reference works that would not normally be considered as periodicals. It is not possible to exclude such annual publications from the figures, except at disproportionate cost.

MSP Exhibitions

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what support has been provided by Trade Partners UK, or its predecessors, to assist military, security and police companies *(a)* to attend and *(b)* to exhibit at MSP exhibitions since 1 May 1997; and if she will list the (i) companies, (ii) exhibitions attended and (iii) sums of money involved. [32273]

Ms Hewitt: TPUK provided support to UK companies to attend and exhibit at police, fire and security exhibitions under the terms of the Support for Exhibitions and Seminars Abroad scheme (and its predecessor Trade Fair Support Scheme) at the following exhibitions during this period:

Date	*Event*	*Town*	*Number of firms*	*Support (£)*
September 1997	ASIS	St. Louis	7	21,310
September 1997	IDEF	Ankara	8	67,850
September 1997	Sitech Berlin	Berlin	8	16,110
November 1997	A+A	Düsseldorf	17	33,078
March 1998	Securex South Africa	Johannesburg	12	23,973
April 1998	MIPS	Moscow	14	48,049
April 1998	DSA	Kuala Lumpur	34	214,682
May 1998	CBW Protection	Stockholm	14	33,862
June 1998	Eurosatory	Paris	20	92,246
October 1998	Security Essen	Essen	38	46,926
November 1998	Fire Asia	Hong Kong	30	98,728
February 1999	Shot Show	Atlanta	16	38,325
March 1999	Securex South Africa	Johannesburg	10	17,627
March 1999	ISC Expo/Las Vegas	Las Vegas	8	31,650
March 1999	IDEX UAE	Abu Dhabi	35	240,792
March 1999	Securex Poland	Poznan	12	1,000
April 1999	LAD—Latin America Defentech	Rio de Janeiro	24	73,442
October 1999	Security Asia	Singapore	16	57,679
October 1999	Sitech Berlin	Berlin	8	14,574
November 1999	Exposec	São Paulo	7	30,648
November 1999	Milipol—France	Paris	15	31,935
January 2000	Intersec	Dubai	28	53,914
February 2000	Securex Poland	Poznan	10	25,651
March 2000	ISC Expo/Las Vegas	Las Vegas	7	18,400
June 2000	Securitex—Hong Kong	Hong Kong	12	39,084
June 2000	Eurosatory	Paris	25	45,189
June 2000	Interschutz	Augsburg	36	75,798
July 2000	Copex—Asia	Singapore	10	21,578
July 2000	ASE	Miami	7	17,294
October 2000	Security Essen	Essen	37	64,052
October 2000	Euronaval	Paris	26	54,870
November 2000	Expoprotection	Paris	32	52,347
November 2000	Exposec	São Paulo	7	30,167
January 2001	Intersec	Dubai	25	62,100
February 2001	Securex South Africa	Johannesburg	9	32,486
March 2001	IWA	Nuremberg	18	23,208
April 2001	MIPS	Moscow	6	17,751
April 2001	LAD—Latin America Defentech	Rio de Janeiro	18	61,466
May 2001	Imdex Asia	Singapore	38	78,896
June 2001	CBW Protection	Stockholm	14	36,684
July 2001	ASE	Miami	10	27,087
November 2001	Exposec	São Paulo	9	37,300
November 2001	Milipol—France	Paris	16	39,541
November 2001	Security Asia	Singapore	12	32,200
January 2002	Intersec	Dubai	25	62,100

The provisions of the Data Protection Act preclude the release of information about individual firms.

Inward Investment

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has received regarding her Department's work to encourage inward investment to the UK. [30163]

Nigel Griffiths: Government Ministers take every opportunity to promote the UK as the place to do business.

Invest UK, as part of its overall promotional effort to attract inward investment to the UK, is in continuous dialogue, with the involvement of Ministers, with both prospective and existing investors to help them in all aspects of locating and doing business here. My noble Friend the Minister for Trade and Investment holds regular breakfast meetings with existing inward investors to discuss specific concerns that they may have.

Ministers are also regularly involved in inward investment events overseas. During a recent visit to Japan, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry hosted a dinner for investors and also met members of the automotive manufacturers and components suppliers in support of their efforts in retaining and making further investment in the UK. In January this year on a two-day visit to Toronto, my noble Friend the Minister for Trade and Investment called on existing major investors and multipliers and held media interviews to promote inward investment. On a visit this month, I shall be hosting an inward investment dinner during my attendance at the largest ICT (information and communications technologies) conference taking place in India this year.

These actions have contributed to the UK retaining its position as the top destination for inward investment in Europe as confirmed by the recently published UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) figures on foreign investment flows.

Employment Tribunals

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people from the Warrington, North constituency were members of employment tribunals or the Employment Appeals Tribunal *(a)* in 1997 and *(b)* at the latest date for which figures are available. [32255]

Alan Johnson: The number of people from the Warrington, North constituency who are currently members of the Employment Tribunals is as follows:

Chairmen (appointed by the Lord Chancellor)—None

Lay members (appointed by the Secretary of State—None.

In 1997, no Employment Tribunal Chairmen resided in the Warrington, North constituency. Historic data for 1997 concerning lay members are not available without incurring disproportionate cost. However, using information available on serving members who were due for re-appointment in 1998, one lay member is recorded as residing in the Warrington, North constituency at that time.

The number of people from the Warrington, North constituency who are currently members of the Employment Appeal Tribunal is as follows:

Judges (nominated by the Lord Chancellor)—None

Lay members (appointed by Her Majesty on joint recommendation of the Lord Chancellor and the Secretary of State)—One.

In 1997, the corresponding figures for the Employment Appeal Tribunal were:

Judges (nominated by the Lord Chancellor)—None

Lay members (appointed by Her Majesty on joint recommendation of the Lord Chancellor and the Secretary of State)—One.

Humber Pilots Ltd.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for what reason two officials from her Department visited the offices of Humber Pilots Ltd. on 18 January. [31525]

Nigel Griffiths: Two officials from my Department's Radiocommunications Agency visited the office of Humber Pilots Ltd. on 18 January 2002 in connection with radio usage under the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949.

Clothing/Textile Industries

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if it is her Department's policy *(a)* to adhere to the timetable agreed at the Uruguay Round for the phasing out of MFA restrictions and *(b)* not to accelerate the liberalisation process. [33274]

Ms Hewitt: The Government are fully committed to the Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC) to phase out Multi Fibre Arrangement (MFA) import restrictions. We also fully support Commissioner Lamy's bilateral market access initiative offering liberalisation of textile and clothing trade with the EU over and above that required in the ATC in return for improved access to the textile and clothing markets of supplier countries.

Employee Pension Entitlements

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claims were made by those seeking part-time employee pension entitlements following a ruling in May 2000 by the European Court of Justice; how many have been settled; and when she expects all outstanding cases to be dealt with. [32292]

Alan Johnson: The Employment Tribunals Service database (RITAS) does not identify these particular claims from any other claims brought under equal pay or sex discrimination legislation. It is therefore not possible to give exact figures for claims brought following the ECJ ruling in May 2000 or which claims brought since then have settled.

However, manual records indicate that since May 2000 approximately 19,000 claims have been made to an employment tribunal following the ECJ ruling. In the same period approximately 11,000 claims were disposed of prior to a hearing including those settled leaving over 51,000 outstanding claims.

The majority of claims are against public sector employers and are stayed awaiting the result of test cases which are scheduled to be heard between 24 June and 19 July 2002. The findings of these test cases will be applicable to those stayed cases.

ECGD

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the net cash outflow was from the Export Credits Guarantee Department attributable to defence exports in the financial years *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 broken down by (i) cost of interest rate support, (ii) claims paid, (iii) interest paid and (iv) operating expenses proportionate to defence related business. [27214]

Ms Hewitt: The following table details claims paid and premium earned for the financial years 2000–01 and 2001–02 to date in respect of defence related business. The cost of interest rate support has been estimated on the proportion of ECGD credit business constituted by defence related business. As for the further information my hon. Friend requests on operating expenses, I am afraid ECGD does not hold its records on a basis which would enable it to provide the level of details he has requested. It would involve disproportionate costs to produce it.

£ million

	2000–01	*2001–02*[1]
Premium earned	38	3
Claims paid	181	86
Estimate of interest rate support	4	7

[1] Provisional figures, which may change considerably throughout the rest of the year.

The claims figures relate mostly to business with Indonesia that has been rescheduled and which ECGD expects to recover in the fullness of time. These claims are in respect of business supported before the years indicated.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the level of Export Credits Guarantee Department coverage for arms sales was in the financial years, *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02. [27215]

Ms Hewitt: According to ECGD's published annual reports the level of ECGD support for defence business in each of the years was as follows:

	£ million
1997–98	763
1998–99	1,700
1999–2000	1,583
2000–01	2,735

The level of ECGD support for defence business in 2001–02 amounts to £31 million up to 31 December 2001.

Oil Fabrication Industry

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the prospects for the downstream fabrication industry over the next five years. [32249]

Mr. Wilson: As my hon. Friend is aware, overall demand for fabrication for the UKCS is unlikely to return to the levels seen in previous years.

Sophisticated field development techniques using floating and subsea technologies have largely replaced heavy fixed platforms. UK Industry has acknowledged this and is presently reconfiguring itself to tackle the new market conditions.

The Department is actively engaged in assisting companies, large and small, to increase their competitiveness by adopting best practice from around the world and particularly from the Gulf of Mexico.

I am confident that the industry will respond well to these challenges.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she last met *(a)* UKOOA and *(b)* LASCOF to discuss the future for oil fabrication. [32250]

Mr. Wilson: The information is as follows:

(a) The future of the oil fabrication industry is a regular agenda item at the quarterly meetings of the cross industry forum PILOT which I chair. UKOOA member companies are fully engaged with this process.

(b) On 14 December I had a very constructive meeting with LASCOF in Glasgow.

BP Clair Field

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what economic assessment she has made of a bid by a British company for a platform for BP's Clair field in terms of employment and economic activity. [32251]

Mr. Wilson: Industrial benefits from BP's £650 million investment in Clair include approximately 1,000 direct jobs—850 of these during the construction phase and the balance offshore.

There will also be a considerable knock-on effect inducing activity and employment further down the supply chain.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the timescale involved for the granting of the contract to build the platform for the BP Clair field. [32252]

Mr. Wilson: While the timing of contract awards is a commercial matter for BP, we understand that the analysis of tenders for the major structural elements of Clair will be carried out during February and March.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to promote British oil fabrication yards in their bid for downstream work from the BP Clair field. [32257]

Mr. Wilson: As my hon. Friend is aware, I regularly meet BP's senior management. On several occasions I have emphasised the importance of Clair to the UK's oil and gas industry, and that UK fabrication yards are anxious to demonstrate their global competitiveness.

I also met representatives of Clair prequalified fabricators in November in Aberdeen to encourage them to deliver the competitive bids I know they are capable of.

Consignia

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the National Audit Office report on Consignia. [32245]

Ms Hewitt: On 24 February the NAO published a report to Parliament entitled "Opening the Post: PostComm and postal services—the risks and opportunities". The Government will consider the detail of that report carefully and will comment where appropriate.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research her Department has commissioned on the effects of *(a)* rural post-offices, *(b)* post-buses and *(c)* directly employed Consignia staff on economic activity by constituency in each year since 1999. [32247]

Ms Hewitt: No such research has been commissioned. Advice received at the end of last year from the Postal Services Commission on transitional assistance to the rural post office network is under consideration. In addition, the Government have made available a £2 million fund to support volunteer and community initiatives to maintain or reopen post office facilities in rural areas where traditional services would otherwise close.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list those businesses overseas which have been acquired by Consignia over the last five years, together with the price paid. [30625]

Ms Hewitt: Consignia plc has advised that it has acquired overseas companies as listed in the table.

Consignia plc: overseas acquisitions

Company	*Consignia shareholding (%)*	*Total investment £ million*
CityMail Group	11.2	5
Citipost	100	28
Crie Group	100	15
Der Kurier	100	9
Extand SA	100	97
German Parcel	100	308
GP Austria	100	14
NPD	100	72
Pakke-Trans	100	20
Williames	100	10
CityMail Sweden	67	23
Domberger Paket Dienst	100	45
DGE S.p.A 49 per cent./Agone	49/100	29
DGE S.p.A 51 per cent.	51	10
Szybka Pazcka	25	7
GP Slovenia	100	1
GP Czechoslovakia	100	1
Stafetten	100	2
G3WW	24.5	35
M Express	100	1
FDS	100	5
CFI Ltd.	100	8

Note:

The numbers quoted above are total investment. As such they are based on acquisition price/transaction costs/debt assumed/capex and taxations i.e. they reflect the total planned investment in the projects by Consignia.

Enron

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the ultimate parent company of Wainstones Plc is Enron. [30708]

Mr. Wilson: In the last accounts filed with Companies House by Wainstones Power Ltd., the ultimate parent company is given as Xcel Energy, formerly known as Northern States Power Company and incorporated in the USA.

Space Research

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what measures have been introduced since 1997 to assist the British National Space Centre and the European Space Programme; [32526]

(2) if she will make a statement on the British National Space Centre and its latest projects [32524]

Ms Hewitt: My noble Friend the Minister for Science and Innovation, announced on 15 November 2001 that the United Kingdom had subscribed £380 million over the next 10 years to the space-related research programmes of the European Space Agency. Details of this and other major announcements since 1997 by the British National Space Centre in relation to the European Space Agency are listed in the table.

Date of announcement	*Financial commitment in £million*	*Programmes*
November 2001	£4.68 over six years	ARTES 1 (satellite telecommunications)
	£49.85 over six years	ARTES 3 (satellite telecommunications)
	£35 over five years	ARTES 4 (satellite telecommunications)
	£12.6 over two years	InfoTerra/TerraSar (operational earth observation)
	£7.23 over five years	Global Monitoring for Environment and Security
	£147.1 over 10 years	Living Planet programme (Earth Observation Envelope Programme)
	£130 over four years	Astronomy and planetary science including new space exploration programme Aurora
	£1.4 over 3 years	Ariane Infrastructure
	£71 over five years	European Space Agency general budget
October 2001	£1	National programme—Earth Observation instrumentation development
December 1999	£1.4 over three years	EMIR-2X (microgravity and life sciences)
August 1999	£10.5 over three years	ARTES (satellite telecommunications)
	£5	Beagle 2 (UK project to be launched on a European Space Agency mission)
May 1999	£128 over four years	Astronomy and planetary science programme
	£56 over four years	European Space Agency general budget
	£8	Galileo definition stage
	£4.5 over five years	ARTES 1 and 4 (satellite telecommunications)
	£67 million over 3 years	Living Planet programme (Earth Observation Envelope Programme)
September 1998	£5	Satellite navigation
	£4	Living Planet programme (Earth Observation Envelope Programme)
	£1.65	ENVISAT data processing/archiving

Date of announcement	*Financial commitment in £million*	*Programmes*
April 1998	£2	General Support Technology Programme
	£2	ARTES 4 (satellite telecommunications)
	£0.5	SMART 1 (technology research)
March 1998	£6.7 over three years	ARTES 3 (satellite telecommunications)
	£8.1 over two years	ERS 2 operations (earth observation)
	£6.4 over five years	Earth Observation preparatory programme

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent meetings she has had with European colleagues on space research and exploration. [32525]

Ms Hewitt: In recent months I have not attended any meetings with European colleagues at which space research and exploration was specifically discussed. However, my noble Friend the Minister for Science and Innovation attended the Ministerial Council of the European Space Agency on 14–15 November 2001, which the United Kingdom hosted in Edinburgh. At this meeting it was agreed the UK would subscribe to the study phase of a potential European programme for exploration of the solar system, the Aurora programme. The Minister also attended the October Research Council which discussed the Global Monitoring for Environment and Security initiative, and the December Research Council where some conclusions on space policy were adopted. More recently he attended a bilateral with the Spanish Science Minister at which the subject of the European global satellite navigation system (Galileo) was raised.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Criminal Justice

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the independent cross-community and lay element incorporated into the complaints mechanism available for juveniles in the criminal justice system is; what representations he has received concerning the compliance of this mechanism with the UN Rules on the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of Their Liberty; what the terms of reference are of his review of the complaints mechanisms and induction material; and if he will place the relevant documents in the Library. [29951]

Mr. Browne: Existing mechanisms for dealing with complaints within Juvenile Justice Centres are operated by an independent Juvenile Justice Board, as required by the Secretary of State. These arrangements, which are fully explained to all young people entering custody, include child protection protocols, planned and unannounced inspections by the Social Services Inspectorate and an Independent Representation Scheme provided by the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO).

The existing arrangements are broadly in accordance with the United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty, and as such no representations have been received by the Secretary of State in relation to their compliance. However, in line with the recommendations made in the Criminal Justice Review, they are being reviewed by a development team, established by the Juvenile Justice Board, as part of a much wider brief to develop new operating policies and procedures in preparation for the closure of Lisnevin and the move to a single centre on the existing Rathgael site.

The development team's remit is currently in draft form and will be placed in the Library when it is finalised.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many applications have been received by the Criminal Cases Review Commission in each year since its creation; what the proportion of outcomes were; and what the average time taken for each stage in the processing of an application was compared to the equivalent times for cases in England and Wales. [29952]

Mr. Browne: The following table indicates the number of applications received each year since the Commission commenced operations.

Year	*All applications*	*Northern Ireland applications*
1997–98	1,382	28
1998–99	1,037	8
1999–2000	777	14
2000–01	799	9
2001–02[1]	610	5
Totals	4,605	64

[1] To 31 December 2001

The status of the Northern Ireland cases at 1 January 2002 is: eight cases have been referred back to the courts, the Commission has decided not to refer 39 cases back to the courts, 11 cases are currently under review and six cases await review.

Information is not readily available on the average time taken by the Commission at each stage of it processes. However, the Commission handles all cases, regardless of their origin, according to the same set of procedures and priorities.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what date the Criminal Justice Board established a Public Information and Education Sub-Group; who comprises this group; what its terms of reference are; on what dates the sub-group has met; and what its work programme is for 2002–03. [33784]

Mr. Browne: The Public Information Working Group, comprising representatives from the six statutory criminal justice organisations, was established on 6 June 2001.

Since then the group has met on 6 September, 24 October and 27 November. A work programme for 2002–03 is under development.

I have arranged for a copy of the terms of reference for the Working Group to be placed in the Library of the House.

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what additional security measures are planned by his Department to deter and detect theft and fraud. [31790]

Dr. John Reid: Policies and physical security measures relating to theft and fraud are considered adequate at present. However, they are kept under review and updated as and when the need arises.

Departmental Salary Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit in 2001–02 will be accounted for by salary costs and pension contributions. [32018]

Dr. John Reid: The proportion of the departmental expenditure limit (excluding NDPBs) in 2001–02 accounted for by salary costs and pension contributions is as follows:

Total departmental expenditure limit—£1,056,836,000

Total salary and pension costs—£113,533,000

Proportion—10.74 per cent. (approx.)

This is an estimate, as exact figures will not be known until the end of this financial year.

Departmental Leave Entitlements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the average annual leave entitlement of staff in his Department in each of the last four years. [31747]

Dr. John Reid: The average annual leave entitlement of staff in my department in each of the last four years was 26 days.

Victims of Terrorism

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much funding has been made available to support the victims of terrorist violence in Northern Ireland since 10 April 1998. [30415]

Mr. Browne: In response to Sir Kenneth Bloomfield's report, "We Will Remember Them", this Government have thus far allocated £18.25 million specifically to help address the needs of Victims of the Troubles. (See breakdown under heading 'funding for victims').

Criminal injuries and damage compensation

In addition, we anticipate that this year alone the bills for criminal injuries and damage compensation to victims of crime in Northern Ireland will be £55 million and £9 million respectively. More than £1.5 billion has been spent in compensation for criminal injuries and damage since 1968–69 (not possible to break these figures down into troubles-related and other crime).

Devolved Administration's contribution

The devolved Administration are also committed to addressing the needs of victims and have so far provided £1.6 million as part of a larger package of EU funding of £6.67 million to victims. They are also currently working to put in place a cross-departmental strategy for ensuring that the needs of victims are met through effective, high quality help and services.

Support initiatives for the security forces

Government have made available more than £1 million to the George Cross Foundation to mark the sacrifices and honour the achievements of the RUC. (The George Cross Foundation has taken on responsibility for the establishment of a Garden of Remembrance and a new RUC museum).

Government have established a police fund which aims to bring additional assistance to police officers and their families directly affected as a result of terrorism. From this fund £4.2 million was paid in a tax free, lump sum payment to police widows, widowed prior to November 1982, as a direct result of terrorism.

The Government have funded the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust (PRRT) to a total of £8.1 million (£4.5 million allocated for three year period in March 1999 and £3.6 million allocated for a further two years, 2002–04). The PRRT was conceived to provide assistance aimed at the rehabilitation of ex-officers who were injured on duty and retraining for those leaving or expected to leave the force.

Funding for victims

Since publication of Sir Kenneth Bloomfield's report "We Will Remember Them" in 1998, over £18.25 million has been made available for victims' initiatives. Funding has so far included:

£700,000 for a Family Trauma Centre which provides therapeutic service addressing the psychological needs of families and young people.

£300,000 for an Educational Bursary Pilot Scheme—for individuals whose education was directly affected by the Troubles, 350 people received awards.

£3 million to the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund with a commitment of a further £2 million at a rate of £1 million per year for the next two years.

The fund has put in place a number of schemes including:

The Small Grants Scheme

The Chronic Pain Management Scheme

The Respite Break Scheme

The Wheelchair Assessment Scheme

The Amputee Assessment Scheme

The Education and Training Scheme

£225,000 for a Victim Support Grants Scheme (now closed) to assist community groups and voluntary organisations to take forward recommendations in the Bloomfield report.

£6.1 million core funding for groups who support Victims of the Troubles.

£500,000 for initiatives in Great Britain including £250,000 for the Legacy Project. This project aims to identify and meet the needs of Victims of the Troubles living in Great Britain.

£1.5 million over next three years for the development of the Northern Ireland Centre for Trauma and Transformation.

£750,000 to fund the re-introduction of the Small Grants Scheme for victims' groups.

£1.5 million over next two years to the devolved Administration's Strategy Implementation Fund to help NI Departments fulfil their commitment to addressing victims' needs.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Television Sets

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many *(a)* integrated digital and *(b)* analogue television sets have been bought by her Department in each of the last 24 months; and if she will publish the guidance given to officials making decisions on television purchases. [33236]

Clare Short: My Department has purchased two television sets in the last two years, both digital. These are being installed in our newly-opened public information area, "infoZone", at our 1 Palace street office.

We have no guidelines specifically on the purchase of televisions.

Burundi

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her Department's aid priorities in Burundi. [32277]

Clare Short: DFID does not have extensive developmental links with Burundi. We are seeking to support international efforts to promote an end to conflict and achieve a secure and lasting peace. We are at the same time supporting humanitarian programmes largely through non-governmental channels. In the current financial year we have committed £1 million for support for emergency health and nutrition programmes, and for the promotion of human rights and political dialogue. We envisage increasing this support during 2002. In addition the UK's share of ECHO's £20 million humanitarian budget for Burundi in 2001 was some £4 million. We have also committed £5.175 million for the implementation of a three-year project tackling the pressing problem of HIV/AIDS in Burundi, and have provisionally allocated US$1 million to the proposed Multilateral Debt Trust Fund for this country.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the instances in which her Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies failed to pay valid invoices within 30 days or after the agreed credit period in the financial year 2000–01. [32040]

Clare Short: During the financial year 2000–01 my Department received 42,171 invoices in respect of goods or services and 40,762 (96.7 per cent.) of these bills were paid promptly. However given the nature of my Department's work and the involvement of our overseas offices in the payment cycle it is more difficult for us to achieve a high level of performance than it is for most other Government Departments.

Ispat International

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has received from employees or directors of Ispat International between May 1997 and December 2001; and if she will list them by date and subject. [33112]

Clare Short: None.

Goma

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress is being made with the distribution of food to those people in Goma affected by the recent volcanic eruptions. [31667]

Clare Short: To date 1,204 tonnes of food have been distributed to people in Goma and surrounding areas affected by the volcanic eruptions. This has met the most urgent needs although the World Food Programme is currently working to improve its capacity to target the most vulnerable. Food monitors are expected to arrive shortly. A further 927 displaced living in the hard-to-reach island of Idjwi are expected to receive their first distribution of food shortly. AAA, a German NGO, is managing the distribution of 23 tonnes of food (beans, maize, oil, salt, sugar). The UK has allocated £2 million to meet the most urgent humanitarian needs, including food.

Rwanda

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has made on the state of refugee camps in Rwanda. [31665]

Clare Short: The conditions in the camps are not a cause for alarm and improvements are in hand. The Rwandan authorities are co-operating with the effort to improve conditions.

Prior to the eruption of Nyarigongo on 18 January, there were about 31,000 Congolese, and 500 Burundian refugees in Rwanda. Although many more Congolese came to Rwanda in the immediate aftermath, most of these quickly returned to Congo.

On 24 January the UN estimated that there were about 11,000 displaced by the eruption remaining in Nkamira and Mudende camps in Rwanda. The UK has provided £250,000 to the British Red Cross, who are responsible for basic services in the camps.

Departmental Secondments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many staff in her Department have been seconded to jobs in the *(a)* private and *(b)* public sector in each of the last four years. [31771]

Clare Short: The figures requested are as follows:

	Private sector	*Public sector*[1]
1997–98	1	22
1998–99	1	38
1999–2000	1	41
2000–01	1	49

[1] Most staff in this category have been seconded overseas to international development institutions and the European Commission.

Education

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she is making to the IMF on the need to include financing free basic education in the public spending targets they set for developing countries; and if she will make a statement. [33521]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

The UK has been at the forefront of encouraging the IMF to reform their medium term programmes to ensure that these deliver growth and poverty reduction. A key element of the new design of IMF programmes is the undertaking to support pro-poor budgets, which includes protecting and expanding where possible education spending. In recent years the IMF programmes have supported the introduction of free education in several countries, including Uganda and Tanzania.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wheelchair Access

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee if he will assess the accessibility for persons in wheelchairs of positions for advisers to Ministers in *(a)* Committee rooms and *(b)* the Chamber. [33361]

Derek Conway: All Committee rooms, including those in Portcullis House, have wide doors and are accessible to wheelchair users. In most rooms, furniture can be moved to provide space for wheelchairs, although manoeuvrability is limited in Committee rooms 9, 10, 11, 12 and 14 because of the fixed furniture and fittings. If an adviser using a wheelchair was needed to support a Minister, special arrangements could be made.

There are no plans to make the Officials' Box in the Chamber accessible to wheelchair users. If a wheelchair-using adviser was required to support a Minister, he or she would be able to do so from the area adjacent to the Officials' Box. A handrail has been fixed in the Officials' Box to assist people with disabilities.

Television Sets

Mr. Yeo: To ask the President of the Council how many *(a)* integrated digital and *(b)* analogue television sets have been bought by his Department in each of the last 24 months; and if he will publish the guidance given to officials making decisions on television purchases. [33230]

Mr. Robin Cook: The Privy Council Office has bought two analogue television sets during this period, but does not own any digital televisions. No specific guidance has been issued by my Department on the purchase of television sets. Both televisions were purchased from an approved supplier.

Computer Equipment

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the President of the Council how many installations of computer equipment in hon. Members' offices *(a)* within the parliamentary estate and *(b)* elsewhere since the inception of the current scheme remain incomplete; and how many were satisfactorily completed (i) within the timetable agreed with each Member concerned and (ii) by the end of each month including and since July 2001. [31111]

Mr. Robin Cook: Approximately 1,280 installations have been undertaken since 5 July 2001, just over half of them on the parliamentary estate. 61 are awaiting completion. Many of these have been deferred at the Member's request and await further instructions.

Satisfaction levels with the new equipment are generally high.

The number of installations completed during each month since July 2001 is shown in the table.

	Number of installations
July 2001	0
August and September 2001	229
October 2001	315
November 2001	550
December 2001	142
January 2002[1]	44
Total	1,280

[1] Until 28 January.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the President of the Council how many hon. Members have had computer equipment installed in offices *(a)* within the parliamentary estate and *(b)* elsewhere since the inception of the current scheme; and of them how many were not Members of the last Parliament. [31110]

Mr. Robin Cook: 528 Members have had equipment installed since the arrangements for central provision of IT equipment took effect in July. The number of installations to date is 1,280, and just over half of these were on the parliamentary estate. 95 of the Members who have received this equipment were not Members of the last Parliament.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the President of the Council how many contractors have been retained to install computer equipment in Members' offices *(a)* within the parliamentary estate and *(b)* elsewhere since the inception of the current scheme; and what assessment he has undertaken of their effectiveness. [31112]

Mr. Robin Cook: A third party supplier, Computacenter, provided contractors to install this equipment. I understand that up to 20 individuals were engaged on this task on any given day. A breakdown of their place of work is not readily available.

Officials monitored the performance of the contractor by means of a system of weekly review. Any concerns were passed on to the contractor for action. We are hopeful that shortcomings experienced in the early months of the scheme have now been rectified and that the contractor is now meeting key targets.

WALES

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what events *(a)* he is and *(b)* other Ministers in his Department are planning to attend as part of the Golden Jubilee celebrations; and what events his Department is planning to arrange to celebrate the Golden Jubilee. [33255]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 58w.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Antisocial Behaviour

13. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to tackle antisocial behaviour and disorder in communities. [29861]

Mr. Denham: The Government are taking urgent action to tackle antisocial behaviour and disorder. My right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary, has already outlined the measures we are taking to increase the effectiveness of antisocial behaviour order (ASBOs). These include proposals to:

extend the power to apply for ASBOs to the British Transport Police and registered Social Landlords

introduce an interim ASBO that can be issued prior to a full hearing

extend the power to make ASBOs to county courts

allowing ASBOs to 'travel with the person' in circumstances where the behaviour is likely to be repeated elsewhere.

We are also speeding up the youth justice system as well as bringing in new community sentences for youth offenders such as Final Warnings, Child Safety Orders and Parenting Orders. Additionally, in the Police Reform Bill we propose new powers for the extended police family to tackle anti-social behaviour.

25. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the use of antisocial behaviour orders in south Wales. [29873]

Mr. Denham: South Wales police were granted four ASBOs between April 1999 and September 2001. Applications are in progress in a number of other cases.

South Wales police have a six-step strategy for dealing with antisocial behaviour, the application for an ASBO is the final step in that strategy. Other measures for dealing with antisocial behaviour include Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs), prosecutions, warning letters, diversion schemes, mediation schemes and multi-agency case conferences.

28. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to help the police tackle antisocial behaviour in small towns and villages. [29876]

Mr. Denham: We have introduced a range of measures to tackle antisocial behaviour, which apply equally in all areas of the country. These include antisocial behaviour orders, child curfews and changes to the youth justice system. In addition, we have introduced new community sentences for youth offenders including Reparation Orders, Final Warnings, Child Safety Orders and Parenting Orders. We have also made additional funding available for the reduction of rural crime.

31. **Mr. Borrow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders have been successfully applied for in the area covered by the Lancashire constabulary. [29879]

Mr. Denham: From the introduction of antisocial behaviour orders in April 1999 to the end of September 2001 (the last point to which data are available), 16 orders have been granted to the Lancashire Constabulary.

Zimbabwe

14. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to ensure that those at risk of persecution are not returned to Zimbabwe. [29862]

Angela Eagle: All applications for asylum are considered in accordance with our obligations under the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary decided on 15 January to suspend removals of unsuccessful asylum seekers to Zimbabwe until after the presidential election is held. We will then assess the country situation and the risks faced by individual returnees and decide whether to resume removals.

Young Offenders

15. **Dr. Starkey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he is taking to tackle persistent youth offending. [29863]

Mr. Blunkett: The Government's youth justice reforms include a wide range of measures to deal with persistent young offenders. We have delivered the youth justice pledge by halving the time from arrest to sentence for persistent young offenders; funded the youth justice board's intensive supervision and surveillance programme for the most prolific offenders; provided direct support to address youth street crime in London; and introduced the detention and training order for persistent and more serious young offenders. We are also providing the courts with new powers to remand to secure accommodation for those juveniles who commit offences while on bail.

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisons in the juvenile estate provide a pre-release scheme. [29606]

Beverley Hughes: All juvenile establishments work with Youth Offending Teams to plan the transfer of the young person into the community phase of the Detention and Training Order. Juvenile establishments plan a young person's release from prison with the young person's community supervising officer and where applicable his/her parents or carers. Release is planned from the start of a sentence through a series of meetings and action plans. A final meeting takes place 10 days before release in order to finalise arrangements for on-going support in the community. The personal officer from the custody setting then attends the first training plan meeting in the community. This ensures that the two parts of the sentence are linked. Sentence planning forms part of this process and is, so far as is possible, tailored to individual needs.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young offenders aged 10 to 16 years are in institutions by region according to their home address expressed as *(a)* a percentage and *(b)* the total number, ranked in descending order according to percentages for the latest date for which figures are available. [30595]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* The number and percentage of juveniles (10 to 16-year-olds) detained in secure establishments broken down by home region on 31 December 2001 is shown in the table.

Home region	*Number of juvenile offenders in secure establishments*	*Percentage of total number of juvenile offenders*
North West	230	17.5
West Midlands	203	15.5
London	188	14.3
Yorkshire	171	13.0
East Midlands	120	9.2
South East	97	7.4
Wales	93	7.1
Eastern	84	6.4
South West	69	5.3
North East	56	4.3
Total	1,311	100.0

Cannabis

16. **Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on recent changes in policy on prosecution for possession of cannabis. [29864]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) is responsible for prosecuting criminal offences. There has been no change in CPS's policy on prosecution of offences for possession of cannabis.

Graffiti

17. **Siobhain McDonagh:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action his Department is taking against graffiti. [29865]

Mr. Denham: Writing graffiti will normally constitute an offence under the Criminal Damage Act 1971. Where criminal proceedings are not appropriate, it can also be dealt with through a number of measures designed to address antisocial behaviour, including antisocial behaviour orders.

Our neighbourhood wardens programme and proposals for community safety officers will help to reduce yobbish behaviour, such as graffiti writing, in our neighbourhoods. We are also providing support through the Youth Justice Board for a range of projects to combat the problem of youth crime, including graffiti.

Crime Detection

18. **Miss Kirkbride:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the crime detection rate. [29866]

Mr. Denham: In the year ending March 2001, just under 1.25 million recorded crimes were detected. This amounted to 24 per cent. of all recorded crime in England and Wales in 2000–01.

This figure is much higher for some crimes than for others—for example, 62 per cent. of all crimes of violence against the person were detected. Of that figure, 90 per cent. of homicides and 81 per cent. of attempted murders were detected.

There are also striking variations in performance at both force and basic command unit (BCU) level. For example, in 2000–01, the detection rate for burglary across thirty comparable urban BCUs varied from 27.7 per cent. to just 5.5 per cent.

There cannot be any justification for such variable performance in similar parts of the country. That is why the work of the Standards Unit will be so important: it is the means by which we will identify and spread good practice, driving the performance of all forces up to that of the best.

Sex Offences

21. **Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase child protection through new sentences for sex offenders. [29869]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We are looking at tougher determinate sentences for sex offenders that will ensure they stay in prison, up to the full term if necessary, or as long as they continue to present a risk of serious harm to our communities and that they are subject to strict and extended supervision on release.

In addition the Government are concerned that the law should provide clear and coherent offences that protect all victims of sexual exploitation, especially children and the more vulnerable, with penalties that enable the appropriate punishment of abusers. My Home Office colleagues and I are currently reviewing the existing laws on sex offences with a view to introducing strengthened legislation when parliamentary time allows.

Home Detention and Curfew Orders

24. **David Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the use of home detention and curfew orders; and if he will make a statement. [29872]

Beverley Hughes: Decisions to release prisoners on home detention curfew (HDC) are a matter for indiviual Governors, within the guidance set down by the Prison Service, including a requirement for a rigorous risk assessment. Research undertaken by the Home Office shows that home detention curfew helps prisoners to make the transition between prison and the community. (Home Office Research Study 222, Electronic monitoring of released prisoners and evaluation of the Home Detention Curfew scheme, March 2001). We have asked Governors to make full use of the scheme where they can do so without unacceptable risk to public safety.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has also announced this morning at the Prison Service Conference, his intention to increase the maximum period that a curfewee may spend on HDC from two months to three months. The eligibility criteria, and the risk assessment process will not change.

Police Morale

26. **Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the state of police morale. [29874]

Mr. Denham: There is no established direct method of measuring the level of morale in the police service.

We are actively improving the resources of the police so they can play their key part in tackling crime and disorder and improving community safety. We are also determined to tackle those elements of police officers' working lives that can create frustration and detract from their ability to do their jobs in the way that they would wish.

We are committed to investment in scientific and technological support and to reducing the burden of unnecessary bureaucracy. This should help officers to spend as much of their time as possible on the front line.

The Police Negotiating Board (PNB) has agreed in principle to a package of reforms to police pay and conditions of service.

The agreement is subject to ratification by all parties by the end of February. We believe that, taking the package as a whole, it will benefit the vast majority of officers.

An ambitious programme of work in police training has begun to raise professional standards for officers and support staff, and to achieve greater consistency nationally.

We have turned around the decline in police numbers that started under the last Government. Police numbers rose by 2,645 officers in the 12 months to September 2001, taking national strength to 127,231, the highest since February 1995. This increase, of 2.1 per cent. is the largest single annual increase in police numbers for 20 years.

We have set the police service a target to reach record numbers of officers by this April, and 130,000 officers by spring 2003.

Crime (Gwent)

22. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the level of crime in Gwent. [29870]

Mr. Denham: In the 12 months to March 2001, crime in Gwent fell 5.7 per cent.

Car Crime

27. **Andrew Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the *(a)* rates of detection and *(b)* impact on victims of car crime. [29875]

Mr. Denham: The successful detection and prosecution of offenders are among the key factors in ensuring that victims of crime are satisfied with the criminal justice system. Others include the provision to victims of adequate information about their cases, personal support, and compensation.

Sentencing

29. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his plans to amend sentencing policy. [29877]

Mr. Keith Bradley: In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, West (Stephen Hesford) on 21 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 355W, I said that I anticipated publishing a White Paper in spring 2002. That is still my intention. Earlier today I announced the publication of an overview of the responses to the consultation on the proposals arising from the review of the sentencing framework (the Halliday Report) a copy of which is being provided to each Member of Parliament.

Ms Munn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he took to ensure that the views of young people were considered in his consultation on sentencing reform and the criminal courts. [29868]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Young people participated in the on-line consultation on the Fairer Sentencing website. They were able to contribute to the reform of criminal courts by visiting the review website. I am also attending events at various university law schools with the aim of giving young people an opportunity to express their views on this issue.

Mr. Anthony D. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish a summary of the responses to the public consultation on the review of the sentencing framework. [33486]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The summary of responses has been published today, 4 February 2002. Copies of the summary are being sent to each Member of Parliament and will be placed in the Library. Further copies will be available in the Vote Office and in the Printed Paper Office.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 843W, on prison sentences, if he will break down the numbers of prison sentences into the categories of offences for which custody of five years or over was handed down in each of those years. [31330]

Beverley Hughes: The table contains the information requested.

Number of persons sentenced to immediate custody of five years or over in England and Wales, 1998 to 2000

Offence	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Murder	254	252	243
Attempted murder	47	59	55
Threat or conspiracy to murder	16	15	22
Manslaughter	101	101	112
Child destruction	—	1	—
Causing death by dangerous driving	43	25	44
Manslaughter due to diminished responsibility	3	7	7
Causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs	8	7	7
Wounding or other act endangering life	366	370	394
Other wounding etc.	33	28	47
Cruelty to or neglect of children	—	1	4
Child abduction	1	4	—
Buggery	72	50	54

Number of persons sentenced to immediate custody of five years or over in England and Wales, 1998 to 2000

Offence	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Indecent assault on a male	44	35	20
Rape of a female	494	474	442
Rape of a male	30	33	25
Indecent assault on a female	90	95	96
Unlawful sexual intercourse with a girl under 13	7	10	7
Incest	11	9	9
Procuration	—	1	—
Burglary in a dwelling	141	166	134
Aggravated burglary in a dwelling	58	65	59
Burglary in a building other than a dwelling	20	16	14
Aggravated burglary in a building not a dwelling	4	4	8
Robbery	646	693	749
Blackmail	13	16	8
Kidnapping, etc.	51	59	61
Theft from the person of another	10	4	4
Theft by an employee	2	1	1
Theft or unauthorised taking from mail	—	1	—
Theft from vehicle	—	1	—
Theft from shops	3	—	1
Theft or unauthorised taking of motor vehicle	4	—	1
Other theft or unauthorised taking	2	4	4
Fraud by company director etc.	4	—	1
False accounting	1	—	1
Other fraud	35	23	31
Handling stolen goods	18	10	7
Arson	73	59	51
Criminal damage endangering life	4	12	5
Other criminal damage	2	—	1
Threat etc., to commit criminal damage	3	—	—
Other forgery etc.	3	—	6
Violent disorder	1	1	2
Perjury	—	—	1
Gross indecency with children	2	5	11
Assist entry of illegal immigrant	5	3	9
Perverting the course of justice	6	1	6
Absconding from lawful custody	—	2	1
Firearms Act offence	13	11	8
Revenue law offence	—	1	—
Other (excluding motoring offences)	12	17	12
Unlawful importation of drugs			
Class A	400	499	549
Class B	88	79	57
Class C	3	—	—
Class unspecified	53	26	13
Unlawful exportation of drugs			
Class A	2	4	3
Class B	4	1	—
Class unspecified	3	—	1
Production, supply and possession with intent to supply a controlled drug			
Class A	433	549	550
Class B	56	56	51
Class C	—	—	1
Class unspecified	7	28	8
Possession of a controlled drug			
Class A	6	4	6
Class B	1	1	—
Other drug offences	11	10	9
Total	3,823	4,009	4,033

Police Retention

30. **Dr. Pugh:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy to improve the retention of police officers. [29878]

Mr. Denham: Police numbers rose by 2.1 per cent. in the 12 months to September 2001. Wastage from the police service, at around 5 per cent. of strength for the last four years, is low compared to other occupations.

But we recognise the importance of retaining the skills and commitment of experienced officers.

An ambitious programme of work in police training has begun to raise professional standards for officers and support staff, and to achieve greater consistency nationally.

We are also addressing retention issues as part of the police reform process.

The Police Negotiating Board (PNB) has agreed in principle to a package of reforms to police pay and conditions of service. The agreement is subject to ratification by all parties by the end of February. We believe that, taking the package as a whole, it will benefit the vast majority of officers.

The PNB package includes more flexible arrangements to retain officers who are entitled to retire with maximum pension benefits.

We also intend to remove the requirement for part-time officers to work a minimum of 16 hours a week. This will help improve retention of officers with parental or caring responsibilities.

We are also developing an Occupational Health strategy which will provide support of officers who are injured or ill and will help forces improve sickness management and reduce medical retirements.

British Crime Survey

32. **Mr. Frank Cook:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the level of crime recorded by the British Crime Survey. [29881]

Mr. Denham: The latest British Crime Survey shows that since 1997 overall crime has fallen by 21 per cent., violent crime by 23 per cent., domestic burglary by 35 per cent., and vehicle related theft by 24 per cent. The survey also showed that the chance of becoming a victim of crime is at its lowest since the survey began.

Police (Funding)

33. **Mrs. Helen Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria he applied in deferring the provisional funding settlement for police authorities in 2002–03. [29882]

Mr. Denham: The provisional police funding settlement is routinely announced in association with the provisional local government finance settlement. The settlement announcement for 2002–03 was moved from 29 November to 4 December as a result of the progress of other parliamentary business.

Police Constables

34. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the future of the office of police constable. [29883]

Mr. Denham: We have no plans to change the status of constables as office holders under the Crown.

Police Expenditure (Wales)

35. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what role his Department has in relation to decisions by the appropriate Secretary in the National Assembly for Wales to *(a)* set limits on and *(b)* cap the expenditure of a police authority; and if he will make a statement. [29884]

Mr. Denham: Police authorities in Wales, as in England, are responsible for setting budgets and precepts. However, local government finance is a devolved issue. Reserve powers over local authority budgets under the terms of the Local Government Act 1999, rest, for police authorities in Wales, with the National Assembly for Wales.

Asylum Seekers

36. **Martin Linton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his plans to reform the system of financial support for asylum seekers. [29885]

Angela Eagle: We intend to introduce a new system by autumn 2002 which will replace vouchers. We are examining the best method of using the new Application Registration Card to access appropriate cash payments. Our aim is a scheme which will be more efficient and less socially divisive.

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time has been over the last six months for individuals granted refugee status to have their grant confirmed in writing. [31946]

Angela Eagle: I regret that the information requested is not readily available, and could be obtained only by examination of individual case records and is, therefore, available only at disproportionate cost.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with children's organisations on how the proposals in the forthcoming asylum White Paper will affect asylum-seeking children and young people. [31821]

Angela Eagle: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan) on 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 302W.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many detainees and asylum seekers will be kept in Winchester prison as of 31 January. [33060]

Angela Eagle: The temporary use of a number of local prisons to provide additional spaces for immigration detainees ended on 12 January. This includes Her Majesty's prison Winchester.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to implement the increase in the cash allowance for asylum seekers supported by NASS; [30827]

(2) what plans he has for the general uprating of support for asylum seekers in line with changes in income support to be introduced in April 2002. [30828]

Angela Eagle: We will introduce these changes to the voucher scheme operated by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) on 8 April 2002. The cash element of subsistence support will be uprated from £10 to £14 and the levels of support will be increased so that the 70 per cent. parity with income support rates for adults and 100 per cent. parity for children are restored. The new rates of support are shown in the table (applicable only to asylum seekers supported by NASS).

Revised levels of voucher support for NASS supported asylum seekers and any dependants from 8 April 2002

£

	Current levels of support since 3 April 2000	*Levels of support from 8 April 2002*
Qualifying couple	57.37	59.26
Lone parent aged 18 or over	36.54	37.77
Single person aged 25 or over	36.54	37.77
Single person aged at least 18 but under 25	28.95	29.89
Person aged at least 16 but under 18 (except a member of a qualifying couple)	31.75	32.50

Asylum seekers in receipt of the full support package (accommodation and subsistence) receive fully furnished accommodation including cooking utensils. Council tax and utilities are paid for centrally.

Drug Awareness

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what initiatives he is taking to promote drug awareness. [29867]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: A key focus of the government's anti-drug strategy is ensuring young people and their parents or carers are aware of the dangers of drugs and where to get help. Drugs education policies are in place in 93 per cent. of secondary and 75 per cent. of primary schools. Information about drugs is routinely sent to schools, GP surgeries and police stations. In December, we launched a campaign to raise the awareness of the risks of drugs and to encourage young people, their parents or carers to call the National Drugs Helpline on 0800 776600 for reliable and credible information about the harm drugs cause.

Gibraltar

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the number of Gibraltarians resident in the UK. [32021]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. George Howarth, dated 4 January 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question about the number of Gibraltarians resident in the United Kingdom. (3202)

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) provides estimates of numbers of UK residents by country of birth and by nationality. The estimate of the number of UK residents who were born in Gibraltar, based on an average over the 12 month period December 2002 to November 2001, is 12,000. The LFS sample size is too small to provide a reliable estimate of the number of nationals to Gibraltar who are resident in the UK.

Monaghan Bombings Inquiry

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will expedite the provision of relevant material relating to the 1974 Monaghan bombings to the Committee of Inquiry; and if he will make a statement. [22389]

Jane Kennedy: I have been asked to reply.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland met with Mr. Justice Barron, sole member of the independent inquiry into the Dublin/Monaghan and Dundalk bombings, on 17 January. The then Royal Ulster Constabulary (now the Police Service of Northern Ireland) and the Northern Ireland Forensic Science Agency have already provided replies to a number of points raised by the inquiry. The Secretary of State is not yet in a position to provide the information requested from the Government; he hopes to do so in the near future.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many officials from his Department have attended the environmental appraisal and integration into policy training course run by the Civil Service College. [29012]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* One official is due to attend the course in February 2002. Officials have also attended Civil Service College courses on environmental and energy issues and environmental management systems. Officials have also attended seminars and workshops on a number of environmental issues such as energy management, green transport, waste and procurement. The Department has also held a green purchasing symposium for procurement staff and a number of seminars for building managers.

The Prison Service has also arranged training for staff on energy management, green procurement and environmental management systems and has plans to include an environmental booklet in their staff induction package.

Board of Visitors

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications to see a member of the Board of Visitors have been made since April 2000. [29600]

Beverley Hughes: This information is not held centrally. All applications to the board from prisoners are recorded in a book which is inspected by the Governor on a regular basis. A manual count at each of the 136 establishments would be required and this would be time consuming and costly.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 10 December 2001 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Mr. John Alvsine Bangura. [29961]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 4 February.

Police Pensions

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if contributions to the Police Pension Scheme made before 5 April 1978 took into account provision for a pro rata pension for widows; and for what reason pensions are not paid to the widows of police officers who married or re-married after their retirement if that retirement was before 5 April 1978. [30762]

Mr. Denham: It is a principle in public service pension schemes that members are required to contribute towards the cost of their benefits. Prior to 5 April 1978 the police scheme attracted a widow's pension of half the husband's pension. However, in line with other public service pension schemes, it did not provide survivor benefits for wives married to those who had already retired from the police service. Officers' pension contributions at the time reflected this. The greater current contribution rate of 11 per cent. partly reflects the additional benefit of the provision of pensions for post-retirement widows.

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers are claiming a retirement pension; and how many of those retired before 5 April 1978. [30750]

Mr. Denham: The data requested are not collated centrally.

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers who retired before 5 April 1978 remarried after that date; and what estimate he has made of *(a)* the average pension payment and *(b)* the total cost to the Government of paying widows of those police officers on the same basis as the widows of police officers who retired after that date. [30751]

Mr. Denham: The data requested are not available centrally. The Government Actuary's Department has estimated that the capitalised cost of agreeing to this retrospective change across public service pension schemes would be in the region of £300 million to £500 million.

Internet and Computer Crime

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent meetings he has had on an international level to discuss the problems of internet and computer crime. [30818]

Mr. Denham: Officials have taken part in recent discussions in the G8 Hi-Tech Crime Subgroup, expert meetings in Europol and more generally within the European Union and Council of Europe.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been arrested and charged with internet and computer crime since 1997; and what sentences they have received where convicted. [30817]

Mr. Denham: No information is collected on numbers of people charged. Also the statistics available on arrests do not identify internet and computer crimes separately.

The available information, taken from the Home Office Court Proceedings Database, relates to England and Wales for the years 1999 and 2000 and is shown in the tables. It covers persons proceeded against under the Computer Misuse Act 1990, those convicted, together with sentences received.

Persons proceeded against under the Computer Misuse Act 1990, England and Wales, 1999 and 2000

Offence description	*Statute*	*Proceeded against*	*Sentenced*	*Absolute/ conditional discharge*	*Fine*
1999					
Unauthorised access to computer material	Computer Misuse Act 1990 Sec. 1	6	3	2	—
Unauthorised Access with intent to commit or facilitate commission of further offences	Computer Misuse Act 1990 Sec. 2	3	1	—	1
Unauthorised modification of computer material	Computer Misuse Act 1990 Sec. 3	4	7	—	1
Total		13	11	2	2
2000					
Unauthorised access to computer material	Computer Misuse Act 1990 Sec. 1	8	9	3	4
Unauthorised Access with intent to commit or facilitate commission of further offences	Computer Misuse Act 1990 Sec. 2	3	1	—	—
Unauthorised modification of computer material	Computer Misuse Act 1990 Sec 3.	8	5	1	1
Total		19	15	4	5

Offence description	*Statute*	*Community sentence*	*Suspended sentence*	*Immediate custody*	*Other*
1999					
Unauthorised access to computer material	Computer Misuse Act 1990 Sec. 1	1	—	—	—
Unauthorised Access with intent to commit or facilitate commission of further offences	Computer Misuse Act 1990 Sec. 2	—	—	—	—
Unauthorised modification of computer material	Computer Misuse Act 1990 Sec 3.	2	1	3	—
Total		3	1	3	—
2000					
Unauthorised access to computer material	Computer Misuse Act 1990 Sec. 1	2	—	—	—
Unauthorised Access with intent to commit or facilitate commission of further offences	Computer Misuse Act 1990 Sec. 2	—	—	1	—

Offence description	*Statute*	*Community sentence*	*Suspended sentence*	*Immediate custody*	*Other*
Unauthorised modification of computer material	Computer Misuse Act 1990 Sec 3.	—	—	3	—
Total		2	—	4	—

Notes:

1. These data are on the principal offence basis

2. Staffordshire police force were only able to submit sample data for persons proceeded against and convicted in the magistrates courts for the year 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data these data are not robust at a detailed level and have been excluded from this table.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures have been introduced since 1997 to combat Internet and computer crime; and if he will make a statement. [30815]

Mr. Denham: In November 2000 my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced a £25 million investment in the police over three years specifically to fight hi-tech crime and to enhance the capability of the police at a national and local level to investigate computer based offences. The National Hi-Tech Crime Unit was established in April 2001.

The Task Force for the Protection of Children on the Internet was established in March 2001 and includes representatives of the internet industry, child welfare organisations, the police and Government. Its aim is to make the United Kingdom (UK) the best and safest place in the world for children to use the internet and to help protect children the world over from abuse fuelled by criminal misuse of new technologies.

Government support the work of the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF). Its aims are to determine whether particular newsgroups carry potentially illegal material; to trace the originator; to ask internet service providers (ISPs) to remove the material from their servers; and to send details of the site to the UK police, or to the enforcement agency of the country concerned via the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) if the originator is abroad. Since it was established, the IWF has asked UK ISPs to remove nearly 30,000 illegal items from the Internet.

The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 provides law enforcement and security agencies with strictly circumscribed powers to investigate the use of computers and the Internet to engage in criminal activities.

Police Complaints

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints have been made about police officers in each police area in each of the last five years; and how many have been upheld. [31055]

Mr. Denham: Complaints and Discipline Statistics are published annually in a Home Office Statistical Bulletin. The latest statistics relating to 2000–01 were published on 14 November 2001 in issue number 21/01. Details are given in the following tables:

Complaints received by the police

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Avon and Somerset	976	1,035	852	871	845
Bedfordshire	217	247	161	207	194
Cambridgeshire	458	473	410	390	281
Cheshire	489	600	597	556	495
Cleveland	375	342	326	400	318
Cumbria	419	315	289	286	283
Derbyshire	384	443	400	421	298
Devon and Cornwall	760	911	798	645	704
Dorset	185	164	165	239	267
Durham	166	163	181	168	181
Essex	573	559	510	538	549
Gloucestershire	323	328	272	296	258
Greater Manchester	2,149	2,181	2,211	2,281	1,807
Hampshire	948	897	654	594	523
Hertfordshire	312	466	416	502	491
Humberside	431	444	425	410	364
Kent	657	675	624	678	620
Lancashire	886	848	850	918	682
Leicestershire	292	266	280	315	333
Lincolnshire	169	141	310	328	313
London City of	133	126	69	63	60
Merseyside	2,028	2,270	1,429	1,312	911
Metropolitan police	9,122	8,037	7,154	6,611	5,830
Norfolk	423	519	326	433	365
Northamptonshire	294	331	256	212	221
Northumbria	650	671	629	668	661
North Yorkshire	370	343	363	441	441
Nottinghamshire	754	812	689	817	770
South Yorkshire	473	454	551	666	582
Staffordshire	587	598	511	629	803
Suffolk	287	308	268	374	229
Surrey	497	561	639	477	460
Sussex	864	1,076	1,153	1,734	1,814
Thames Valley	742	604	768	756	768

Complaints received by the police

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Warwickshire	165	180	206	194	205
West Mercia	506	517	454	578	410
West Midlands	1,681	1,676	1,590	1,868	1,884
West Yorkshire	966	864	796	871	795
Wiltshire	162	185	259	230	266
Dyfed-Powys	202	183	180	148	157
Gwent	427	446	505	557	487
North Wales	392	353	381	439	297
South Wales	965	723	752	733	747
Total	33,859	33,335	30,659	31,854	28,969

Complaints against the police upheld

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Avon and Somerset	15	26	28	16	27
Bedfordshire	14	3	11	9	6
Cambridgeshire	23	42	15	28	18
Cheshire	16	11	17	11	10
Cleveland	13	2	12	0	5
Cumbria	2	1	7	7	0
Derbyshire	26	5	8	2	7
Devon and Cornwall	14	38	26	24	22
Dorset	3	6	7	3	5
Durham	7	5	1	5	4
Essex	14	22	25	6	12
Gloucestershire	12	12	3	11	5
Greater Manchester	22	20	20	30	40
Hampshire	30	22	24	22	20
Hertfordshire	15	12	10	8	20
Humberside	8	18	9	14	14
Kent	27	26	24	26	63
Lancashire	30	12	15	13	26
Leicestershire	10	15	10	5	13
Lincolnshire	12	6	6	5	7
London City of	7	5	6	4	3
Merseyside	11	7	12	6	36
Metropolitan police	203	236	146	168	138
Norfolk	26	11	28	11	17
Northamptonshire	9	1	6	9	7
Northumbria	8	12	6	3	12
North Yorkshire	13	10	27	20	16
Nottinghamshire	15	13	1	12	26
South Yorkshire	3	13	11	18	14
Staffordshire	7	9	6	20	34
Suffolk	12	11	24	11	5
Surrey	7	5	17	7	17
Sussex	33	23	31	54	79
Thames Valley	27	32	23	37	45
Warwickshire	6	6	4	6	9
West Mercia	14	6	23	13	11
West Midlands	23	61	47	26	38
West Yorkshire	54	26	13	13	19
Wiltshire	2	27	5	3	11
Dyfed-Powys	1	3	1	5	4
Gwent	7	3	5	3	8
North Wales	5	9	14	7	13
South Wales	28	17	11	13	17
Total	834	850	745	714	903

Traffic Wardens

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the training which would be required to ensure traffic wardens could effectively discharge the extended powers proposed in the Policing a New Century White Paper; and if he will make a statement. [30825]

Mr. Denham: Chief officers will be required to ensure that all staff who are designated as community support officers, including traffic wardens, receive training that is appropriate both to the functions that they will be performing and the powers that have been conferred on them.

The new Police Skills and Standards Organisation will have an important role in drawing up these training requirements.

Police Training

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the level of training direction and guidance given to police officers driving to emergency incidents. [30821]

Mr. Denham: The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) recognises that the police service has a fundamental duty to equip officers with the necessary skills, through training, to undertake their operational tasks successfully and safely.

In December 2000, ACPO launched its new police driver training course, introducing a universal standard for driving in England and Wales. An essential element of the course is to emphasise that officers must recognise the need to give priority to public safety above all other considerations such as attending an incident or apprehending a suspect.

Police Vehicles

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* deaths and *(b)* incidents of serious injury involving police vehicles have been recorded in each of the past five years. [30822]

Mr. Denham: The available information is set out in the table and relates to the number of serious injuries and deaths involving police vehicles engaged in immediate/emergency response or pursuit.

	Deaths	*Serious injury*
1996–97	15	207
1997–98	15	200
1998–99	11	210
1999–2000	14	115
2000–01	18	160

Notes:

1.The information has been provided by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), to which forces submit statistical returns.

2.Two forces did not submit a return in 1996–97, one force did not submit a return in 1998–99 and 2000–01.

3.All figures for financial year.

4.The figures are numbers of deaths/injuries, not numbers of accidents.

5.The figures include both police and civilian casualties.

Asylum White Paper

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to involve asylum seeking children and young people in the consultation on the forthcoming Asylum White Paper. [30703]

Angela Eagle: The forthcoming White Paper will be available widely to those with an interest. For example, the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Childrens Stakeholders Group which pays particular attention to issues relating to asylum seeking children and young people.

Internet Pornography

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures have been introduced since 1997 to combat Internet pornography. [30816]

Beverley Hughes: The Government are determined to tackle illegal pornography whether on or off line, and the criminal law applies equally to both.

We are particularly concerned to deal with child pornography both on and off line. In January 2001, we raised the maximum penalties for taking, making, distributing or showing indecent photographs or pseudo-photographs of children to 10 years (from three years), and the maximum penalty for simple possession of such material to five years (from six months).

In November 2000, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced a £25 million investment in the police over three years specifically to fight hi-tech crime and to enhance the capability of the police at a national and local level to investigate computer based offences, including the possession and distribution of illegal pornography.

In March 2001, the then Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), established a Task Force on Child Protection on the Internet. The task force began work in May. It is a partnership of: representatives from internet service and communication providers; the Internet Watch Foundation, set up in 1996 which provides a hotline for the public to report child pornography; PC and software retailers and manufacturers; child welfare organisations; the main opposition parties; law enforcement agencies and academics. The task force is looking at proposals for legislation to tackle paedophile 'grooming' activity on and off-line; a best practice model of Internet chat safety measures for providers and computer awareness training for the police and child protection practitioners.

Internationally, the Government actively support efforts within the European Union, and more widely, to combat child pornography on the Internet. In November 2001, we signed the Council of Europe convention on Cybercrime, which will underpin co-operative action between signatory states in respect of computer-related crimes, including the making, distribution and possession of child pornography.

Firearms

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were murdered by use of a firearm in 2001. [30745]

Mr. Denham: The latest published information is for the year ending March 2001. In that year, there were 73 homicides where a firearm was used.

Fingerprinting (Training)

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the training standards for fingerprint experts were last reviewed. [30707]

Mr. Denham: The training standards for fingerprint experts have recently been revised. All new fingerprint officers undergo the new modular training programme which incorporates the impact of the change from the previous 16 point standard. The new training programme began being rolled out from 1 April 2001.

Police (Lancashire)

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there were in Lancashire in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001. [31220]

Mr. Denham: Lancashire constabulary employed 3,247 full-time equivalent officers on 31 March 1997 and 3,288 on 30 September 2001.

The force also employed 1,409 civilian support staff on 30 September 2001, 283 more than at 31 March 1997.

Burglary (Uxbridge)

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much funding has been awarded to schemes under the Reducing Burglary Initiative in the Uxbridge constituency in the last 12 months. [31359]

Mr. Denham: We did not receive any bids for funding for burglary reduction projects in this area.

Drug Deaths (Reading)

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the change in the number of drug deaths in Reading in the last 12 months and his strategy to combat the spread of hard drugs. [31347]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The number of drug-related deaths for the Reading unitary area held by the Office for National Statistics are in the table.

	Number of deaths
1998	9
1999	6
2000	15

Reading has a new dedicated Drug Action Team (DAT), which is continuing to address the problems of drug misuse highlighted as issues when Reading was part of the Berkshire DAT. Reading DAT is carrying out a needs analysis to quantify the local drugs misuse problem and, in line with all DATs, is preparing a drug action plan for submission to the Home Office by the end of April.

The Government are determined to reduce the number of drug-related deaths. That is why we have published an action plan which sets out all the activities that need to be taken over a three-five year period to reduce drug-related deaths by 20 per cent. by 2004. The plan covers three strands:

campaigns—to increase the awareness and skills of those working in the drug sector and drug users;

better surveillance and monitoring—because we are concerned that precise levels of drug-related deaths are not clearly identified and;

research—to improve the information on causes of drug-related death and provide advice on strategies and service approaches.

We know we need to be more effective in tackling the harms caused by Class A drugs. The action plan is one of the measures we are taking to increase the focus on harm minimisation, which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced in his evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee on 23 October 2001. He also announced his intention to seek advice from the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs on their assessment for reclassifying cannabis from Class B to Class C, the setting up a group of key experts to tackle the treatment of crack cocaine addiction and, with the Department of Health, the development of new guidance for heroin prescribing.

Child Curfews

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* police services have applied to introduce a local child curfew; how many local child curfews have been introduced; and if he will make a statement. [29689]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* No applications have been received to impose child curfew schemes under section 14 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Sections 48 and 49 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001, which took effect on 1 August 2001, extended the upper age limit to 15 and allowed the police, as well as local authorities, to initiate schemes. Local areas are assessing the implications of these changes and we know that local consultation is taking place in some of them. Applications to establish curfews are a discretionary matter for local authorities and the police, to be considered in the light of local needs and wider strategies to deal with disorder in their areas.

Air-guns

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase controls on the *(a)* use and *(b)* ownership of (ii) air rifles and (ii) air pistols. [31339]

Mr. Denham: There are already strict laws in place to control the use and possession of air weapons including age limits for acquisition and possession and controls on their possession in a public place.

We are aware that some air pistols which operate on the air cartridge system have been found to be readily convertible to fire live ammunition. We are currently in discussion with the importers and the Forensic Science Service, considering what needs to be done to establish the full extent and nature of the problem and how to tackle it.

Hampshire Police

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will raise the cost of living allowance for Hampshire Police. [31139]

Mr. Denham: Following a recommendation from the Police Negotiating Board (PNB) on 8 February 2001, the previous Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) approved a new allowance of £1,000, from 1 April 2001, for officers in Hampshire appointed on or after 1 September 1994, and not in receipt of housing allowance.

Any case for increasing the allowance for officers in Hampshire would first have to be made in the PNB. However, it should be noted that the Police Arbitration Tribunal, in rejecting a Staff Side claim for a wider regional allowance, confirmed the PNB agreement of 8 February, including the allowance of £1,000 for qualifying officers in Hampshire.

The PNB is the statutory negotiating body for police pay and conditions of service. Representatives from the Association of Police Authorities, the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Police Federation sit on the board, as well as the Secretary of State. The process of negotiation, which led to the joint recommendation on 8 February, will have afforded Hampshire Police Authority and the Chief Constable of Hampshire the opportunity to comment on the proposed new allowance for officers in Hampshire.

On 27 December 2001, PNB reached agreement in principle on a package of changes to police pay and conditions. If implemented, the agreement will provide for older recruits to receive a higher starting salary from 1 April 2003, enabling forces to attract more experienced recruits to the police service.

Human Trafficking

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment the Government have made of the effectiveness of legislation prohibiting and punishing human trafficking; and if he will make a statement. [31157]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Government consider that effective legislation to criminalise and punish trafficking in human beings is an important component of any strategy to tackle this crime. This must also encompass effective enforcement, alongside support and assistance for victims, and prevention and education.

United Kingdom (UK) Ministers were among the first to sign the Trafficking Protocol to the United Nations Convention on Transnational Organised Crime and are committed to implementing its measures, one of which is the introduction of trafficking offences. To take measures forward, the European Union Framework Decision on trafficking in human beings has been provisionally agreed by representatives of all European Union member states and will be adopted by the Justice and Home Affairs Council as a legally binding document in the near future. We will introduce legislation to introduce criminal offences into UK law as soon as parliamentary time permits.

Migrant Workers

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of his policy on signing the 1990 UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and their Families; and if he will make a statement. [31156]

Angela Eagle: I would refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) on 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 900W.

Essex Police

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assistance he is giving to Essex Police to increase the numbers of officers. [31491]

Mr. Denham: Under the Crime Fighting Fund (CFF) recruitment initiative, Essex police has been allocated a total of 197 recruits over and above the force's previous recruitment plans for the three years to March 2003.

The force was unable to recruit any of its CFF allocation of 70 officers in 2000–01, but was allowed to carry-over the allocation into 2001–02. The force currently expects to recruit at least 127 CFF officers this financial year.

Essex police strength rose from 2,818 at 30 September 2000 to 2,937 at 30 September 2001. This was an increase of 4.2 per cent.

Essex officers appointed since 1 September 1994 and not in receipt of housing allowance, benefit from an allowance of £2,000 per annum which has been payable since 1 April 2001.

We have also announced the creation of a task force, chaired by Sir David O'Dowd, Her Majesty's retiring Chief Inspector of Constabulary, to consider the steps necessary to deliver a significant increase in the capacity of police officers to provide a visible presence in the community.

Police Officers (Length of Service)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the ratio between police officers of less than a year's experience and those of more than a year's experience in each police authority area. [30456]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* The information is not held centrally.

CID Officers

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of CID officers were recruited in 2001 as a ratio against those who left. [30457]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* The information requested is not held centrally.

Police Earnings

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the average earnings of a police officer in *(a)* London and *(b)* Surrey. [31556]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* The information is not available in the format requested.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the ratio is between the average earnings of (1) a superintendent and the average house price in *(a)* Surrey, *(b)* London, *(c)* Yorkshire and *(d)* Tyne and Wear; [31502]

(2) a police officer with three years' service and the average house price in *(a)* Surrey, *(b)* London, *(c)* Yorkshire and *(d)* Tyne and Wear; [31499]

(3) what the ratio is between the average earnings of a police officer with 10 years' service and the average house price in *(a)* Surrey, *(b)* London, *(c)* Yorkshire and *(d)* Tyne and Wear. [31498]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* The information is not available in the format requested as no data are held in this context on average house prices.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the ratio is between the average earnings of a chief inspector and the average house price in *(a)* Surrey, *(b)* London, *(c)* Yorkshire and *(d)* Tyne and Wear. [31501]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* The information is not available in the format requested; no data are held in this context on average house prices.

The current national pay scale for Chief Inspectors is £38,124 to £40,773. The scale for a Chief Inspector serving in the Metropolitan police or City of London police forces is £39,729 to £42,378. An individual's salary will be determined by his length of service in the rank.

Depending upon the force to which he belongs, and his length of service, a chief inspector may be entitled to housing allowance or transitional rent allowance.

A Chief Inspector in London will, if appointed before 1 September 1994, get London weighting of £1,773 a year and a London allowance of £1,011 a year.

Police Houses

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 846W, on police houses, in what circumstances such an officer who remained a tenant from the present day until July 2002 would not enjoy a right to buy at that date. [31563]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* Those Metropolitan police service tenants who became secure tenants as a result of amendments to the Housing Act 1985 made by the Greater London Authority Act 1999, will acquire a right to buy once they have occupied the property for two years, ie at July 2002.

If the officer was not a secure tenant (under the Housing Act 1985) in July 2002, the right to buy would not arise.

We propose in the Police Reform Bill to remove the Metropolitan police authority from the secure tenancy regime, while ensuring that any secure tenant who has acquired the right to buy at the time of Royal Assent of the Bill will have a three month period of grace to exercise that right.

The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has informed me that the Metropolitan police service intends to write to those tenants affected to give early notification of the provisions of the Bill.

Community Sentences

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions his Department has had with the Department of Health and the Department for Work and Pensions about the non-production of medical certificates when there is a failure to comply with a community sentence on health grounds. [32238]

Beverley Hughes: My officials met representatives of the Department of Health and the Cabinet Office deregulation unit last year to discuss this issue. Work is in progress examining various ways in which to validate offenders' claims of unfitness to attend community sentence appointments through ill health.

Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act

Mr. Joyce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many arrests have been made in 2002 under the terms of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. [29854]

Beverley Hughes: None. I would like to inform my hon. Friend that there has been no exercises of the powers of arrest in 2002 as of yesterday under the terms of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, but eight people were detained in 2001 under Part 4 of the Act.

Afghan Hijackers

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the hijackers of the Afghan jet which landed at Stansted airport *(a)* have been deported and *(b)* remain in the UK. [31399]

Angela Eagle: None of those recently convicted of hijacking the Afghan jet which landed at Stansted airport have been deported. All those convicted have made asylum applications. For those who have been given long sentences, decisions on their immigration status, including the question of deportation from the United Kingdom, will be taken towards the end of those sentences: the situation in Afghanistan could change significantly by the time they are released and a decision taken now might not be relevant in two years time. The applications of those who received shorter sentences, two of whom have now been released, are under consideration now.

Nine convicted hijackers remain in the United Kingdom. One suspected hijacker was too ill to stand trial: a medical report is awaited.

Household Burglaries

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many household burglaries there were by region, expressed as *(a)* a percentage and *(b)* the total number, ranked in descending order according to percentage figures for the latest year for which figures are available. [30586]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* The requested information is given in the table.

Burglary in a dwelling: offences by region[1], England and Wales

Region	*Percentage of England and Wales total*	*Offences recorded*	*Offences per 100,000 population*
London	17.4	70,217	964
North-west	17.3	69,826	1,015
Yorkshire and the Humber	14.5	58,561	1,160
West midlands	11.5	46,362	869
South-east	10.1	40,662	503
East midlands	8.1	32,711	780
South-west	6.9	27,792	563
East of England	5.7	22,983	424
North-east	5.4	21,720	841
Wales	3.0	12,150	414
England and Wales		402,984	765

[1] 12 months ending March 2001

Asylum and Immigration Cases

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to improve the processing of *(a)* asylum and *(b)* immigration cases. [29858]

Angela Eagle: In his statement on 29 October 2001, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary set out a substantial package of measures to overhaul our immigration and asylum policy. We will shortly be publishing a White Paper containing details of the Government's proposals for a comprehensive approach to asylum, immigration and nationality in order to improve the processing of cases.

DEFENCE

European Capabilities

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on which of the expert panels taking work forward on the Helsinki Headline Goal the UK will chair; and if he will make a statement. [31619]

Mr. Hoon: The European Capabilities Action Plan working groups will not be fully established until the middle of February. Discussions are under way to determine the composition of each group. The UK has indicated that it wishes to be fully involved in this initiative and would be willing to take the lead in co-ordinating the work in some capability areas.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much of the Helsinki Headline Goal will be contributed to by non-EU countries; what negotiations have taken place to secure such contributions; and if he will make a statement. [31618]

Mr. Hoon: The Helsinki Headline Goal is a target for EU member states, although additional contributions to the improvement of European capabilities from non-EU countries have been welcomed. These contributions have been offered voluntarily by the countries concerned.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are to pursue bilateral arrangements along the lines of the UK/Netherlands Amphibious force with other European countries; and if he will make a statement. [31620]

Mr. Hoon: The UK/Netherlands Amphibious Force has been very successful. For some time we have been considering whether similar approaches elsewhere could bring benefits. The working groups being formed to address the remaining Helsinki Headline Goal capability shortfalls provide a suitable context in which to consider such initiatives.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many troops are being pledged to meet the Helsinki Headline Goal; and if he will make a statement. [32131]

Mr. Hoon: The UK has identified a range of forces as a possible contribution towards the Helsinki Headline Goal. This includes a pool of 20,000 ground troops, from which a maximum of 12,500 could be deployed at any one time. Maritime and air forces have also been identified. The scale and type of forces committed to a particular operation would be decided by the Government according to the circumstances at the time.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the gaps in capability to meet the Helsinki Headline Goal; and if he will make a statement. [32130]

Mr. Hoon: Offers from EU member states have so far met 104 of the 144 capability requirements that underpin the Headline Goal. Approximately half of the remaining shortfalls are considered to be militarily significant. Member states are currently forming working groups under the European Capabilities Action Plan to address these areas.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the maximum geographical range of EU-led operations with existing strategic airlift capability; and if he will make a statement. [33021]

Mr. Hoon: The decision to undertake an operation would be based on an assessment of a number of factors, including the feasibility of delivering and sustaining the required scale of forces at the necessary range. The EU member states recognise that strategic mobility is likely to be an important aspect of any military operation and are working to improve their capabilities in this area.

Salaries

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much of the defence budget is represented by salaries; what the total sum is for *(a)* the uniformed services and *(b)* his Department's civilian employees; and what the percentage of both is paid out in (i) Scotland and (ii) overseas. [32451]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* Information on salaries for the current financial year is provided in "The Government's Expenditure Plans 2001–02 to 2003–04—Ministry of Defence" (Cm 5109) and in the Ministry of Defence Departmental Performance Report (Cm 5290). Copies of these documents are available in the Library of the House.

Information on the percentage of salaries paid in Scotland and overseas is not immediately available. I will write to the hon. Member.

PRIME MINISTER

Special Advisers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 594W, on special advisers, how many special advisers have left his Department since May 1997; on how many occasions the Head of his Department has recommended a gap between leaving employment in his Department and taking up outside employment; if he will list the gap for each occasion this has occurred; and if he will make a statement. [30300]

The Prime Minister: As with all civil servants, special advisers are covered by the Business Appointment Rules. They are only required to seek permission to take up outside appointments in the circumstances set out in the rules. Since May 1997, 10 special advisers have left my office. Four submitted applications under the Business Appointment Rules to take up outside appointments. One appointment was subject to a three month waiting period and a restriction and another subject to a restriction only. A further three special advisers have resigned from my office, one to join my political office, one to become a full-time civil servant, and one has been appointed as special adviser to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport.

Arthur Andersen

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister what the total cost to his Department has been of services provided by *(a)* Andersen and *(b)* Accenture, Andersen Consulting for (i) accountancy services, (ii) consultancy work and (iii) other work in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [32105]

The Prime Minister: No expenditure has been made by my office since 1997.

Energy Industry

Tom Brake: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received from *(a)* BP, *(b)* Shell, *(c)* Exxon-Mobil, *(d)* Enron, *(e)* Conoco, *(f)* Texaco and *(g)* TotalFinaElf with regard to the Performance and Innovation Unit Energy Review; what meetings he held with each company; when the representations were received and the meetings held; if he will place related documentation in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [33223]

The Prime Minister: Over 400 responses have been received, most of which are available on the PIU website, www.piu.gov.uk.

The PIU energy review will make recommendations on a range of issues and will be published in due course.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the occasions since 1997 when he has discussed UK energy policy with members of the American embassy in London; and if he will make a statement. [32506]

The Prime Minister: I have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals. As with previous Administrations it is not my practice to provide details of all such meetings.

Tom Brake: To ask the Prime Minister on what occasions he and his Department have held meetings since May 1997 with representatives from *(a)* BP, *(b)* Shell, *(c)* Exxon-Mobil, *(d)* Enron, *(e)* Conoco, *(f)* Texaco and *(g)* TotalFinaElf; if he will state the purpose of each meeting; and if he will provide details of the outcomes and agreements reached as a result of each meeting. [33217]

The Prime Minister: As my official spokesman has already confirmed, I have not had formal meetings with representatives from Enron.

I have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals. As with previous Administrations it is not my practice to provide details of all such meetings.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the occasions on which he has met senior executives of energy companies since 7 June 2001; and if he will make a statement. [32810]

The Prime Minister: As my official spokesman has already confirmed, I have not had formal meetings with representatives from Enron.

I have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals. As with previous Administrations it is not my practice to provide details of all such meetings.

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 102W, on BP, for what reason his normal practice did not apply in respect of Enron; and if he will disapply it in respect of BP. [33303]

The Prime Minister: As with previous Administrations, it is not normal practice to provide details of ministerial meetings. However on this occasion because unsubstantiated and unjustified allegations were made against the Government it was thought right to make clear, without setting a precedent, where there had been meetings with the DTI as that is the lead Department dealing with energy policy.

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Prime Minister what information from the Railtrack administrator he has received to indicate that they have uncovered greater financial difficulties at the company than had previously been recognised. [33395]

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to my previous answer.

Parliamentary Questions

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Prime Minister what guidance he has given to Ministers on the time taken to respond to written parliamentary questions. [32855]

The Prime Minister: The Government have made it clear that they are committed to providing prompt and accurate answers to parliamentary questions. The Secretary to the Cabinet has written to all Departments reminding them of the importance of answering parliamentary questions helpfully and within the required time scales.

Broadcasting

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the work of his special adviser with responsibility for issues relating to the broadcasting industry. [33325]

The Prime Minister: The special adviser works in the No. 10 Policy Directorate, which covers domestic policy including the broadcasting industry.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Prime Minister how many *(a)* integrated digital and *(b)* analogue television sets have been bought by his Department in each of the last 24 months; and if he will publish the guidance given to officials making decisions on television purchases. [33225]

The Prime Minister: My office has not bought any televisions during the last 24 months.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Prime Minister who is responsible for making the decision about the switch off of the analogue television signal. [33326]

The Prime Minister: A decision to switch off analogue terrestrial television transmissions will be taken collectively by the Government. A number of Government Departments have an interest in managing the terrestrial broadcasting spectrum, in particular the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Department of Trade and Industry.

Ministerial Meetings

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Prime Minister in relation to the meeting that he had on 2 December 1999 with Lou Gerstner, what the criteria were according to which that meeting was arranged; what its outcome was; and if he will make a statement. [33670]

The Prime Minister: It is not the normal practice of the Government to release details of meetings or discussions with private individuals or companies.

UK-Japan 21st Century Group

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish the agenda for the February conference of the UK-Japan 21st Century Group. [32256]

The Prime Minister: The UK-Japan 21st Century Group is a non-governmental organisation.

Acquis Communautaire

Mr. Soames: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement defining his interpretation of the acquis communautaire. [33262]

The Prime Minister: The acquis communautaire is generally understood to mean everything decided and agreed upon by the Communities and the state of Community law at any given time. It covers the whole range of principles, policies, laws, practices and obligations that have been agreed or that have been developed within the European Communities.

Ispat International

Adam Price: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received from employees or directors of Ispat International between May 1997 and December 2001; and if he will list them by date and subject. [33117]

The Prime Minister: On the advice of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office I wrote to the Romanian Prime Minister on 23 July 2001 welcoming the contract for the privatisation of the Romanian steel plant SIDEX with the British LNM group.

Adam Price: To ask the Prime Minister what meetings have taken place and on which dates between *(a)* himself, *(b)* officials within the Prime Minister's office and *(c)* special advisers within the Prime Minister's office and representatives of Ispat International since May 1997. [33116]

The Prime Minister: It is not the normal practice of the Government to release details of meetings or discussions with private individuals or companies.

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Prime Minister what events he is planning to attend as part of the golden jubilee celebrations; and what events his Department is planning to arrange to celebrate the golden jubilee. [33243]

The Prime Minister: As present, I expect to attend the following events:

29 April—Hosting a dinner at No. 10 Downing street.

30 April—Session of the Joint Houses of Parliament in Westminster Hall at which Her Majesty will address both Houses.

4 June—National thanksgiving service at St. Paul's.

25 July—Opening of the Commonwealth games.

4 August—Closing of the Commonwealth games.

TREASURY

Independent Financial Advisers

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what effect the defined payment system as outlined in the Financial Services Agency's polarisation paper will have on the number of independent financial advisers. [32902]

Ruth Kelly: The FSA consultation paper analyses the likely impact of these proposals on the IFA sector at paragraphs 4.19 to 4.21.

It concludes that the IFA sector would be likely to shrink to some extent. This does not mean that these firms would go out of business, as existing IFA firms who do not want to move to the defined payment system proposed by the FSA would be able to operate as they do now, expect that they would not be able to hold themselves out as independent. This outcome also needs to be seen in the context of the current market where 80 per cent. of mass market consumers buying packaged products use the non-IFA or tied sector. These consumers should benefit from increased choice under the FSA's proposals.

The FSA consultation exercise closes on 19 April.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list his Department's total expenditure by month in each financial year since 1997–98. [32802]

Ruth Kelly: Monthly figures for all Departments could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, the Treasury has published full, financial year outturns for the years 1997–98 to 1999–2000 in Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses (Cm 5101). Provisional financial year outturns for 2000–01 have been published in Public Expenditure 2000–01 Provisional Outturn (Cm 5243).

NDPBs (Payments)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the instances in which his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies failed to pay valid invoices within 30 days or after the agreed credit period in the financial year 2000–01. [32039]

Ruth Kelly: The bodies the Chancellor is responsible for have paid the following percentages of invoices within 30 days or within contractual arrangements.

HM Treasury 99.09 per cent.; National Investment and Loans Office 100 per cent.; Department of National Savings 99.6 per cent.; Inland Revenue 98.65 per cent.; HM Customs and Excise 97.36 per cent.; and Royal Mint 95 per cent.

More detailed information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Tax Returns

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many households completed neither a tax return nor a tax credit claim form in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000 and *(c)* 2000–01. [32868]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue does not hold return information by household.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the concession under which the penalty for not submitting a return on time will not be charged if the Revenue reject a return as incomplete and the taxpayer returns it within 14 days will apply this year; and what the statutory authority is that allows the Revenue to reject a return in such circumstances. [32736]

Dawn Primarolo: Section 8 of the Taxes Management Act 1970 requires a person who is given a notice to make and deliver a return containing such information as may reasonably be required in the pursuance of the notice. The Inland Revenue will reject a return if it fails to satisfy the requirements of section 8.

The term "incomplete" had the potential to be misleading and the Inland Revenue now refers to such rejected returns as "unsatisfactory".

The 14 day period of grace will apply this year if a return received before the filing date is sent back to someone who has genuinely forgotten something, such as signing the return. The 14 day period of grace will not be given in cases where it appears a delaying tactic is being employed.

A detailed explanation of the position was given in Inland Revenue Tax Bulletin 53.

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the *(a)* full and *(b)* partial regulatory impact assessments published in respect of the proposed change in the tax system since May 1997. [32926]

Dawn Primarolo: All full and partial regulatory impact assessments are published on the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise internet sites. Copies of full regulatory impact assessments are also available in the House of Commons Library.

Income Tax

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people *(a)* only paid tax at the rate of 10p in the pound and *(b)* would have done so if they had not claimed the children's tax credit in 2000–01. [32867]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to "Inland Revenue Statistics" table 2.1, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. The latest version can be accessed on the Inland Revenue website http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/income_tax/it_t01_1.htm.

The children's tax credit was introduced in 2001–02.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the yield would be of increasing *(a)* the higher rate and *(b)* the standard rate of income tax by 1p. [32866]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to table 4 in the "Tax Ready Reckoner and Tax Relief" published in November 2001, a copy of which is held in the Library of the House.

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the capital gains tax rate would be if the current yield was maintained but taper relief was abolished. [32864]

Dawn Primarolo: There is no separate capital gains tax rate. Capital gains are taxed on individuals using the income tax savings rates: 10 per cent., 20 per cent. and 40 per cent. The rate depends on how far the individual's income has used up the starting and basic rate bands. A rate of 34 per cent. applies to trusts.

The cost of taper relief for 2001–02, the latest available year, is £580 million.

Assuming an across the board cut in tax rates applicable to capital gains and ignoring behavioural changes, the relevant tax rates applied to individuals would be 7.4 per cent., 14.8 per cent. and 29.6 per cent. The rate for trusts would be 25.2 per cent.

Parliamentary Questions

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will reply to the question from the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (ref 27653) of 10 January, on gross receipts of the windfall tax on Railtrack. [32950]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I replied to the hon. Lady's question on 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 516W.

Beer Duty

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will introduce a progressive beer duty to assist small-scale brewers. [31310]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Prisk) on 13 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 1003W.

Tax Credits

Alan Keen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the most recent quarterly statistical returns are of the number of awards for *(a)* working families tax credit, *(b)* disabled persons tax credit and *(c)* children's tax credit for (i) the constituency of Brentford and Isleworth and (ii) the constituency of Feltham and Heston. [31311]

Dawn Primarolo: For *(a)* and *(b)*, I refer my hon. Friend to my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Hepburn) on 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 293W.

Information about the children's tax credit is not available by constituency. However, the number of families who are eligible for the CTC in London is estimated to be 475,000.

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many families eligible for receipt of the child tax credit have yet to claim their entitlement. [33012]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer to the hon. Member to my answer to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) on 4 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 203W.

VAT

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many changes there have been in the scope of VAT since May 1997. [32929]

Mr. Boateng: Since May 1997, there have been no substantive changes to the scope of VAT, in terms of the range of goods and services which are liable to the tax. This Government have however reduced the rate of VAT on certain items, such as domestic fuel and power. Details of such changes, and of any marginal adjustments made, for example, to the scope of certain reliefs, are identified in the relevant Budget documentation.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the rate of VAT would be if the yield were maintained but all goods and services currently exempt or zero rated were classified as being standard rated. [32863]

Mr. Boateng: Since sufficiently robust estimates are not available of the effect of applying VAT to exempt goods and services, it is not possible to calculate the VAT rate that would apply were they, and zero-rated items, taxed (and the overall yield maintained).

Customs/Inland Revenue

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff were employed by *(a)* the Inland Revenue and *(b)* Customs and Excise at (i) 1 May 1997, (ii) 31 December 1997, (iii) 31 December 1998, (iv) 31 December 1999, (v) 31 December 2000 and (vi) at the most recent date. [32930]

Mr. Boateng: The numbers of staff in each Department at the appropriate dates were as follows:

HM Customs and Excise

	Number of staff	*Full-time equivalent*
31 May 1997	'24,461	'23,634
1 January 1998	24,559	23,690
1 January 1999	23,940	23,086
1 January 2000	23,422	22,577
1 January 2001	23,254	22,436
1 January 2002	23,100	22,320

	Permanent and FTA			
	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Number of staff*	*FTE*
Inland Revenue				
1 May 1997	43,905	9,097	53,002	49,727
1 January 1998	43,382	9,144	52,526	49,234
1 January 1999	43,33[illegible]	9,489	52,825	49,409
1 January 2000	[illegible]3,598	12,584	66,182	61,778
1 January 2001	53,941	13,367	67,308	62,763
1 January 2002	54,279	14,495	68,774	63,991
Valuation Office Agency				
1 May 1997	3,983	480	4,463	4,290
1 January 1998	3,842	483	4,325	4,151
1 January 1999	3,608	471	4,079	3,909
1 January 2000	3,630	484	4,114	3,945
1 January 2001	3,512	520	4,032	3,855
1 January 2002	3,411	542	3,953	3,774
Total Inland Revenue and Valuation Office Agency				
1 May 1997	47,888	9,577	57,465	54,017
1 January 1998	47,224	9,627	56,851	53,385
1 January 1999	46,944	9,960	56,904	53,318
1 January 2000	57,228	13,068	70,296	65,723
1 January 2001	57,453	13,887	71,340	66,618
1 January 2002	57,690	15,037	72,727	67,765

Staffing figures as at 1 April and 1 October each year are provided to the Cabinet Office by both Departments and are published as part of the Civil Service manpower figures. In addition, each Department publishes an annual report (year end 31 March) that contains details of staffing figures.

Accounting

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes he has made in accounting for *(a)* taxes and *(b)* spending since May 1997; and what the impact of these changes has been. [32951]

Mr. Andrew Smith: There have been two major changes in accounting practice since 1997 that have impacted on the accounting for taxes and public spending, one in respect of national accounts and one in respect of accounting by Government Departments.

In 1998, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) converted UK national accounts to the European System of Accounts 1995 (ESA95). This changed the accounting for some components of taxes and public spending. The ESA95 treatment was described in "National Accounts Concepts Sources and Methods" (ONS, 1998, ISBN 0–11–621062–1), chapters 5 and 21. The impact of the changes on the main public finance aggregates was quantified in the 1998 pre-Budget report (Cm 4076), paragraphs B26 to B36.

The Government introduced resource accounting and budgeting (RAB) for Government Departments with effect from 2001–02. This applies generally accepted accounting practices to the accounts and budgets of Government Departments, and replaced the previous system, which just recorded cash flows. The impact of the introduction of RAB on departmental expenditure limits was set out in Spending Review 2000 (Cm 4807), Table A7.

Exchange Rates

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact on the economy of a fall in the value of sterling relative to *(a)* the US dollar, *(b)* the euro and *(c)* the yen by 10 per cent. compared with its rate at 1 January. [32865]

Ruth Kelly: The effects of exchange rate changes depend on the drivers of the changes, and are difficult to isolate with any confidence.

Personal Care (VAT)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether VAT is payable on the wages element of home care provided by private sector organisations; and if he will make a statement. [32700]

Mr. Boateng: Personal care services provided by private businesses are VAT exempt when performed or directly supervised by qualified nurses to meet the medical needs of the client. VAT is chargeable on all other care provided commercially in the home.

When the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry lays before Parliament revised regulations governing the conduct of the private recruitment industry, Customs and Excise will introduce a VAT concession for the wages element of commercially provided home care.

Duty-free Imports

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether it is Government policy to seek to achieve greater convergence between EU countries on those goods which may be purchased outside the EU and imported duty-free into each country. [32701]

Mr. Boateng: In general, the same rates of customs duty apply throughout the EU. Where optional reliefs from these duties are available, it is for individual member states to decide whether to introduce them.

Capital Housing Debt

Mr. Weir: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he intends to remove capital housing debt from local authorities in Scotland. [32089]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Scottish Executive are responsible for determining their policies in devolved areas of responsibility. The Scottish Executive announced arrangements for housing stock transfer on 18 September 2001, including arrangements for handling debt agreed with the Treasury and similar to those in England.

Credit Statistics (Scotland)

David Hamilton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money was borrowed *(a)* in 2001, *(b)* 10 *(c)* 20 and *(d)* 30 years ago on (i) credit cards, (ii) bank loans and (iii) mortgages in Scotland. [32484]

Ruth Kelly: The information is as follows:

£ billion

	Mortgage lending[1,2]
1971[3]	0.12
1981[3]	0.82
1991[3]	2.08
2001[4,5]	5.91

[1] Loans for house purchase only

[2] Scotland only

[3] Building society lending only

[4] Lending by all mortgage lenders

[5] Estimate

Source:

Council of Mortgage Lenders/DTLR Survey of Mortgage Lenders, CML/DoE 5 per cent. Sample Survey of Building Society Mortgage Completions

Borrowing on credit cards and through bank loans in Scotland is not currently identifiable from existing data sets. However, the Committee of Scottish Clearing Banks is currently looking at collecting statistics in these areas in the future.

Euro

Mr. Wray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much the Government have spent in making preparations for entry to the European single currency. [32527]

Ruth Kelly: Government spending on preparations for possible entry to the single currency is set out in the Fifth Report on Euro Preparations, published in November 2001.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the nature of the preliminary technical work being undertaken on the five economic tests and how many officials are involved in it. [32084]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury published a note in November 2001, "Preliminary and Technical Work to Prepare for the Assessment of the Five Tests for UK Membership of the Single currency", which addressed the issues of content and timing of the preliminary and technical work to prepare for the assessment of the five economic tests for UK membership of the single currency. A copy can be found in the Library of the House. Regarding the second part of the question, I refer the hon. Member to my answer on 25 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 373W.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures have been introduced to assist businesses that want to trade in euros; and how much they have cost. [32528]

Ruth Kelly: Details of the information provided to UK businesses and expenditure on business euro preparations were set out in the Treasury's fifth report on euro preparations, published on 4 November, copies of which were deposited in the Library of the House.

Prospectus Directive

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made in negotiations on the proposed prospectus directive to minimise the disclosure costs of issuers. [32686]

Ruth Kelly: The UK's objective is to secure a prospectus directive that will strike a more appropriate balance between the need to keep the cost of raising capital as low as possible and to protect the interests of investors.

I am encouraged by both the direction that negotiations in council working group are taking, and the work of the European Parliament to date.

However, all parts of the proposed prospectus directive are still subject to further negotiation.

Inland Revenue (Internet Access)

Mr. Gray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when officers of Inland Revenue in the *(a)* Special Compliance Office Bristol, *(b)* Large Business Office Bristol and *(c)* Business Tax Group of International Division were first provided with personal direct access to the Internet from their desk workstations. [32722]

Dawn Primarolo: The information is as follows:

(a) There is only one person in Special Compliance Office Bristol with personal direct access to the internet from their desktop. That access was provided on 27 April 2001.

(b) There is nobody in Large Business Office Bristol with personal direct access to the internet from the desktop.

(c) Twenty members of the Business Tax Group of International Division were provided with personal direct access to the internet from their desktops. That access was provided on 10 September 2001.

Private Medical Insurance (Buckingham)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many residents in the Buckingham constituency have private medical insurance. [24868]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the national statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. John Bercow, dated 4 January 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question on the number of residents in the Buckingham constituency with private medical insurance. (24868)

The latest available information is from the 1995 General Household Survey. Because this is a survey based on a sample of the population, it can only provide information in percentage terms, and only down to Government Office Region level, not by parliamentary constituency.

In 1995 18 per cent. of people (of all ages) had private medical insurance cover in the South East Government Office region (which includes Buckinghamshire). The figure for Great Britain was 9 per cent.

Demography

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women aged (i) 60 to 64, (ii) 65 to 74, (iii) 75 to 79 and (iv) 80 years or above, in each region of the UK. [32766]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. Steve Webb, dated 14 January 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your parliamentary question concerning the number of men and women in each region of the UK. I am replying in his absence. (32766)

The requested information is provided in the attached table. These data are provided for the Government Office Regions (GORs) of England and for Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.

Estimated resident population mid-2000 for Government office regions of England and country totals for Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland

Thousand

	Males				*Females*			
Area	*60–64*	*65–74*	*75–79*	*80 and over*	*60–64*	*65–74*	*75–79*	*80 and over*
England								
North East	63.5	106.6	36.8	29.6	68.1	124.1	52.5	67.4
North West	167.8	265.7	93.3	82.3	175.4	309.2	136.7	188.6
Yorkshire and the Humber	121.9	195.2	71.8	63.8	127.7	227.2	100.2	141.0
East Midlands	102.6	168.5	62.5	55.3	104.6	187.8	83.9	112.9
West Midlands	132.5	212.8	74.5	65.4	134.5	237.7	105.6	141.6
East	130.9	218.1	79.1	76.3	134.4	242.5	108.5	151.6
London	144.3	219.9	78.1	78.9	149.7	249.4	111.0	170.8
South East	189.6	310.2	114.0	115.9	196.6	354.5	162.9	243.9
South West	124.4	214.0	83.0	83.8	129.6	244.3	116.6	171.7
Wales	75.1	124.9	46.1	41.0	77.5	142.9	64.6	88.9
Scotland	122.7	196.7	65.3	56.1	136.6	243.0	99.0	127.0
Northern Ireland	35.2	54.4	18.6	16.5	38.1	67.5	28.0	36.1

Source:
Office for National Statistics, General Register Office Scotland and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate how many women aged (i) 60 to 64, (ii) 65 to 74, (iii) 75 to 79 and (iv) 80 years or above *(a)* are married, *(b)* are widowed, *(c)* are divorced and *(d)* have never been married. [32765]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. Steve Webb, dated 14 January 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your parliamentary question concerning the number of women 60 years of age and over by their marital status. I am replying in his absence. (32765)

The table gives the requested information.

The mid 2000 marital status estimates for females in Great Britain

Thousand

	0–64	*65–74*	*75–79*	*80 and over*
Single	69.1	150.1	79.6	140.5
Married	1,017.1	1,464.1	422.6	286.5
Widowed	193.0	765.2	588.6	1,142.7
Divorced	155.5	183.3	50.8	35.8
Total	1,434.7	2,562.6	1,141.6	1,605.6

Source:
Office for National Statistics and the General Register Office for Scotland

Special Advisers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library a copy of the record kept under Clause 9 of the Code of Conduct for Special Advisers of contacts between his special advisers and the news media since September 2001; and if he will make a statement. [32509]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) on 31 October 2002, *Official Report*, columns 741–42W.

Earnings Statistics (Greater London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average earnings were for *(a)* men and *(b)* women working in the Greater London area at the latest available date. [32120]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 4 January 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question on average pay in Greater London. I am replying in his absence. (32120)

New Earnings Survey (NES) provides earnings data for full-time employees on adult rates of pay. In April 2001, the latest date for which figures are available, estimates of the average weekly pay in the Greater London Government Office Region are £667.70 for men and £483.10 for women.

Public Spending

Tony Baldry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has made to the IMF to ensure that public spending targets account for the need to finance free basic education in developing countries. [31673]

Mr. Boateng: The UK has been at the forefront of encouraging the IMF to reform their medium term programmes to ensure that these deliver growth and poverty reduction. A key element of the new design of IMF programmes is the undertaking to support pro-poor budgets, which includes protecting and expanding where possible education spending. In recent years the IMF programmes have supported the introduction of free education in several countries, including Uganda and Tanzania.

Departmental Contracts

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the *(a)* number and *(b)* value of Government contracts awarded to (i) Arthur Andersen, (ii) Deloitte and Touche, (iii) Ernst & Young, (iv) KPMG and (v) PricewaterhouseCoopers accountants in each year since 1997. [33415]

Mr. Andrew Smith: This information is not held centrally. Each Department is responsible for its own contracts.

Stamp Duty

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent assessment he has made of the impact of stamp duty rate increases on the housing market. [32928]

Ruth Kelly: We regularly review the state of the housing market, bearing in mind all the factors which have an impact on it.

Enron

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy that the report prepared by Arthur Andersen accountants on the private finance initiative will not be considered by the Government until the completion of the US Senate Committee investigation into Enron. [33417]

Mr. Andrew Smith: This report was published by the Government in January 2000.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the cost of *(a)* ministerial cars and drivers and *(b)* taxis for his Department in each of the last four years. [27900]

Ruth Kelly: The expenditure on *(a)* ministerial cars and drivers was addressed in the answer given by the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 405–06W.

Expenditure on taxis for the Treasury for the years 1998–99 to 2001–02 (inclusive) is as follows.

Taxis

	£
1998–99 outturn	148,657
1999–2000 outturn	123,015
2000–01 outturn	143,048
2001–02 year to date	89,800

Railtrack

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer under which section of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information he withholds information on consultations on draft legislation prepared by the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to put Railtrack into administration. [29294]

Mr. Andrew Smith: A railway administration order was made in respect of Railtrack plc under the provisions of the Railways Act 1993. No extra legislation was necessary to put the company into administration.

There is no obligation to disclose confidential communications between Departments, in accordance with Exemption 2 (internal discussion and advice) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total external spend by his Department was on Private Finance Initiative consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PFI consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by his Department over this period; and if he will make a statement. [31047]

Mr. Andrew Smith: There are currently two Treasury PFI projects: the Treasury Building project and the Metropolitan Telephone Service (MTS) project, which is the responsibility of the Office of Government Commerce.

Fees paid to eight firms of professional advisers to the Treasury on the refurbishment between the start of the project in 1995 and financial close of the deal in May 2000 amounted to £2.637 million. Details on numbers of consultants employed and the number of days billed for each one could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

There has been no expenditure under the MTS project on PFI consultants in the last four years.

It is important that Departments develop their own internal sources of professional advice to reduce reliance on expensive external consultants. Where external advice is required Departments should take account of the guidance in Treasury Taskforce Technical Note No. 3 on How to Appoint and Manage Advisers, a copy of which is available on the Office of Government Commerce website www.ogc.gsi.gov.uk.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 6 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 522W, on private finance initiative projects, when the revised guidance from the Office of Government Commerce on the standardisation of PFI contracts will be published. [32067]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The private sector has been asked to comment on the draft revised general guidance on Standardisation of PFI Contracts, which has been placed on the websites of the Office of Government Commerce and Partnerships UK. Responses have been requested by 15 February. These will be considered by the Office of Government Commerce drawing on the advice of Partnerships UK, and there will then be a period of consultation with interested parties in the public and private sectors. Publication of the revised guidance is expected in the spring.

Departmental Leave Entitlements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the average annual leave entitlement of staff in his Department in each of the last four years. [31750]

Ruth Kelly: The annual leave entitlements for staff below the senior civil service for the last four years is shown in the table.

	On entry	After 10 years service	After 20 years service
Range A-E			
1998	—	—	—
1999	—	—	—
2000	25	30	—
2001	25[1]	—	—
Range A-C			
1998	25	27	30
1999	25	28	30
2000	—	—	—
2001	—	—	—
Range D-E			
1998	25	30	—
1999	25	30	—
2000	—	—	—
2001	—	—	—

[1] 30 days after seven years service.

The annual leave entitlement for members of the senior civil service is currently set by the Cabinet Office at 30 days and has been so for the last four years.

Amateur Sports Clubs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 773W, on community amateur sports clubs, how many such clubs *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in the Buckingham constituency have applied for charitable status since the Charity Commission's announcement. [32069]

Mr. Boateng: The Charity Commission announced on 30 November that it would recognise as charitable the

> promotion of community participation in healthy recreation by the provision of facilities for the playing of particular sports.

Community amateur sports clubs are able to apply immediately. The commission has received a significant number of inquiries from sports clubs interested in taking advantage of the new charitable purpose. As clubs will have to consider the implications of charitable status, seek agreement from their members if they wish to pursue this option and make any necessary changes to their constitutions before applying for charitable status, there will inevitably be some delay before clubs are in a position to formally apply for registration. No clubs in the Buckingham constituency have yet formally applied to register.

Gibraltar

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the balance of trade between Gibraltar and the UK in the last five years. [31860]

Ruth Kelly: HM Customs and Excise collect statistics for trade in goods with countries outside the EU from customs declarations.

Customs do not estimate UK trade with Gibraltar. The published figures are taken from customs declarations and reflect actual trade in goods.

The figures shown are the import and export totals for 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000, and the latest available for 2001 (ie to November 2001).

	£ million	Quantity: kg
1997		
Exports	82,351,296	161,733,566
Imports	5,679,884	297,301
1998		
Exports	81,070,327	168,491,470
Imports	10,075,382	1,566,507
1999		
Exports	97,681,145	215,911,465
Imports	12,790,871	6,398,953
2000		
Exports	121,598,796	199,572,334
Imports	11,547,065	4,977,261
2001[1]		
Exports	116,063,008	107,221,109
Imports	13,734,599	2,490,850

[1] January-November

Productivity

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 765W, on productivity, what steps he is taking to raise productivity growth to the level of the (a) G7 and the (b) OECD average. [32068]

Ruth Kelly: The Government's strategy for improving the UK's long-term productivity performance was set out in "Productivity in the UK: The Evidence and the Government's Approach" (November 2000). Further steps to raise productivity growth were announced in Budget 2001, "Productivity in the UK: Enterprise and the Productivity Challenge" (June 2001) and the 2001 pre-Budget report.

Engagements

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library his official diary for July 2001. [32508]

Ruth Kelly: During July 2001 my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer attended a number of meetings with ministerial colleagues and others, carried out duties in the House of Commons, gave several speeches and undertook a number of engagements in his constituency.

Tobacco Revenue

Mr. Roy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue was raised through tobacco sales in each year since 1999. [32468]

Mr. Boateng: Excise Duty receipts from tobacco products were £3,695 million in 1999, £7,760 million in 2000 and £7,708 million in 2001.

Estimated VAT receipts from the sale of tobacco products were £1,755 million in 1999 and £1,856 million in 2000. An estimate of VAT receipts from the sale of tobacco products in 2001 is not yet available.

Tax Receipts

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the proportion of total receipts from income tax, VAT and national insurance paid by the top *(a)* 1 per cent., *(b)* 5 per cent. and *(c)* 10 per cent. of tax payers in (i) 1997–98 and (ii) 2000–01. [26217]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The available information is given in the table. It is not possible to estimate amounts of VAT paid by taxpayers in different parts of the distribution.

Proportions of total income tax and national insurance contributions paid by percentiles of the distribution

	Income tax	*National insurance contributions*
1997–98		
Top 1 per cent.	19	2
Top 5 per cent.	37	9
Top 10 per cent.	47	18
2000–01		
Top 1 per cent.	23	2
Top 5 per cent.	41	9
Top 10 per cent.	51	19

Reputational Externalities

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 15 January, Ref. 27602, on reputational externalities, for what reason he has not undertaken to place his Department's internal guidance on reputational externalities in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [28934]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Treasury offers advice to other Departments in making appraisals, taking into account the specific circumstances of individual cases. Exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information provides for the confidentiality of internal opinion, advice, recommendation, consultation and deliberation.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with reference to his letter of 11 December 2001, to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell, for what reason his Department used reputational externalities as a justification for the choice of discount rate recommended in "Appraisal and Evaluation in Central Government"; and if he will make a statement. [28933]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Reputational externalities have not been used in this way; and my letter of the 11 December does not say that they have been used in this way.

Geoffrey Spence

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 16 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 296W, on Geoffrey Spence, if he will place a copy of Mr. Spence's *(a)* terms of reference, *(b)* terms and conditions and *(c)* job description in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [29691]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Mr. Spence has been appointed by Partnerships UK to provide professional advice to the Treasury on PFI and PPP and, as necessary, on current policy issues and projects. His terms and conditions are a matter for Partnerships UK.

Arthur Andersen

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many of his Department's PFI contracts Arthur Andersen has been an adviser; and if he will make a statement. [31722]

Ruth Kelly: None.

Departmental Underspends

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 27W, on departmental underspends, whether he estimates that underspends will be higher in 2001–02 than in 2000–01. [32085]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Table B16 of the pre-Budget report (Cm 5318) assumes that the outturn for total Departmental Expenditure Limits will be at the planned level. A revised position will be published on total DEL outturn in the Budget.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people working in the Greater London area receive the national minimum wage. [32123]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 4 February 2002:

> As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question about the number of workers in Greater London who receive the National Minimum Wage (NMW). (32123)
>
> The estimated number of jobs in the United Kingdom with pay below NMW rates in April 2001 was 320,000. Of these 50,000 relate to 18–21 year olds and 270,000 relate to 22 year olds and over.
>
> The National Statistics website contains estimates for the numbers and proportions of jobs paid at below NMW rates for Government Office Regions for all persons. However, for Greater London the estimates are not available because the survey sample sizes are too small to provide reliable information. Figures are posted at: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/themes/labour_market/pay_and_earnings/measuring_low_pay.asp

ECOFIN

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on what his policy will be during discussions on Germany's projected budget deficit at ECOFIN on 12 February. [33185]

Ruth Kelly: These issues will be discussed at ECOFIN on 12 February. The process is set out in the treaty, and the regulations regarding the operation of the Stability and Growth Pact.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Overseas Trips

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list each of the overseas trips made by himself and other members of his ministerial team in each of the last four years, specifying the purpose and cost of each trip. [30177]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: For details of Cabinet Ministers' visits overseas costing more than £500 and the annual cost of all Ministers' visits overseas since 2 May 1997, I refer the hon. Member to the answers provided by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 17 June 1999, *Official Report*, columns 196–97W, 28 July 2000, *Official Report*, column 969W and 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 467W. The Government are committed to publishing this level of information on an annual basis, and information for 2001–02 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year. In view of this commitment which involves a significant amount of work and cost, the Government have no plans to widen the scope of the annual list to include junior Ministers.

Civil Defence Grants

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the settlement for civil defence grants for 2001–02, broken down by authority. [31239]

Mr. Leslie: A list broken down by authority showing the amounts of civil defence grant paid to each eligible authority in England and Wales for this financial year, 2001–02, has been placed in the Library. This amounts to 90 per cent. of the approved grant. The balance will be paid in financial year 2002–03 and depends on the actual expenditure incurred in accordance with the provisions of the civil defence grant regulations.

Terrorism (Contingency Plans)

Valerie Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how the Government plan to consult external scientists to ensure that contingency plans for responding to a terrorist attack using chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear material are scientifically robust. [33648]

Mr. Leslie: The Government's chief scientific adviser has been asked to consult on a regular basis with appropriate scientists and expert advisers to ensure that contingency plans reflect the latest scientific knowledge. He reports on a regular basis to the CBRN sub-committee chaired by the Minister of State, Home Department, my right hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham).

Departmental Leave Entitlements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what has been the average annual leave entitlement of staff in his Department in each of the last four years. [31746]

Mr. Leslie: Annual leave entitlements for Cabinet Office staff in grades below the senior civil service in each of the last four years have been as follows.

Grade	*On entry*	*After 10 years service*	*After 20 years service*
Bands A and B2			
1998	25	30	—
1999	25	30	—
2000	25	30	—
2001	25	[1]—	30
Bands B1 and C			
1998	[2]22	27	30
1999	[2]22	27	30
2000	25	30	—
2001	25	[1]—	30

[1] Rising by one day each year up to a maximum of 30 days

[2] 25 days after one year

The annual leave entitlement for the senior civil service is set centrally by the Cabinet Office at 30 days, and has been so for the last four years.

Relationships (Civil Registration) Bill

Glenda Jackson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the impact enactment of the Relationships (Civil Registration) Bill would have on his Department; and if he will make a statement. [29845]

Mrs. Roche: Civil partnership registration and associated rights and responsibilities raise a number of complex issues, which have prompted a growing debate within society and the Government are watching this debate with interest.

These issues potentially have significant financial and administrative implications and the Government cannot commit themselves to making any changes in these areas before undertaking a comprehensive analysis of all the implications. The Government are examining the issues in detail. The Home Office will contribute to the work, which the Cabinet Office is co-ordinating.

Television Sets

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many *(a)* integrated digital and *(b)* analogue television sets have been bought by his Department in each of the last 24 months; and if he will publish the guidance given to officials making decisions on television purchases. [33228]

Mr. Leslie: The information in *(a)* and *(b)* could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

My Department follows the Government's requirement to consider the whole-life cost when making any purchasing decision. Whole-life costs take account of possible future obsolescence.

Computer Hacking

Norman Baker: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister on how many occasions in 2001 attempts were made to gain unauthorised access to computers in his Department by hacking; and of those how many were successful. [32737]

Mr. Leslie: During 2001 there have been no identified cases of successful attempts to gain unauthorised access to computers in my Department and its agencies by hacking.

Lost/Stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list those items valued at more than £50 which have been stolen or lost from his Department in each of the last four years. [28006]

Mr. Leslie *[pursuant to his reply, 29 January 2002, c. 251]:* I regret that my answer on lost or stolen items from my office was incorrect, and the Prime Minister's Office should not have been included. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's answer to an identical parliamentary question from the hon. Member for Buckingham is to be found on 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 26W.

Regulatory Reform

Valerie Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when the Government's regulatory reform action plan will be published. [33655]

Mr. Leslie: The Government have today published their regulatory reform action plan. This fulfils a commitment given in July 2001 to produce a list of reforms, including those that could be delivered through the new streamlined process under the Regulatory Reform Act 2001.

This action plan contains 63 new proposals for regulatory reform orders. It is also wide-ranging, covering reform at all levels, across all sectors and by all routes and bringing together over 260 proposals for change that will benefit businesses, charities, the voluntary and wider public sectors, and the individual citizen.

The Government are committed to better regulation. This involves legislating only where necessary and in the most efficient way, and deregulating and simplifying existing legislation wherever possible. The action plan brings together our proposals for deregulation and better regulation.

The plan represents a beginning, and the Government will report on progress. In the plan, we also ask people to come forward with detailed suggestions for what more could be done to reduce bureaucratic burdens and to simplify legislation.

Copies of the plan are available from the Libraries of the House.

SCOTLAND

Air Traffic Control

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what preparatory work has been completed in the building of the new air traffic control centre at Prestwick; [29101]

(2) what plans she has to hold further meetings with *(a)* representatives of NATS and *(b)* others regarding the building of the new air traffic control centre at Prestwick; [29103]

(3) if she will make a statement about her meeting with the senior management of NATS, held on 16 January; [29104]

(4) what requests she received from representatives of NATS asking for financial assistance for the new air traffic control centre at Prestwick *(a)* before 16 January and *(b)* at her meeting with the senior management of NATS on 16 January; [29105]

(5) what estimate she has made of the total cost for the building of the new air traffic control centre at Prestwick; and how this figure differs from the estimated cost before the delay; [29098]

(6) what interim targets and dates have been set for the building of the new air traffic control centre at Prestwick; [29099]

(7) what efforts she will make to monitor the progress of the building of the new air traffic control centre at Prestwick; [29100]

(8) what is the completion date for the new air traffic control centre at Prestwick; [29102]

(9) when she last met *(a)* the Secretary of State for Transport and *(b)* the Under Secretary of State for Transport to discuss the building of the new air traffic control centre at Prestwick. [29097]

Mrs. Liddell: My hon. Friend the Minister of State and I met with Richard Everitt, the CEO of National Air Traffic Services Ltd. (NATS) on 16 January. It was a useful and constructive meeting, at which I stressed the importance of the NATS new Scottish Centre (NSC) at Prestwick to the Scottish economy.

Mr. Everitt confirmed that NATS remained committed to a two-centre strategy, and to the construction of the NSC at Prestwick to bring it into operation in the

2008–09 time scale. he has agreed to keep me informed over the coming months about NATS plans for implementation of the project.

I continue to have regular discussions with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on a wide range of transport issues which affect Scotland, including matters relating to the new air traffic control centre at Prestwick.

I have not received any requests from NATS asking for financial assistance for the centre at Prestwick.

NATS have indicated that their intention is to transfer staff from the existing centre at Prestwick to the new centre when it is completed. It is not expected that the operation of the new centre will result in additional jobs; however, there will be some additional short-term employment opportunities during the construction and commissioning phase.

Although construction of the new air traffic control centre at Prestwick is being deferred, contracts for the design of the building and initial site works are in progress and will be completed. The value of these contracts is a commercial matter between NATS and the contractors. Construction of the building and the design and installation of equipment systems will be subject to a competitive procurement process, which will determine the total costs of the new centre.

Television Sets

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* integrated digital and *(b)* analogue television sets have been bought by her Department in each of the last 24 months; and if she will publish the guidance given to officials making decisions on television purchases. [33239]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department has not purchased any television sets in the last 24 months. There are no specific guidelines for making television purchases but Departments are required to consider the whole life cost when making any purchasing decision. Whole life costs take account of possible future obsolescence.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Freedom of Information Act

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what proposals he has for reviewing the operation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000; and what representations he has received on its operation. [32075]

Mr. Wills: The Freedom of Information Act 2000 is not yet fully in force. The Lord Chancellor set out his proposals for the implementation of the Act in his report to Parliament in November 2000. When the Act is in operation, it is for the Information Commissioner to draw to the Government's attention any changes to the Act she wishes to see, in her annual statutory report to Parliament.

As the Act is not yet fully in force, no representations have been received on its operation.

IT Consultants

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, how much his Department spent on IT consultants in 1992–93, 1993–94 and 1994–95. [32050]

Mr. Wills: Prior to 1995–96 information was not held centrally. On the best information available, I can provide total expenditure for external consultants for the specified period as set out in the table, but this cannot be broken down specifically for IT consultants.

	£ million
1992–93	4.706
1993–94	2.070
1994–95	2.254

Criminal Justice Policy

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what proposals he has for the reform of criminal justice policy. [32053]

Mr. Wills: The period of comment on Sir Robin Auld's report "Review of the Criminal Courts" closed on 31 January. The Government are now considering the recommendations in detail, including assessments of costs and benefits, and of comments received. The Government will announce their conclusions by way of a White Paper in the spring.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what estimates his Department has made of the costs of the proposals by Lord Justice Auld for reorganisation of the criminal courts in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [32715]

Mr. Wills: The Government have taken no decisions on Sir Robin Auld's review report. The period of comment closed on 31 January. The Government are now considering the recommendations in detail, including assessments of costs and benefits. The Government will announce their conclusions by way of a White Paper in the spring.

Magistrates Courts (Merseyside)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what his budget for the magistrates courts was on Merseyside in each year since 1992–93. [32052]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor's Department provides separate grants for revenue and capital (buildings and IT) to local authorities for magistrates courts costs. Grant is paid at 80 per cent. of expenditure, with the remaining 20 per cent. met by local authorities.

The total budget (revenue and capital in 100 per cent. terms) for magistrates courts in Merseyside by financial year is:

Year	*£ million*
1992–93	9.62
1993–94	9.55
1994–95	10.25
1995–96	9.61

Year	*£ million*
1996–97	9.77
1997–98	10.04
1998–99	10.48
1999–2000	10.73
2000–01	10.92
2001–02	12.72
2002–03	11.28

Merseyside magistrates courts committee was formed by the amalgamation of five separate committees in April 1999. The cost figures for years before 1999–2000 are aggregates of the budgets of the five committees which then existed in Merseyside.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent representations he has received about the operation of magistrates courts on Merseyside. [32051]

Mr. Wills: I have received no representations about the operation of the magistrates courts on Merseyside.

Departmental Audit

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proposals she has for auditing the efficiency of *(a)* her Department and *(b)* the agencies for which she is responsible; and if she will make a statement. [30851]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor's Department carries out a wide-ranging programme for auditing its efficiency. This is undertaken by a professional internal audit service which operates to Government internal audit standards and which audits risk management, control and governance in the Department and its agencies on an annual basis. The National Audit Office is the external auditor for the Department and its agencies' accounts and also conducts value for money studies.

Census Online

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, when she estimates the Census Online service will be made available to the public; and what will happen to the profits arising from Census Online. [32142]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Census Online service is currently available at 150 local centres around the country. At present effort is being concentrated on ensuring that, when the service returns to general internet access, it will be reliable. The charges for the census have been calculated on the basis of full cost recovery. Revenue generated by the operation of the service is intended to finance the set-up costs and the future digitisation of earlier census records.

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what the contractual arrangements are between QinetiQ and Census Online and the Public Record Office; if she will place copies of these in the Library; and if she will make a statement. [32143]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) on 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 374W.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what the estimated cost is to QinetiQ of carrying out the enhancements to the 1901 Census Online project. [32305]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 374W.

Criminal Courts Review

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, how many internet users have attempted to access the Public Record Office online site for the 1901 census; and if she will make a statement. [31308]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Public Record Office website and the 1901 census website are two distinct services. The former is attracting an increased number of users and continues to work normally. For an estimate of the number of users attempting to access the 1901 census website, I refer the hon. Member to the answer which I gave the hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) on 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 89W.

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what the results were of the evaluation undertaken by the Review of the Criminal Courts Regional Discussion Events which have taken place to date. [R] [30799]

Mr. Wills: At each event delegates were handed an evaluation form. The results of the answers are as follows: 93 per cent. of delegates who returned their evaluation forms believed that these events had value, 3 per cent. felt they did not and 4 per cent. abstained. 72 per cent. of these delegates felt they had enough opportunity to air their views, 24 per cent. did not and 4 per cent. abstained. 80 per cent. of delegates responding believed that the format of the event was effective, 13 per cent. felt that it was not and 7 per cent. abstained from answering. 86 per cent. of delegates who returned their forms would attend another event such as this, 11 per cent. felt they would not and 3 per cent. failed to answer. The number of returned forms varied at each event, for example, only seven forms were returned at Cambridge whereas at Birmingham 101 were returned.

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, how many people *(a)* attended, *(b)* registered but did not attend and *(c)* were refused registration at each of the Review of the Criminal Courts Regional Discussion Events which have taken place to date. [R] [30800]

Mr. Wills: The numbers of those who attended and those who registered but did not attend are included in the table. Registration was refused only where the number booked had reached the capacity of the room. Because of the large non-attendance rate at London, "over booking" was allowed for the events in Cardiff and Manchester.

	Attended	*Did not attend*	*Capacity of room*
Newcastle	95	13	150
Cambridge	55	5	130
London	171	129	300
Exeter	59	25	120
Birmingham	144	33	180

	Attended	*Did not attend*	*Capacity of room*
Manchester	130	67	180
Bradford	104	56	180
Cardiff	90	28	110
Total	848	356	

Transsexuals

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what steps she has taken to implement the recommendations of the Home Office report of the Interdepartmental Working Group on Transsexual People. [29880]

Lynne Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what action she proposes to take in response to the report of the Interdepartmental Working Group on Transsexual People. [30846]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The report has been carefully considered within Government and by other interested groups. The Government are sympathetic to the issues raised in the report and are actively considering how to take the matter forward.

Private Finance Initiative (Consultants)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the total external spend by his Department was on Private Finance Initiative consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PFI consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by his Department over this period; and if he will make a statement. [31038]

Mr. Wills: The total amount spent on PFI consultants over the last four years is as follows:

1998: £836,427

1999: £1,725,782

2000: £1,317,391

2001: £2,288,870.

The total number of consultancy firms used over this period was 25. The other information requested regarding full-time equivalent consultants, billed consultancy days and the implied average cost of each consultant is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Queen's Counsel

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what account she is taking of the Office of Fair Trading recommendations on the appointment of Queen's Counsel in the current year's round; and if she will make a statement. [31642]

Ms Rosie Winterton: None. There were no OFT recommendations on the appointment of Queen's Counsel, which is beyond the scope of OFT powers. The report did raise questions for my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor to consider, which he will do. The criteria for appointment of Queen's Counsel in the current year's round are set out in the Guide for Applicants, and in the Guide for Consultees. The current Guides have been available by post and on the Department's website since 28 August 2001.

Magistrates

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many magistrates have been appointed since 7 June 2001; and how many are *(a)* women, *(b)* black and *(c)* Asian. [31865]

Mr. Wills: The figures are as follows:

988 magistrates have been appointed since 7 June 2001, of which

(a) 463 were women

(b) 14 were black, and

(c) 46 were Asian.

Juvenile Offenders

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many 17-year-old defendants were dealt with by the courts in Northern Ireland in 1998. [31398]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In 1998, there were 1,008 17-year-old defendants dealt with by the courts in Northern Ireland.

Court Service

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, when the Court Service issued a notice concerning its policy on the declaration of "God Save the Queen"; and if she will place a copy of the notice in the Library. [29950]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Northern Ireland Court Service is the ministerial responsibility of the Lord Chancellor. The declaration of "God Save the Queen" on entry to and exit from the courts by the judiciary in Northern Ireland has been discontinued for some years. Court Service staff were reminded that there should be no declaration of "God Save the Queen" when the Criminal Justice Review Implementation Plan was published. A formal notice to that effect dated 25 January 2002 has now been issued and a copy has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the registered providers of individual learning accounts. [28852]

John Healey *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* A list of registered learning providers has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for what reason information concerning the availability of a disc containing personal details and identification numbers of individual learning account holders, given to Ministers on 21 November 2001, was not disclosed to hon. Members in the

Westminster Hall debate on 11 December 2001; and for what reason this information was released to the *Financial Times* for publication on Wednesday 16 January. [29228]

John Healey: At the time of the debate on 11 December we believed it would adversely affect the conduct of the investigations to release this more detailed information. However, after a further five weeks we felt that it was possible to release this information without adversely affecting the investigations and the Minister did so in writing to the chair of the Select Committee in advance of the hearing on 16 January.

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when an alternative scheme to the individual learning accounts will be put in place. [30359]

John Healey *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* We are determined to review thoroughly all aspects of the operation of the ILA scheme. During January and February we are conducting a consultation with providers, learners and other stakeholders to take their views. The results will be an important element in developing a successor scheme.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will announce a successor to the individual learning accounts scheme; and if she will make a statement. [26478]

John Healey *[holding answer 11 January 2002]:* We are determined to review thoroughly all aspects of the operation of the ILA scheme. During January and February we are undertaking a survey to gather the views of a wide range of ILA learning providers, a sample of learning account holders and key stakeholders. The results will be an important element in developing a successor scheme.

Pre-school and After-school Provision

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* day nurseries, *(b)* playgroups, *(c)* child minders, *(d)* out of schools clubs and *(e)* holiday schemes have been provided in the constituency of Buckingham in each year since 1997. [27769]

Margaret Hodge: The information is not available in the form requested. The Department collects information on day nurseries and playgroups and pre-schools defined in terms of the full day or sessional care that they provide. It does not collect information on pre-schools separately from playgroups. The Department collects information in terms of local authorities and not constituencies.

As a result of the local government reorganisation of Buckinghamshire in April 1997, information for 1997 is not comparable with that for later years.

The available information for Buckinghamshire local authority is shown in the following table.

Numbers of day care providers[1] by type of provider: Buckinghamshire local authority area, 1998–2001

Position at 31 March each year	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Day nurseries	—	20	90	90
Playgroups and pre-schools	—	70	200	200
Child minders	1,300	450	1,100	1,100
Out of school clubs	—	20	20	20
Holiday schemes	—	10	[2]80	70

Numbers of day care places[1] by type of provider: Buckinghamshire local authority area, 1998–2001

Position at 31 March each year	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Day nurseries	—	1,050	2,430	1,397
Playgroups and pre-schools	4,926	1,820	1,350	4,644
Child minders	—	1,792	6,822	6,174
Out of school clubs	—	546	210	417
Holiday schemes	—	614	[2]1,630	4,156

[1] Figures have been rounded

[2] Includes those schemes exempt from registration

Source:

The local authority provided the data

Figures for March 2001 for England and Government Office regions were in Statistical Bulletin 08/0[illegible] "Children's Day Care Facilities as at 31 March 2001" which is available at www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics/ and from the Library.

Higher Education

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of higher education entrants in 2000–01 and 2001–02 *(a)* from Dartford and Gravesham and *(b)* in England were from social classes III, IV and V. [28241]

Margaret Hodge: The available information on the social class of higher education students in the UK, covering only those who apply to full-time and sandwich undergraduate courses via the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) are given in the table; data on the family background of students on postgraduate or part-time courses are not held centrally. Comparable figures on the social class of HE students from each constituency are not held centrally.

The Government are committed to raising the participation rates for people from less affluent family backgrounds, and have introduced Excellence Challenge, including the AimHigher campaign, which is targeted at raising attainment and aspirations among young people who traditionally would not consider going to university.

UK domiciled accepted applicants to full-time and sandwich undergraduate courses in the UK

	Year of entry			
	2000–01		*2001–02*	
Social class	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
I Professional	38,800	14	39,700	14
II Intermediate	117,700	44	120,800	44
IIIN Skilled non-manual	37,800	14	38,800	14
IIIM Skilled manual	44,400	17	48,400	18
IV Partly skilled	24,200	9	23,100	8
V Unskilled	5,500	2	5,600	2
Total known	268,400	100	276,500	100
Unknown	40,300	—	49,000	—
Total	308,700	—	325,500	—

Source:

Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of students from socio-economic classes IIIm, IV and V she estimates higher education institutions will accept by *(a)* 2005 and *(b)* 2010; whether each higher education institution will be expected to accept the same proportion; what deviation from a standard proportion will be accepted; and if she will make a statement. [31979]

Margaret Hodge: We are committed to widening participation in higher education, and we are raising the attainment and aspirations of young people from these social classes through our work in schools and colleges and the Excellence Challenge. As we progress towards our target to increase participation to 50 per cent. of those aged 18–30 by the end of the decade, we expect the proportion from these social classes to increase. The Higher Education Funding Council for England will be setting targets to support this objective.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her definition is of higher education. [31373]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* The Act of Parliament which defines courses of higher education is the Education Reform Act 1988. Schedule 6 of the Act describes courses of higher education as:

(a) a course for the further training of teachers or youth and community workers;

(b) a post-graduate course (including a higher degree course);

(c) a first degree course;

(d) a course for the Diploma of Higher Education;

(e) a course for the Higher National Diploma or Higher National Certificate of the Business and Technician Education Council, or the Diploma in Management Studies;

(f) a course for the Certificate in Education;

(g) a course in preparation for a professional examination at higher level;

(h) a course providing education at a higher level (whether or not in preparation for an examination).

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what criteria the Government use for determining which higher education courses qualify for meeting the university participation target of 50 per cent. of people under the age of 30 years. [31269]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* The target relates to good quality HE experiences. We are therefore including all courses of one year or more, above A level and its equivalents, that lead to a qualification awarded by higher education institutions or widely recognised national awarding bodies (eg the Institute of Management).

We are also considering including a small number of professional qualifications of less than one year's duration, for example in nursing, law, business and management. We are currently seeking advice from the QCA as to whether the nature and content of these qualifications could appropriately be classified as being of a higher education standard.

Sixth-forms

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the transfer of responsibility for post 16 education from Coventry city council to the Learning and Skills Council; and for what reason an additional £1.5 million has been taken away from the SSA grant. [28887]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 23 January 2002]:* The Learning and Skills Council will begin funding LEAs for the provision delivered in their school sixth-forms from April. LEAs will continue to pass funds to schools and retain their wider responsibilities for sixth-forms.

The overall amount of funding that we have transferred to the LSC is £1.35 billion for 2002–03. This represents our best estimate of the likely funding for school sixth-forms in that year, taking into account growth in pupil numbers and in funding per pupil. The LSC issued provisional allocations for 2002–03 to LEAs and schools in December. These include funds for both mainstream sixth-forms and for post-16 pupils with special needs. The provisional allocation for Coventry was £11.8 million, of which almost £1 million was for provision for pupils with statements of SEN.

Data on pupil numbers and qualifications taken from the September 2001 pupil count have been used to calculate funding levels for mainstream school sixth-forms under the LSC's formula. A higher proportion of schools than originally expected are being funded under the formula. For around two-thirds of sixth-forms it generates higher levels of funding than their underpinning real terms guarantee. The pattern in Coventry is broadly in line with this national picture.

The total amount of funding passing to an LEA from the LSC for school sixth-forms will be matched by a deduction from their Education SSA. The allocations will be confirmed shortly.

New Schools

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the new schools built since 1997; and if she will list those granted funding to be built in the next two years. [29627]

John Healey: We do not hold information in the form requested. It is for local education authorities to determine the need for additional school places in the maintained sector and, where necessary, to build or support the provision of new schools. The Department makes available capital funding for new school places; many of these are provided in existing schools.

School Places

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 30 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1209W, on school places, what application her Department has received from Buckingham local education authority for capital funding for school places in each year since 1997; and what the outcome was in each case. [30083]

John Healey: The table shows the number of new pupil places applied for by Buckinghamshire local education authority since 1998, the earliest year for which records are readily available, the number of places the Department recognised and supported and the amount of funding that was allocated. This support reflected the need for additional numbers of school places in areas of population growth where there was no capacity in any of the schools in the surrounding area.

	Places applied for	*Places supported*	*Funding allocated (£000)*
1998–99	1,242	1,213	4,579
1999–2000	881	847	5,372
2000–01	452	384	2,490

	Places applied for	*Places supported*	*Funding allocated (£000)*
2001–02	342	271	1,822
2002–03	495	495	4,203
Total	3,412	3,210	18,466

National Grid for Learning

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 712W, what the average National Grid for Learning funding has been per LEA in each year since 1997. [30123]

John Healey: National Grid for Learning funding through the Standards Fund began in 1998–99. Funding is allocated to LEAs by formula based on school and pupil numbers and any average would not be an accurate indication of the amount of funding allocated to each LEA. However, a notional average for National Grid for Learning allocations by LEA is:

	£ million
1998–99	0.680
1999–2000	0.700
2000–01	1.366
2001–02	1.633

Government-supported Training

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many young people were on Government training schemes in each of the last 10 years. [30479]

John Healey *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* This information is published in quarterly Statistical First Releases, which are in the Library of the House. The information is also available on the world wide web. Figures for England are on the Department for Education and Skills site at http://www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics/DB/SFR/s0310/ index.html. Government supported training is a devolved matter in Wales, and figures for Wales are on the National Assembly for Wales site at http://www.wales.gov.uk/keypubstatisticsforwalesheadline/content/post16education/2001/hdw20011221a-e.htm.

Sector Skills Development Agency

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the new Sector Skills Development Agency will be created. [30549]

John Healey: The Sector Skills Development Agency will come into existence from the beginning of April 2002. We expect to have a chair in place and other senior post holders identified by 31 March. A small support team will be in place from the beginning of April. The SSDA will have filled most posts by June 2002.

Schools (Harwich)

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much funding has been given to *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in the Harwich constituency for the refurbishment of school buildings since 1997. [30983]

John Healey: Information is not available in the form requested. Allocations of most capital funding for schools are made at local education authority level, which will hold information about how allocations have been made at school level.

The new deal for schools (NDS) programme was introduced in 1997, particularly to focus on refurbishing schools and also to help address the backlog of urgent repairs in school buildings. The following table sets out the capital resources made available for schools in Essex under the NDS programme, including those already announced for future years. Total capital resources for schools allocated to Essex over the period 1997–98 to 2003–04 amount to £210 million.

New deal for schools: Essex

£ million

	Allocation
1997–98	1.2
1998–99	2.6
1999–2000	6.2
2000–01	24.3
2001–02	14.5
2002–03	24.5
2003–04	36.7
Total	110.0

School Sports Facilities

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools have private sports facilities built on school grounds. [31061]

John Healey: The Department does not hold this information.

Mobile Phone Masts

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools have sold land to mobile phone companies to build mobile phone masts since 1997. [31062]

John Healey: The Department does not collect this information.

Class Sizes (Lancashire)

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many five, six and seven-year old children were taught in classes of more than 30 pupils in Lancashire in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001. [31219]

Mr. Timms: The total number of key stage 1 pupils in classes of 31 or more pupils taught by one teacher in Lancashire local education authority as at January 1997 and 2001 were 17,712 and 127 respectively.

Union Learning Fund

Dr. Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the growth and development of the Union Learning Fund. [R] [31466]

John Healey: Trade unions play a key role in promoting the development of learning and skills in the workplace. To help them do this my Department has provided financial support through the Union Learning Fund since 1998. This year (2001–02) funding will total £7 million, rising to £9 million next year and £11 million in 2003–04.

When it was launched, the Union Learning Fund was a new and innovative experiment, but it has now become an established part of the lifelong learning agenda. It is helping trade unions use their influence with employers, employees and others to encourage greater take up of learning at work and boost their capacity as learning organisations. It has so far benefited over 25,000 people in the workplace through a wide variety of projects ranging from tackling basic skills needs to advanced professional development. It has also led to the development of a new breed of activist, the union learning representative, and helped to establish a network of over 3,000 learning representatives nationwide.

Union learning representatives are ideally placed to help and encourage workers to improve their skills, particularly among the very lowest skilled workers and those with literacy and numeracy problems. That is why we have included a clause in the new Employment Bill that will give statutory backing to union learning representatives. It will reinforce the invaluable role that union learning representatives are currently playing in the workplace to promote work force development and open up new training opportunities for their colleagues.

Mature Students

Dr. Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the proportion of *(a)* part-time and *(b)* full-time mature students entering higher education in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000 and (iii) 2001. [R] [31468]

Margaret Hodge: The available data for 1999 and 2000 are given in the table. Corresponding data for 2001 will be available in April 2002. Latest figures from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), covering full-time first degree and HND courses only, show that 63,700 home domiciled students aged 21 or over were accepted for entry in autumn 2001, an increase of 9.5 per cent. compared to the previous year. UCAS does not cover students applying for part-time undergraduate courses.

The Government have introduced additional financial help for student parents, the great majority of whom are mature, including a child care grant and a travel and equipment grant.

Home domiciled undergraduate entrants[1] in the UK

Thousand

	1999–2000		*2000–01*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Full-time				
Young[2]	277.4	73	276.1	73
Mature[2]	103.1	27	103.1	27
Total	380.5	100	379.3	100
Part-time				
Young[2]	23.7	9	24.5	8
Mature[2]	249.1	91	274.7	92
Total	272.8	100	299.2	100

[1] Census count as at 1 December. Covers first degree, HND, HNC and all other undergraduate courses in both HE and FE institutions.

[2] Young entrants are those aged under 21, mature are those aged 21 or over.

School Expenditure

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total expenditure per pupil was in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in (i) Westminster, (ii) Kensington and Chelsea and (iii) each region in England in (A) 1997–98, (B) 2000–01, (C) 2001–02 and (D) projected for 2002–03. [31823]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is contained in the following table.

NIE per pupil—unit cost

	Pre-primary and primary		*Secondary*	
	1997–98	*1999–2000*	*1997–98*	*1999–2000*
Cash terms				
LEA				
Westminster	2,550	2,770	3,120	3,350
Kensington and Chelsea	2,650	2,850	3,460	3,650
GOR				
North-east England	1,640	1,960	2,210	2,440
North-west England	1,660	1,930	2,340	2,560
Yorkshire and Humberside	1,700	1,980	2,200	2,500
East midlands	1,660	1,940	2,330	2,540
West midlands	1,730	2,040	2,340	2,580
Eastern England	1,720	1,940	2,390	2,560
South-east England	1,690	2,000	2,320	2,510
South-west England	1,660	1,930	2,300	2,510
London	1,080	—	2,810	—
Inner London	—	2,700	—	3,360
Outer London	—	2,230	—	2,830
Real terms				
LEA				
Westminster	2,740	2,820	3,340	3,410
Kensington and Chelsea	2,840	2,900	3,700	3,720
GOR				
North-east England	1,750	2,000	2,370	2,480
North-west England	1,780	1,960	2,510	2,600
Yorkshire and Humberside	1,820	2,020	2,350	2,550
East midlands	1,780	1,980	2,500	2,580
West midlands	1,850	2,080	2,500	2,630
Eastern England	1,840	1,970	2,560	2,610
South-east England	1,810	2,040	2,490	2,550
South-west England	1,780	1,960	2,460	2,550
London	2,230	—	3,010	—
Inner London	—	2,740	—	3,420
Outer London	—	2,270	—	2,880

Notes:

1. The figures consist of NIE per pupil in pre-primary/primary schools and secondary schools in 1997–98 and 1999–2000 (the most recent year for which the Department has finalised outturn data) and are in both cash and real terms.

2. Expenditure data are drawn from RO1 (1997–98) and section 52 table 3 (1999–2000) returns. The expenditure data used to derive these unit costs cover all school based recurrent spending, including teaching and non-teaching staff salaries, school premises costs, equipment and supplies and unspent balances held by schools at the year end.

3. Academic year pupil numbers are drawn from annual schools census data and a weighted average is taken to provide financial year estimates.

4. All figures are rounded to the nearest £10.

5. Figures are converted from cash to real terms 2000–01 prices using the December 2001 GDP deflators.

6. Information for 2000–01 and 2001–02 is not yet available and as a result it is not possible to arrive at a projection.

Coalfield Areas (Educational Attainment)

Dr. Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the Government's strategies to raise educational attainment in present and former coalfield areas. [R] [31470]

Mr. Timms: We have several strategies that are helping to raise educational attainment in coalfield and other areas. Standards of literacy and numeracy in primary schools are the highest they have ever been and evidence shows that the coalfields are benefiting from these strategies although we recognise that there is still work to be done.

We published the Schools White Paper "Achieving Success", last September, which sets out our vision for education for the years ahead. The Key Stage 3 strategy (11 to 14-year-olds) aims to build on the success at primary level but has been adapted to meet the more diverse and complex nature of the secondary curriculum.

We have introduced floor targets so that every school, wherever it is based, will be supported to secure at least 20 per cent. of students with five good GCSEs by 2004, rising to 25 per cent. by 2006.

Coalfield areas are also benefiting from more localised targeting with initiatives such as Excellence in Cities and Education Action Zones providing additional resources for schools serving disadvantaged areas. Coalfield areas already benefiting from these initiatives include Rotherham, St. Helens, Barnsley, Doncaster and Wigan. Matters relating to Wales, should be addressed to the Welsh assembly.

Pupil Mobility

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures she *(a)* has introduced and *(b)* plans to implement in response to the report of the Migration Research Unit into the effect of pupil mobility on (i) schools and (ii) educational attainment. [31849]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The report from the Migration Research Unit identified a number of groups of mobile pupils. In only one of these was an effect on attainment found. This was for those pupils who moved house frequently due to family break-up. The effects on schools included the need for flexible induction. Measures being introduced and that are planned for implementation include:

> A project with 22 schools facing challenging circumstances with high mobility to raise the attainment of mobile populations;
>
> Guidance on the Standards Site illustrating how schools with high mobility have effectively tackled this;
>
> Monitoring and evaluation of outcomes of mobile pupils through the use of unique pupil numbers.

Departmental Payments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the instances in which her Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies failed to pay valid invoices within 30 days or after the agreed credit period in the financial year 2000–01. [32037]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: In the financial year 2000–01 the number of invoices not paid within 30 days or after the agreed credit period for the DfEE and its agencies are as follows:

	Number
DfEE	10,420
Employment Service	6,197

[1] 4.5 per cent. of all invoices paid

[2] 3.0 per cent. of all invoices paid

Information for the relevant non-departmental public bodies is not collected centrally.

Teacher Training Courses

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students failed to complete their teacher training courses; and what percentage of all the students on such courses this represented in the latest academic year for which figures are available. [32233]

Mr. Timms: The numbers and rates of students failing to complete their teacher training courses are not collected centrally.

The Initial Teacher Training Performance Profiles, published by the Teacher Training Agency show the number and percentage of final-year trainees at 1 December in England who subsequently failed to gain Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) at the end of their final year. Latest figures are available for academic year 1999–2000 (ITT Performance Profiles 2001).

In 1999–2000, there were 24,654 final-year trainees in England, of whom 2,960 failed to gain QTS at the end of their final year. This represented 12 per cent. of final-year trainees.

These figures do not take into account drop-out during earlier years of the course, which mainly applies to undergraduate courses; and may include trainees awarded QTS after the November following the trainee's final year.

AS Levels

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many representations her Department has received since June 2001 critical of the AS Levels from *(a)* school governing bodies, *(b)* headteachers, *(c)* local education authorities, *(d)* teachers, *(e)* students and *(f)* parents. [32692]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department received a total of 694 representations from 1 June 2001 to date in which criticism of some aspect of AS Levels was raised. Complete data are not available on the number of representations under the various categories as requested. However, available information suggests that the majority of correspondence came from parents and students.

Maintenance Grants

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much grant was paid to higher education students in 1979. [32731]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* The total amount paid in maintenance grants in academic year 1978–79 was £272 million (cash terms). There were 320,000 eligible higher education students, which equates to an average maintenance grant of £850 per student.

Key Stage 4

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to deregulate Key Stage 4; and if she will make a statement. [33054]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: In the White Paper "Schools: achieving success" we said that it would be necessary to create more space at Key Stage 4 of the National Curriculum and agreed that there is insufficient flexibility in the current system. We will shortly be publishing a consultation paper setting out more detailed proposals.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Open Skies

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if it is his policy to seek to conclude a treaty between the UK and the USA on open skies before 31 January; [30538]

(2) if a treaty between the USA and the UK on open skies covers *(a)* cabotage, *(b)* wet leasing, *(c)* foreign ownership and *(d)* fifth freedoms; and if these issues need to be resolved before the UK would agree to a treaty; [30536]

(3) if it is his policy to seek full wet leasing rights for UK airlines in the USA before agreeing a new open skies treaty with that country; [30541]

(4) if it is Government policy that there should be a full reciprocation of rights and privileges between the carriers of both nations before the UK concludes a treaty on open skies with the USA; [30535]

(5) what assessment he has received on the balance of benefits to the UK economy of conceding fifth freedom access to the European market for USA airlines in return for the American authorities approval of the British Airways/American Airway alliance; [30540]

(6) what assessment he has made of the impact on UK carriers of granting rights at *(a)* Stansted and *(b)* other UK airports to USA carriers without reciprocal rights in the USA to UK carriers; [30537]

(7) if it is his policy to seek fifth freedom rights for UK airliners in the USA before agreeing a new open skies treaty with that country; [30542]

(8) when the next negotiations on open skies are scheduled to take place between the USA and the UK; [30539]

(9) if it his policy that an open skies treaty between the USA and the UK should be subject to review by the *(a)* European Court and *(b)* European Commission. [30543]

Mr. Spellar: Negotiations on UK/US air services, which were scheduled to resume in Washington on 28 January, were postponed when it became clear that the prospect of a large part of the UK's airline industry gaining effective access to the large US domestic market had been removed. However, we remain committed to achieving the full and genuine liberalisation of the UK/US aviation market. In pursuing this policy we shall continue to be guided by a consideration of the widest spectrum of UK consumer and economic interests.

In negotiating air services agreements we seek to make balanced exchanges of rights. A liberalisation deal would, by definition, include more liberal traffic rights for the carriers of each side so, if granted, fifth freedom rights in a new UK/US Agreement would be available to the carriers of both sides.

It remains Government policy to seek to persuade the US Government to open up their large domestic market to competition from UK carriers, both passenger and cargo.

The UK has no policy that air services agreements which it concludes with the US, or indeed with any other country, should be subject to review by the European Court or the European Commission.

Fares

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what assumptions about future fare levels the 10-year plan and the SRA strategic plan are based. [32935]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to page 26 of the SRA Strategic Plan and to page 9 of the 10-year plan background analysis document.

East London Line

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will make a further statement on the East London line. [32940]

Mr. Spellar: I have no immediate plans to make a further statement.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimates he has made of the availability of network capacity to run East London line trains to Croydon. [32941]

Mr. Spellar: The Strategic Rail Authority, in taking the project forward, has determined that network capacity is available for a service to operate to Croydon.

Central Railway

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the situation concerning the Central Railway proposal. [32957]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) on 14 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 17W.

South Central

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who will have executive responsibility for establishing the special purpose financing vehicle for investment in routes operated by South Central. [32932]

Mr. Jamieson: The terms on which any special purpose vehicle is set up, and the responsibility for doing so, are a matter for negotiation among the parties.

Crossrail

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will take steps to promote crossrail through a hybrid bill. [32946]

Mr. Spellar: A final decision has yet to be taken on the most appropriate method for securing powers for any crossrail scheme.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether the promoters of crossrail will be able to bring forward and construct the scheme earlier than envisaged in the SRA strategic plan; and if he will provide public financial support for such a move. [32947]

Mr. Spellar: As the plan states, options for taking forward the scheme are being developed by the SRA/TfL joint venture Cross London Rail Links Ltd. Timing of the next stages will depend on the outcome of that work, and construction of a scheme will depend upon the necessary powers being obtained.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he last met the Mayor of London to discuss crossrail. [32948]

Mr. Spellar: Various crossrail issues were on the agenda when I chaired the most recent meeting of the High-Level London Rail Group on 17 January. The Mayor of London and the chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority are co-members of the group.

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what status the Crossrail project has within the Strategic Rail Authority plans up to 2010; and if he will make a statement. [30737]

Mr. Jamieson: The SRA's Strategic Plan makes it clear that a number of major schemes, including Crossrail, are being explored further in terms of feasibility and value for money. The authority has underlined its commitment to Crossrail by providing half of the £154 million funding for the new company which is currently undertaking development work.

Tyne and Wear Metro

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if it is his policy to allow mixed use of lines by heavy and light rail services on routes, in a similar way to the Tyne and Wear Metro extension. [33406]

Mr. Spellar: Mixed use of lines by heavy and light rail services is a matter for the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Any proposal for dual use would entail a fundamental change to the safety case of the infrastructure operator. The HSE would consider an application on that basis. For example, HSE approval of the Tyne and Wear Metro extension was dependent on all signals on the Metro extension being fitted with an automatic train protection system similar to those fitted to the rest of this stretch of the mainline network.

Rail Strategic Plan

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 30 January 2002, Ref 30261, *Official Report*, column 324W, if he will list the infrastructure projects that will not require some funding through special purpose vehicles. [33405]

Mr. Jamieson: This will be a matter for consideration case by case.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions where the development work on the 10-year plan identified 23 per cent. spare capacity on the rail network in forming its assumptions for future growth potential. [33394]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to footnote 7 on page 10 of the 10-year plan background analysis document.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the level of unallocated financial reserves in the total allocation for the 10-year plan on *(a)* 14 January and *(b)* 30 January. [32960]

Mr. Spellar: The level of the unallocated provision in the total allocation for the 10-year plan on both *(a)* 14 January 2002 and *(b)* 30 January 2002 was £6.7 billion.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 321W, ref 31540, what proportion of the funding relates to each of (i), (ii) and (iii). [33390]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 175W, with (i) relating to the transfer from the unallocated budget in the 10-year plan while (ii) and (iii) relate to the funding additional to the original 10-year plan.

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 321W, ref 31541, if he will make a statement on the timetable required to achieve the target dates for the complete opening of the East London line as outlined in the SRA strategic plan. [33392]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 866W.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 320W, ref 26291, what took place between the meeting with the Chairman of Railtrack and 6 August that led him to appoint advisers. [33413]

Mr. Jamieson: My officials met with Railtrack's financial advisers between these two dates.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 321W, ref 31540, if he will make a statement on the cost implications of the October 2000 final conclusions of the Rail Regulator's periodic review of access charges. [33391]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to Appendix D of the October 2000 final conclusions.

Multi-modal Studies

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the estimated cost is of multi-modal studies initiated since 1997. [32958]

Mr. Jamieson: The estimated cost of the programme of multi-modal studies is £30 million excluding VAT.

Railways

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in which financial years the additional finance for the railways announced on 29 January will be allocated and spent. [32961]

Mr. Jamieson: The profile of the £33.5 billion of Government funding for the railways was set out in the reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) on 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 871–72W. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 175W, setting out where this increase in funding is to come from.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions by what means he has set a target figure for private investment in rail under the 10 year plan. [32953]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to paragraphs 53 and 54 of the 10-year plan background analysis document.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what additional projects he will bring forward following the additional finance for the railways announced on 29 January. [32962]

Mr. Spellar: The £4.5 billion increase in public funding has been factored into the prioritised investment programme set out in the Strategic Rail Authority's Strategic Plan.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 872W, what the annual public investment in railways was in each year since 1978–79, calculated on the same basis. [32082]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to Table 4.2 of the Strategic Rail Authority's quarterly national Rail Trends bulletin, and for years before 1986–87 to the British Rail annual report and accounts.

London Underground

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether the PPP scheme for London Underground will deliver additional capacity at a faster rate than projected passenger growth. [32933]

Mr. Spellar: The modernisation plans have been designed to eliminate London Underground's massive investment backlog and ensure that the existing infrastructure is brought up to, and maintained at, modern standards, both now and in the future.

At the same time the plans will deliver improved waiting times, journey times and crowding levels on all underground lines, which will result in increased passenger capacity.

Against this background London Underground believe that capacity increases should keep pace with likely forecast increases in demand.

Investment

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total public sector investment in transport was between 1987 and 1997; and what the figure is in 2002 prices. [32954]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to Table 4.2 of the Strategic Rail Authority's quarterly national Rail Trends bulletin.

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much public money was invested in the railways in each year from 1990. [27695]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the right hon. Member to Table 4.1 of the Strategic Rail Authority's quarterly National Rail Trends bulletin for an historic series of Government support to the rail industry.

Rail Projects

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the cost of setting up a special purpose financing vehicle; and from what source funding will be drawn to finance the establishment of such financing vehicles for rail projects. [32931]

Mr. Spellar: Section 4 of the SRA Strategic Plan discusses the issues involved in developing and implementing special purpose vehicles. Funding issues will be addressed as part of this process.

Official Engagements

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list his official engagements since 16 November 2001; and what mode of transport he used to get to engagements outside Westminster. [33059]

Mr. Byers: My arrangements for official travel are made in line with guidance set out in Chapter 7 of the Ministerial Code and the accompanying guidance document "Travel by Ministers", using the most efficient and cost-effective mode of transport, and bearing in mind security considerations.

I travelled by car to four engagements in London, in the city, Bloomsbury, Dalston and Pall Mall on 20 November, 5 December, 6 December and 11 December, and one in Newcastle on 3 December.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 13 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 1018W, on the millennium dome, what advice he has received on when the holes in the lining of the two skin roof of the millennium dome will be repaired. [33389]

Ms Keeble: Although the holes in the inner lining of the roof of the dome did not affect the operation and effectiveness of the roof and the lining, the holes were repaired in late December 2001, while carrying out other work near the top of the dome, since this offered a cost-effective opportunity to undertake repair.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 17W, on the Millennium Dome, if he will state for each visitor to the millennium dome since 1 July whether they visited the interior of the millennium dome, indicating the length and purpose of safety training they received; and in how many cases no safety training was received; and for what reason. [33388]

Ms Keeble: The information is not available centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Central Line

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what feasibility study has been carried out into the construction of a new Central line station at Bishopsgate; and what conclusion that study reached. [32942]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for London Underground, who advise that no business case could be made for this option. The cost was then estimated at around £50 million. The benefits of a station for users in the Bishopsgate area were largely outweighed by the time penalty which would have resulted for users travelling through.

Satellite Television Dishes

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 20W, on satellite television dishes, if he will make a statement on the process by which he will review planning regulations relating to satellite terminals to determine how current rules could be relaxed to facilitate broadband deployment; and when he plans to announce the result of the review. [33387]

Ms Keeble: As indicated in our Broadband Strategy, published on 3 December 2001, we shall review planning regulations relating to satellite terminals to determine how current rules could be relaxed to facilitate broadband deployment, while continuing to minimise the environmental and visual impact of residential satellite terminals.

We are currently considering the process by which the review will be taken forward.

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what events *(a)* he is and *(b)* other Ministers in his Department are planning to attend as part of the golden jubilee celebrations; and what events his Department is planning to arrange to celebrate the golden jubilee. [33250]

Dr. Whitehead: The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and other Ministers in his Department will fully support the golden jubilee celebrations, attending official events as invited. The Department has played a full role in supporting the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in making suitable preparations for the golden jubilee programme.

Government Expenditure (London)

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total Government expenditure in each London borough *(a)* was in each of the past five years and *(b)* is planned for 2002–03, broken down into (i) Revenue Support Order Standard spending assessment, (ii) education special projects, (iii) education capital spending, (iv) housing capital spending, (v) Single Regeneration Budget and (vi) crime prevention. [28084]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Rail Delays

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the cost to business of rail delays in each of the past five years. [28531]

Mr. Spellar: The Department has made no such estimate.

Housing (Birmingham)

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the change in annual revenue available for financing investment in Birmingham's council housing if stock transfer goes ahead; and what assumptions he has made in calculating this figure. [30363]

Ms Keeble: This is a matter for Birmingham city council to determine as part of its assessment of investment options. Its 2001 Housing Revenue Account Business Plan suggests that there is a funding shortfall over the 30 year life of the plan of £351 million. The current housing transfer proposal meets the investment needs in full.

Rail Speed Restrictions

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the *(a)* location and *(b)* line where temporary speed restrictions are in force on the railway. [31027]

Mr. Spellar: This is an operational matter for Railtrack.

Social Housing

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what entitlement there is to social housing for British citizens leaving Zimbabwe because of the internal situation in that country. [31192]

Ms Keeble: British citizens returning to the UK from overseas have the same entitlement to local authority housing as citizens already resident provided they are habitually resident in the Common Travel Area (CTA), that is, the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. Unless resuming a previous period of habitual residence within the CTA, they would need to demonstrate, among other things, that their future centre of interest lay in the UK in order to establish habitual residence. Some local housing authorities currently set additional qualifying criteria.

British citizens returning to the UK from overseas are entitled to apply for social housing held by other registered social landlords (housing associations). They are also eligible to seek assistance from social services authorities under the National Assistance Act 1948 or the Children Act 1989, if necessary.

Concessionary Coach Travel

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which coach companies have agreed to participate in the national concessionary coach travel scheme for pensioners. [31713]

Ms Keeble: As my hon. Friend will know from my written answer of 14 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 725W, my Department is currently discussing with representatives of the coach industry implementation of the proposal that concessionary fares for older and disabled passengers should be offered on scheduled long distance coach services in return for those services becoming eligible for fuel duty rebate.

We aim to complete these discussions as soon as possible with the intention, as previously announced, of bringing forward regulations during 2002–03 to implement this proposal. Until details are finalised, I would not expect any company to confirm participation in these new arrangements. However, my expectation is that the scheme will involve the majority of, if not all, relevant services.

Train Protection Systems

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will estimate the *(a)* lives that would be saved and *(b)* track worker lives lost over 10 years by the alternative train protection systems under consideration; and if he will give the (i) capital and (ii) running costs of each system. [32074]

Mr. Jamieson: A steering group chaired by the Strategic Rail Authority and Railway Safety is presently evaluating options for the extension of automatic train protection systems and their costs.

Local Authority Housing (London)

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what was *(a)* the actual and *(b)* percentage change in the number of council and RSL homes available to let between 1997–98 and 2000–01 in each local authority in London. [31851]

Ms Keeble: The number of properties owned by local authorities and registered social landlords which were reported as being vacant and available for letting in each London borough at the start of each year was as follows.

Local authority and registered social landlord "management vacant"[1] *dwellings*

	As at end of year		*Change*	*Change*
	1997–98	*2000–01*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Barking and Dagenham	510	382	–128	–25
Barnet	217	172	–45	–21
Bexley	187	73	–114	–61
Brent	270	188	–82	–30
Bromley	207	274	67	32
Camden	364	192	–172	–47
City of London	14	11	–3	–21
Croydon	256	201	–55	–21
Ealing	181	134	–47	–26
Enfield	243	178	–65	–27
Greenwich	437	204	–233	–53
Hackney	546	490	–56	–10
Hammersmith and Fulham	287	210	–77	–27
Haringey	369	184	–185	–50
Harrow	70	80	10	14
Havering	200	247	47	24
Hillingdon	122	119	–3	–2
Hounslow	160	129	–31	–19
Islington	770	290	–480	–62
Kensington and Chelsea	216	154	–62	–29
Kingston upon Thames	80	93	13	16
Lambeth	572	403	–169	–30
Lewisham	367	248	–119	–32
Merton	83	71	–12	–14
Newham	473	299	–174	–37
Redbridge	98	192	94	96
Richmond upon Thames	149	87	–62	–42
Southwark	601	408	–193	–32
Sutton	107	52	–55	–51
Tower Hamlets	479	399	–80	–17
Waltham Forest	283	206	–77	–27
Wandsworth	296	245	–51	–17
Westminster	354	196	–158	–45
London total	9,568	6,811	–2,757	–29

[1] Management vacants are those available for letting immediately, or after completion of only minor repairs.

Source:

DTLR annual Housing Investment Programme and Housing Corporation RS returns

There will always be a certain level of empty properties for operational reasons, including those vacant for very short periods between tenants.

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many public appointments he has made since 7 June 2001; and if he will list the names of the persons appointed. [31861]

Ms Keeble: DTLR Ministers made 20 appointments and 17 reappointments between 7 June 2001 and 31 December 2001 to its non-departmental public bodies. These were:

	Non-departmental public bodies
Appointments	
Timothy Corner[1]	Advisory Panel on Standards for the Planning Inspectorate
Hazel Duffy[1]	
Anthony Prior[1]	
Gill Richardson[1]	
Richard Bowker	Commission for Integrated Transport
Mike Hodgkinson	
Sir Roy McNulty	
Baroness Scott	
Stephen Richards	Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Wales
John Bowen[2]	Audit Commission
Victor Benjamin	Commission for the New Towns and English Partnerships
Janet Putman	Housing Action Trust, Castle Vale
Geraldine Huka	Housing Corporation
Richard Bowker	Strategic Rail Authority
Liane Farrier	Rent Assessment Panel, Southern
Jane Perrett	Traffic Area, North Eastern
Jane Perrett	Traffic Area, North Western
David Ibbs	Valuation Tribunal, West Midlands West
Sir Roy McNulty	Civil Aviation Authority
Helen Simpson	
Reappointments	
Charlie Watson	Advisory Panel on Standards for the Planning Inspectorate
Kenneth George	Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Wales
Judith Curson[2]	Audit Commission
Yvonne Hutchinson	Housing Corporation
Andrew Winckler	
Lew Adams	Strategic Rail Authority
Pen Kent	
David Quarmby	
Maldwyn Chapman	Rent Assessment Panel, London
Donald Perry Cooke	Rent Assessment Panel, Southern
Patrick Mulvenna	Traffic Area, North East
Patrick Mulvenna	Traffic Area, North West
Richard McFarlane	Traffic Area, Scottish
Alan Bourlet	Traffic Area, West Midland and Wales
Alan Jenkins	
Alan Maddrell	
Colin Senior	Civil Aviation Authority

[1] These appointments are made jointly with the First Minister for Wales

[2] These appointments are made jointly with the Secretaries of State for Health and Wales

Shipping (Safety)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures have been introduced since 1997 to improve the safety of seamen involved in merchant shipping and fishing. [31710]

Mr. Jamieson: The United Kingdom is a signatory to all international maritime Conventions, a number of which have been updated since 1997 to enhance the safety of seafarers. In particular we will have fully met our international obligations with respect to the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers, 1978 as amended in 1995, by the date of its implementation on 1 February 2002. The Convention requirements will apply to all officers and crew serving on UK registered merchant ships and includes the introduction of mandatory safety and upgrade training for certificate of service holders and fishermen serving on certain categories of merchant ships.

Further, the United kingdom has fully participated in the development of the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Fishing Vessel Personnel, and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) is closely liaising with the fishing industry with respect to implementation.

Additionally a joint UK/EU funded programme for safety training for fishermen was introduced on 1 April 2001. This programme will run for three years and introduces a 'safety awareness course' as an additional requirement to the Fishing Vessels (Safety Training) Regulations 1989 and allocates funding for this and other basic training.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proposals he has to strengthen the rules on flags of convenience. [31711]

Mr. Jamieson: Our primary concern is with the safety of those who crew and travel on ships, and with the protection of the marine environment. Analysis suggests that some open registers have a better safety and environmental performance than some of the more traditional maritime flags. We are working with like-minded states within the International Maritime Organisation, including the more reform-minded open registers, to raise the level of flag state performance. The wider shipping industry is also making a helpful contribution within the context of the international Quality Shipping Campaign.

Marine Industry

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the importance of the marine industry; and what support the Government have provided. [31712]

Mr. Jamieson: Britain is a natural maritime nation, so shipping is vitally important to us. 95 per cent. of our trade by weight arrives or leaves by sea, and the UK shipping industry is one of our biggest service-sector exporters. The UK industry was, however, in decline until we introduced our new shipping policy. A central element of our new policy is the tonnage tax, which brings certainty and clarity about tax liabilities, which are related to the tonnage of the ship operated rather than to actual profits made. Shipping companies are not obliged to enter the tonnage tax regime or to register their ships in the UK, but the new climate created by the tonnage tax, together with reforms at the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, has helped to bring about significant increases in the UK registered fleet.

A key feature of the tonnage tax, unique to the UK, is a minimum training obligation. This requires each shipping company opting for the tonnage tax to recruit and train one officer trainee each year for every 15 officer posts in its fleet and also give consideration to employment and training opportunities for ratings. The Government provide financial support for seafarer training through the Support for Maritime Training (SMarT) scheme. Following a review of SMarT in autumn/winter 2000 and the receipt of EU State Aid clearance, additional courses will be included in the scheme and levels of funding will be increased.

Speed Limits

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment has been made of the proportion of motorists who exceeded the speed limit in 2001. [31677]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department monitors traffic speeds and traffic levels at about 130 sites on different types of road throughout Great Britain. The information comes from automatic traffic counters, which are generally situated away from junctions, hills or sharp bends, at locations where traffic is likely to be free flowing. Thus in principle they provide information on the speeds at which drivers choose to travel when their behaviour is not constrained by congestion or other road conditions.

Results are published annually. The latest available results relate to 2000 and were published in 'Vehicle Speeds in Great Britain: 2000', in July 2001. A copy is in the House of Commons Library. Results for 2001 will be published when they are ready later this year.

Merchant Ships' Officers

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action the Government plan to improve recruitment and retention of merchant ships' officers. [32128]

Mr. Jamieson: Recruitment and retention are matters for the individual shipping companies themselves. There are Government measures, however, to assist and encourage the training and employment of British seafarers. We provide financial support for seafarer training through the Support for Maritime Training (SMarT) scheme. Following a review of SMarT in autumn/winter 2000 and the receipt of EU State Aid clearance, additional courses will be included in the scheme and levels of funding will be increased. We introduced the Tonnage Tax option as part of the Finance Act 2000, a key feature of which is a minimum training obligation. This feature is unique to the UK, and requires each shipping company opting for the tonnage tax to recruit and train one officer trainee each year for every 15 officer posts in its fleet and also give consideration to employment and training opportunities for ratings.

Ordnance Survey

Roger Casale: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of Ordnance Survey's progress in facilitating the work of Government by collaboration with other data providers. [32609]

Ms Keeble: A specific assessment has not been made of Ordnance Survey's progress in facilitating the work of government by collaboration with other data providers. However, it is clear that a number of initiatives by Ordnance Survey in recent years has increased other data providers' input to the national topographic database.

One initiative has been the CODES project, Collection of Data from External Sources, where data from architects, house builders and construction companies has been taken into the database. Commercial terms have been agreed for the use of these data such that Ordnance Survey costs have reduced and customers in both the public and private sectors have benefited from more up-to-date mapping being available sooner. The inclusion of this type of data will increase further in the coming months.

In addition, Ordnance Survey has developed its policies on working with data providers following responses to Information Paper 13/1999 'Joined-up geography for the new millennium' and Consultation paper 1/2000 'Digital National Framework'. Both of these documents are within the public domain and can be found on the Ordnance Survey website.

The launch of OS MasterMap in November 2001, with its system of unique referencing for every individual map feature, provides new opportunities for data providers and customers to link their own information to Ordnance Survey data. Ordnance Survey actively promotes the benefits of such data association and integration among its customers and partners. Some additional layers of OS MasterMap are already being taken forward in collaboration with other data providers.

The continued growth of licensed partners and their development of new and innovative products is at the heart of Ordnance Survey's business model. These products draw on Ordnance Survey's own data and data from other providers.

Roger Casale: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what operations Ordnance Survey carries out in partnerships with private sector bodies; and if he will make a statement. [32608]

Ms Keeble: Ordnance Survey works with a range of private sector bodies in support of the delivery of its products and services. A wide range of activities are currently conducted in conjunction with the private sector including aerial photography, cyclical revision and the IT infrastructure.

Ordnance Survey is in the process of negotiating a new long-term strategic agreement, Contract 2002, with a small group of private sector organisations. This agreement will operate in the spirit of partnership to deliver urban and rural cyclical revision work and other associated data collection activities.

All such commercial agreements are regarded by both Ordnance Survey and our partners as being strictly commercial in confidence. However, it would be both inappropriate and a breach of confidentiality publicly to disclose details of any of these arrangements.

Passenger Transport Authorities

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to allow representation of transport users on passenger transport authorities. [32171]

Ms Keeble: Passenger Transport Authorities (PTAs) are formally composed of elected members from the relevant metropolitan district councils, as set out in primary legislation. I believe that PTAs have a good record of consulting passengers and their representatives, and therefore have no plans to change current arrangements.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on levels of remuneration of PTA members. [32154]

Ms Keeble: Passenger Transport Authorities are able to pay allowances to their members under the Local Government Act 1972 and the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. Regulations under these acts provide that it is for each local authority to decide its scheme and the amounts to be paid under that scheme. These provisions apply to joint authorities such as Passenger Transport Authorities. The amounts of remuneration to PTA members under such schemes are therefore matters for local determination.

SRA Spending

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of Strategic Rail Authority spending will be made in *(a)* London, *(b)* the south-east of England and *(c)* Yorkshire and Humber in the next 10 years. [32096]

Mr. Spellar: Each individual rail project and improvements negotiated through franchise agreements will usually benefit more than one part of Britain. The Strategic Rail Authority has therefore not attempted to break down its planned expenditure on a regional basis.

Bellwin Scheme

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will modify the Bellwin scheme to allow unitary authorities to recoup costs incurred by flood damage. [32099]

Mr. Raynsford: Section 155 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 already allows payment of Bellwin grant to any local authority that satisfies the conditions. Local authorities specified in the Act include county councils, district councils and London borough councils. This definition covers unitary authorities.

Integrated Ticketing/Transport Information

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 534W, on totaljourney.com, what assessments he has made of the impact of the decision to cease operation of the site on the delivery of targets for integrated ticketing and transport information. [32415]

Mr. Jamieson: Totaljourney.com made a valuable contribution to integrated ticketing and transport information by offering both rail and air tickets. There are currently other websites offering similar services but none which exactly replicate Totaljourney.com. In the longer term, Transport Direct will be introduced and will offer information and the ability to buy a ticket on all modes of transport. We are working with operators and local authorities to deliver this. The demise of Totaljourney.com is not expected to delay Transport Direct.

Rail Services

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 529W, if he will *(a)* place in the Library and *(b)* publish on the Strategic Rail Authority website the monthly punctuality of train operating companies. [32464]

Mr. Jamieson: The SRA publishes twice a year a bulletin (On Track) which includes information on the performance of each franchise operator. This bulletin is placed in the Library and on the SRA website.

Telecommunication Masts

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many applications for planning permission for mobile phone masts were made in South Tyneside; and how many mobile phone masts were erected in South Tyneside in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [32091]

Ms Keeble: The information is not held centrally. I understand from information held by the local planning authority that South Tyneside council received 26 planning applications for the construction of mobile phone masts within its administrative area during the three year period 1999–2001: one in 1999, 11 in 2000 and 14 in 2001. 12 of these applications received planning permission. As a result of these decisions six masts were built during this period, four in 2000 and two in 2001.

Toll Bridges and Tunnels

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the *(a)* bridges and *(b)* tunnels in the United Kingdom subject to tolls; and what is the rate payable at each toll. [32900]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions only has policy responsibility for tolled bridges and tunnels in England. My hon. Friend should contact the Scottish Executive and the National Assembly for Wales for information about tolled undertakings within their jurisdiction.

Following is a list of statutory tolled bridges and tunnels. Toll rates at each of these crossings often vary based on the classification of vehicle using the particular crossing; therefore, for simplicity the list only shows the tolls charged for motorcars and large goods vehicles:

£

Undertaking	*Motorcar*	*Large goods vehicle*
Aldwark Bridge[1]	0.15	0.80
Clifton Suspension Bridge[1]	0.20	0.20
Dartford Crossings[1]	1.00	2.90
Dunham Bridge[1]	0.20	0.40
Humber Bridge[1]	2.40	9.60 to 16.10
Itchen Bridge[1]	0.60	1.00 to 25.00
Mersey Tunnels[1]	1.20	2.40 to 4.80
Rixton and Warburton Bridge[1]	0.12	0.12
Severn Bridges[2]	4.40	13.30
Shrewsbury (Kingsland) Bridge[1]	0.10	0.10
Swinford Bridge[1]	0.05	0.20
Tamar Bridge[2]	1.00	2.50 to 5.50
Tyne Tunnel[1]	1.00	1.20
Whitchurch Bridge[1]	0.08	0.50
Whitney on Wye Bridge[1]	0.50	1.00

[1] Each way

[2] One way

There are also a number of unregulated private bridges where a toll is charged for the right to cross private land. A complete list of these undertakings is not available.

Marine Accidents Investigation Board

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what was the *(a)* average time and *(b)* maximum permitted time taken to complete an investigation by the Marine Accidents Investigation Board in the last five years. [32198]

Mr. Jamieson: The Marine Accident Investigation Branch is required by the Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations 1999 to cause a report of an investigation into an accident to be made publicly available in the shortest time possible. The target time for publishing a report is nine months. The average time taken to complete an investigation and publish reports in the past five years has been 9.8 months. There is no maximum permitted time.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects to publish the report by the Marine Accidents Investigation Board into the sinking of the Solway Harvester. [32199]

Mr. Jamieson: Subject to there being no unforeseen last minute delay, the Marine Accidents Investigation Branch intends to publish its report of the sinking of the Solway Harvester during the last week in February 2002.

Mobile Phones (Car Drivers)

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations his Department has received on the banning of mobile phone use by car drivers. [32248]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department regularly receives representations from the public and from Members of Parliament about banning the use of mobile phones use by drivers.

Community Transport Schemes

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 202W, on community transport schemes, what sources of finance will be available to sustain community transport schemes when the Rural Bus Challenge scheme is ended. [32861]

Ms Keeble: Current spending plans provide for at least two further annual Rural Bus Challenge competitions. However, it was never envisaged that the Rural Bus Challenge scheme would provide funding for particular projects on a permanent basis.

In addition to the possibility of further funding from an authority's existing Rural Bus Subsidy Grant allocation, which I mentioned in my previous answer, local authorities have powers to provide continuing support from their own resources for projects which meet a public transport need which would not otherwise be met. Authorities also have discretion to use capital funding allocated by my Department for small scale integrated transport measures to provide capital support for community transport projects, in line with the priorities in their local transport plans.

Funding is also available for community transport, and other, projects in rural areas through the Rural Transport Partnership and Parish Transport Grant schemes.

Planning Appeals

Ann McKechin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he has completed his review of the effectiveness of the changes to the planning appeal procedures implemented on 1 August 2000; and if he will make a statement. [33838]

Ms Keeble: Revised procedures were introduced on 1 August 2000 to improve the handling of planning appeals by inquiry, hearing, and written representations to streamline the process and make the arrangements fairer and more transparent. When launching the new arrangements we indicated that their operation would be monitored and reviewed after a year.

We have now completed the review in conjunction with the Planning Inspectorate and a wide range of stakeholders, including appellants, local planning authorities, planning agents, and third parties. Local planning authorities were surveyed and a series of stakeholder meetings was held.

Overall, the new rules are meeting the objectives of improved handling and greater fairness. The new arrangements represented a radical change of culture for all concerned. Strict enforcement of deadlines has had a big impact on parties' delivery of documents and has contributed to improved performance by the Planning Inspectorate in deciding planning appeals over the last year. There is now greater recognition and acceptance that all parties have a responsibility in making the appeals system work smoothly.

We have concluded that no further changes to the procedures should be made at this stage. Rather, we intend to allow more time for the new rules to bed in. In the meantime, it is essential that all parties adhere to deadlines and do not seek to gain advantage over others by failing to do so. We shall continue to reinforce this message and to keep the operation of the procedures closely under review. We do not rule out the possibility of further measures to improve the operation of the planning appeals procedures to tackle abuses and to improve the speed of decisions.

The Planning Green Paper which we published on 12 December 2001 notes the dramatic improvements made by the Planning Inspectorate in the timeliness of appeal decisions and that we are working with them to consider ways in which the targets we set for this work might be improved still further without compromising quality.

We welcome the publication on 30 January of "Planning Practice Standard: Handling Appeals in England", prepared by the Royal Town Planning Institute with the active involvement of the Planning Inspectorate. This gives helpful good practice advice on participation in the planning appeals system and underlines the importance of parties acting in a responsible, co-operative and timely manner and of observing high standards of professional conduct.

Greater London Authority

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what level of general grant he will set for the Greater London Authority in 2002–03. [33834]

Mr. Raynsford: General GLA Grant for 2002–03 has today been determined at £27.95 million, after consultation with the Mayor of London. This includes provision for accommodation costs at City Hall, the landmark building the Government are providing for the GLA and the Londoners from June this year.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Animal Transport Directive

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the extent to which the provisions as outlined in the European directive on animal transport (Council Directive 91/625/EEC, as amended by 95/628/EEC) are working to protect non-human primates during transport; and if she will make a statement. [32633]

Mr. Morley: This is a matter that we shall take up with the European Commission later this year when they bring forward proposals to improve and update Directive 91/628/EEC, as amended, on the protection of animals during transport.

BSE

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what operational changes have resulted in changes in the number of cases of BSE confirmed by active surveillance. [32197]

Mr. Morley: The increase in positive cases of BSE identified by active surveillance is a direct result of the expansion of our active surveillance programme since 1 July 2001.

In July 2001, in Great Britain we tested nearly 4,000 cattle of which 0.5 per cent. were confirmed as positive; in December 2001 we tested nearly 19,000 cattle of which 0.4 per cent. were confirmed as positive.

Air Pollution

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many days of *(a)* moderate, *(b)* high and *(c)* very high air pollution there were recorded at Lullington Heath, East Sussex, in each year since 1997. [31962]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 31 January 2002]:* The numbers of days of moderate, high and very high pollution at Lullington Heath since 1997 are given in Table 1. Pollution at each site is defined according to the pollutant that is in the highest band during the day. Ratified data are available up to 30 September 2001. After this date, care must be taken in interpretation of the pollution levels recorded, since high measurements may be the result of instrument error that is still to be identified.

Table 1: Number of days of moderate, high and very high air pollution at Lullington Heath, East Sussex in each year since 1997

	Level		
	Moderate	*High*	*Very high*
1997	77	3	0
1998	47	1	0
1999	83	5	0
2000	43	0	0
2001	54	3	0

All the days of moderate, high and very high pollution recorded at Lullington Heath were due to ozone pollution. There were no recorded days of moderate, high or very high pollution for nitrogen dioxide or sulphur dioxide in any of the five years. High air pollution episodes due to ozone are recorded only in the summer months. The pollution is linked to hot sunny weather when industrial and motor vehicle emissions react under these conditions to form ground-level ozone. Light easterly winds sometimes bring this pollution across to the UK from central Europe. If conditions are very still for several days then high pollution can be generated by pollution emissions from UK sources too.

Racial Unrest

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to act on the analysis in the Sustainable Development Commission Review of last summer's racial unrest in respect of the importance of environmental justice. [29409]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The Sustainable Development Commission Review helpfully draws attention to the links between social deprivation and environmental inequality, and it highlights the significant impact this has on ethic minority communities.

My speech on Environmental Equity given to the Environmental Law Foundation on 21 November 2001 demonstrates how seriously I view these issues, and the work I am doing to generate debate and find answers.

The issues raised are cross-cutting, from regeneration to justice. They involve many Government Departments and agencies. Examples of our work so far include the Action Plan published last November for addressing the housing needs of black and ethnic minority people. This has 70 specific commitments about such things as, for example, allocations policy. The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit has developed Community Support Teams. Each has a pool of people with special skills who can be deployed flexibly and directly. They will be able to support and develop local political leadership to supplement the local authorities and Local Strategic Partnerships. The reports published in December 2001 about last summer's disturbances in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley stressed the need to make community cohesion a central policy objective of all that we do. This must include environmental policy.

Refrigerators

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many applications there have been for recycling plants for refrigerators and freezers in Buckinghamshire area; and when she expects them to be operational. [30044]

Mr. Meacher: There have been no planning applications for recycling plants for refrigerators and freezers in the Buckinghamshire area. Neither have there been any applications for waste management licences for such plants.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to enable *(a)* farmers and *(b)* non-farmers to have access to funds available for rural recovery following the foot and mouth crisis. [31158]

Alun Michael: As the hon. Member is aware from a previous answer of 29 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 539W, the Government have been actively raising awareness among affected businesses of the financial aid available to help cope with the impact of foot and mouth disease. The Small Business Service has sent out 3.7 million copies of their leaflet "Coping with Foot and Mouth Disease—help for business" via banks, post offices, trade associations, employer organisations, etc. Business advice fact sheets have been posted on DEFRA's website, http://www.defra.gov.uk/, and we have set up help lines. The regional development agencies have also been actively promoting the Business Recovery Fund.

"England's Rural Future" published on 13 December our response to the reports of the Rural Task Force and Lord Haskins along with steps taken to implement the Rural White Paper. We are further promoting increased awareness and penetration of the measures we have put in place.

The Small Business Service embarked on an ambitious £2.5 million national advertising campaign in autumn 2001 under the title "The Unfair Advantage". It is designed to improve awareness of Business Links, and start driving responses from all business sectors to the national contact centre or Business Link website.

Farmers whose animals have been culled out as a result of foot and mouth disease have been targeted directly for the enhanced (five day) Farm Business Advice Service (FBAS). Publicity for the service has been direct to farms in the form of a personalised mail shot and explanatory leaflet. In addition the Rural Development Service's seminars held locally outlined the components of the service and how farmers can register. Further regional promotion by Business Links is conducted as and when it is necessary.

Aggregates Levy

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much of the sustainability fund set up as a result of the aggregates levy will be controlled and allocated at a local level. [26046]

Mr. Meacher: Consultations on how to distribute the aggregates levy sustainability fund in England ended on 27 November. We are currently reflecting on all the issues raised in the consultation, and decisions on the final shape and distribution of the fund are expected to be made soon.

Radioactive Waste

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she has made of international agreements on the disposal of radioactive waste at sea; whether these agreements are being renewed; and if it is her policy that they should be reviewed. [28758]

Mr. Meacher: The UK is a contracting party to both the OSPAR convention for the protection of the marine environment of the north east Atlantic 1992, and the convention on the prevention of marine pollution by dumping of wastes and other matter 1972 (known as the London convention) which applies globally. Both conventions prohibit the disposal at sea of radioactive waste, and we see no need for these provisions to be reviewed. The UK is very active within both conventions in seeking to ensure that environmental protection standards continue to develop in an effective and appropriate way in the light of the latest scientific knowledge.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what arrangements there are for the *(a)* concealing and protected disposal of radioactive waste for which the UK Government are responsible and *(b)* retrieval and protected containment of previously disposed of radioactive waste where it has been necessary to retrieve it. [28756]

Mr. Meacher: There are certainly no arrangements to conceal disposals of radioactive waste for which the UK Government are responsible.

The arrangements for disposal of radioactive waste in the UK require that all disposals of civil waste are subject to the provisions of the Radioactive Substances Act 1993, as amended. This Act does not apply to the Ministry of Defence, but its policy is that where practicable it will apply standards at least as stringent as those required by the Act. At present the main UK disposal site is at Drigg in Cumbria; this is authorised to accept only low level waste. The UK environment agencies are the enforcing authorities for the Radioactive Substances Act. The health and safety executive are the enforcing authority for the safety of workers at the Drigg site.

With regard to arrangements for the retrieval of waste already disposed of on land, the Government have accepted a proposal from the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority that it retrieve the waste from the Dounreay shaft and process it to a form suitable either for disposal or any other long-term management option which the Government decide on for intermediate-level waste. Such retrieval will be subject to regulation by the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate.

The consultation paper "Managing radioactive waste safely" sets out the Government's proposed decision making programme. The consultation period ends on 12 March and we would welcome comments from people all over the UK.

The radioactive waste which was dumped at sea by the UK in the past does not give any cause for concern provided it is left undisturbed. Results obtained under the OECD's co-ordinated research and environmental surveillance programme (CRESP) related to sea disposal of radioactive wastes have demonstrated that the radiological impacts on human and oceanic populations emanating from the north east Atlantic dumpsites are exceedingly small compared to the natural background levels, and are likely to remain so. This view was reiterated in the OSPAR convention's quality status report 2000, copies of which are available in the Library of the House. Any attempt to retrieve such waste would be both unnecessary and potentially hazardous for the personnel involved.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which *(a)* national and *(b)* international regulations and agreements apply to the disposal of UK originated radioactive waste (i) within mainland Britain, (ii) within territorial waters, (iii) outside territorial waters and (iv) in other countries. [28757]

Mr. Meacher: Within mainland Britain and territorial waters, the disposal of radioactive waste is subject to the Radioactive Substances Act 1993. The UK is also subject to the provisions of Directive 96/29/Euratom laying down basic safety standards in the European Union for the protection of the health of workers and the general public against the dangers arising from ionising radiation.

The dumping of radioactive waste at sea is prohibited under the OSPAR convention for the protection of the marine environment of the north east Atlantic 1992, and under the convention on the prevention of marine pollution by dumping of wastes and other matter 1972 (known as the London convention), as amended in 1994, which applies globally. These conventions apply both within and beyond territorial waters, and the UK is a contracting party to both.

The UK does not dispose of radioactive waste in other countries. However, it is Government policy that the wastes resulting from the reprocessing of foreign spent fuel are returned to the country of origin.

Shipments of radioactive waste into, out of, and through the EU are regulated under the 1993 Transfrontier Shipment of Radioactive Waste Regulations (TFSRW). They apply to radioactive waste shipments to or from anywhere in the world.

Sewage Treatment

Linda Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if he will take steps to clarify the powers which local authorities have to act in respect of smell nuisance from sewage treatment works. [32065]

Mr. Meacher: Except in the specific circumstances under which sewage works are regulated under the IPPC provisions, local authorities have a duty under section 79(1)(d) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, to investigate complaints about smell or odours arising on industrial, trade or business premises and being prejudicial to health or a nuisance. If a local authority's environmental health officer is satisfied that the smell or odour complained about amounts to a statutory nuisance then the local authority must serve an abatement notice on the owner or occupier of the premises. However, in coming to a decision an environmental health officer would need to determine whether "best practicable means" are being used to prevent the nuisance or counteract its effect. Generally local authorities will try to work closely with the water undertakings to investigate and monitor odour problems from sewage treatment works without having to resort to abatement measures or legal action.

Countryside and Rights of Way Act

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what studies she has conducted into the implications for wildlife of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 since its enactment; and if she will make a statement. [31616]

Alun Michael: The Countryside and Rights of Way Act was the first major piece of wildlife legislation for 20 years and introduced new rights of access to the open countryside, amended the law in relation to rights of way and improved protection and management of sites of special scientific interest, wildlife and areas of outstanding natural beauty. We believe the Act has significant benefits, both for the wildlife which, through the provisions in Parts III and IV of the Bill, it aims directly to protect and conserve, and for people better to appreciate the wildlife in our countryside.

The wildlife and access advisory group has collated known research and guidance on the sensitivities of wildlife to access. The group comprises English Nature, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, the Countryside Agency, the Countryside Council for Wales, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and others. In addition the Access Scientific Research and Monitoring Group, whose members also include EN, the agency and CCW, is advising on a range of project proposals arising from the report "Access and bird conservation: priorities for research", produced in 2001.

No studies about the implications of Part II for wildlife have been carried out or are planned: however the provisions include amendments to the circumstances in which traffic authorities may make traffic regulation orders, so as to include the purpose of protecting SSSIs.

English Nature is responsible for implementing the new provisions for more effective protection and management of SSSIs. The improvements are likely to take time to take effect. English Nature's regular SSSI condition assessments will show over time how far the new legislation has resulted in improvements to these sites. Further detail on the exercise of the new powers will be provided in English Nature's annual report, to be published later in the year.

In relation to the wildlife law enforcement provisions in Schedule 12, officials have asked for information, through the Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime, about the use of the new powers and the imposition of higher penalties for offences under Part I of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. From the responses received it is clear that the powers are being used to good effect and that at least one person has received a prison sentence while others have been given community service orders.

Environmentally Beneficial Land Use

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what incentives are being provided by her Department to farmers and landowners practising environmentally conscious methods of land use on their property; and if she will make a statement. [31615]

Alun Michael: Funding for farmers and land managers undertaking environmentally beneficial activities is available under the DEFRA agri-environment schemes, Countryside Stewardship, Environmentally Sensitive Areas and Organic Farming. Under the England Rural Development Programme, a total of £1 billion is planned to be spent on these schemes between 2000–06.

A review of the agri-environment schemes will begin shortly, with a view to reporting in 2003. The review will take forward the recommendation of the Policy Commission on the future development of these schemes.

Water Industry

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the impact of competition in the water industry. [31509]

Mr. Meacher: Existing possibilities for competition in the water industry have led to significant improvements in the efficiency of statutory undertakers and benefits for customers. Undertakers already contract out a number of their services and activities on a competitive basis. They compete with one another to offer large industrial users water management services and customers using more than 100 mega litres of water per year are also able to take advantage of inset appointments. The regulatory regime also provides for a system of comparative competition which enables the Director General of Water Services to compare the efficiency of statutory undertakers when setting price limits. The Department has been examining the possibilities for extending the scope for competition in the water industry, including consideration of the impact this would have on different customer groups. DEFRA will be publishing a consultation paper, setting out the issues and proposals later this year.

Central Heating (Pensioners)

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assistance is available to pensioners to upgrade inefficient central heating systems; and if she will make a statement. [31344]

Mr. Meacher: Where either a pensioner does not have a central heating system of their existing system has broken down they may apply to the Government's Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES) for assistance. HEES has been designed to provide packages of insulation and heating measures up to £2,000, dependent upon the needs of the householders and property type. Its annual budget is £150 million.

Further assistance is provided through the reduction of VAT on domestic fuel to 5 per cent. and the increase to winter fuel payments for pensioner households to £200. The latter is expected to be worth £1.7 billion per annum and provides assistance to 11.5 million people.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the time scale for stage 2 of the feasibility assessments for combined heat and power under the terms of climate change agreements. [32309]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* Climate change agreements set eligible operators challenging targets to reduce their energy use in return for an 80 per cent. reduction in the level of climate change levy on that energy use. A move to use more energy efficient combined heat and power (CHP) installations is one way in which operators can meet their targets. The targets for most facilities have taken into account any contribution that CHP installations can make. However, in some sectors not enough was known about the technical and economic feasibility of combined heat and power in their processes. In these cases the agreements provided for an assessment of the feasibility over the first 18 months of the agreements, with a view to revising targets for those installations in which CHP could make a significant, cost effective contribution, by the third milestone ie 2007.

The first stage in the assessment was completed in November 2001 and the second was due to be completed by 4 January. However, current conditions in the energy markets have not helped the economic case for CHP and there have also been delays in obtaining data with which to set the tests. Consequently, stage 2 has been deferred. This will also allow the procedure's design to take account of developments resulting from the Government's draft CHP Strategy and DTI's consultation on the Impact of NETA on Smaller Generators, both of which will be published shortly.

A decision on the revised timetable for the assessment will be made over the coming months but it will not delay the re-negotiation of targets for the third milestone as originally intended.

Sellafield

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs why the Department of Environment in Northern Ireland was not consulted prior to the decision to commission the mixed oxide plant at Sellafield; and if she will make a statement. [24262]

Margaret Beckett: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and I decided on 3 October 2001 that mixed oxide (MOX) manufacture is "justified" under the basic safety standards directive. We alone were responsible for taking the decision and others could only offer advice. We and the Environment Agency conducted five public consultation exercises before we made the decision.

The Health and Safety Executive gave its consent on 19 December 2001 to the plutonium commissioning of the Sellafield MOX Plant. Its consent was required under the terms of British Nuclear Fuels' nuclear site licence, before the plant could operate.

Health and Safety issues were fully considered in the decision published on 3 October, and the Executive was under no obligation to consult before reaching its own decision.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of EU proposals to introduce a traceability system that ensure all GMOs can be identified through the food chain. [21208]

Mr. Meacher: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I represented the UK at the Environment Council held in Luxembourg on 29 October. This was the first Environment Council of the Belgian presidency. Council reached political agreement on four common positions: the UK voted in favour of each. Four sets of Council conclusions were agreed. There were two orientation debates: one, in public, on a proposed regulation concerning traceability and labelling of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and products derived from them, and a second on the Commission's review of the Pesticides Authorisation Directive (91/414/EEC).

Political agreement was reached without discussion on a recommendation concerning implementation of Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) in Europe. This aims to encourage member states to carry out a stocktake of institutions and laws affecting their coastal zones, and to adopt national strategies to promote integrated management.

In reaching political agreement on a proposed amendment to Directive 97/68/EC on non-road mobile machinery emissions, the UK achieved its objective of ensuring deletion of an article permitting the use of economic incentives, noting that the directive did not have an appropriate legal base for such an article. The amended directive will introduce exhaust emission standards for small, off-road petrol engines and large diesel generators, and aims to align European provisions with existing US regulations.

Political agreement was also reached on an amendment to Directive 94/25/EC laying down limit values for exhaust and noise emissions from new recreational craft placed on the Community market. The Council agreed limit values at the levels proposed by the European Commission in COM(2000)639 dated 12 October 2000. Particularly in relation to noise emissions, agreement was reached on less costly methods of demonstrating compliance. Overall the agreement represents a reasonable balance between achieving challenging environmental objectives while minimising the cost to small and medium-sized business and individuals.

Council reached political agreement on a proposed decision continuing for the period 2002–06 an annual funding programme for environmental NGOs active at a European level. The Commission's proposed total budget of euro 32 million was agreed. The UK's main objective of ensuring that the selection and monitoring process was transparent and fair was met in the common position text.

Ministers agreed a common approach on a proposed directive to bring Community rules into line with the second pillar of the Aarhus Convention dealing with public consultation in environmental decision-making. The UK welcomed the proposal and asked that the Commission also take steps to present another proposal seeking to apply the provisions of the Aarhus convention to the Community institutions, in order to enable the Community to ratify the convention.

During a public orientation debate on a proposed regulation on traceability and labelling of GMOs, Council discussed the scope of the proposed system. While welcoming the intention of the proposal to improve safety and consumer choice in GM food and crops, the UK's current judgment was that the requirement to label and trace the source of products which contain no detectable GM material would be unworkable. The UK expressed concern about whether the information given to consumers would be reliable and whether developing countries would be able to provide the information expected from importers. The UK took the view that the Commission's proposals for allowing certain imports of crops containing GMOs that are not approved in the EU were unsatisfactory as they stood and that further urgent work was needed, particularly on agreeing an international system for identifying individual GMOs. Member states were still divided on when the EU decision-making process for GM products could be restarted. While recognising the importance of the proposal to rebuilding confidence in the decision-making process on GMOs in the EU, the UK called for case-by-case consideration of applications and said that it was not tenable to encourage an illicit moratorium.

Council conclusions adopted in preparation for the seventh Conference of the Parties (COP7) to the UN framework convention on climate change, taking place in Marrakech from 29 October to 9 November, called on all parties to respect the Bonn agreement, and underlined the need for progress in the relevant international fora in tackling emissions from aviation and shipping. The conclusions stressed the resolve of the Community and its member states to ratify the Kyoto protocol in a timely manner, with a view to its entry into force by the World summit on sustainable development next September. Environment Commissioner Wallstrom also presented a proposal to ratify the Kyoto protocol, a draft directive on a CO2 emissions trading scheme and a communication on the European climate change programme.

Council Conclusions were adopted on a Clean Air for Europe (CAFÉ) Programme stressing the priority attached to the problems of ozone, particulates and acidification. Council also adopted Conclusions on a Communication on Conservation of Natural Resources, and Conclusions on the Commission's general Communication on Biodiversity, highlighting the need to implement biodiversity action plans and halt biodiversity decline across the EU.

Council held a discussion to inform the adoption of six sustainable development indicators to be used in the Commission's synthesis report for the Barcelona spring European Council. The Commission would publish its report on indicators on 31 October. An exchange of views was also held on the Commission's review of Directive 91/414/EEC on agricultural pesticides. The UK stressed the need to speed up the pace of the review of older compounds. The debate also considered the substitution principle and restrictions on those allowed to use certain categories of pesticides.

The Belgian presidency and Commission reported on a number of proposals, including the EU Chemicals Strategy, environmental liability and a recently adopted Communication on dioxins, furans and PCBs. France briefly outlined measures taken by the French Government since a major explosion at an ammonium nitrate manufacturing plant in Toulouse in September. The inquiry into this accident will inform the planned revision of the Seveso II directive, but the Commission will not delay adoption of its proposal.

Over lunch Ministers discussed preparations for the WTO Ministerial in Doha on 9–13 November, and preparations for the World summit on sustainable development (Rio+10) to be held in Johannesburg in September 2002.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many GM crop sites there are in the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement on GM crops. [22868]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 18 December 2001]*: There were 161 sites in the UK where GM crop plants were grown in 2001. Of these, 108 were in respect of the Farm Scale Evaluations, 16 were for National List trials and 37 were in respect of other research trials The Government will not approve GM crop releases unless it is clear there is no significant risk to human health or the environment.

Insulation Grants

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many insulation grants have been made in each of the last 10 years. [30564]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* The original Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES) started in 1991 and ran until May 2000. HEES was available in Great Britain and provided a single main insulation measure up to the value of £315.

New HEES was launched on 1 June 2000 and is now marketed as the Warm Front Team. The scheme has been designed to provide packages of insulation and heating measures up to £2,000 to private sector householders in England, dependent upon their needs and property type. The annual budget is £150 million. HEES is expected by 2004, to have provided assistance to 800,000 fuel poor householders i.e. those who spend 10 per cent. or more of their income to stay warm.

Fuel Poverty is a devolved area of responsibility. Scotland launched its scheme in July 1999 and Wales followed in November 2000. Northern Ireland runs its own scheme.

The table provides the information requested:

Financial year	*Number of insulation grants made in Great Britain*
1991–92	167,000
1992–93	204,000
1993–94	270,000
1994–95	450,000
1995–96	624,000
1996–97	415,000
1997–98	416,000
1998–99	419,000
1999–2000	[1]405,000
2000–01	[2]85,000
2001–02	[3]171,000

[1] Data relate to the whole of Great Britain up to July 1999 when Scotland launched its own scheme.

[2] Data relate to England and Wales up to November 2000 when Wales launched its own scheme.

[3] Data relate to the period April 2001 to December 2001

Correspondence

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when she will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for West Worcestershire to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State dated 3 December 2001; [28512]

(2) when the hon. Member for West Worcestershire will receive an answer to his question tabled on 15 January (ref. 28512). [32857]

Mr. Morley: A response to the hon. Member's letter of 3 December 2001 was sent on 26 January 2002.

Wye Navigation Order

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress is being made in regard to the Wye navigation order. [33118]

Mr. Meacher: The application made by the Environment Agency for an order under the Transport and Works Act 1992 to confer on it powers to regulate navigation on the River Wye has raised complicated legal and policy issues which require very careful consideration. We are considering the inspector's report, together with the comments of those appearing at the inquiry on the detailed post inquiry representations which we received.

We will make a decision on the application as soon as possible. Before doing so, we will consult the National Assembly for Wales since the proposed order would, if made, affect Wales as well as England.

Noise Nuisance

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it her policy to achieve the community noise level of 60dBa for an outside noise event. [11081]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

The figure of 60dBA is the World Health Organisation's recommended guideline limit for night time noise events. Noisiness of equipment is regulated variously at UK and/or international level depending on the type of source. New noisy and noise-sensitive development is potentially subject to planning controls, and local authorities must have regard to PPG 24 (Planning and Noise) when formulating and applying their development plans. Noise from dwellings may be addressed by local authorities. Noise from aircraft taking off or landing is subject to airport-based noise controls, and in the case of Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports is regulated by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions under s.78 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Unemployment

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people are unemployed in the Greater London area; and if he will make a statement. [32125]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 4 January 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about unemployment in Greater London. I am replying in his absence. (32125)

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) provides estimates of unemployment in the Greater London region, based on the International Labour Organisation (ILO) definition of unemployment. The most recently available figures—for autumn (September to

November) 2001—show that the number of unemployed people in Greater London was 269,000, with an unemployment rate of 7.2 per cent. These estimates are not seasonally adjusted.

Fraud and Error

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the proportion of claims for the children's premium in income support and jobseeker's allowance which have been *(a)* fraudulent and *(b)* incorrect. [25988]

Mr. McCartney: There is not a 'children's premium' in income support or jobseeker's allowance. People claiming either benefit may claim for dependent members of their household. The latest information on the levels of fraud and error is in "The Results of the Area Benefit Review and Quality Support Team from April 1999 to March 2000: Fraud and Error in Claims for Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance", a copy of which is available in the Library. However, it is not possible to disaggregate the number of cases in which fraud and error are attributable solely to incorrect claims for dependent children.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the expected saving in 2001–02 from the security and control programme. [19002]

Malcolm Wicks: The security and control programme has been replaced by our comprehensive strategy to reduce fraud and error. This strategy is set out in our paper: A New Contract for Welfare: Safeguarding Social Security (Cm 4276; March 1999). We are tightening up the system to make sure that the right amount goes to the right person from the outset of a claim.

We have set firm targets to reduce the amount of fraud and error in income support and jobseeker's allowance by 25 per cent. by 2004 and 50 per cent. by 2006. Latest results show that from our baseline period in 1998 to March 2001 we have achieved an 18 per cent. reduction and we expect this good progress to continue.

MSPs

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many cases have been raised with his Department by Members of the Scottish Parliament since 1 July 1999. [26401]

Maria Eagle: Around 900 letters from Members of the Scottish Parliament have been sent directly to this Department and the former Department of Social Security [illegible]e 1 July 1999.

New Deal (Wales)

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many of those who have entered work through the new deal programme have commenced unsubsidised employment in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* the Cynon Valley. [26866]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The available information is in the tables.

	Number of people helped into jobs in Wales[1]	
Programme	*All jobs*	*Unsubsidised jobs*
New deal for young people	23,218	21,078
New deal 25 plus	[2]4,432	[2]2,981
New deal 50 plus (employment credit claims)	4,041	4,041
New deal for lone parents	8,006	8,006
New deal for disabled people	[3]269	269
New deal for partners	[4]110	110

[1] Up to the end of October 2001, unless otherwise stated.

[2] Figures relate to pre-April 2001 programme.

[3] From 2 July 2001 to 30 November 2001. From 1998 to June 2001 the new deal for disabled people pilots helped 8,200 people into unsubsidised jobs in 12 pilot areas. As this was not a national programme, figures cannot be broken down for Wales, Scotland or England, or constituencies.

[4] At 30 November 2001.

Sources:

New Deal Evaluation Database

New Deal for Disabled People Management Information

	Number of people helped into jobs in Cynon Valley[1]	
Programme	*All jobs*	*Unsubsidised jobs*
New deal for young people	748	673
New deal 25 plus	[2]41	[2]34
New deal 50 plus (employment credit claims)	89	89
New deal for lone parents	144	144

[1] Up to the end of October 2001, unless otherwise stated.

[2] Figures relate to pre-April 2001 programme.

Sources:

Employment Service Labour Market System

New Deal Evaluation Database

By definition, all jobs gained through the new deals for lone parents, 50 plus, disabled people and partners are unsubsidised. Constituency level information is not available for the new deals for disabled people and partners.

Departmental Accounts

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in which years since 1972 his Department and its predecessors have had accounts qualified by the Comptroller and Auditor General due to irregular expenditure; and if he will specify the irregular expenditure involved in each case. [26152]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 15 January 2002]:* Details of the accounts for the Department for Work and Pensions and its predecessors which have been qualified by the Comptroller and Auditor General on the basis of irregular expenditure since 1990–91 are shown in the table which has been placed in the Library.

The Departmental Resource Account for 1999–2000 was also qualified, on the same basis as the Class XII Vote 1 and the National Insurance Fund Accounts.

Care Homes (Expense Allowances)

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make it his policy to increase the expense allowance for pensioners living in old people's homes. [30383]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

Decisions on the level of the personal expenses allowance for people in residential care to apply from April 2002 will be announced shortly.

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the number of pensioners in the Loughborough constituency living in old people's homes on with an expense allowance of less than £16.05 per week. [30382]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

We have not commissioned research into the number of pensioners in the Loughborough constituency living in old people's homes on a personal expense allowance of less than £16.05 per week. Under the Charging for Residential Accommodation Guide, all care home residents who are financially supported by the local council are left with a personal expenses allowance of at least £16.05 per week.

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what guidance he has given to local authorities on the provision of expense allowances to pensioners living in care. [30385]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

Guidance on the personal expenses allowance is issued to councils in the charges for residential accommodation guide. The Department is in the process of updating this guidance.

Jobcentre Plus

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many incidents of *(a)* physical and *(b)* verbal assault have been recorded in Jobcentre Plus offices since their introduction. [23371]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Since the introduction of the Jobcentre Plus pathfinders over half a million people have passed through the new offices. During that period there has been only one report of an incident involving physical contact. There have been 102 other reported incidents, the majority involving verbal abuse, or, in three cases, damage to office equipment.

Social Fund Expenditure

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what the budget for the social fund Inspectorate was in each of the last 10 years; [24964]

(2) how much was claimed from the social fund in each of the last 10 years; [24965]

(3) how many claimants sought review of their social fund provision in each of the last 10 years. [24967]

Malcolm Wicks: Information on the social fund Inspectorate/Independent Review Service administration budget is available from 1994–95 onwards in the departmental reports of the former Department of Social Security. Information on this budget prior to 1994–95 was not collected separately. Information on social fund expenditure and social fund reviews from 1991–92 onwards is in the social fund annual reports.

Copies of these publications are available in the Library.

Employment

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of persons aged 18 to 24 years who are *(a)* unemployed, *(b)* unemployed for more than six months, *(c)* unemployed for more than 12 months and *(d)* unemployed for more than two years found sustained unsubsidised jobs in each quarter since 1991. [25980]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Information is not available in the format requested. However, research evidence[1] suggests that of those who leave jobseeker's allowance for work, around three quarters do not return within the next three months.

[1] *Source:*

JUVOS Cohort Survey

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans there are to establish a job transition service in the Cynon Valley. [26871]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Job Transition Service began operating in April 2001. Since 28 November 2001 its work has continued under the new name of the Rapid Response Service (RRS).

The aim of the RRS is to support those affected by redundancy to make the transition into sustainable new jobs. The RRS responds to redundancies that have a significant impact on the local labour market. Each redundancy is different, and the exact nature of the help will be tailored to the needs of individuals, the local economy and the labour market concerned.

A dedicated RRS Senior Manager has been appointed in Wales, Scotland and each region of England. Some elements of the service are already in place while others are still being piloted. The RRS is on track to be launched in full in April 2002, with an additional £6 million being allocated to this work over the next 2 years.

The RRS has already provided specific assistance to people in the Cynon Valley affected by redundancies at Hitachi. Through an on-site jobshop employees were offered support to help find alternative employment and training opportunities. As a result of this support, to date over 60 people have been offered employment.

Press Officers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many press officers there were in his Department in each of the last four years; and what was the annual cost of their remuneration over that period. [27471]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in May 2001. This involved the amalgamation of parts of the Department for Education and Employment (including the Employment Service) with the Department of Social Security.

The current level of full time press officers employed within the new Department for Work and Pensions is 18.

The overall costs of press officers for the last four years have formed part of the budgets relating to the Departments that predated the formation of the Department for Work and Pensions. As such, it would be at disproportionate cost to retrieve precise figures for the remuneration of these staff.

Benefit Take-up

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action has been taken by each local authority in each of the last three years to increase benefit take-up; and how much each campaign has cost. [27766]

Mr. Wicks: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many employers, having advertised vacancies with the Employment Service, have subsequently been found to have breached the minimum wage legislation. [27886]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information requested is not available.

The Employment Services takes in excess of 200,000 vacancies a month and all of these must meet the requirements of the National Minimum Wage Act 1998. If we receive a complaint about an employer who advertised with the Employment Service but is subsequently found not to be meeting the requirements of the minimum wage legislation, we direct the complainant to the Minimum Wage Enforcement Agency to investigate the case. The Employment Service also suspends its services to that employer until investigations are completed.

Muslim Women

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 11 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 1045W, on Muslim women, what research he has commissioned on the participation of Muslim women in the labour market. [28219]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Previous research in the Department has been concerned with labour market participation by ethnic group rather than religion. However, the Department is currently giving consideration to funding a qualitative research study in 2002 featuring the labour market experiences of Muslim women as part of a wider study of all ethnic groups.

Parliamentary Questions

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what measures he is putting in place to meet targets for the answering of written parliamentary questions. [28337]

Maria Eagle: In the Department for Work and pensions during the period from October to December 2001 we dealt with 1,392 questions, which is around double the number for similar periods in recent years. We have allocated on a temporary basis additional resources to process the higher level of questions and we are monitoring the situation very closely to see whether the trend continues. Parliamentary questions are not the only way of getting information from the Department. Some information sought by hon. and right hon. Members is available in departmental publications which can be found in the Library.

Child Support

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place in the Library a copy of the Child Support Agency costings required by his Department's Euro Programme. [24212]

Malcolm Wicks: Should the UK decide to enter the single currency, costs to the DWP will depend on the approach taken. Details of progress on DWP's euro preparations work were included in the Fifth Report on Euro Preparations, published in November 2001. The report is available in the Library.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the timetable for implementation of the new Child Support Agency maintenance laws; and if he will make a statement. [28918]

Malcolm Wicks: Changes to the child support scheme will take effect for new cases from April 2002. Existing cases will be transferred when the new scheme is working well, we expect this to be about a year later.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what additional resources have been allocated to the Independent Case Examiner in anticipation of the child support reforms. [30958]

Malcolm Wicks: Plans are being developed to deal with any anticipated potential increase in the work load of the Independent Case Examiner arising from the introduction of the new child support scheme. Appropriate levels of resource will be determined as part of the planning process.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many staff have worked for the Independent Case Examiner Service in each year since its creation. [30959]

Malcolm Wicks: Details of the number of staff working for the Independent Case Examiner's Office, in each year since the establishment of the office (in April 1997), are in the table.

	Staff employed
1997–98	41
1998–99	38
1999–2000	46
2000–01	60
2001–02	[1]72
2001–02	[2]80

[1] Figures as at 25 January 2002

[2] Projected to 31 March 2002

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the budget of the Independent Case Examiner has been in each year since its creation. [30960]

Malcolm Wicks: Details of the actual costs of funding the Independent Case Examiner's office, in each year since its creation (in April 1997) are in the table:

	Annual budget
1997–98	1,025,675
1998–99	920,960
1999–2000	1,040,811
2000–01	1,176,087
2001–02	[1]1,619,945

[1] Projected expenditure to 31 March 2002

Parental Leave (Income Support)

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many parties have claimed income support during parental leave in each year since its introduction. [29293]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

WAN Service

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 302W, on benefit fraud, if he will state the exact contract price of the new WAN service and its predecessor. [30135]

Malcolm Wicks: The contract for the new WAN service was let to the BT led ACCORD Consortium ARCWAY through open competition. The contract price for the WAN is therefore commercially confidential.

The contract price of the new WAN service is broadly comparable to that of the old one and is at the lower price end of industry benchmarks for this type of service.

The Department will receive a significantly improved service in the areas of service flexibility, performance, management information and security, and so position the Department to further modernise its IT in the future.

Departmental Spending

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 899W, on the 2001 departmental report, how much and what proportion of the departmental unallocated provision has been used to meet unexpected funding. [30139]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: None to date.

Departmental Payments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the instances in which his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies failed to pay valid invoices within 30 days or after the agreed credit period in the financial year 2000–01. [32028]

Mr. McCartney: The Department aims to pay all invoices within 30 days of receipt where no other contract exists. During 2000–01 in the former Department of Social Security of the 228,186 invoices paid there were 12,772 invoices not paid according to the prescribed timescales—this means 94.4 per cent. were within target. Details for departmental agencies and bodies are listed below.

	Invoices paid	*Invoices paid within target*	*Percentage of invoices paid within target*	*Invoices paid outside target*	*Percentage of invoices paid outside target*
Benefits Agency	151,609	144,104	95.05	7,505	4.95
Child Support Agency	22,869	20,863	91.23	2,006	8.77
Headquarters	38,919	36,142	92.86	2,777	7.14
Independent Statutory Bodies	539	533	98.89	6	1.11
War Pensions Agency	3,612	3,581	99.14	31	0.86
Appeals Service	10,638	10,191	95.80	447	4.20
Total	228,186	215,414	94.40	12,772	5.60

Hospital Stays (Benefit Downrating)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many NHS patients were subject to hospital downrating of benefits in the last three years; what were the average delays in days between *(a)* their discharge from hospital and *(b)* their formal claim for restoration of benefit, and the first payment of such benefits; and what was the average delay from (i) discharge and (ii) claim to restoration of benefit for those experiencing the top decile of such delays. [32463]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested.

Fuel Direct Scheme

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much his Department has *(a)* allocated and *(b)* spent on the fuel direct scheme in each of the last four years; how many people have benefited in each year; and how the scheme is promoted. [32625]

Malcolm Wicks: Tackling fuel poverty is one of this Government's key priorities. A number of measures have been put in place to ensure that by 2010, no vulnerable household will have to struggle to heat their home when it is cold. These measures include the £200 winter fuel payment for households that qualify, cold weather payments, a cut in the level of VAT on fuel and radical improvements to the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme.

The fuel direct scheme provides valuable, last-resort protection against the threat of disconnection for people in receipt of income support and income-based jobseeker's allowance who are in arrears with their utility bills. Fuel companies generally make customers who have fallen into arrears aware of the scheme.

Information on the value of deductions from benefit under the fuel direct scheme is not available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. Information on the numbers of people benefiting from the scheme is in the table.

Income Support and income-based Jobseeker's Allowance recipients with deductions for fuel direct, Great Britain, 1997–98 to 2000–01

Year	*Number of people*
1997–98	147,500
1998–99	103,500
1999–2000	75,000
2000–01	61,400

Notes:

1. Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample of all Income Support and income-based Jobseeker's Allowance recipients and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling variation.

2. The figures are an average, using quarterly data for each of the last 4 years, of the number of people with deductions.

Source:

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiries, May 1997 to February 2001.

Jobseeker's Allowance Quarterly Statistical Enquiries, May 1997 to February 2001

State Pension

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will set out the basis for the statement by Baroness Hollis on 24 January 2002, *Official Report, House of Lords*, column 1642, regarding the proportion of men and women who receive the full basic state pension. [32859]

Mr. McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my noble Friend, Baroness Hollis of Heigham, in the other place on 28 January 2002, *Official Report, House of Lords*, column WA14.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to restrict the winter fuel allowance to those of pensionable age; and if he will make a statement. [33050]

Mr. McCartney: There are currently no plans to make such a change to the winter fuel payment scheme.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Aid

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his EU counterparts on amendments to the nature and direction of the EU overseas aid package. [31490]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary of State for International Development and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs have regular discussions with EU counterparts on the nature and direction of the EU's external assistance.

The General Affairs Council will discuss the effectiveness of the EU's external action's including financial assistance, on 18 February. The Development Council on 8 November 2001, attended by the Secretary of State for International Development recommended that further work be done by the Permanent Representatives Committee to ensure that the views of Development Ministers are fed into the General Affairs Council discussion on external actions in February.

Detainees

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what report he has received on the numbers and conditions of detention of UK citizens held by the United States *(a)* at the Guantanamo base in Cuba and *(b)* elsewhere. [29797]

Mr. Bradshaw: British officials visited Guantanamo Bay from 17–20 January and saw three British detainees. None of the detainees complained of any ill treatment.

We continue to investigate reports of individuals detained in Afghanistan who might be British. We are currently aware of two such individuals detained in Kandahar by the US authorities.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received from the International Committee of the Red Cross and other NGOs on the treatment of prisoners held by the United States at the Guantanamo base and elsewhere. [29799]

Mr. Bradshaw: None. It is standard practice for the International Committee of the Red Cross to report confidentially to the detaining power only. The ICRC have established a presence at Guantanamo Bay and their officials have access to the detainees at any time. They also have access to detainees held by the US authorities in Afghanistan.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has received from the United States Government concerning the treatment of prisoners captured in the conflict in Afghanistan. [29800]

Mr. Bradshaw: The US authorities have said that the detainees held by the US are being treated humanely and consistently with the principles of the Geneva conventions.

Diego Garcia

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reason US television networks were not permitted to film a recent forces show at the US base on Diego Garcia. [29795]

Mr. Bradshaw: By treaty agreement with the US, access to Diego Garcia is restricted. Conditional permission was given for a television network to cover a US forces show planned for Diego Garcia, but the television network decided in the end not to go ahead with the event.

European Union

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's policy is on the areas of the European Union's institutions' exclusive competence in the European Union. [29764]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* The Government accept that in certain fields, such as the common commercial policy and fisheries conservation, exclusive Community competence is essential and beneficial for all EU member states.

The issue of competences will be discussed at the convention on the future of Europe, beginning on 28 February, under the heading of "A better division and delimitation of competences in the European Union".

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the areas of member states' exclusive competence in the European Union. [29841]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* Unlike the member states, the European Communities have no inherent competence; they only have such competence as is accorded to them by the Community treaties. Accordingly, the competence of the member states is limited only to the extent that the communities have competence in accordance with the treaties.

Overseas Posts (Publications)

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what publications are produced by *(a)* the British Embassy, *(b)* British consulates and *(c)* British Council offices in (i) Poland, (ii) Estonia, (iii) Latvia and (iv) Lithuania; and in what languages they are produced. [31147]

Peter Hain: There are no British consulates in any of the three Baltic states. The British consulates in Katowice, Poznan, Gdansk, Szczecin, Wroclaw and Kradov do not have any publications.

Publications for embassies are as follows:

Poland

UK21 (British Embassy magazine) in Polish.

Leaflet on travelling to the UK in Polish.

Action Local Government in Polish.

Estonia

Embassy brochure (English).

Book on UK's role in Estonia's fight for independent (English and Estonian).

Latvia

No publications on a regular basis.

Material for last May's British Week (programmes/flyers)—Latvian/Russian.

Lithuania

Britain's view on the advantages of European Union membership for Lithuania (Lithuanian).

Farm diversification book (Lithuanian).

Organic food production and marketing (Lithuanian/English).

European fund and experience-A chance to every region (Russian).

Studying in the EU and acknowledgement of diplomas (Russian).

There are further documents published both on the websites of individual posts. The addresses are—Poland: www.britishembassy.pl; Latvia: www.britain.lv; Lithuania: www.britain.lt; Estonia: www.britishembassy.ee.

Publications by the British Council are as follows:

Poland

British Council monthly events calendar (English, Polish); Publicity and promotional leaflets and catalogues for various events (English, Polish); English language resource centre materials (English, Polish); English teaching centre brochures (English, Polish); various competitions and programmes (English, Polish); governance and society programmes and projects (English); Examinations promotional and information materials (English, Polish); British Council Poland website (www.britishcouncil.pl) (English, Polish is planned); European year of languages—www.ey12001.pl (English); British studies project website http://elt.britcoun.org.pl (English); Literature project Poland organisations—translations of British poets (Polish); various bilingual pamphlets (English, Polish); First translations of author/text into Polish—Roll Call: essays on twentieth century English fiction (Polish); In the belly of the whale: essays on modern British poetry (Polish), Don Paterson and Ciaran Carson-poetry and music (CD—English); Four author presentation (CD—English).

Estonia

Quarterly information leaflets about events and projects run by the British Council are published in English. Media briefings about British Council events and occasionally longer articles for magazines and newspapers are published either in Estonian or Russian depending on the language of the publication. The www.britishcouncil.ee website is in English but its main content will be bilingual (English and Estonian) later in 2002.

Latvia

A quarterly British Council news and events listing, in poster format is published in English. The www.britishcouncil.lv web site is in English but will be bilingual (English/Latvian) by the end of 2002. Promotional leaflets about the British Council are produced in English and Latvian. The quarterly English language teaching newsletter (for teachers) is published in English.

Lithuania

British Council Vilnius News—a quarterly newsletter about Council activities is a bilingual (English/Lithuanian) publication. Promotional leaflets about British Council services are bilingual. The www.britishcouncil.lt website is currently in English only, but will be bilingual from April 2002.

KPMG

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contracts his Department has with KPMG; and what the value is of each one. [31328]

Mr. MacShane: The FCO has two contracts with KPMG. The first relates to new financial management and human resource systems for which the value to date is £4.04 million with an additional £1.48 million forecast for 2002–03. The second relates to the implementation of an information communications technology strategy for which the value to date is £1.9 million with a further £200,000 forecast for 2002–03.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit *(a)* China, *(b)* Taiwan and *(c)* South Korea. [31680]

Mr. Straw: I hope to visit China later this year. I have no plans to visit Taiwan. Other visits to the region remain under review.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit *(a)* Singapore, *(b)* Malaysia and *(c)* Indonesia. [31679]

Mr. Straw: I have no firm plans to visit these countries.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit the Gulf states. [31682]

Mr. Straw: I have no current firm plans for a substantive visit to the Gulf states.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he plans to visit Poland. [31867]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State visited Poland in october 2001. I intend to visit in the next two months.

Gibraltar

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Gibraltar. [33835]

Peter Hain: At the Brussels process ministerial meeting today the Secretary of State and Spanish Foreign Minister, Josep Pique, continued to make good progress in our discussions about Gibraltar in the atmosphere of friendship and understanding which links the UK and Spain, reaffirming the full range of commitments that we assumed at our previous meetings in London and Barcelona.

Our common aim remains to conclude a comprehensive agreement before the summer, covering all outstanding issues, including co-operation and sovereignty.

Both Governments confirmed that their shared objective is to overcome their differences over Gibraltar and to ensure a secure future for Gibraltar in which Gibraltar can preserve its way of life and traditions, enjoy greater internal self-government, sustain and enhance its prosperity, and reap the full benefits of a harmonious and mutually beneficial co-operation in all fields together with the wider region.

We reiterate our invitation to the Chief Minister of Gibraltar to attend future Brussels process meetings so that he, and through him the Gibraltarians, can join the current dialogue and contribute to it to the benefit of Gibraltar. We confirmed that the Chief Minister is warmly invited to participate on the basis of the two flags, three voices formula, having his own and distinct voice as part of the British delegation.

Our intention is that the comprehensive agreement we seek will offer the best framework for a secure, stable and prosperous future for Gibraltar. In that framework, our objective is that Gibraltar can enjoy enhanced powers of internal self-government allowing its Government and population to have a greater say in their lives. We will invite the Government of Gibraltar to develop together with us the relevant ideas on this objective.

We also took forward our work on all possible ways of enhancing co-operation to improve the quality of the daily lives of people in Gibraltar and the Campo region. The UK and Spain reaffirmed that the aim of the arrangements they seek is to promote the highest level of fruitful co-operation within the wider region, favouring better standards of living and working conditions in Gibraltar and the Campo, and fluid communications with the region.

The Spanish Government recalled the arrangements it had made to allocate a further 70,000 telephone numbers for Gibraltar and reaffirmed that, as regards the technical responsibilities of the Spanish side, they are operational. It expressed its commitment to ensure that no obstacles prevent their immediate use for the benefit of all Gibraltarians. To that end, the UK and Spain agreed to engage in immediate talks to assess the situation and attain their objective. Both Governments also tackled the issue of pensions, a problem on which they will intensify their efforts to find a prompt solution consistent with the responsibilities of the public authorities involved.

Afghanistan

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of the interim Afghanistan Government in implementing democratic reforms. [30270]

Mr. Bradshaw: Since its inauguration on 22 December, the Interim Administration has made good progress in implementing the Bonn agreement. The Interim Administration represents the major ethnic groups in Afghanistan and includes Afghanistan's first Minister for Women's Affairs.

On 25 January Hamid Karzai, Chair of the interim Administration, announced the appointment of the 21 members of the Special Commission for the convening of the Emergency Loya Jirga (the traditional Afghan Grand Council). The commission has the task of organising a Loya Jirga to take place in June. The Loya Jirga will then appoint a transitional Government to hold office until elections are held for a fully representative Government in 2002.

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent changes there have been to United Nations sanctions against Afghanistan. [33836]

Mr. MacShane: With the full support of Her Majesty's Government, on 16 January the United Nations Security Council ("UNSC") adopted resolution 1390 (2002). Taking into account the changing situation in Afghanistan, the resolution extended or amended some of the existing measures and introduced new measures targeting Usama bin Laden, members of the al-Qaeda organisation and the Taliban and other individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with them designated by the UN Sanctions Committee on Afghanistan. Other UNSC sanctions targeting Afghanistan were terminated or allowed to lapse.

UNSC resolution 1390 (2002) continues the asset freeze imposed by resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1333 (2000) on senior members of the Taliban, Usama bin Laden and individuals and entities (including members of al-Qaeda) designated by the Security Council as associated with him, and extends it to all designated members of the Taliban and their associates. The resolution also places an embargo on the supply of arms and military assistance to, and imposes a world-wide travel ban on, Usama bin Laden and persons designated by the Security Council as members of the al-Qaeda organisation or the Taliban or their associates.

A full list of those designated by the UN Sanctions Committee on Afghanistan is available on the UN website: http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/committees/Afghanistan/Afg_list_eng.htm.

On 15 January the UNSC had adopted resolution 1388 (2002) removing all previous UNSC restrictions on Ariana Afghan Airlines.

UK-Japan 21st Century Group

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his Department's involvement with the UK-Japan 21st century group. [32259]

Mr. MacShane: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office supports the work of the UK-Japan 21st century group. Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials and, where possible, Ministers have attended the annual conference of the group since it was founded (as the UK-Japan 2000 Group) in 1984.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representation he will have at the February conference of the UK-Japan 21st century group. [32258]

Mr. MacShane: The Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office will host a reception for the group. I shall attend the conference, together with officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Echelon Interception System

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the European Parliament report of the Temporary Committee on the Echelon interception system. [32634]

Mr. Straw: In January 2001, as Home Secretary, I briefed a delegation from the European Parliament Temporary Committee on the legislation underpinning the work of the UK's intelligence agencies, most notably the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) 2000. The report seeks to address a difficult subject, but does not fully reflect the safeguards in place in the UK under RIPA, which ensure compliance with the European convention on human rights.

Computer Hacking

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions in 2001 attempts were made to gain unauthorised access to computers in his Department by hacking; and of those how many were successful. [32738]

Mr. MacShane: In 2001 there were three occasions when unauthorised access to FCO systems was identified. On the first occasion successful access was gained to the FCO's website, and the internet service provider has subsequently put stronger firewalls in place. The second and third occasions both involved access to FCO computer systems through weaknesses which have now been resolved. In common with other Departments, no facility exists to alert FCO to unsuccessful attempts to gain unauthorised access.

British Expatriates (Spain)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 36W, on British expatriates in Spain, what figures are held by the *(a)* Foreign Office and *(b)* the British Embassy in Spain, as to the number of UK nationals living permanently in Spain. [33125]

Peter Hain: *(a)* None.

(b) For consular purposes, British nationals in Spain, whether visiting or permanently resident, may register their presence with the British embassy in Madrid, or the nearest British consulate. However, as registration is not compulsory, and few citizens choose to register, any figures derived from these registers would not be authoritative. Official Spanish figures therefore provide the best guide as to the number of British nationals resident in Spain.

Syria

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on recent allegations made by Britain in the United Nations Sanctions Committee that Syria has violated UN sanctions on Iraqi oil. [32860]

Mr. Bradshaw: Regular media and oil industry reports have shown that in 2001 Syria suddenly began exporting an average of over 100,000 barrels of oil per day more than the previous year, without increasing its own domestic production. These reports have consistently attributed this to Syria's illegal import of large quantities of Iraqi oil through the Kirkuk-Banias pipeline connecting the two countries. 100,000 barrels per day is a significant amount of oil, worth at current prices about $260 million of humanitarian funding every six months. This is more than Iraq plans to spend on medicine or education under the current six-month phase of the humanitarian programme. The export of Iraqi oil, without seeking UN approval, would be a serious breach of UN resolutions 661 and 986. We have therefore sought Syrian assurances in the UN Sanctions Committee that they will make transparent the operation of this pipeline, bring it within the UN system and allow the revenue raised from it to benefit the Iraqi people rather than the Baghdad regime.

Kenya

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Kenyan Government about the imposition of import duties on goods being sent from the United Kingdom to aid street children; and if he will make a statement. [33053]

Mr. MacShane: Our High Commission in Nairobi has raised this issue with the Kenyan authorities. They are at this stage unwilling to grant an exemption for goods for charitable purposes. We will continue to raise the issue.

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what events *(a)* he is and *(b)* other Ministers in his Department are planning to attend as part of the golden jubilee celebrations; and what events his Department is planning to arrange to celebrate the golden jubilee. [33246]

Mr. Straw: It is still too early yet to be certain of what national events I, or other FCO Ministers, will be attending. I expect, however, to attend the national service of thanksgiving at St. Paul's cathedral on 4 June.

I will also be attending my county service of thanksgiving in Blackburn cathedral on Sunday 2 June.

The Under Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), plans to be in his Exeter constituency for the visit there by Her Majesty on 1 May.

Baroness Amos will attend the Commonwealth Day observance on 11 March (I shall be at the General Affairs Council in Brussels).

The FCO are sponsoring the tour of the Queen's golden jubilee baton through 20 Commonwealth countries. It will leave London on Monday 11 March, Commonwealth Day, and return to the UK on 5 June. Our posts overseas will arrange events and encourage publicity to support the baton's passage, supported by the local Commonwealth games associations and the British Council. We have also sponsored some aspects of the "Spirit of Friendship" festival associated with the 17th Commonwealth games in Manchester this summer, one of the high points of the jubilee.

Additionally, there will be eight open days from April to October when the FCO will be open to view by members of the public. It is one of the "String of Pearls" of historic public buildings that will be open to the public, along the banks of the Thames in central London.

We have issued general guidance to all our posts overseas on the celebrations of the golden jubilee. Many embassies and high commissions may use the occasion of the jubilee to enhance their regular Queen's Birthday Party. Missions will possibly hold additional events using publicity materials specifically prepared for the jubilee in the FCO, taking into account their local circumstances, and the Queen's desire that there should be no undue expenditure from public funds.

HEALTH

HIV

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how he will ensure that priority is given to HIV prevention work after April. [28930]

Yvette Cooper: The Department will monitor investment in HIV prevention through the national health service performance assessment framework and through returns required under the AIDS (Control) Act 1987. This work will be underpinned by the proposed target to reduce by 25 per cent. the number of newly acquired HIV infections and gonorrhoea infections by the end of 2007, set out in the sexual health and HIV strategy.

Audiology Treatment

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients aged *(a)* 16 to 59, *(b)* 60 to 75 and *(c)* over 75 years have been waiting for (i) less than one year, (ii) more than one year and (iii) more than two years for a hearing test at (A) the Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust and (B) the Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS Trust by quarter in the last three years for which figures are available. [28844]

Ms Blears: Information is not available in the format requested centrally.

North Staffordshire Health Authority

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the health spending per head of population was in the North Staffordshire health authority in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01, *(c)* 2001–02 and *(d)* estimated for 2002–03. [29269]

Yvette Cooper: Health spending per head of population in North Staffordshire health authority was £675.34 in 1999–2000 and £725.72 in 2000–01. Future estimates of spending are not available.

Notes:

1. In many health authorities there are factors which distort the expenditure per head. These include:

the health authority acting in a lead capacity to commission health care;

asset revaluations in NHS trusts being funded through health authorities; and

some double counting of expenditure between health authorities and primary care trusts within the health authority area.

Expenditure on health per head cannot therefore be reliably compared between health authorities.

Allocations per weighted head of population provide a much more reliable measure to identify differences between funding of health authorities.

2. Expenditure on health is taken from health authority and primary care trust summarisation forms which are prepared on a resource basis and therefore differ from cash allocations in the year. The expenditure is the total spent on the commission of health care by the health authority and by the primary care trusts within each health authority area. The majority of general dental services expenditure is not included in the health authority or primary care trust accounts and is separately accounted for by the Dental Practice Board.

3. Health authorities and primary care trusts should account for their expenditure on a gross basis. This results in an element of double counting where one body acts as the main commissioner and is then reimbursed by other bodies. The effect of this double counting within the answer cannot be readily identified.

Source:

Health authority audited summarisation forms 1999–2000 and 2000–01

Primary care trust audited summarisation schedules 2000–01

Weighted population estimates for 1999–2000 and 2000–01.

Arthur Andersen

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many of his Department's PFI contracts Arthur Andersen has been an adviser; and if he will make a statement. [31720]

Mr. Hutton: Of the 23 major private finance initiative projects that have reached financial close, Arthur Andersen were lead financial advisers on one—Bromley Healthcare NHS Trust. Bromley reached financial close in November 1998.

Arthur Andersen is not acting as lead financial adviser on any of the major PFI schemes currently in procurement. However, their legal arm, Andersen Legal, is acting for Stoke Mandeville NHS Trust on their scheme which is currently in procurement.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list his Department's total expenditure by month in each financial year since 1997–98. [32795]

Mr. Hutton: The monthly expenditure by the Department for the period 1 April 1997 to 31 December 2001 is shown in the table.

£000

Month	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
April	3,289,571	3,272,043	3,981,814	4,334,631	4,352,192
May	3,363,658	3,131,688	3,049,401	3,258,726	4,279,585
June	2,902,421	3,304,207	3,568,651	4,288,344	4,795,583
July	3,289,298	3,785,692	3,986,260	3,397,964	3,971,748
August	3,079,196	2,785,252	3,922,629	3,776,939	5,132,307
September	3,425,728	4,758,707	3,617,399	4,522,599	4,247,376
October	3,703,245	3,764,203	3,597,776	3,520,058	4,702,310
November	2,680,109	4,980,046	3,632,962	3,878,473	5,208,304
December	3,624,934	3,819,993	4,375,852	4,623,396	5,604,820
January	3,239,372	3,102,676	3,216,403	3,646,583	—
February	3,269,260	3,888,446	3,857,369	4,478,028	—
March	3,827,711	4,651,852	4,741,358	5,867,822	—

Notes:

1. Figures represent the actual monthly cash expenditure in round £000.
2. Figures are shown gross of income receipts.

Rape Victims

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he has in place to provide support to victims of rape; and what funding he provides to support rape victims. [22448]

Jacqui Smith: The first step for most people will be to discuss the problem with their general medical practitioner. We have set out clear national standards in the National Service Framework for mental health. It describes how people should be able to get quicker access to more effective treatments in and through primary care, with support from specialised services where necessary. Some people may also seek help through other routes, including specialised services in the charitable and voluntary sector. We support a selection of such services each year.

People who have been raped need access to a variety of services including forensic examination, counselling and treatment to prevent sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy. These services are provided by a number of agencies including general medical practitioners and genito-urinary medicine clinics. Counselling provision will be strengthened by the clear national standards in the National Service Framework for Mental Health.

Breast-feeding

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the Government are taking to promote breast-feeding. [24446]

Yvette Cooper: We take very seriously our responsibility to protect infant health in the United Kingdom, and support the promotion of breast-feeding. It is important that women and their partners are able to make a fully informed choice on how to feed their babies based on accurate and consistent information. This means that women should have access to information about all infant feeding practices through the relevant health care professional.

The Infant Feeding Initiative was established in May 1999 with the aim to increase the incidence and duration of breast-feeding among those groups of the population where breast-feeding rates are the lowest, as well as to help all women to make informed choices about how they feed their infant. Breast-feeding rates are low in lower socio-economic groups. A total budget of nearly £3 million over three years from Public Health Development Fund has been allocated for this initiative and reflects our commitment to tackle health inequalities that was highlighted by the Acheson report.

It included the appointment of two part-time National Infant Feeding Advisers and funding of 79 "best practice" projects to date to enable effective communication and evaluation of current good practice, to address the barriers to breast-feeding, and thereby lead to improved breast-feeding rates among those least likely to breast-feed. This has resulted in joint working efforts between health professionals and voluntary organisations. Sure start initiatives also support local projects on breast-feeding.

Other departmental activity includes support for an annual National Breastfeeding Awareness Week, support to four main voluntary organisations involved in the promotion of breast-feeding, research into breast-feeding through quinquennial surveys of infant feeding practices, and maintaining close links with UNICEF's Baby Friendly Initiative.

The forthcoming Children's National Service Framework will address maternity services that can help to give all children a good start in life to grow into healthy adults.

GPs (London)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GPs are practising in Greater London; and what the figure was in 1997. [24628]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* The information requested is provided in the table.

All practitioners (excluding GP retainers)[1] *and unrestricted principals and equivalents (UPEs)*[2]

London region and England, 1997 and 2000 — *headcount*

	1997	*2000*
All practitioners (excluding GP retainers)		
England	29,389	30,252
London Region	4,532	4,548
of which:		
UPEs		
England	27,099	27,704
London Region	3,849	3,951

[1] All Practitioners (excluding GP Retainers) include GMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs, PMS Salaried GPs, Restricted Principals, Assistants, GP Registrars, Salaried Doctors (para 52 SFA), and PMS Other.

[2] UPEs include GMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs and PMS Salaried GPs.

Note:

GP Retainers figures were first collected in the 1999 census. In September 2000, there were 1,117 GP Retainers in England and 146 in London Region.

1997 data have been converted to correspond with April 1999 regional boundaries.

Data as at 1 October 1997 and 30 September 2000.

Source:

Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

Hospital Waiting Times

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many paediatric patients who received hospital treatment in each health authority area between 1 September 2000 and 1 September 2001 waited *(a)* under four weeks, *(b)* under three months, *(c)* under six months, *(d)* under eight months, *(e)* under 12 months, *(f)* under 18 months and *(g)* over 18 months for admission to hospital. [24627]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* The data requested for the latest available period 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001 are in the table.

Waiting times for waiting list and booked admissions for all paediatric specialties NHS hospitals, England 2000–01[1]

						Duration of elective wait	
	Up to 4 weeks	*4 weeks to 3 months*	*3–6 months*	*6–8 months*	*8–12 months*	*12–18 months*	*Over 18 months*
Hillingdon HA	181	63	16	4	4	1	0
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	144	137	68	40	27	26	0
Enfield and Haringey HA	279	126	66	26	17	6	1
Redbridge and Waltham Forest HA	152	86	69	18	14	2	0
Bedfordshire HA	212	93	30	15	10	2	0
Berkshire HA	229	116	35	10	28	6	0
Buckinghamshire HA	641	204	54	23	21	3	2
Bexley and Greenwich HA	432	194	71	16	18	1	0
Bromley HA	277	149	58	14	10	3	0
Croydon HA	302	101	39	7	16	9	1
East Kent HA	318	88	26	7	7	1	0
West Kent HA	426	337	101	22	21	4	0
Kingston and Richmond HA	137	136	46	14	16	5	1
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	1,066	619	232	50	41	11	0
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth HA	507	728	236	62	50	19	6
East Surrey HA	168	178	68	29	22	9	1
West Surrey HA	158	75	52	17	16	10	1
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove HA	674	399	229	113	52	16	1
West Sussex HA	311	221	144	51	36	10	1
Barking and Havering HA	101	78	52	16	4	1	0
Barnet HA	165	101	49	16	9	3	0
Brent and Harrow HA	236	162	67	26	15	14	0
Camden and Islington HA	285	198	102	19	12	4	0
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	716	229	70	41	44	18	2
East London and The City HA	498	312	199	45	47	6	0
North Essex HA	157	115	57	13	10	4	0
South Essex HA	382	181	60	12	8	4	1
South Lancashire HA	96	51	16	3	5	4	0
Liverpool HA	291	343	126	26	20	5	1
Manchester HA	566	98	70	27	31	80	12
Morecambe Bay HA	96	112	23	7	4	8	4
St. Helens and Knowsley HA	268	206	59	8	6	4	0
Salford and Trafford HA	203	67	49	14	21	62	4
Sefton HA	181	125	45	9	5	1	0
Stockport HA	97	29	21	9	12	29	6
West Pennine HA	145	79	26	14	18	82	9
Northamptonshire HA	501	140	31	12	19	9	2
Oxfordshire HA	616	335	84	19	21	17	2
Suffolk HA	279	149	32	5	7	5	0
Barnsley HA	128	117	35	4	3	0	0
North Derbyshire HA	220	130	47	6	4	3	0
South Derbyshire HA	231	195	162	84	43	9	0
Doncaster HA	114	109	37	12	3	0	0
Leicestershire HA	328	395	220	93	29	9	1
Lincolnshire HA	113	61	24	5	8	3	0
North Nottinghamshire HA	172	116	30	5	9	1	0
Nottingham HA	389	296	79	19	27	16	5
Rotherham HA	132	119	34	2	2	1	0
Sheffield HA	1,006	407	123	28	21	1	0
Bury and Rochdale HA	577	60	34	15	14	73	8
North Cheshire HA	78	90	38	4	6	5	1
South Cheshire HA	160	78	39	12	16	8	4
East Lancashire HA	436	82	24	21	9	52	8
North West Lancashire HA	124	53	10	4	2	7	1
North and Mid Hampshire HA	83	90	66	20	14	5	2
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire HA	75	110	60	15	12	4	0
Southampton and South West Hampshire HA	150	296	231	81	52	14	9
Isle of Wight HA	10	21	22	5	9	4	1
Somerset HA	770	93	20	5	7	3	0
South and West Devon HA	1,561	77	17	5	2	0	0
Wiltshire HA	399	141	40	14	14	9	1
Avon HA	1,301	507	152	44	23	0	0
Birmingham HA	490	353	166	46	99	19	2
Wigan and Bolton HA	222	38	19	2	11	34	3
Wirral HA	72	66	28	2	4	0	0
Bradford HA	787	272	44	15	23	11	3

Waiting times for waiting list and booked admissions for all paediatric specialties NHS hospitals, England 2000–01[1]

	Duration of elective wait						
	Up to 4 weeks	*4 weeks to 3 months*	*3–6 months*	*6–8 months*	*8–12 months*	*12–18 months*	*Over 18 months*
County Durham HA	172	120	79	25	19	11	1
East Riding HA	517	207	84	32	35	9	2
Gateshead and South Tyneside HA	577	139	19	0	4	3	1
Leeds HA	751	263	108	41	36	32	9
Newcastle and North Tyneside HA	34	4	0	0	1	0	0
North Cumbria HA	22	16	6	7	10	2	0
South Humber HA	93	63	26	3	4	0	0
Northumberland HA	12	1	0	0	0	0	0
Sunderland HA	611	170	62	1	3	1	0
Tees HA	30	9	2	1	0	0	0
Wakefield HA	372	49	28	3	5	14	2
North Yorkshire HA	675	132	55	17	15	16	3
Calderdale and Kirklees HA	463	81	36	16	12	9	2
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly HA	283	54	13	4	5	0	0
Dorset HA	214	137	101	19	10	6	1
North and East Devon HA	104	45	24	9	5	3	0
Gloucestershire HA	970	161	48	10	12	4	0
Coventry HA	79	43	16	7	5	1	0
Dudley HA	70	38	21	3	5	2	0
Herefordshire HA	127	70	18	2	3	3	0
Sandwell HA	187	59	26	7	9	4	0
Shropshire Ha	247	50	22	3	3	1	1
Solihull HA	40	25	7	2	4	5	0
North Staffordshire HA	785	50	15	3	5	6	0
South Staffordshire HA	970	186	48	12	11	5	0
Walsall HA	200	78	41	6	8	6	0
Warwickshire HA	110	90	29	4	15	3	0
Wolverhampton HA	733	35	4	1	4	3	0
Worcestershire HA	177	116	29	11	9	5	0
East and North Hertfordshire HA	172	89	36	14	12	0	0
West Hertfordshire HA	165	101	53	9	15	6	0
Cambridge HA	223	129	32	2	6	2	0
Norfolk HA	368	537	76	10	9	0	1

[1] 1 April to 31 March

Notes:

1. Waiting time statistics from HES are not the same as the published waiting list statistics. HES provides counts and waiting times for all patients admitted to hospital within a given period whereas the published waiting list statistics count those waiting for treatment at a given point in time and how long they have been on the waiting list. Also, HES calculates the waiting time as the difference between the admission and decision to admit dates. Unlike published waiting list statistics, this is not adjusted for self-deferrals or periods of medical/social suspension.
2. Figures in this table have not yet been adjusted for shortfalls in data.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is towards the suspension from hospital waiting lists of patients recovering from the first stage of a bilateral procedure. [25499]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* Patients who are recovering from the first stage of a bilateral operation should not be suspended from the waiting list but should be placed on the planned list.

Antidepressants

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the side effects of tricyclic antidepressants and selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors; and what evidence he has collated on their impact on suicidal tendencies in their users. [25436]

Ms Blears: Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and tricyclic antidepressants (TCAs) are effective medicines in the treatment of depression, features of which may include suicidal behaviour. It is known that features of depression, including suicidal behaviour, can worsen after introduction of any antidepressant prior to its beneficial effect being apparent.

As with all medicines the safety of TCAs and selective SSRIs is continually monitored by the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) and the independent expert advisory body, the Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM). The safety profiles of TCAs and SSRIs are well established and are reflected in the product information for prescribers and patients.

Reports of adverse effects, including suicidal behaviour, suspected to be associated with SSRIs and TCAs are collated by MCA/CSM through the spontaneous reporting scheme, the yellow card scheme. These data are reviewed on a regular basis.

A possible causal association between SSRIs and suicidal behaviour has been reviewed by the CSM on a number of occasions, most recently in 2001. The CSM concluded that the current evidence is insufficient to confirm a causal association between SSRIs and suicidal behaviour and advised that the issue should be kept under review.

The product information and the British National Formulary warn that patients should be closely monitored for suicidal impulses, particularly in the early stages of treatment. An article emphasising this advice was published in the MCA/CSM drug safety bulletin "Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance" in September 2000.

International Recruitment

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 8 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 647W, on international recruitment, by what means he monitors the results of the international recruitment and regional international recruitment co-ordinators; and if he will publish the names of the international nursing recruitment agencies who fail to adhere to his guidance. [28881]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* International recruitment is monitored by the international recruitment co-ordinators who work closely with the national health service employers recruiting internationally. Their role is to ensure that the code of practice is followed and that developing countries are not targeted for international recruitment by providing guidance and advice directly to NHS trusts. The director of international recruitment reviews this process monthly.

Recruitment agencies who fail to adhere to the code of practice will not be used by NHS organisations.

NHS Assets

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each three star NHS trust in England the estimated value of assets held in *(a)* land and *(b)* buildings at the latest date for which figures are available. [28671]

Ms Blears: The table shows the estimated net book value of three star national health service trust's *(a)* land and *(b)* buildings installations and fittings as at 31 March 2001.

NHS trust tangible fixed assets—net book value as at 31 March 2001

£000

NHS trust code	*NHS trust name*	*Land*	*Buildings, installations and fittings*
RGT	Addenbrooke's NHS Trust	21,243	99,308
RDD	Basildon and Thurrock General Hospital NHS Trust	23,135	58,525
RCP	Bassetlaw Hospital and Community Health Service Trust	4,070	31,496
RMB	Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley NHS Trust	5,095	73,620
RMR	Blackpool Victoria Hospital NHS Trust	5,303	53,338
RAE	Bradford Hospitals NHS Trust	9,373	85,701
RGA	Calderdale Healthcare NHS Trust	3,376	21,926
RCV	Central Sheffield University Hospitals NHS Trust	7,490	117,702
RFS	Chesterfield and North Derbyshire Hospital Trust	8,150	37,033
RLN	City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Trust	5,645	76,452
RJR	Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Trust	6,064	36,581
RA5	East Gloucestershire NHS Trust	22,507	84,159
RDU	Frimley Park Hospital NHS Trust	9,900	47,757
RGB	Huddersfield Health Care Services NHS Trust	8,359	57,213
RJZ	King's College Hospital NHS Trust	21,356	108,796
RC9	Luton and Dunstable Hospital NHS Trust	6,887	35,855
RQ8	Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust	45,921	78,138
RTX	Morecambe Bay Hospitals NHS Trust	10,481	111,631
RM1	Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital NHS Trust	2,492	4,258
RVW	North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Trust	7,595	73,964
RNS	Northampton General Hospital NHS Trust	15,152	60,348
RBZ	Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust	9,172	39,126
RTF	Northumbria Health Care NHS Trust	14,619	116,072
RGN	Peterborough Hospitals NHS Trust	4,454	24,064
RQW	Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust	16,000	34,386
RG2	Queen Elizabeth Hospital NHS Trust	16,813	10,432
RH8	Royal Devon and Exeter Healthcare NHS Trust	21,431	94,218
RK5	Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Trust	6,504	41,003
RA9	South Devon Health Care NHS Trust	21,906	72,567
RTA	South Durham Health Care NHS Trust	6,558	43,184
RE9	South Tyneside Health Care NHS Trust	6,523	51,546
RTG	Southern Derbyshire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	12,313	103,241
RBA	Taunton and Somerset NHS Trust	11,448	77,073
RGR	West Suffolk Hospitals NHS Trust	6,400	29,101
RN1	Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS Trust	24,010	62,879

Source:
NHS Trust Summarisation Schedules 2000–01

Hospital Performance

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of *(a)* the effect of under investment and *(b)* the poor performance of management with regard to persistently failing NHS hospitals; and if he will make a statement. [29397]

Mr. Hutton: The national health service performance ratings for acute trusts were published in September 2001. The ratings show that hospitals of a similar size perform differently. Variations in performance are largely down to hospital management teams. The direct effect of funding levels on performance has not been used in deciding the ratings, although maintaining financial balance is a key target.

The poorest performing, zero star trusts, have submitted performance improvement plans to the Department. These are being reviewed and will subsequently be monitored. The modernisation agency is playing a full role in this process, to bring the performance of these trusts up to a level that patients have the right to expect.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take into account *(a)* social, *(b)* economic and *(c)* demographic data when assessing an NHS hospital's (i) success and (ii) failure rate. [29396]

Mr. Hutton: The national health service performance ratings for acute trusts, published in September 2001, were based on areas of performance that are under the influence of hospital managers. Where appropriate, the performance indicators used in the assessment are standardised to take into account the age and sex of patients to make meaningful comparisons between hospital trusts.

Drop-in Body Scans

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the proposal by private firms to offer drop-in body scans claiming to identify cancer and heart disease; and what *(a)* checks and *(b)* licensing a company must undergo to ensure that such a service is (i) reliable and (ii) effective. [27853]

Yvette Cooper: From 1 April this year the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) will take over from health authorities the regulation of independent health care providers under the Care Standards Act 2000. For the first time, owners and managers of independent drop-in medical services and exclusively private general practitioners offering primary care or diagnostic services to the public will be obliged to register with the NCSC, comply with regulations and meet core and service-specific national minimum standards.

Treatment and diagnostic services provided solely by registered nurses or other non-medical health professionals will not be required to register with the NCSC. However, under the Care Standards Act my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has powers to make regulations to bring services not initially regulated by the National Care Standards Commission under regulation at a future date.

Other specific legislation requires that all medical exposures to ionising radiation, such as X-rays or CT scans, whether undertaken in the national health service or private sector must be justified.

Health Action Zones

Mr. Bailey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will announce the level of funding for health action zones for the financial year 2003–04. [30340]

Ms Blears: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 389W.

Staff Shortages

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment has been made of staff shortages of *(a)* doctors, *(b)* nurses, and *(c)* scientific personnel in the Portsmouth and South East Hampshire health authority; and if he will make a statement. [30276]

Ms Blears: We are aware of the difficulties that have been faced by trusts in the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire area in recruiting doctors, nurses and scientific personnel. A task force has been established locally, to look at staffing needs across the health authority. Details of local initiatives to recruit staff will be available from the chairmen of the health authority and national health service trusts.

Information collected centrally on staff vacancies is published on the Department's website.

Wheelchairs

Mr. Luke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what his policy is on the purchase by health authorities of wheelchairs and mobility products made in Britain; [30339]

(2) if he will take steps to ensure that the wheelchairs and mobility products purchased by health authorities meet British fire safety standards. [30336]

Jacqui Smith: The National Health Service Purchasing and Supply Agency has negotiated a national contract for powered and manual wheelchairs (for England). The wheelchairs supplied under this contract conform to all relevant British and European safety standards.

Although health authorities and NHS trusts are expected to use this national contract they do have the freedom to purchase from different suppliers, depending on local circumstances. It is therefore their responsibility to ensure the contracts conform to all relevant British and European safety standards.

Mr. Luke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the level of safety standards on wheelchair and mobility products being purchased by health authorities. [30337]

Jacqui Smith: The Medical Devices Agency, (MDA), maintains a database of all incidents reported to them concerning safety or quality problems with wheelchairs. MDA regularly carry out trend analysis on the content of reports received from United Kingdom, Europe and United States of America and also on the outcomes of any subsequent investigations. If these trends reveal the need for individual manufacturers to re-design their products or improve their usage instructions, labelling, repair instructions or quality control etc manufacturers are informed and MDA monitor the situation until appropriate improvements are made. Also, if any of these trends reveal a shortcoming in an issued British standard concerning wheelchairs or a need for a new standard, the MDA work with the British Standards Institution, (BSI), to make any necessary revisions or assist with the drafting of any new standard.

MDA maintain regular contact with the Purchasing and Supply Agency to ensure that they can consider any possible effects on existing or future purchase agreements.

Mr. Luke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he takes to monitor the safety and quality of wheelchairs purchased by health authorities. [30338]

Jacqui Smith: The Medical Devices Agency, (MDA), has specific responsibility on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to safeguard public health where medical devices are involved. MDA has an established wide ranging reporting system, which is open to users, carers and health care staff etc who wish to report safety or quality problems concerning medical devices. Within the Medical Device Regulations manufacturers are legally bound to report to MDA on any serious safety problems concerning their devices. MDA also carry out pro-active investigations on a range of manufacturers to ensure that they are in compliance with the requirements of the regulations.

Within this overall remit, MDA has a specific unit responsible for wheeled mobility devices where all reported incidents concerning the quality or safety of wheelchairs are considered. If the unit's investigation highlights a need for an improvement in a wheelchair's design, usage instructions or manufacturing process then appropriate action is taken with the manufacturer/supplier.

Huntington's Disease

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what specialist facilities are available for sufferers of Huntington's disease in *(a)* Northumberland, *(b)* Durham, *(c)* Cumbria, *(d)* North Yorkshire, *(e)* East Riding of Yorkshire, *(f)* Lincolnshire, *(g)* Norfolk, *(h)* Suffolk, *(i)* Essex, *(j)* Cambridgeshire, *(k)* Buckinghamshire, *(l)* Herefordshire, *(m)* Oxfordshire, *(n)* Berkshire, *(o)* Wiltshire, *(p)* Gloucestershire, *(q)* Hampshire, *(r)* Somerset, *(s)* Kent, *(t)* Sussex, *(u)* Isle of Wight, *(v)* Dorset, *(w)* Devon and *(x)* Cornwall. [30404]

Jacqui Smith: Information on local service configuration in England, such as the availability of specialist facilities for patients with Huntington's disease, is not collected centrally. It is a decision for health authorities, in partnership with primary care groups/trusts and other local stakeholders, to assess the health needs of their populations, including those with Huntington's disease, and to commission services to meet those needs.

National Radiological Protection Board

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what discussions he has had with the Scottish Executive on the functions currently carried out in Scotland by the National Radiological Protection Board after the formation of the National Infection Control and Health Protection Agency; [30686]

(2) what discussions he has had with the Scotland Office regarding the proposals for the disbanding of the National Radiological Protection Board and its amalgamation into the NICHP; [30690]

(3) what consultations the Chief Medical Officer had with agencies in Scotland prior to making his recommendations on the National Infection Control and Health Protection Agency. [30688]

Yvette Cooper: Discussions are taking place between the Department and the Scottish Executive about how the proposals will affect Scotland. These discussions include consideration of how the functions currently exercised in Scotland by the National Radiological Protection Board might be affected by the proposed creation of the National Infection Control and Health Protection Agency.

Infectious Diseases

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to implement the recommendations contained in the report, Getting Ahead of the Curve-A Strategy for Combating Infectious Diseases. [30685]

Yvette Cooper: The strategy includes a commitment to have updated plans in place by the end of 2002 for health care associated infection; tuberculosis; antimicrobial resistance; and blood-borne and sexually transmitted viruses. We hope to set up the new National Infection Control and Health Protection Agency at the latest by 1 April 2003, and will be working to have other elements of the strategy in place as soon as possible. Preparation of the strategy took account of a wide range of views, and we shall consult further as we work up the details of how to take particular components of the strategy forward.

Head Injuries

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average age was of an individual sustaining a head injury in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [30797]

Jacqui Smith: The table shows the information requested for the year 2000–01.

Finished consultant episodes (FCE) by main diagnosis, age group and average age—NHS hospitals, England 2000–01

	Age									
Diagnosis	*0–4*	*10–14*	*15–44*	*45–64*	*65–74*	*75–84*	*85 and over*	*Not known*	*Median*	*Total*
S00 superficial injury of head	1,835	1,931	3,630	967	536	1,214	1,248	18	27	11,379
S01 open wound of head	4,877	3,642	8,567	2,753	1,172	2,191	2,652	29	28	25,883
S02 fracture of skull and facial bones	1,549	2,924	19,226	2,842	640	711	408	18	25	28,318
S03 dislocation sprain and strain of joints and ligaments of head	77	62	120	15	8	22	10	0	18	314
S04 injury of cranial nerves	5	3	43	13	4	0	0	0	32	68
S05 injury of eye and orbit	157	527	1,440	454	175	245	232	0	33	3,230
S06 intracranial injury	772	1,360	4,664	2,100	990	1,246	739	21	38	11,892
S07 crushing injury of head	0	0	3	1	0	1	0	0	40	5
S08 traumatic amputation of part of head	1	5	92	9	5	4	7	0	31	123
S09 other and unspecified injuries of head	6,279	7,964	13,974	4,150	1,624	2,587	2,562	35	23	39,175
Total	15,552	18,418	51,759	13,304	5,154	8,221	7,858	121	26	120,387

An FCE is defined as a period of patient care under one consultant in one health care provider. The figures do not represent the number of patients, as one person may have several episodes within the year. The main diagnosis is the first of seven diagnosis fields in the Hospital Episode Statistics data set, and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital. Figures in this table have not yet been adjusted for shortfalls in data.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the classifications for determining the severity of a head injury are. [30787]

Jacqui Smith: The Glasgow Coma Scale is the most widely used system for classifying the severity of head injuries. This scale assigns points to each patient based upon three categories: verbal function, eye opening, and best motor (movement) response. Additional information on severity is provided by X-ray and from CT and MR scans.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will reclassify brain injury rehabilitation as a specialist service within the NHS. [30786]

Jacqui Smith: Rehabilitation for brain injuries is already defined as a specialised service, ie it has a planning population larger than the total population of several primary care teams and sometimes larger than the population of a strategic health authority. It was included in the National Specialised Services Definitions Set published by the Department on its website in December 2001.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many individuals have sustained a head injury in each of the past five years. [30796]

Jacqui Smith: Around one million people a year receive a head injury in the UK, and over 100,000 of those attend hospital. We have hospital activity data on the number and type of injuries as shown in the table:

Finished consultant episodes (FCEs) by main diagnosis NHS hospitals, England 1995–96 to 2000–01

S00-S09 Injuries to the head	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
S00 Superficial injury of head	9,731	10,829	11,000	10,875	12,293	11,379
S01 Open wound of head	20,180	23,186	23,824	23,668	27,184	25,883
S02 Fracture of skull and facial bones	29,839	31,419	30,265	27,837	30,825	28,318
S03 Dislocation sprain and strain of joints and ligaments of head	317	381	367	410	349	314
S04 Injury of cranial nerves	78	63	94	96	106	68
S05 Injury of eye and orbit	3,655	3,503	3,320	3,255	3,591	3,230
S06 Intracranial injury	23,226	20,036	16,529	11,942	12,790	11,892
S07 Crushing injury of head	30	16	11	19	16	5
S08 Traumatic amputation of part of head	127	116	102	111	123	123
S09 Other and unspecified injuries of head	40,912	42,193	41,102	40,163	43,271	39,175
Total	128,096	131,742	126,615	118,376	130,548	120,387

Notes:

1. A FCE is defined as a period of patient care under one consultant in one health care provider. The figures do not represent the number of patients, as one person may have several episodes within the year.
2. Data for 1995–96 to 1997–98 are adjusted for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data.
3. 1998–99 to 2000–01 data are not yet adjusted for shortfalls.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the National Service Framework for long-term conditions will cover vocational rehabilitation for people with acquired brain injury. [30837]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has said that the National Service Framework (NSF) for long-term conditions will have a particular focus on the needs of people with neurological disease and brain and spinal injury.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will change the Government's response to the Health Committee's Third report of Session 2000–01 into Rehabilitation Following Head Injury, to take account of criticism from *(a)* Headway, *(b)* Rehab UK and *(c)* other organisations. [30839]

Jacqui Smith: We are aware of the concerns expressed by Headway, Rehab UK and others about our response to the Health Committee's report. We do not, however, intend to change our response as there are a number of initiatives under way that will help improve services for people with head injury. These include the National Service Framework on long term conditions and the clinical guideline for the initial assessment, management and first referral of patients with head injury that the National Institute for Clinical Excellence has been asked to produce.

We think that it is better to invest time to appraise the existing service configuration of head injury services across the national health service, so that we can get it right for the future.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the percentage of individuals who survived a head injury who *(a)* returned to work within a year, *(b)* return to work within five years and *(c)* never returned to work in the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [30798]

Jacqui Smith: No assessment has been made of the percentage of head injured individuals who return to work.

We are keen to help ensure that disabled people, including those with head injury, are able to return to work whenever possible. Currently local authorities are taking the lead on joint investment plans on the Welfare to Work for disabled people initiative. The idea of these plans is to provide effective and joined up services for disabled people who want to work, to stay in work, or to move closer to the world of work.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce further measures to simplify the funding streams available to organisations offering vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with acquired brain injury. [30785]

Jacqui Smith: The final stages of the process of rehabilitation for people who have acquired brain injury may be an individualised programme of employment rehabilitation delivered through the employment service's work preparation programme. The employment service has worked with the organisations delivering work preparation for people with brain injuries to produce a national framework. This will result in greater coherence within regions and countries in terms of the scope and duration of its individualised programmes.

Silicone Cosmesis

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been allocated by his Department to individual health authorities in the *(a)* current and *(b)* previous financial years for the provision of silicone cosmesis; and what monitoring procedures exist to ensure that the funds are used to provide cosmesis for amputees. [30792]

Jacqui Smith: On the 9 January 2001 we announced that funding totalling £4 million to provide silicone cosmesis to prosthetic limb users was to be made available over the next three years. The funding started with £0.5 million for 2001–02, £1.5 million for 2002–03 and £2 million for 2003–04. This was an addition to the baseline allocations to individual health authorities.

Each local health authority will provide funding to individual disablement service centres (DSCs) to provide silicone cosmesis. To support this initiative officials in my Department wrote, on 12 December 2001, to all health authorities reminding them that this funding has been provided to them in their allocations.

The contract for purchasing silicone cosmesis covers was awarded on 1 October 2001 and the contractor is required to provide the NHS purchasing and supply agency with quarterly contract sales figures which will include:

total sales figure in £s

£s spent by each DSC

what span of products are purchased.

Health Authority Expenditure

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, (1) pursuant to the answer of 14 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 63–64W, on health authority expenditure, if he will publish the latest forecast outturn for 2001–02 for each health authority and NHS trust in the south-east region of England; [30557]

(2) if he will place in the Library details of the savings in expenditure which the NHS south-east regional executive is requiring each trust and health authority to make by 31 March; and if he will make a statement on the implications of those savings for the services and the capital expenditure programmes of each trust and health authority. [31548]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answers 25 January and 29 January 2002]:* Health bodies in the south-east reported in mid January a projected overspend at the end of the financial year of £60 million. Support is being provided to ensure that this can be managed without any adverse effect on patient care principally through brokerage from elsewhere in the national health service. This is normal practice in managing the year-end financial position. Discussions will therefore be ongoing, with the financial position being closely monitored right up to the end of the financial year.

Autism

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many psychiatrists are employed by the NHS to diagnose and treat autistic spectrum children; [30988]

(2) what plans he has to allow autistic spectrum children to receive their social communication assessments in the private sector when they have waited longer than 12 months in the NHS; [30985]

(3) what the waiting time has been for a social communication assessment on autistic spectrum children by psychiatrists in the last year for which figures are available; [30987]

(4) what discussions he has had with the Royal College of Psychology concerning the effect of delay in diagnosis on the eventual outcome for autistic spectrum children. [30986]

Jacqui Smith: Diagnosis of autism and early interventions are being considered by an independent group chaired by Professor Ann Le Couteur which is expected to report in 2002. The Royal Colleges of Psychiatrists and Paediatrics and Child Health, the National Autistic Society and the British Psychological Society are all represented. The Department and the Department for Education and Skills both have observers on the group. We will consider what further discussions may be required in the light of the group's report.

As we develop the National Service Framework (NSF) for children we will consider the needs of disabled children, including those with autism. The NSF will set out to tackle inequalities, raise standards and reduce unacceptable variations in NHS and social services. We have recently announced that one of the exemplars we will use to show how services should be provided will be around services for children with autism.

The data requested on numbers of psychiatrists and waiting times for assessments are not collected centrally. We recognise that assessment of communication skills plays an important part in the diagnosis of autism. This requires a multi-disciplinary, multi-agency assessment and may be led by a consultant community paediatrician or a child and adolescent psychiatrist. In some places specialist learning disability psychiatrists offer a service to children as well as adults and they, rather than child and adolescent psychiatrists, will be involved in diagnosis and management of children with autism. All these professionals have a broad range of responsibilities. The proportion of their time devoted to diagnosis and treatment of autism will vary. In the three years ending 31 March 2002 we will have invested some £85 million in children and adolescent mental health services across the national health service and local authorities.

We have no objection in principle to involving the private sector in assessment processes at whatever stage may be appropriate. Local statutory authorities have a duty to ensure that the particular health and social care needs of each person with autism are met with genuine choices for both clients and families, through the most appropriate community based services, in a cost-effective way. They should determine the pattern of services in their areas in the light of their knowledge of local needs.

Overhead Power Cables

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the number of cases of *(a)* leukaemia, *(b)* skin cancer and *(c)* lung cancer which may be attributed to overhead power cables near places of residence. [30752]

Yvette Cooper: The Department obtains advice on the possible health implications of exposure to electromagnetic fields, including the extremely low frequency fields (ELF) associated with overhead power cables, from the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB).

In March last year, the NRPB's Advisory Group on Non-ionising Radiation (AGNIR) issued a report on "ELF Electromagnetic Fields and the Risk of Cancer". This was issued following a wide-ranging and thorough review of scientific research related to this issue. The group concluded that the power frequency electromagnetic fields that exist in the vast majority of homes are not a cause of cancer in general. However, some epidemiological studies do indicate a possible doubling of the risk of childhood leukaemia associated with exposure to unusually high levels of power frequency magnetic fields. The AGNIR found no clear evidence of a carcinogenic effect in adults or of a plausible explanation from experiments on animals or isolated cells. Their view was that the epidemiological evidence is currently not strong enough to justify a firm conclusion that such fields cause leukaemia in children.

The board of NRPB issued a statement following publication of the AGNIR report. This indicated that if the doubling of the risk of leukaemia in children with exposures to magnetic fields above 0.4 T (400 nanotesla) was causal then an additional two cases of childhood leukaemia might be caused each year in the UK in addition to the 500 cases that would arise from other causes. Possibly one case every two years would be due to proximity to powerlines. There is no clear evidence of effects of magnetic fields on other cancers in children or of any cancers in adults. The AGNIR is, however, examining the possible effects on health of corona ions generated by powerlines. A number of concerns have been raised by members of the academic community in the United Kingdom that corona ions may have an influence on the behaviour of pollutant aerosols and cause an increase in exposure which could cause increases in risk of cancer or other diseases.

Midwifery

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of the availability of funding for full-time midwifery degrees in Scotland from August on the numbers of English students registering for courses in *(a)* England and *(b)* Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [30362]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* Midwifery courses are oversubscribed in both countries and we do not envisage any unfavourable impact from the re-organisation of funding in Scotland.

Work force development confederations will continue to work with the universities, with whom they have contracted midwifery education, to ensure suitable applicants fill all the available places in England.

Meningitis

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people suffered from group C meningitis and septicaemia in each year since 1997 in each health region. [31333]

Yvette Cooper: The number of laboratory confirmed cases of Group C meningococcal disease between 1997 and 2001 are shown in the table.

Region	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*[1]
Eastern	47	54	61	70	25
London	99	91	127	132	57
North-west	146	143	204	109	46
Northern and Yorkshire	115	133	153	79	36
South-east	105	100	116	102	39
South-west	77	59	60	41	26
Trent	104	109	110	69	51
West midlands	69	77	79	74	19
England total	762	766	910	676	299

[1] 2001 data are highly provisional

Food Imports

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the regulation of food imports. [29541]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 31 January 2002]:* All imports of products of animal origin, such as meat and dairy products, to the United Kingdom from countries outside of the European Union are subject to harmonised EU import controls. All such imports must enter the UK through designated border inspection posts where they undergo documentary and identity checks and a proportion are subject to physical checks. Food which is not of animal origin, such as fruit and vegetables, from countries outside of the EU is subject to import controls under UK national legislation and is subject to checks on the basis of risk assessment by local port health authorities and local food authorities at the point of entry to the UK.

Food coming to the UK from other EU member states is in free circulation within the EU and is not subject to routine checks at UK ports. Such food can be subject to import checks where there is information to support such action.

Once admitted to the UK, all imported food may be subject to the same checks at retail level by local authorities in the same way as those applicable to UK produced food.

The Board of the Food Standards Agency recently approved a report containing a number of proposals aimed at improving the co-ordination of enforcement action on imports and the effectiveness of inspection of import controls. Agency officials are exploring these proposals further and will report back to the board.

Health Authorities (London)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the latest forecasts are of the *(a)* underspending or ovespending for the present financial year, *(b)* funding pressures which impact on the 2002–03 planning round and *(c)* deficits in the local health economy in each health authority in London submitted to the London regional office. [31879]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 31 January 2002]:* By the end of this financial year we expect all health authorities to live within their agreed resource limits. Where they require support at year-end, this will be provided principally through brokerage from elsewhere in the national health service. This is normal practice in managing the year end financial position of individual bodies and for the NHS overall.

The London regional office is in discussions with health authorities and trusts about managing their 2001–02 year-end positions. The London region forecasts financial balance.

Information on 2002–03 is not available.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of the £7 million research funding on mobile phones will be used to examine the safety of mobile phone masts. [31812]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 31 January 2002]:* The mobile telephone health research (MTHR) programme that has recently been announced follows from the publication of a report in May 2000 by the Independent Expert Group on Mobile Phones under the chairmanship of Sir William Stewart FRS, FRSE on "Mobile Phones and Health". Radio signals from handsets were identified as a research priority because local exposures of people using phones are in general appreciably higher than exposures to the whole body from base stations. In both cases, however, exposures need to comply with exposure guidelines.

The first group of proposals agreed for funding by the programme management committee has generally related to the areas of research identified in the Stewart report. Although the main focus of much of the funded research relates to the use of mobile phones, in practice many of the experimental studies will also be valuable in providing evidence on any possible effects on people of exposures to radiofrequency (RF) radiation from base stations. The agreed programme includes a study on exposures from the newer types of base station that are being introduced in urban areas. Details of research now approved for funding are given on the MTHR website at www.mthr.org.uk.

A second call for proposals was issued last year with a deadline for submission of outline proposals of Friday 25 January 2002. The aim of this call was to extend the range of research being carried out in the MTHR programme. One aim of this call was to seek further proposals for volunteer studies that will examine possible effects of RF exposure of people. The proposals have yet to be considered but it is expected that some of the proposals will be of direct relevance to exposures to RF radiation from base stations.

Royal Sussex County Hospital

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the findings of the Commission for Health improvements investigations at the Royal Sussex County hospital, Brighton. [31842]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 31 January 2002]:* The Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) itself publishes the findings of its independent clinical governance reviews, not my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

We understand that CHI's clinical governance review report for Brighton health care national health service trust which includes the Royal Sussex County hospital will be published shortly.

GP Services (Isle of Sheppey)

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which organisation will be responsible for the GP after hours service on the Isle of Sheppey after the present contract comes to an end. [31847]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 31 January 2002]:* No decision has yet been made by Swale Primary Care Group on the provision of out of hours general practitioner services when the current arrangement with Healthcall ends in March.

Hospices

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will undertake a review into the way children's hospices are funded with special reference to the funding regime and level of funding given to adult hospices; and if he will make a statement. [31236]

Yvette Cooper: The mechanism for obtaining health service funding is essentially the same for children's and adult hospices. There is a process of negotiation between hospice service providers and the commissioners of health services from areas served by individual hospices.

In some areas, services for children with life threatening illnesses are more developed than in others. Regional offices of the Department are working with health professionals and agencies to review current service provision for children and any gaps in provision with a view to a better strategic fit.

As we develop the National Service Framework for children we will also consider the needs of disabled children, including those whose disability is sadly, of a life threatening nature and for whom respite care at a children's hospice is the option of choice. In the meantime, and within the next two months, the New Opportunities Fund will invite applications for funding for projects in support of children with life threatening illnesses. Children's hospices are eligible to apply.

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when his departmental budget received the new money for hospices announced in the Chancellor's last Budget; when he *(a)* intends to and *(b)* has delivered this to hospices, and in what form; and if he will make a statement; [32145]

(2) on what date the money he announced for hospices in his last Budget was provided to his Department's budget; [32141]

(3) when the new money for hospices announced in the last Budget will be paid directly to hospices. [32150]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer's last Budget, on 8 March 2001, did not include an announcement of new money for hospices. Funding to increase investment in specialist palliative care was included in the resources to support implementation of the NHS Cancer Plan. The overall increased investment for implementing the Cancer Plan includes an additional £50 million for specialist palliative care by 2004. This investment is intended to help tackle inequalities in access to specialist palliative care and enable the national health service to increase their contribution to the cost hospices incur in providing agreed levels of service. This will mean that NHS investment in specialist palliative services will match that of the voluntary sector.

Mr. Beard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons hospices for children receive less financial support per patient from Government than hospices for adults; and if he will take steps to bring funding for the two into line. [30835]

Yvette Cooper: Children's hospices are a relatively new concept in the overall provision of services for children with life threatening illnesses. In some cases the role they play in local provision is not as well established as that of adult hospices. They need to consult with and establish links with the commissioners of health care provision within their catchment area in order to secure funding.

In order to assist this process, we issued guidance in February 1998, "Evaluation of the Pilot Project Programme for Children with Life Threatening Illnesses" which addresses the range of options available, including hospice care. In addition, regional offices of the Department have been asked to work with health professionals and agencies to identify current service provision and any gaps in this provision, with a view to encouraging a better strategic fit.

As we develop the National Service Framework (NSF) for children we will consider the needs of disabled children, including those whose disability is sadly of a life threatening nature and for whom respite care at a children's hospice is the option of choice. In the meantime, and within the next two months, the New Opportunities Fund will be inviting applications for funding for projects in support of children with life threatening illnesses. Children's hospices are eligible to apply.

NHS Structural Reform

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the impact on Portsmouth and South East Hampshire health authority of the structural reforms proposed for the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [30277]

Ms Blears: With effect from 1 April 2002, the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire health authority (the Isle of Wight and Portsmouth and South East Hampshire health authorities were merged in April 2001) will become part of the larger Hampshire and Isle of Wight health authority. Subject to the decision of Parliament, this will become one of 28 new strategic health authorities in October 2002.

These changes are part of our drive to shift the balance of power to the front line in the national health service. Under them, the responsibilities of the current regional offices of the Department will be devolved to the new health authorities, and those of the current health authorities to primary care trusts.

Organ Donors

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase public awareness of donor cards and the Donor Registry. [30956]

Yvette Cooper: There have been numerous wide-ranging initiatives in England to raise the public's awareness of the shortage of organs for transplantation. The Department runs a public information campaign with a current annual budget of £900,000. A public information leaflet, incorporating the organ donor card is widely distributed, and is also available through the organ donor literature line. The campaign is further enhanced by securing free TV airtime for short public information films, a campaign website and partnerships and arrangements with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, The Passport Agency, rotarian clubs, Boots the Chemist and some banks who have chosen organ donation as a cause to support.

The Department runs a special campaign to raise awareness among members of the Asian community. This includes short TV films featuring well-known Asian personalities and leaflets in various languages. Awareness is also raised by maintaining a presence at cultural and religious events, and by facilitation of debate on this issue at forums set up within Asian communities. Phase three of this campaign was launched in September 2001.

A similar campaign targeting the African and African-Caribbean communities is planned for launch in spring 2002. The campaign will feature a public information leaflet, targeted advertising and public relations.

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to encourage councils to include organ donor registration forms in their electoral registration form. [31349]

Jacqui Smith: We fully support the initiative by local councils to encourage their local populations to join the national health service organ donor register by including a letter and form with the annual council mailing for the electoral register. The scheme has already proved successful in many areas and we believe that it owes its success to the fact that it is locally inspired and embraces the local community spirit.

Last year, my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of States for Health and for the Home Department wrote jointly to the chairmen of the Association of Electoral Administrators and SOLACE's Electoral Matters Panel inviting them to encourage their members to distribute organ donor leaflets via the electoral canvass. While the Home Secretary has no powers to direct electoral registration officers to send out non-electoral material, the aim is to encourage councils to join this initiative which demonstrates how effective a truly local appeal can be.

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce an opt-out scheme for organ donorship. [31348]

Jacqui Smith: We have no plans to introduce an opt-out scheme for organ donation. We are in the process of undertaking a comprehensive review of the law governing the taking, removal and use of human tissue, and will be issuing a consultation paper shortly.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 5 February 2002

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Middle East

14. **Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the economic circumstances of Palestinians living in the occupied territories. [30495]

Mr. Bradshaw: The on-going violence and Israel's response to the second intifada—above all its policy of closures—has caused an enormous drop in incomes and living standards and a sharp drop in economic activity in the occupied territories. Levels of poverty have increased considerably from 21 per cent. at the start of the intifada, to at least 35 per cent. This means that about 1 million people exist on less than $2 per day. Unemployment is very high. Many people are just getting by thanks to savings and humanitarian aid.

33. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Archbishop of Canterbury about his meetings with other faith leaders and their implications for the middle east peace process. [30514]

Mr. Bradshaw: We warmly welcome the inter-faith meetings convened by the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth Palace and in Alexandria between 17 and 21 January. Dialogue and debate between the faiths is an essential part of mutual understanding. We particularly welcome the First Alexandria Declaration on the situation in the middle east, with its condemnation of the killing of innocents, and its call for a religiously sanctioned ceasefire and a return to negotiations.

34. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current situation in the middle east. [30515]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier in the House today to the hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) at column 718W.

Serb Refugees

15. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what efforts are being made to ensure the safe return of Serbs who were forced to flee *(a)* Krajina and *(b)* Kosovo. [30496]

Mr. MacShane: The Croatian Government have committed themselves to ensuring the safe return of Serbs to their former homes in Croatia by the end of 2002. We are continuing to remind the Government of the importance of honouring this commitment.

We strongly support the right of Kosovo Serbs who fled their homes to return in safety. Belgrade and Pristina are now co-ordinating closely on this issue. Efforts are being spearheaded by the newly established UNMIK Office of Returns and Communities.

Colombia

16. **Paul Goggins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent action he has taken to support the peace process in Colombia. [30497]

Mr. MacShane: The UK strongly supports the Colombian peace process, as I made clear in a press release on 23 January. We are particularly active in the EU. We have invited the Colombian presidential candidates to the UK to exchange views on the situation in Colombia, including prospects for the peace process.

Afghanistan

17. **Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what diplomatic steps he is taking to secure the safe transportation of food and the essential supplies throughout Afghanistan. [30498]

Mr. Bradshaw: The continuing provision of emergency humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people remains a key priority for the international community. To support this aim we continue to have an open dialogue with Afghanistan's neighbours, especially Pakistan, Iran and Uzbekistan, on keeping open the most important land corridors for the delivery of aid.

We are also working with the Interim Administration, the UN and other members of the international community to ensure that the security situation in Afghanistan continues to improve so that supplies can be delivered to the most vulnerable people.

20. **Mr. Blizzard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the capacity remaining for a base for international terrorism in Afghanistan. [30501]

Mr. Bradshaw: Prior to 11 September, al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan trained an estimated 10,000 extremists a year, some of whom went on to carry out international terrorist attacks. As a part of the highly successful coalition military campaign in Afghanistan, all these camps have been closed. While pockets of resistance remain, these have little opportunity to train and develop networks of terrorists.

24. **Judy Mallaber:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions the Government have had with Afghan women's organisations on women's rights. [30505]

Mr. Bradshaw: During her visit to London on 31 January, Dr. Sima Sumar, the Vice Chair of the Afghan Interim Administration and Minister for Women, met my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, the Secretary of State for International Development, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, the Secretary of State for Defence and myself. We discussed her priorities for improving the lives of women in Afghanistan and emphasised the Government's support for her work.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I met my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) and a delegation of Afghan women from the UK Women's Link with Afghan Women on 24 January to discuss their priorities for reconstruction in Afghanistan.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the UK Government are taking to ensure the protection of women from violence in Afghanistan, with particular reference to sexual violence. [30421]

Mr. Bradshaw: The UK Government condemn all violence against women. The restoration of security and stability in Afghanistan will be an essential step towards ensuring their protection. The UK-led International Security Assistance Force is working with Afghans to establish security in and around Kabul. The establishment of trained police services will also be key. We welcome the offer by the German Government to train police in Afghanistan.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the UK Government are taking to *(a)* recognise and *(b)* act on the demands of Afghan women addressed to the international community, as set out in the Brussels Proclamation of the Afghan Women's Summit in December of last year. [30422]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Government believe that it is extremely important that the international community consults the women of Afghanistan themselves about their priorities. The UNIFEM Afghan Women's Summit, held in Brussels last December, marked a positive start.

The summit was the largest global gathering of Afghan women leaders to focus on the role of women in the new post-Taliban Afghanistan. It addressed the crucial needs of all the people of Afghanistan, focusing on health care, education, refugees and human rights. We hope that the international community will support the aims of the summit declaration, calling for a greater role for women in the future decision-making process in Afghanistan.

We welcome the pledge made by the Chair of the Afghan Interim Administration, Hamid Karzai, at the Tokyo Donors' Conference on 21 January to ensure that the needs of women are a priority in the reconstruction process. We welcome his commitment to ensure that girls get back to school.

We also welcome the establishment of the Women's Ministry and fully support the work of Dr. Sima Samar, Vice Chair of the Interim Administration and Minister for Women. We have long said that, while the form of the Government and constitution is for the Afghan people to determine, the future Government must be broadly based and representative of all Afghans. We have encouraged the involvement of women in the Afghan Interim Administration and the Special Commission for the Convening of the Loya Jirga, established under the Bonn Agreement, and expect that women will be involved in any future Government of Afghanistan.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the UK Government and the international community are taking to ensure that the interests and role of women are being acted on during the initial phase of peace-building in Afghanistan. [30424]

Mr. Bradshaw: We welcome the pledge made by the Chair of the Interim Administration, Hamid Karzai, at the Tokyo Donors' Conference that the needs of women should be a high priority in the reconstruction process. The people of Afghanistan are beginning to see real improvements in their lives. Girls are returning to school and university. Access to television and to international media will allow women to be better informed about the situation both inside their country and the wider world. Better access to health care and to education will afford women an improved standard of living.

As women return to work, their financial situation will improve. This is especially important for all the female heads of household who were destitute when deprived of their livelihoods by the Taliban restrictions on female working. Afghanistan has more than a million war widows. NGO and UN-run projects to get women back to work will have a huge impact on the lives of many Afghan women and children. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has also agreed to fund a project by a local Afghan women's NGO to help establish a quilt weaving co-operative as a means to providing a trade and an income for destitute women.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what training is funded by the UK Government for staff involved in projects working with women in Afghanistan. [30426]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have given an allocation of $1 million to the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) for a programme to support Afghan women's leadership through awareness raising, capacity building and gender mainstreaming as well as local level, quick impact recovery projects supporting women. We are also in discussion with the Ministry for Women on how we can provide other support activities.

Our funding for UNIFEM will include support for gender mainstreaming within the reconstruction and peacebuilding strategies of the UN, inter-governmental bodies and regional organisations. This will involve awareness building and training initiatives.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the UK Government and the international community are taking to ensure that the monitoring of the reconstruction work within Afghanistan takes into account its impact on women. [30428]

Mr. Bradshaw: We strongly support the common programming approach under the United Nations-led Strategic Framework for Afghanistan, which is intended to provide a principled, co-ordinated and coherent approach to programming. One of its key themes is the protection and advancement of human rights, with particular emphasis on gender issues.

We recognise the need to build the capacity of Afghanistan's women to enable them to take full part in the reconstruction of their society, including the new Interim Administration, and to ensure that legal, constitutional and other provisions are not discriminatory against women. Our funding for support of Afghan women during the recovery and reconstruction of Afghanistan is being channelled through United Nations agencies and non-governmental organisations, who will work closely with the Interim Administration and who have expressed a commitment to involving Afghan women in the design, implementation and monitoring of their strategies and programmes.

To date this includes an allocation of $1 million to the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) for a programme to support Afghan women's leadership through awareness raising, capacity building and gender mainstreaming as well as local level, quick impact recovery projects supporting women. We are also in discussion with the Ministry for Women on how we can provide other support to its activities.

St. Helena

18. **Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the discovery of the island of St. Helena. [30499]

Mr. Bradshaw: I know that there are a number of special events planned on St. Helena to commemorate this historic event and a successful year. We are in touch with the St. Helena Government representative in London over plans to mark the occasion in the United Kingdom.

Iran

19. **Mr. Barker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the President of Iran on bilateral relations. [30500]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary had a meeting with President Khatami on 25 September, when he first visited Iran. They discussed the international fight against terrorism, the situation in the region and bilateral relations.

Human Rights

21. **Mr. Hendrick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on preparations for the Geneva conference on human rights in March. [30502]

Mr. MacShane: Promotion of human rights is at the heart of our foreign policy. Britain is an active and committed member of the Commission on Human Rights. We are making preparations within Whitehall, with EU partners and with NGOs. I will go to Geneva myself in March to deliver the UK speech.

Zimbabwe

22. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to help ensure that elections in Zimbabwe will be fair. [30503]

Mr. MacShane: On 28 January the EU decided to impose targeted sanctions on senior members of the Government of Zimbabwe if the election is assessed as not being free and fair. On 30 January the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) called on the Government of Zimbabwe to ensure that all parties in the election be allowed to campaign freely. It called for the immediate deployment of Commonwealth election observers and the Government's full co-operation in facilitating the operation of all international observers.

23. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the role the United States will play in finding a political solution in Zimbabwe. [30504]

Mr. MacShane: The United States Government have expressed strong concern at the situation in Zimbabwe over a number of months. In addition, the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act invites the US Administration to consult and co-ordinate with international partners on action against Zimbabwe. The US Administration are yet to impose sanctions but are urgently considering their next steps.

27. **Mr. Simmonds:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the EU concerning imposing smart sanctions upon Zimbabwe. [30508]

Mr. MacShane: On 28 January EU Ministers agreed to impose targeted sanctions on senior Members of the Government of Zimbabwe if:

> they prevent the deployment of an EU observation mission starting by 3 February 2002, or if they prevent the mission from operating effectively;
>
> they prevent the international media from having free access to cover the election;
>
> there is a serious deterioration on the ground, in terms of a worsening of the human right situation or attacks on the opposition;
>
> the election is assessed as not being free and fair.

Central Africa

25. **Barbara Follett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress in the Lusaka accord and moves to bring peace to the countries of central Africa. [30506]

Mr. MacShane: We welcome the continued ceasefire, the withdrawal of some foreign troops from the DRC and the progress which has been made in the disarmament, demobilisation, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration process in the last six months. But further progress is necessary. During my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary's recent visit to the Great Lakes with his French counterpart, Hubert Vedrine, he stressed the need for further progress and expressed our joint commitment to achieve this.

His visit demonstrates clearly this Government's determination to help resolve conflict within central Africa and to bring peace and prosperity to the region. We are committed to this goal. We will continue to work closely with the EU and the UN in order to achieve it.

National Missile Defence

26. **Mr. George Osborne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the US Administration about the future of the ABM treaty. [30507]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given earlier in the House today by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) at column 715W.

Gibraltar

28. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations between the Governments of Spain and Gibraltar. [30509]

Peter Hain: At the Brussels process meeting held in London yesterday my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Spanish Foreign Minister, Mr. Pique, reiterated their invitation for the Chief Minister of Gibraltar to attend talks under the Brussels process. Building on the climate of confidence established by the Brussels process we have encouraged the Governments of Spain and Gibraltar to talk and meet.

Sierra Leone

29. **Mr. Reed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking within the UN to promote human rights in Sierra Leone. [30510]

Mr. MacShane: The formal ending of the conflict in Sierra Leone on 18 January 2002 marked the beginning of the restoration of human rights for the long-suffering Sierra Leonean people. An important element in this process is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in which the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights is leading the way. We have funded preparatory work for the UN, to facilitate the commission, and will continue to strongly support its establishment. We have also led in the UN Security Council to secure the special court for Sierra Leone, which will bring to justice those responsible for the worst of the atrocities committed in Sierra Leone during the last few years.

31. **Ms Drown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take steps to establish a special court for human rights abuses in Sierra Leone. [30512]

Mr. MacShane: The UK has been at the forefront in supporting UN Security Council resolution 1315 (2000) for a special court for Sierra Leone. This institution will bring to justice those most responsible for gross human rights abuses committed during the conflict, and send a strong signal to others, wherever they are, that they will be brought to account for their actions. The agreement establishing the court was signed in Freetown on 16 January. We are contributing £6.6 million over three years towards the court's estimated budget of £40 million.

Sudan

30. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the recent peace agreement in the Sudan. [30511]

Mr. Bradshaw: There has been no recent peace agreement in Sudan. However, we were delighted to hear last month that as a result of the efforts of the US special envoy, with whom we have been working closely, the parties agreed on 19 January to a limited ceasefire in the Nuba mountains. Under the terms of the agreement civilians will be allowed to move freely within the region currently held by the SPLA. There will be two demilitarised zones to allow the Nuba people to access fertile land, and humanitarian assistance will be allowed to enter the region by air. An external military commission will supervise the ceasefire, which is one small but encouraging step towards peace.

Georgia

32. **Mr. Heath:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the political situation in the Republic of Georgia. [30513]

Mr. Bradshaw: Georgia continues to need help to build capacity to tackle problems it faces. Both bilaterally and multilaterally we will continue to provide appropriate assistance. HMG continue strongly to support the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia. We encourage a constructive relationship between Georgia and Russia.

British Detainees (Guantanamo Bay)

35. **Mr. Salter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the statement of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State of 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 623, what action he is taking to ensure that the suspected al-Qaeda prisoners being held by the United States are being treated humanely and in accordance with international law. [30516]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are in close contact with the US as the detaining power. During my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary's visit to Washington on 31 January and 1 February, he again made it clear that detainees should be treated humanely and in accordance with international norms.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will request that the report of the ICRC into conditions at Camp X-Ray be made available to the British Government. [33763]

Mr. MacShane: In order to preserve the impartiality and neutrality which enable it to pursue its humanitarian work, the ICRC never releases its reports to third parties. Its report on conditions at Camp X-Ray will accordingly be made confidentially to the United States as detaining power.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the International Committee of the Red Cross has had access to detainees held at centres other than Bagram and Kabul. [33606]

Mr. MacShane: Yes.

Kashmir

36. **Ms Ward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Pakistani Government about terrorism in Kashmir. [30517]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs visited Pakistan on 22–23 November when he had extensive discussions with President Musharraf and other interlocutors on a range of issues including terrorism. Since then, he has spoken to his Pakistani counterpart about terrorism and other issues.

38. **Linda Gilroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Indian Government about human rights in Kashmir. [30519]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary recently discussed the issue of human rights in Kashmir with Mr. Jaswant Singh, the Indian Foreign Minister, during his meeting on 29 January. We will continue to raise our concerns over human rights in Kashmir with the Government of India.

EU Constitution

37. **Mr. Laws:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with European Union Ministers on introducing a new constitutional settlement for the European Union. [30518]

Peter Hain: The Laeken European Council in December 2001, at which the Secretary of State was present, agreed to set up a Convention on the Future of Europe to prepare the next intergovernmental conference in 2004. The convention will hold its inaugural meeting on 28 February 2002 and will include in its membership the representatives of the Heads of State or Government of the member states. The Minister for Europe has been appointed to represent the Government. The convention will produce options to the Heads of Government or State.

The convention will consider the issues laid out in the Laeken Declaration. One of the headings is: Towards a Constitution for European Citizens.

Visas

Mr. Mudie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of refusals for overseas visitors visas have been overturned by appeal by post since October 2000. [30834]

Mr. Bradshaw: We do not maintain information centrally on the number of family visit applications refused entry clearance, which are subsequently overturned on appeal.

We do record the number of family visit appeals dispatched for those posts which complete a monthly statistical return. These posts generate 98 per cent. of total applications (110 posts in 2001).

Between October 2000 and December 2001 4,564 family visit appeals were dispatched by entry clearance managers.

The Lord Chancellor's Department has provided the following details of appeals upheld in cases for which they hold data.

From 1 October 2000 to 31 December 2001, the number of successful visit visa appeals decided on the papers alone was:

904 appeals allowed by adjudicators, and

86 appeals allowed by Tribunals.

In the same period, the number of successful visit visa appeals decided at an oral hearing was:

1,424 appeals upheld by adjudicators, and

five appeals upheld by Tribunals.

Based on these figures 53 per cent. of appeals were in favour of the applicant. But there is no automatic correlation between the number of appeals dispatched and the number of appeals upheld. The time difference between appeals being dispatched and hearings held makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions. Neither do we have information on appeals withdrawn after dispatch.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many complaints have been received regarding applications for student visas by students from *(a)* China, *(b)* Russia, *(c)* Turkey, *(d)* Korea and *(e)* Latin American countries since 1997; how many applications from these countries have been turned down in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [31613]

Mr. Bradshaw: I regret that the information requested by the hon. Member is not available; complaints are not recorded by subject matter.

The statistics for the number of student applications refused are as follows:

	Number of applications	*Refusal rate (percentage)*
China		
1997	1,380	41
1998	1,782	24
1999	2,561	21
2000	4,484	23
2001[1]	1,063	29
Russia		
1997	1,360	15
1998	847	8
1999	65	2
2000	448	9
2001[1]	43	9
Turkey		
1997	567	4
1998	679	5
1999	527	6
2000	608	9
2001[1]	147	16
Korea		
1997	5	17
1998	6	21
1999	2	10
2000	6	15
2001[1]	0	0
Latin America		
1997	49	4
1998	113	8
1999	383	9
2000	1,490	16
2001[1]	224	18

[1] The figures for 2001 are for January to March 2001. We collect these statistics only on an annual basis.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many persons from *(a)* the Czech Republic and *(b)* Turkey have been refused entry to the United Kingdom at ports of entry in each month since 1 January 2000. [31578]

Angela Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

Statistics on nationals of the Czech Republic and Turkey refused entry to the United Kingdom and removed in each month during 2000 are given in the table. This is the latest available information. Data for 2001 are due to be published in the summer this year.

Passengers refused leave to enter and removed, by selected nationality, January to December 2000

	Czech Republic[1]	*Turkey*
January	127	29
February	147	35
March	103	27
April	206	24
May	265	11
June	267	15
July	337	37
August	349	37
September	326	19
October	170	23
November	223	20
December	263	22
Total	2,783	299

[1] Include Czechoslovak passport holders

Southern Rhodesia Act

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what power HM Government retain to make orders under section 3(1)(b)(i) of the Southern Rhodesia Act 1979. [27750]

Mr. Bradshaw: The power to make orders still appears in the Southern Rhodesia Act 1979. Other powers were later repealed but the section 3 powers were not. It would technically be possible to make an order, but it would have to relate to unconstitutional action that had taken place in Southern Rhodesia before independence.

Angola

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the supplementary report of the monitoring mechanism on Sanctions against UNITA appointed, pursuant to Security Council resolution 1295 (2001), paragraph 3, in relation to the situation in Angola. [31193]

Mr. MacShane: We welcome the supplementary report of the monitoring mechanism. We believe the report accurately highlights the continuing destabilising impact of UNITA in Angola. It describes the problem of the ongoing flow of arms to UNITA, albeit at a reduced level and contains detailed evidence of the role of sanctions buster, Victor Bout, in supplying arms to UNITA.

We are working in the UN Angola Sanctions Committee to ensure that all breaches of sanctions detailed in the report are appropriately followed up. We believe the monitoring mechanism has an important role to play in ensuring the targeted sanctions against UNITA are fully implemented and enforced and fully support Security Council resolution 1374 (2001) of 19 October 2001, extending the mechanism's mandate for a further six months.

Civil Servants

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 581W, which senior management structure positions are held by non-career civil servants; when the terms of their appointment end; and whether either has been promoted during their current employment in his Department. [31590]

Mr. Bradshaw: Two senior management structure positions are held by non-career civil servants: The Chief Economist and High Commissioner Canberra.

The Chief Economist contract runs from 1 April 1999 to 31 March 2002. The appointment carries the possibility of extension or permanency. The High Commissioner Canberra contract runs from 1 October 1999 to 31 October 2001, with an option for extension by one year to 31 October 2002 and a further option after that for a final extension to 31 October 2003.

Neither has been promoted during their time with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Business Ambassadors

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many new business ambassadors he has appointed since 7 June 2001; and if he will list them. [31591]

Mr. Bradshaw: No appointments to the Ambassadors for British Business scheme have been made since that date.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit Argentina. [31678]

Mr. Straw: Plans for a visit to Latin America are kept under review.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for further joint visits with EU foreign secretaries. [31683]

Mr. Straw: I visited the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda with Hubert Védrine on 21–23 January. There are no confirmed plans at present for further joint visits with any of my EU colleagues but I am happy to undertake such visits when opportunities arise, subject to other commitments.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit other countries when he attends the CHOGM Conference in Brisbane. [31681]

Mr. Straw: I am looking at a number of options. No decisions have yet been taken.

Turkey

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the principal obstacles are to the opening of Turkey's accession negotiations to join the EU. [32983]

Mr. Straw: As with all candidates for EU membership, Turkey can only start accession negotiations once it has met the Copenhagen political criteria (relating to democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and minorities). Turkey has begun to make progress against the EU Accession Partnership which sets out priorities for reform. But it is important that Turkey picks up the pace of reform, notably with regard to human rights.

British Foreign Policy

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the aims and objectives of British foreign policy. [33041]

Mr. Straw: I refer the hon. Member to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's current Departmental report (Cm 5110) and website (at www.fco.gov.uk) which details the aims and objectives of British foreign policy.

British Overseas Territories [Lords] Bill

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps are being taken to issue new passports once the British Overseas Territories *[Lords]* Bill is enacted. [30668]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (John Austin) on 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 583W.

Azerbaijan

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs with reference to the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 1272(2002) adopted on 24 January, what recent representations the UK Government have made to the Government of Azerbaijan to secure the release or retrial of political prisoners. [33765]

Mr. Bradshaw: Our Ambassador in Baku called on the Chairman of the Parliamentary Human Rights Commission on 25 January to discuss the issue of political prisoners. Prior to the Council of Europe resolution, the Ambassador also discussed the issue with Ilham Aliev, Chairman of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe delegation.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations it has made to the Government of Azerbaijan concerning the conscription into the military of Fazil Gazanfaroglu, Deputy Chairman of the Popular Front in Azerbaijan. [33766]

Mr. Bradshaw: No representation has been made about Fazil's military service. Neither he nor his party has approached us about this or asked us to intervene. Fazil has said he is ready to serve his country.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Government of Azerbaijan concerning allegations that local authority permission is needed before representatives of the Azerbaijani Institute of Peace and Democracy can meet local NGOs outwith Baku. [33770]

Mr. Bradshaw: Our ambassador in Baku raised this issue on Monday 4 February at a meeting at the President's office. He was told that no such regulation preventing such meetings existed; that prior permission was not needed but that for security reasons local authorities should be informed; and that Lenkoran, the area involved, was a sensitive area due to previous separatist activity.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Free Television Licences

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many over 75-year-old pensioners in Shrewsbury and Atcham have received free television licences. [32590]

Dr. Howells: TV Licensing, which administers the free television licence scheme for the BBC as Licensing Authority, is not able to provide geographical breakdowns of the number of free licences issued. However, estimates based on the 1991 Census indicate that there were approximately 6,500 people aged 75 or over in the Shrewsbury and Atcham constituency.

Gambling Review Body

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) of 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 620W, when she expects to announce her conclusions to her consideration of the report of the Gambling Review Body. [32545]

Mr. Caborn: We hope to be able to announce our conclusions within the next few months.

Television

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the members of the viewers panel established to advise the Government on the consumers' view on digital switchover who have ceased their membership of the panel, indicating the reasons for the cessation. [33328]

Dr. Howells: The information is as follows:

Organisations invited to nominate panel members	*Nominated members*	*Changes to membership*	*Reason given (if any)*
National Council for One Parent Families	Natasha Benenson		
Comunn na Gaidhlig	Allan Campbell		
Royal National Institute for the Blind	Denise Evans		
Action with Communities in Rural England	Les Roberts	Replaced by Carole Garfield	Left ACRE
National Consumer Council	Alison Hopkins		
Royal National Institute for the Deaf	Stephen Iliffe		
Age Concern	Gretel Jones		
National Council for Voluntary Youth Services	Cara MacDowell	Replaced by Rebecca Leete	
National Family and Parenting Institute	Dean Mahoney		
Voice of the Listener and Viewer	Vincent Porter		
Disability Rights Commission	Alun Thomas		
National Pensioners' Convention	Roger Turner		
Welsh Language Board	John Walter Jones		
Consumers' Association	Adam Scorer	Replaced by Allan Williams	
VCC[1] Wales	Michael Clarke		
VCC Yorkshire	Ruth Clarke		
VCC North East	Anthony Gaw		
VCC West	Karen Gough		
VCC East	Denise Hitchcock		
VCC South West	Tony Poole		
VCC Midlands	Peter Quinn		
VCC South	Janice Roberts		
VCC North West	Keith Roberts		
VCC Northern Ireland	Alison Scott		
VCC Scotland	Carol Ann McDowell		
BBC Regional Broadcasting Council (RBC) Wales	Sue Balsom		
RBC Scotland	John Gerrie		
BBC Regional Advisory Council for South East	Nancy Elliott	Replaced by Richard Mais	Died
Low Pay Unit	Bharti Patel	Resigned	Work commitments
RBC Northern Ireland	Brenda McLaughlin	Resigned	Work commitments
VCC London	Cynthia Yearwood	Resigned	Work commitments

[1] ITC Viewer Consultative Council

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 6 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 501W, what advice has the Government given to the BBC and ITC in their consideration of how to improve the coverage of DTT multiplexes across the United Kingdom. [33386]

Dr. Howells: The Government have provided general guidance to the BBC and to the Independent Television Commission on priorities in planning the use of currently unused spectrum for transmitting terrestrial television services. This guidance was last reviewed in 1997. We published on 11 December 2001 a consultation paper inviting views on the basis on which we should plan the use of the spectrum currently used for analogue television broadcasting once analogue transmissions cease. The closing date for responses is 12 March 2002.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for South Suffolk, of 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1113W, on analogue switchoff, if she will list *(a)* the names of the individuals and the Departments and organisations they represent who are conducting the comprehensive review of progress towards digital switchover, *(b)* the terms of reference of the review, *(c)* the dates on which meetings of the individuals conducting the review have been held and *(d)* the date on which the first review is expected to be sent to Ministers. [33414]

Dr. Howells: The review will be taken forward by officials from my Department and from the DTI who are working on the digital television action plan project, with input from the individual task groups established under the action plan. A first report from the action plan project is due by 31 March 2002.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many *(a)* integrated digital and *(b)* analogue television sets have been bought by her Department in each of the last 24 months; and if she will publish the guidance given to officials making decisions on television purchases. [33242]

Dr. Howells: The Department has not purchased any television sets in the past 24 months. We do not have any specific guidance on the purchase of television sets, but any such purchase would be subject to normal Government procurement rules. These rules are produced and published by the Office of Government Commerce.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on what dates the viewers panel established to advise the Government on the consumers' view on digital switchover has met; and how many panel members attended each meeting. [33327]

Dr. Howells: The information is as follows:

Date of meeting	*Number of members attending*[1]
27 November 2000	20
26 March 2001	18
22 June 2001	19
27 September 2001	21

[1] This does not include DCMS officials who provided a chairperson and secretariat for the panel's meetings.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the television without frontiers directive. [33323]

Dr. Howells: Directive 89/552/EEC as amended by 97/36/EC "the television without frontiers directive" came fully into effect in the UK with regulations made under SI 2000 No. 54 on 19 January 2000. The Commission, as required under Articles 4(4) and 25a, are in the process of reviewing the implementation of Article 4; they are also further considering, as required by Article 26, any

> "further proposals to adapt the directive to developments in the field of television broadcasting, in particular in the light of recent technological developments".

They expect to publish a consultative document in May this year.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many copies of the leaflet "Digital TV Information for Landlords" have *(a)* been printed and *(b)* been distributed, stating for each distribution whether it was (i) solicited and (ii) unsolicited. [33330]

Dr. Howells: A total of 8,340 leaflets have been printed. Copies have been distributed to the organisations who were consulted over its production in the quantities agreed with them, as follows:

Organisation	*Number of leaflets distributed*
ASTRA Marketing Ltd.	10
BBC	50
BSkyB	50
Confederation of Aerial Industries Ltd.	50
Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions	20
Department of Trade and Industry	50
Digital Television Group	6
Housing Corporation	4,175
Independent Television Commission	20
ITV Digital	30
Local Government Association	650
National Assembly for Wales	[1]400
National Housing Federation	200
Scottish Assembly	50
Welsh Local Government Association	[2]2,400

[1] 200 in Welsh

[2] 1,200 in Welsh

Note:

Further distribution is a matter for these organisations.

In addition:

	Number of leaflets distributed
Unsolicited copies	
Libraries of both Houses	6
Lower Press Gallery	15
Clerk of the Select Committee	1
Solicited copies	
Public requests to Department for Culture, Media and Sport	Less than 10

The leaflet is available on the website www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk.

Lottery Grant (Gloucestershire)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how many lottery grant applications were made by organisations in Gloucestershire, broken down by parliamentary constituencies *(a)* since its inception and *(b)* since January 2001; [33305]

(2) how much lottery money has been applied for by organisations in Gloucestershire, broken down into parliamentary constituencies *(a)* since its inception and *(b)* since January 2001. [33306]

Mr. Caborn: Comprehensive information on applications for lottery grants is not centrally held at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Public Service Broadcasting

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what information she has *(a)* received and *(b)* is seeking about the definition of public service broadcasting in (i) other EU states and (ii) other countries. [33317]

Dr. Howells: Officials in my Department are in regular contact with their opposite numbers in those states which are party to the Council of Europe's European convention on transfrontier television, as well as the other member states of the European Union. They also, from time to time, meet representatives from other countries to discuss issues which include public service broadcasting.

BBC

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she *(a)* has made and *(b)* will make of the numbers of licence fee payers who are able to access BBC online at their place of residence. [33315]

Dr. Howells: I have made no such assessment and have no plans to do so. However, we know that an estimated 97.5 per cent. of households have television and therefore have or should have a television licence. Oftel's latest estimate, which was published on 29 January, is that 45 per cent. of households in the UK are now connected to the internet. All such homes will therefore be able to access BBC online.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what assessment she *(a)* has made and *(b)* plans to make of the (i) benefits and (ii) disadvantages to licence fee payers of (A) BBC Choice, (B) BBC Knowledge, (C) BBC Parliament, and (D) BBC News 24; [33312]

(2) what assessment she *(a)* has made and *(b)* will make of the (i) benefits and (ii) disadvantages to licence fee payers of BBC1. [33313]

Dr. Howells: Any proposed new BBC public service requires approval by the holder of my office, who assesses it against criteria designed to ensure that the service is compatible with the BBC's primary public service role. A programme of reviews of such services against the approvals given, starting with BBC News 24, was announced by my predecessor as part of the licence fee settlement in February 2000. The terms of reference for the first review will be announced shortly. BBC Knowledge will be replaced soon by the new BBC4 service which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State approved in September 2001 and which will be reviewed in 2004. She is currently considering a further application for approval of a new BBC3 service which would replace BBC Choice.

BBC1 covers the BBC's online, interactive and text services. A review of BBC online will be undertaken as part of the programme of reviews to which I have already referred.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will include methods other than the licence fee to fund the BBC as part of the process leading to a decision on the renewal of the BBC charter. [33316]

Dr. Howells: Yes.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she *(a)* has made and *(b)* will make of the numbers of licence fee payers who are able to (i) receive and (ii) view (A) BBC Choice, (B) BBC Knowledge, (C) BBC Parliament, and (D) BBC News 24 at their place of residence. [33314]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* BBC digital services are broadcast free-to-view on digital terrestrial television, on digital satellite and are usually available on basic digital cable subscription packages. I provided information on digital television take up and on digital television coverage in my answer to the hon. Member for South Suffolk on 6 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 501W.

Lottery Funding

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the ventures in the Edinburgh, West constituency that have benefited from lottery money within the last 12 months. [32155]

Dr. Howells: There have been 25 lottery awards made to the Edinburgh, West constituency, amounting to £4,628,512.00 over the past 12 months. A list of these awards is set out in the following table.

£

Distributing body	*Recipient*	*Project title*	*Award date*	*Award amount*
Community Fund	Edinburgh Volunteer Tutors Organisation	This three-year project will provide one to one support for children (5–14 years) who are on the margins of school and community life, and whose behaviour or development is giving serious cause for concern.	9 February 2001	97,139
Scottish Arts Council	Carnegie Youth Theatre	This group provides a platform for young people to join and participate in youth theatre. The grant will be used to fund advertising, hire of theatre, scenery, costumes, sound system and orchestra.	22 February 2001	4,900
Sport Scotland	Craigmount Cougars	This group provides young people with the opportunity to play American football both in friendly and competitive matches. The grant will be used to purchase helmets with face cages, shoulder pads, practice pants and lower pads.	22 February 2001	3,675
Heritage Lottery Fund	North West Heritage	This group encourages awareness of local heritage to the local community by giving presentations, creating archives and researching local history. The grant will be used to purchase archive storage drawer, filing cabinets, tape recorders, transcriber and stationery.	22 February 2001	1,379

£

Distributing body	Recipient	Project title	Award date	Award amount
Community Fund	Partners in Advocacy	This project will expand the number of volunteers recruited and trained to advocate for people with learning disabilities and support them in self advocacy in Dundee, Glasgow and West Lothian, establish a new base in West Lothian and create strong publicity.	23 March 2001	247,505
Heritage Lottery Fund	Scottish Wildlife Trust	Scottish Wildlife Trust Reserves	27 March 2001	3,691,000
Community Fund	Corstorphine Village Playgroup	This group provides pre-school education and play opportunities for children. The grant will allow the group to purchase chairs.	5 April 2001	760
Scottish Arts Council	Edinburgh College of Piping Trust	This group provides opportunities for people to practice and perform piping. The grant will be used to purchase musical instruments including practice chanters, pipes, drum and maintenance supplies.	5 April 2001	4,975
Community Fund	17 Platoon Royal Scots ACF	This group provides growth and personal development opportunities for young people. The grant will be used to purchase equipment and fund training and publicity material.	8 June 2001	5,000
Community Fund	Kids Around The World	This group provides opportunities for children to experience cultural diversity through summer educational programmes. The grant will be used to purchase equipment and materials and fund sessional workers, transport, entrance fees and venue hire.	8 June 2001	5,000
Community Fund	Invisible Disability Group	This group provides social and recreational opportunities for young adults with invisible disabilities. The grant will be used to fund social activities, group work support, training and publicity.	8 June 2001	5,000
Scottish Arts Council	Common Ground Arts	This group provides opportunities for people of all ages to participate in a wide range of arts, working particularly with people with disabilities and mental illness. The grant will be used to purchase computer equipment, art materials and equipment and fund refurbishment of shop space and workshop space, publicity, administration and exhibition costs.	8 June 2001	4,950
Scottish Arts Council	Edinburgh Chinese Dance and Culture Youth Group	This group provides opportunities for education, tuition and participation in chinese dance and arts. The grant will be used to fund venue hire, tutor's fees, transport, accommodation and costumes.	8 June 2001	3,100
Scottish Arts Council	The Castle Concert Orchestra	This group provides opportunities for people to participate in orchestral music. The grant will be used to fund fees for musicians, conductor and soloist, material and equipment hire, music/score hire, venue hire, publicity, promotion and administration.	8 June 2001	3,285
Heritage Lottery Fund	Queensferry History Group	This group seeks to stimulate interest in local history and to research and record the history of the local area. The grant will be used to fund the production of a 'Guided Walk' booklet.	8 June 2001	5,000
Community Fund	134 Merchiston Scout Group	This one year grant will fund the purchase of tents, cooking utensils, table and benches, navigation and orienteering equipment, emergency cards, ropes and stopwatches, a parachute and football strips. This project will enable the group to purchase new equipment to host a special 50th anniversary camp involving members and other community groups in a range of social and physical activities aimed at improving young peoples confidence and leadership skills. The new equipment will also allow greater diversity.	6 July 2001	4,997
Community Fund	Drylaw/Telford Community Association	This project aims to develop the centre's volunteer programme, increase the level of community participation in the centre by extending the number of times the cafe operates weekly and increase the capacity of the organisation to support volunteers and three existing and three new groups in their group development to develop their ideas further and identify where they can find the resources to take these ideas forward.	20 July 2001	100,198
Community Fund	Black Community	This project will support black and minority ethnic people	20 July 2001	152,141

Distributing body	Recipient	Project title	Award date	£ Award amount
	Development Project	in Greater Pilton, especially women, to overcome poverty, gain independent access to key resources (employment, training, services) and participate more fully in the community.		
Sport Scotland	Baseball Scotland	This group promotes, develops and administers baseball in Scotland. The grant will be used to purchase team strips and caps, bats and balls for coaching clinics and to fund stadium rental, promotional costs, travel and accommodation for competitors.	9 August 2001	5,000
Scottish Arts Council	North Edinburgh Arts	Towards the cost of the Oyster project to provide opportunities for leisure and learning in the context of a festival	6 September 2001	68,964
Scottish Arts Council	Aspects Art Project	This group enables people from the local area to participate in a public arts project in order to design and install art works in a new community building. The grant will be used to fund sessional art workers and professional fees.	4 October 2001	5,000
Community Fund	21st South Queensferry (City of Edinburgh) Scout Group	The project aims to build a new scout hall on land leased from Edinburgh city council. This will give larger and more flexible accommodation as well as full disabled access.	23 November 2001	70,000
Community Fund	Royal Scottish Agricultural Benevolent Institution	This project will allow the organisation to employ additional welfare staff to assess increased applications for support from farmers and their families in Dumfries and Galloway who have been affected by the foot and mouth outbreak.	23 November 2001	130,765
Community Fund	Hamari Pechaan	This group seeks to promote the well being of young Asian women, providing information and advice and organising cultural and social activities. The grant will be used to purchase computer equipment, and to fund fees for sessional tutors and workshop facilitators, administration, volunteer expenses, cultural outings and transport.	6 December 2001	5,000
Community Fund	Ratho Community Centre Association	This group provides a varied programme of social and recreational activities in the local community centre. The grant will be used to purchase a bouncy castle and disco equipment.	6 December 2001	3,779

Golden Jubilee

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many *(a)* applications have been made to and *(b)* grants have been awarded by the lottery-funded awards for all grants programme, to help communities celebrate Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee in June. [30375]

Tessa Jowell: To date 408 applications have been made. Of these 171 have been awarded grants and 196 await a decision.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received on the resignation of Lord Levene from his responsibilities for co-ordinating the Queen's Golden Jubilee celebrations in London. [30704]

Tessa Jowell: None.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if she will publish *(a)* the terms of reference, *(b)* the instructions and *(c)* other guidance Lord Levene of Portsoken was given by the Government; [31076]

(2) when Lord Levene of Portsoken was appointed by the Government to oversee aspects of the Golden Jubilee celebrations. [31077]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* Lord Levene's agreement to chair a special committee responsible for directing the planning and co-ordination of the celebrations in London was announced on 17 January 2001 by the Home Secretary. The terms of reference, announced the same day, were:

1. To direct and deliver a programme of Golden Jubilee celebrations in London without incurring additional expenditure from public funds.
2. In planning the above, to stimulate and consider proposals from potential organisers and sponsors of events in London to celebrate the Queen's Golden Jubilee.
3. To ensure that the programme of celebrations in the capital for the Queen's Golden Jubilee is co-ordinated with the official programmes for the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh in London.
4. To provide Londoners with a lasting legacy of the Golden Jubilee celebrations.
5. To report to the Official Committee for the Queen's Golden Jubilee.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when *(a)* she, *(b)* other Ministers in her Department and *(c)* other Government Ministers have visited the Golden Jubilee Office; and what the purpose of each visit was. [31082]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* I visited the Golden Jubilee Office on 5 December 2001 to meet the staff and hear about their work. There have been no other ministerial visits.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when information about Lord Levene of Portsoken's resignation from the role to oversee aspects of the Golden Jubilee celebrations was released to the media; on what grounds the decision to release the information was made; and who authorised the release of the information. [31079]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* No information was released to the media by my Department.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many staff *(a)* work and *(b)* have stopped working (i) at their own request and (ii) at the request of others in the Golden Jubilee Office; when each member of staff was appointed; what the Department was from which each was seconded; what the Civil Service grade of each is; what the main responsibilities of each is; and what the reasons were for any who stopped work. [31080]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* On 21 January 2002, 21 staff, ranging from administrative assistant (grade D) to senior civil servant or equivalent levels, were working in the Golden Jubilee Office on a wide range of policy, operational and administrative duties. They were appointed between October 2000 and October 2001, from the Home Office, Government Information Service, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Cabinet Office, and from non-government sources. One Home Office administrative officer decided to leave during 2001 because she wished to return to her previous work.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when Lord Levene of Portsoken resigned from his role to oversee aspects of the Golden Jubilee celebrations. [31078]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* 5 July 2001.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions *(a)* she, *(b)* other Ministers in her Department and *(c)* officials in her Department have had with Ministers and officials in (i) the Scottish Executive, (ii) the Welsh Assembly, and (iii) the Northern Ireland Assembly about the Golden Jubilee; and for each one if she will state the nature of the discussion. [31085]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* The ministerial group for the Queen's Golden Jubilee is responsible for supervising the programme to celebrate the Jubilee. I chair this group which includes Ministers from the devolved Administrations. We have discussed and approved various Golden Jubilee issues through correspondence. Senior officials from the devolved Administrations are members of the Official Committee for the Queen's Golden Jubilee (which has met every two months), and its Programmes sub-Committee (which met monthly until it completed its work in December). In addition, officials in the Golden Jubilee Office are in regular touch with officials in the devolved Administrations on a wide range of issues.

Departmental Leave Entitlements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what has been the average annual leave entitlement of staff in her Department in each of the last four years. [31738]

Dr. Howells: The information is as follows.

(a) The number of days of annual leave for full-time staff, outside the senior civil service, within the Department for Culture, Media and Sport depends on the individual's length of service. The initial allowance is five weeks, and after 10 years' service six weeks, and has been so for the past four years. Those staff who work part-time are allowed a proportion of the annual leave allowance, according to the length of their working week.

(b) The annual leave entitlement for members of the senior civil service is currently set by Cabinet Office at 30 days per year and has been so for the last four years.

(c) In addition to annual leave, full-time staff, including the senior civil service, are entitled to 10 full days and one half day each year by way of public or privilege holidays.

Broadcasting (Ministerial Audiences)

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if she will list the television programmes which *(a)* she and *(b)* other Ministers in her Department have viewed in an official capacity since 8 June 2001, stating for each occasion the date on which the viewing took place; [33224]

(2) if she will list the television programmes which *(a)* she and *(b)* other Ministers in her Department have viewed in an official capacity since 8 June 2001, stating for each occasion the (i) date on and (ii) venue at which the viewing took place; [33321]

(3) if she will list the radio programmes which *(a)* she and *(b)* other Ministers in her Department have listened to in an official capacity since 8 June 2001, stating for each occasion the (i) date on and (ii) venue at which the listening took place. [33320]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* Ministers both view television programmes and listen to radio programmes as part of their official duties. They also do so in a personal capacity. However, there is no distinct boundary between the two and we do not maintain a central record.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the recordings of *(a)* television and *(b)* radio programmes which (i) she and (ii) other Ministers in her Department have attended as an invited member of the audience since 8 June 2001, stating for each occasion the (A) date on and (B) venue at which the recording took place. [33322]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* Since 8 June 2001, DCMS Ministers have attended the following events which were broadcast on television and radio as invited members of the audience. Attendance at such events allows Ministers to see developments in their sector at first hand and demonstrates our support. These are, of course, in addition to visits made in a private capacity or for party reasons.

	Minister	*Event*	*Venue*
24 October 2001	Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting	British Independent Film Awards ceremony[1]	Park Lane Hotel, London
9 December 2001	Secretary of State	Turner Prize 2001	Tate Britain, London
9 December 2001	Minister of State for Sport	BBC Sports Personality of the Year	Television Centre, London
14 December 2001	Secretary of State	BBC Richard Dimbleby Lecture	Institute of Education, London
20 January 2002	Minister of State for Sport	Northern Rock North East Sports Awards[1]	Seaburn Centre, Sunderland

[1] Also to present an award.

Analogue Television

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what advice she has *(a)* received and *(b)* plans to seek about when the conditions that need to be fulfilled before the analogue television signal is switched off might be fulfilled. [33331]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* I have received no advice about a specific date though I have made clear that the target 2006–10 is challenging. I expect to seek advice in the light of the work set out in the Digital Television Action Plan.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the meetings which *(a)* she and *(b)* other Ministers in her Department have had with representatives of broadcasters since 8 June 2001, stating for each meeting the (i) date on which it took place, (ii) the broadcasters represented at the meeting and (iii) primary purpose. [33319]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* My ministerial colleagues and I have met many representatives from the broadcasting industry in the course of our duties since 8 June 2001 as part of the process of policy development and analysis. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code, the Civil Service Code and Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists. Some of these discussions take place on a confidential basis and in order to preserves this confidentiality it is not the normal practice of Governments to release details of specific meetings with private individuals or companies.

Digital Television

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 37W, on digitally originated graphics, if she will make an assessment of the *(a)* benefits and *(b)* disadvantages to television viewers and television owners of the use of on-screen digitally originated graphics, other than electronic programme guides, to identify and promote (i) television channels, (ii) programme strands, (iii) internet links and (iv) other programmes. [33308]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* I have no current plans to do so, but if the hon. Member would like to write explaining any particular issue he would like me to consider, I would be happy to do so.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the *(a)* benefits and *(b)* disadvantages to consumers of receiving digital television by (i) digital terrestrial, (ii) digital satellite and (iii) digital cable. [33318]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* My Department keeps all technologies under review.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Outsourcing (IS/IT Services)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 6 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 514W, on outsourcing, what the estimated size is of the reduced cost to his Department from the outsourcing of IS and IT services. [30140]

Mr. McCartney: The Department first outsourced its IT data centre and mainframe operations in 1995, and subsequently outsourced the development and maintenance of its IT systems in 2000. Costs and benefits associated with the outsourcing of all of these IS/IT services were forecast on the basis of initial planning assumptions known at the time that the contract was let. A prudent approach was taken in the calculations in terms of spending on IT systems development and maintenance, and data centre and mainframe operational services.

Based on these factors, a positive net present value was delivered representing a reduction of 3 per cent. in costs over the life of the contract. However, a fuller assessment of the actual financial impact of outsourcing is not available, since the contract is only in its early stages.

Additionally, this contract cannot be viewed within the context of cost reduction alone. Various non-financial factors were also of considerable importance in the decision to proceed with strategic outsourcing. In particular, the transfer of high levels of risk associated with new IT development to the service provider.

Income Support

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what amount of rental income is disregarded from income support calculations when heating is included in the rent of a sub-tenant. [34372]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The disregard will increase from £9.25 to £9.40 from April 2002, and this will be included in the Up-rating Order which will shortly be laid before the House. I regret that the list of rates that was published in November 2000 and November 2001 gave incorrect rates for April 2001 and April 2002. The correct rates are included in the legislation and reflect movements in fuel prices.

Disability Living Allowance

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of disability living allowance benefits appeals were won by claimants after the medical examination in *(a)* the West Midlands and *(b)* the UK in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [30738]

Maria Eagle: Disability living allowance appeals cleared at hearing in Great Britain and those processed through the Appeals Service's Birmingham regional centre during the period 1 October 2000 to 30 September 2001:

	Great Britain	*Birmingham regional centre*
Cleared at hearing[1]	90,935	8,330
Found in favour	46,770	3,595
Percentage found in appelant's favour	51.4	43.2

[1] Includes both oral and paper hearings

Note:

All figures are subject to change as more up to date data become available. Figures are rounded to the nearest five.

Source:

100 per cent. download of the Generic Appeals Processing System

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of claimants for disability living allowance have been refused benefit after they have been receiving disability living allowance for *(a)* one year, *(b)* five years, *(c)* 10 years and *(d)* 20 years since medical testing was introduced. [30742]

Maria Eagle: Information is not available in the form requested. Since its inception in 1992, decisions about entitlement to DLA have been made on the basis of all the available evidence about a severely disabled person's care and/or mobility needs. In some cases, this evidence includes a report from the claimant's general practitioner or from an examining doctor, but there is no "medical test" which determines entitlement.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many representations he has received over the last 12 months about the Benefits Agency's use of inadequately qualified and experienced doctors to assess disabled living allowance applicants; and if he will make a statement. [30971]

Maria Eagle: Information on representations received regarding inadequately qualified and experienced doctors undertaking examinations for disability living allowance is not collected. The Department takes steps to ensure that only doctors with appropriate experience and qualifications conduct such examinations.

The chief medical adviser must approve all such doctors. There are strict recruitment criteria and doctors must undertake prescribed training and demonstrate competence in these examinations. Ongoing approval is subject to satisfactory performance and attendance at an agreed programme of continued medical education. Complaints are taken into account in determining performance.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what was the average time taken for a review of disability living allowance in the last 12 months. [33638]

Maria Eagle: Reviews of disability living allowance (DLA) were replaced by Reconsiderations under the system of decision making and appeals introduced from October 1999.

The average clearance time for DLA Reconsiderations in the year to December 2001 was 38.9 days.

Departmental Leave Entitlement

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what has been the average annual leave entitlement of staff in his Department in each of the last four years. [31740]

Mr. McCartney: The two main elements of DWP formed in June 2001 are the former DSS and ES. The average annual leave entitlements outside the Senior Civil Service over the last four years within those organisations have been as follows:

Staff in the grades AA up to and including EO:

DSS

22 days on entry
25 days after 1 years service
30 days after 12 years service effective from 1 April 2002
30 days after 14 years service effective from 1 January 2000
30 days after 15 years service effective from 1 August 1999
30 days after 20 years service prior to 1 August 1999

ES

22 days on entry
25 days after 1 years service
30 days after 12 years service effective from 1 April 2002
30 days after 14 years service effective from 1 October 2000
30 days after 15 years service prior to 1 October 2000

Staff in HEO grade:

DSS

22 days on entry
25 days after 1 years service
30 days after 12 years service effective from 1 April 2002
30 days after 14 years service effective from 1 January 2002
30 days after 15 years service prior to 1 January 2000

ES

22 days on entry
25 days after 1 years service
30 days after 12 years service effective 1 April 2002
30 days after 14 years service effective 1 October 2000
30 days after 15 years service prior to 1 October 2000

Staff in grades SEO up to and including UG6. Both DSS and ES:

25 days on entry
30 days after 1 years service

Senior Civil Service:

The annual leave allowances for members of the Senior Civil Service is set by the Cabinet Office and continues to be 30 days on entry.

Performance and Verification Frameworks

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which local authorities have implemented the Verification Framework; how much the expert Help

Team has cost; how many local authorities have applied for money from the Help Fund; which have been given grants and of how much; and what evaluation has taken place of the local authorities involved in piloting the Performance Framework. [29489]

Malcolm Wicks: I am pleased to announce that 32 of the 104 bids submitted to the Help Fund have been successful. As many of these are joint bids from groups of local authorities, the allocations, totalling £1.638 million, will help around 250 local authorities overall. The Help Fund was set up to address core problems in housing benefit delivery at a local level and is a practical demonstration of the Government's commitment to working with local authorities to improve the standard of housing benefit administration. The funded projects will make significant improvements in areas such as training, customer service and IT capabilities. I am placing a full list of the successful bids in the Library today.

As at 1 February 2002, 242 local authorities are compliant with the Verification Framework. A list has been placed in the Library.

The Help Team is a partnership initiative to support local authorities which are working to improve the administration of housing benefit. Help Team visits to local authorities began in March 2001. The total forecast costs for the project until March 2002 are £970,000.

14 local authorities participated in the pilot work for the Performance Framework. The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate had inspected 11 of them before the pilot and one has now had a best value inspection. The pilots provided useful information and views on the realism of the standards, and input from these authorities has helped us improve their specification.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 27 December 2001 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Janet Hamnett. [33529]

Mr. Darling: I replied to my right hon. Friend today.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Electoral Modernisation

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the names of those authorities that have been approved to run electoral modernisation pilot schemes in the May 2002 local elections; and if he will make a statement. [34272]

Mr. Raynsford: I have today agreed that 30 local authorities will pilot new methods of voting at local and mayoral elections this May.

These electoral modernisation pilots build on the 2000 local election pilots and will test new and easier arrangements, such as early voting, all postal ballots and mobile ballot kiosks.

The earlier successes of postal voting ensure it will play a key role in the pilot programme. In the 2000 local elections, most postal pilots recorded a 50 per cent. or greater rise in the number of votes cast compared with previous local elections in 1999. The 2001 general election saw a record number of postal votes cast—some 1.4 million, compared with 738,614 postal votes at the 1997 general election. Postal voting has shown that it can make a difference. The pilot programme aims, therefore, to build upon these successes and explore all-postal ballots and other techniques to make the voting process simpler, accessible and more efficient for the electorate.

In addition over half of the pilots will explore innovative ways in which people can vote electronically using mobile phone text message services, touch telephone, local digital television and on-line voting methods using home computers, local libraries and council-run information kiosks. The councils involved will be working with IT suppliers.

This marks an important first step towards e-voting across the country. The pilots will be crucial in building public confidence and testing technical robustness to ensure that the integrity of the poll is maintained. We are particularly keen to engage younger voters and feel these new innovations will help. Our aim is to learn from these pilots so we can confidently modernise our voting arrangements—making the most of new technology so that voting is more accessible for everyone, but at the same time secure and efficient. We propose an ever more extensive programme of pilots at future local elections to open up the possibility of an e-enabled general election some time after 2006.

My announcement reflects the Government's commitment to modernising our democratic processes. My Department has worked with the Electoral Commission, the Local Government Association and the Office of the e-Envoy in considering all of the 41 bids received. The successful authorities, together with a brief description of the activity to be undertaken in the pilot, are listed in the table. Of the remaining authorities, three withdrew their bids, eight applications were judged to fall outside our published criteria or the scope of the enabling legislation.

The Electoral Commission will be providing support and advice to pilot authorities. We will be providing financial support for the costs of IT investment—up to £3.5 million. Officials will now be discussing allocation details with the pilot authorities and the IT suppliers.

List of applications

Name of Council	*Type of ballot*	*Area covered*
Borough of Basingstoke and Deane	All postal	Three wards
Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council	E-voting (kiosk) and e-counting	All wards
Borough of Broxbourne	E-counting	Four wards
London Borough of Camden	Early weekend voting (27–28 April) in addition to 2 May	All wards
Chester City Council	E-voting (touch screen machine) and e-counting	Three wards
Chorley Borough Council	All postal and e-counting	All wards
Crawley Borough Council	All postal	Three wards

List of applications

Name of Council	*Type of ballot*	*Area covered*
Borough of Crewe and Nantwich	E-voting (option of voting on line via Council's web site prior to 2 May) in addition to traditional methods	Two wards
Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council	E-counting of elected Mayoral votes	All wards
Epping Forest District Council	E-counting	All wards
Gateshead Council	All postal	All wards
London Borough of Greenwich	All postal	Two wards
London Borough of Hackney	All postal and e-counting for local elections and mayoral referendum	All wards
London Borough of Havering	All postal	All wards
Hyndburn Borough Council	Leaflet address from all parties to each voter	All wards
The City of Liverp[illegible]	E-voting and e-counting (telephone, internet, digital TV or text messaging) early voting—from 27–4. Real time on-line register at any polling station in voters ward	Two/three wards
London Borough of Newham	E-voting and e-counting. Early voting, mobile voting and use of languages in voting	All wards
North Tyneside Council	All postal in local and mayoral elections, and e-counting	All wards
North West Leicestershire District Council	All postal	One parish
Preston Borough Council	All postal	Two wards
Rugby Borough Council	E-counting (use of optical scanners)	All wards
South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council	All postal with electronic counting option	All wards
St Albans City and District Council	E-voting (kiosk and internet) and e-counting	Two wards
Sheffield City Council	E-voting (kiosk, internet and SMS mobile phone text) and e-counting in addition to traditional methods	3 wards
Stevenage Borough Council	All postal	All wards
Stratford-on-Avon District Council	E-voting (kiosk) and e- counting	All wards
Swindon Borough Council	Early voting (25–30 April) by internet or touch tone telephone (with in-built security measures) in addition to traditional methods	All wards
Trafford Metropolitan Borough	All postal	All wards
London Borough of Wandsworth	Extended hours from 7.00am to 10.00pm	All wards
City of Westminster	E-counting and extended hours (0700–2200 hrs)	All wards

Electoral Fraud

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the proportion of ballot papers which were the product of forgery and were not counted in the *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* 1997 general elections. [32167]

Dr. Whitehead: We are not aware that any forged papers were identified at either of these elections.

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the official mark as a safeguard against electoral fraud; and what plans he has to introduce further safeguards. [32161]

Dr. Whitehead: At least five of the applications for electoral pilots to take place at next May's local elections include proposals for alternatives to the official mark, including watermarked or bar-coded ballot papers. Should they be approved and go ahead, the pilots will be evaluated by the Electoral Commission. We, together with the commission, will consider any conclusions carefully.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what research he has undertaken into security and the prevention of ballot rigging in the evaluation of the feasibility of internet voting. [32090]

Dr. Whitehead: We have jointly commissioned research by a team led by De Montfort university, into the potential barriers (among which are security issues) to electronic voting, including internet. Our partners include the Electoral Commission and the Local Government Association. We expect to publish the findings from this research by June 2002.

We will be approving a number of pilot schemes of innovative electoral practices in the May 2002 local elections, which may include internet voting. The Electoral Commission will evaluate each pilot scheme to assess whether it met our criteria of making voting straightforward, efficient, accessible and secure. The reports will be published within three months of election date.

Consultants

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many contracts and what fees in each financial year since 1997–98 *(a)* PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Cap Gemini Ernst & Young, *(c)* KPMG, *(d)* PA Consulting, *(e)* WS Atkins, *(f)* Accenture, *(g)* Deloitte & Touche, *(h)* McKinsey, *(i)* Capita, *(j)* AEA Technology, *(k)* Xansa Group, *(l)* Sema Group, *(m)* CMG Admiral, *(n)* ICL Group and *(o)* Logica received for advising his Department on PFI and PPP contracts; and if he will make a statement. [32503]

Dr. Whitehead: My Department's contracts for the provision of advice on PFI and PPP contracts since 1997–98 are set out in the following table. Details of the fees incurred in each financial year can be only provided by incurring a disproportionate cost.

	Number of advice contracts
(a) PricewaterhouseCoopers	4
(b) Cap Gemini Ernst and Young	3
(c) KPMG	2
(d) PA Consulting	1
(e) WS Atkins	0
(f) Accenture	0
(g) Deloitte and Touche	1
(h) McKinsey	0
(i) Capita	0
(j) AEA Technology	0

	Number of advice contracts
(k) Xansa Group	0
(l) SEMA Group	0
(m) CMG Admiral	0
(n) ICL Group	0
(o) Logica	0

Special Advisers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 24 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1041W, on special advisers, how many special advisers have left his Department since May 1997; on how many occasions the head of his Department has recommended a gap between leaving employment in his Department and taking up outside employment; if he will list the gap for each occasion this has occurred; and if he will make a statement. [31594]

Dr. Whitehead: Since May 1997 10 special advisers have left the Department. Special advisers, like other civil servants, are subject to the business appointment rules which require them to seek approval for taking up outside employment in defined circumstances. Following consideration by the Independent Advisory Committee on Business Appointments, a gap of six months was recommended in one case.

Government Expenditure (London)

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total Government expenditure in each London borough *(a)* was in each of the past five years and *(b)* is planned for 2002–03, broken down into (i) the Standards Fund, (ii) the Ethnic Minority Achievement grant, (iii) The Excellence in Cities grant and (iv) the Sure Start grant. [28083]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Standard Spending Assessment

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the average SSA is in 2002 for councils and local authority areas in England. [32109]

Dr. Whitehead: The average SSA for 2002–03 in England across all 432 local authorities is £115.190 million. Different classes of authority provide different services. The table shows the average SSA by class of authority.

£ million

Class of authority	*Average SSA*
City of London	54.645
Inner London boroughs	281.295
Outer London boroughs	236.383
Greater London authority	1,168.594
Metropolitan district councils	297.089
Metropolitan fire authorities	64.521
Metropolitan police authorities	150.103
Shire district councils	9.891
Shire county councils	491.364
Shire unitary authorities	163.422
Shire police authorities	60.378
Isles of Scilly	3.192

Noise and Nuisance

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much funding his Department has allocated to tackling noise and nuisance in Buckinghamshire in each of the last five years. [32174]

Dr. Whitehead: Local authority revenue expenditure on noise reduction is covered by the district level sub-block of environmental, protective and cultural services. Allocations for individual services within the sub-block are not identified separately.

High Hedges

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects to publish his Department's guidance on disputes between neighbours about high hedges and overhanging trees; and how such disputes may be amicably resolved. [33945]

Ms Keeble: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on 10 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 584–85W.

Departmental Studies

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many studies initiated since 1997 have covered subjects that have previously been the subject of studies by his Department since 1972. [32959]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The Department initiates studies on a wide range of issues relevant to particular aspects of its policy areas. Many policy areas are the subject of more than one study. To carry out a precise analysis of all the studies undertaken since 1997 and the policy areas they address would entail unreasonable cost. Results of studies and research projects are regularly announced on the DTLR website.

Buses

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total public sector subsidy for buses was, at current prices, in each year between 1991 and 2001. [32956]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The figures are shown in table 19 of the DTLR publication "A Bulletin of Public Transport Statistics GB: 2001 edition", which is in the Libraries of the House.

Essen Plan

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 321W, ref 31544, if it is his policy to build a new dual carriageway or motorway link through mid-Wales along the route of the link in the Essen plan. [33393]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The Essen plan includes the Ireland-UK-Benelux road link, of which sections of the A5 as well as roads in Wales form part. A study to consider safety and environmental problems on the A5 and A483 between Shrewsbury and Chester is due to report this spring and its recommendations will be carefully considered. Any recommendation for improvements to highways in Wales will be considered by the devolved Administration.

Road Safety

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will place in the Library legal advice received by his Department about the use of repeater signs in 30mph speed limits. [32943]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* Legislation on the use of repeater signs in lit 30mph speed limits is already available in the Library. Direction 10 of the statutory instrument: traffic signs regulations and general directions 1994 provides that repeater signs shall be placed at regular intervals on all roads except restricted roads or on any road where the national speed limit is in force.

Section 82 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 describes a restricted road as a road which there is a system of street lighting placed not more than 200 yards apart.

Roads Investment

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what total public sector investment was in roads, at current prices, in each year between 1991 and 2001. [32955]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* Figures for years up to 1999–2000 are published in table 1.16 of transport statistics Great Britain (TSGB) 2001, a copy of which is available in the Libraries of the House. Figures for 2000–01 are not yet available.

Cycling

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to introduce a law compelling cyclists to have bells. [32845]

Mr. Spellar: The Department is considering this in its review of regulations dealing with safety standards for pedal cycles.

Urban Capacity Studies

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on how many local authorities have produced urban capacity studies *(a)* before 7 March 2000 and *(b)* since 7 March 2000; and how many of these are in accordance with the good practice guidance in "Tapping the Potential" published in December 2000. [33424]

Ms Keeble: We have a major research project under way looking at the implementation of the policies set out in planning policy guidance note 3 "housing" (PPG3). The research will report the progress made by local authorities in carrying out the urban housing capacity studies expected by PPG3 and the extent to which these reflect the guidance set out in "Tapping the Potential".

Airport Security

David Cairns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to monitor the security of airports abroad and to publish advice on this issue to British nationals. [30520]

Mr. Jamieson: Under international law, host states are responsible for the security applied to civil aircraft leaving the state. However, my Department closely monitors the security afforded to and carried out by UK carriers at overseas airports. My Department is also working closely with our international partners to increase the existing minimum international standards for aviation security.

We do not discuss security measures at airports, but the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website contains helpful information to travellers about safety and other matters.

British Waterways

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on what powers British Waterways has to grant itself planning permission and to carry out works in a conservation area without being subject to the normal planning procedures. [33127]

Ms Keeble: British Waterways has no powers to grant itself planning permission but does enjoy permitted development rights under Part 17 of schedule 2 to the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 which enable it to carry out certain development in relation to canal or inland navigation undertakings without having to apply for planning permission.

Greenfield Sites

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on whether the Government had carried out a national audit of greenfield allocations to complement the national land use database of brownfield sites. [33426]

Ms Keeble: The Government have not carried out a national audit of greenfield allocations to complement the national land use database of brownfield sites. Our planning policies for housing give priority to re-using previously-developed land within urban areas in preference to the development of greenfield sites. We set up the national land use database to help local authorities establish how many additional homes can be built in urban areas on brownfield sites.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many hectares of greenfield land previously allocated for housing in local plans and unitary development plans have been de-allocated since 7 March 2000. [33425]

Ms Keeble: The Secretary of State is a statutory consultee in the preparation of development plans and through the Government offices has been examining emerging plans carefully to identify unnecessary greenfield releases. Just over 300 objections to plans on PPG3 grounds were made in the period 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001. Information on the hectarage of greenfield de-allocations is not collected centrally.

Starter Home Initiative

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how the building land for the Starter Home Initiative is being sourced. [32656]

Ms Keeble: The majority of Starter Home Initiative assistance will help key workers to purchase an existing dwelling. Beyond this, scheme providers will obtain building land from purchases from the private sector, local authorities and other public bodies.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people in the Epsom and Ewell constituency have benefited from the Starter Home Initiative for key workers; and what the *(a)* average and *(b)* total amount granted is. [32654]

Ms Keeble: The Starter Home Initiative allocations announced on 6 September 2001 included a Surrey-wide scheme, including Epsom and Ewell constituency, to help 398 key workers and in addition a dedicated scheme for Epsom and Ewell covering seven key workers. The grant that has been allocated to these two schemes over the three years 2001–02 to 2003–04 averages £17,605 per person.

Bidding guidance for the Starter Home Initiative Equity Loan scheme, announced on 16 January 2002, proposed help for a further 79 key workers across Surrey.

Worcestershire Structure Plan

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what grounds Government Departments may disregard the Worcestershire Structure Plan when considering the location of a new facility built by departments or their agencies; and if he will make a statement. [33063]

Ms Keeble: The non-statutory procedures set out in DOE circular 18/84 that deal with development by Crown bodies make it clear that if any development proposal would constitute a departure from the development plan, it must be dealt with like an application for planning permission for similar development and be subject to the same arrangements for advertisement and notification to my Department. If the Secretary of State decides that the proposal should be the subject of a non-statutory public inquiry and subsequent consideration by him, the local planning authority will be informed. The development plan comprises both the adopted structure plan and the local plan where applicable.

Community Transport Services

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the proposed regulations extending fuel duty rebate to community transport services will come into force. [33071]

Ms Keeble: Following consultation with relevant organisations last year, we will be bringing forward regulations within the next few weeks with the intention of introducing this new entitlement as early as possible in 2002–03.

Concessionary Fare Schemes

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what the gross cost is in each local authority of concessionary fare schemes at the most recent date for which information is available; and what the cost is per *(a)* resident, *(b)* resident aged 60 years or over and *(c)* bus passenger mile in each local authority; [33635]

(2) what the anticipated gross cost would be to each local authority of concessionary fare schemes following implementation of the proposals in the Travel Concessions (Eligibility) Bill *[Lords]*; and what the cost would be per *(a)* resident, *(b)* resident aged 60 years or over and *(c)* bus passenger mile. [33646]

Ms Keeble: The information can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list by local authority those areas in which pensioners travel concessions are available *(a)* offering nil fares, (b) offering half fares and (c) offering concessions amounting to less than half fares. [33788]

Ms Keeble: The Transport Act 2000 requires that from 1 June 2001 local authorities provide their resident pensioners with at least half-fares on local buses. Some local authorities using their discretionary powers have more generous schemes.

Ferries

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the ferry crossings from mainland Great Britain that are in receipt of central Government financial support; and if he will give the extent of that support in each case, in each of the last three years. [33072]

Mr. Spellar: Her Majesty's Government do not subsidise ferry crossings. The Scottish Executive subsidise lifeline ferry services in the Scottish highlands and islands for which they are accountable to the Scottish Parliament. Responsibility for expenditure on such services prior to the introduction of devolution on 1 July 1999 lay with the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Crossrail

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether it is his policy to allow funding for Crossrail to be raised through a public bond issue. [32939]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* No decisions have yet been taken about the most appropriate method of procuring any Crossrail scheme.

Channel Tunnel Freight Services

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what plans he has to increase the number of freight services using the channel tunnel; and if he will make a statement; [29582]

(2) what action has been taken since the meeting with the head of security for the French railways on 3 December last year to accelerate implementation of the measures needed to restore the number of freight services through the channel tunnel to pre-7 November 2001 levels. [29583]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) on 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 322–23W.

Rail Network

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many coaches are operating on the rail network; and how many are projected to be in operation in 2005. [28562]

Mr. Spellar: There are approximately 10,000 vehicles currently in operation on the national rail network. It is anticipated that, after taking into account those coaches which must be withdrawn from service, there will be in the region of 10,500 vehicles in operation by 2005.

There are to date 2,218 confirmed orders for new coaches to replace older stock before 2005.

Selby Rail Crash

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement regarding the application made by North Yorkshire Police Authority under the Bellwin scheme to cover its costs associated with the Selby rail crash. [33740]

Mr. Raynsford: I have received a request from North Yorkshire Police Authority for assistance under the Bellwin scheme with the exceptional costs they incurred in connection with the Selby rail crash. I am satisfied that financial assistance under the Bellwin scheme is justified in the case of North Yorkshire Police Authority given the exceptional nature of the costs incurred by the authority following the rail crash. A scheme will, therefore be established under section 155 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. Grant will be paid to cover 85 per cent. of the eligible costs above a threshold, which the authority incurred in dealing with the rail crash.

Strategic Rail Plan

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether public investment in the Railways under the 10-year plan includes the public sector contribution to projected payments to Railtrack in Control Period 2. [32945]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* Network grants to Railtrack, and its successor company, are classified as public investment support. The proportion of the renewals investment programme that is unsupported by grant is classified as private investment.

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total *(a)* loan facility and *(b)* working capital facility drawn down by the Railtrack Administrator under the commercial loan agreement is. [32938]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* £1,492,017,636 has been drawn down from the loan facility. Nothing has been drawn down from the working capital facility.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether the additional money originally announced on 14 January for the railways includes the additional funding for Railtrack brought forward from Control Period 3 into Control Period 2. [32937]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 322W.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 9W, on Railtrack, for whom the assessment of cash-flow from assets was conducted; why his Department conducted an assessment of the cash-flows provided by assets from Railtrack, but no assessment of the direct value of assets in (i) Railtrack plc and (ii) Railtrack Group; and if he will make a statement. [32694]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to previous replies given to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) on 19 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 31W, 23 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 496W, and 3 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 22W.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether Railtrack needed to raise more money during the current financial year than was envisaged in its business plan. [32741]

Mr. Spellar: The evidence to the High Court on 7 October 2001 demonstrated that Railtrack plc was, or was soon likely to become, unable to meet its existing debts. On that basis it could not raise the money envisaged in its business plan.

TREASURY

Treasury Building PFI Deal

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total costs involved in the Exchequer Partnership bond issue for the Treasury Building PFI deal were including total fees paid to banks, professional advisers and others, showing for each amount paid the *(a)* payer and *(b)* payee. [32214]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information is as follows:

(i) Fees paid by EP up to and including financial close (May 2000), as shown in the financial model, were:

		£ million
SG	Financial advice to EP	1.250
SG	Mezzanine underwriting	0.100
Chesterton	Property/letting advice to EP	0.900
PwC	Tax and accounting advice to EP	0.100
Ashurst Morris Crisp	Legal advice to EP	0.800
C. E. Heath	Insurance advice to EP	0.060
Marsh Bankrisk	Insurance due diligence for funders	0.030
Faithfull & Gould	Technical due diligence for funders	0.150
Allen & Overy	Legal due diligence for funders	0.532

		£ million
PKF	Model audit	0.070
Rating Agencies	Bond rating costs	0.200
UBS Warburg	Bond arrangement fee	0.799
Ambac	Initial credit enhancement premium	1.845
Ambac	Mezzanine arrangement fee	0.132
Total		6.968

(ii) Fees paid by HMT up to and including financial close were:

		£ million
GTMS	Project management and technical advice	0.462
Berwin Leighton	Legal advice	1.355
Dresdner Kleinwort Benson	Financial advice	0.645
Cecil Denny Highton	Advice on accommodation requirements	0.101
C. B. Hillier Parker	Specialist property-related advice	0.013
Roger Preston & Partners	Mechanical and electrical engineering advice	0.043
Willis Corroon	Insurance advice	0.006
PricewaterhouseCoopers	Accountancy advice	0.012
Total		2.637

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total *(a)* refurbishment and *(b)* operating costs are of the Treasury building, broken down by the principal cost headings used. [32210]

Ruth Kelly: As at financial close (5 May 2000), the total projected costs to the start of operations are:

	Total	
Funding requirement	*£ million*	*Percentage*
Net VAT paid/(received)	0.115	0.1
Construction cost	118.659	84.2
Pre-operating costs	7.578	5.4
Senior debt service reserve	4.392	3.1
Change in law reserve	2.419	1.7
Cash	0.608	0.4
Interest and fees:	0.800	0.6
Mezzanine Debt Bond (net of interest received)	6.394	4.5
Total	140.965	100.0

The annual service costs payable to EP form part of the single Unitary Payment payable by HMT. These costs are expressed in March 1999 prices and are subject to indexation:

	£000
Hard services[1]	1,504
Soft services[2]	1,930
Total services	3,434
Capital charges	10,603
Total unitary payment	14,037

[1] Includes M&E systems, building fabric, fire and safety systems, security hardware.

[2] Includes cleaning and waste management, security personnel, Help Desk.

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for the 10 years prior to the Treasury Building PFI deal, how much the Treasury has paid in annual rent for the Treasury Building. [32207]

Ruth Kelly: Figures for the years up to 1995–96 are not readily available. Figures for later years are in an answer I am giving to the hon. Member today.

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assumptions have been made about inflation in the Treasury Building PFI deal. [32204]

Ruth Kelly: The base case assumption was a constant 2.5 per cent. annual increase in the RPI all items index.

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discount rate was used for the Treasury Building PFI deal; and using this discount rate, what the total net present cost is of the annual unitary payments over the lifetime of the Treasury Building PFI deal. [32215]

Ruth Kelly: The total net present cost of the annual unitary payments over the lifetime of the deal is £169.3 million, discounted at 6 per cent. in real terms and assuming 2.5 per cent. inflation.

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer under the terms of the Treasury Building PFI deal, who owns the freehold of the Treasury Building. [32212]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The building remains a Crown freehold throughout the term of the deal. Exchequer Partnership plc will be granted a head lease for the whole site on completion of the refurbishment of the Treasury accommodation at the west end of the summer. They will then grant the Treasury a sub-lease for our accommodation for the thirty-five year operating period. Once the eastern end is refurbished, Exchequer Partnership will grant similar sub-leases to the tenants there.

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total capital sum involved in the Treasury Building PFI deal was, broken down by *(a)* equity and *(b)* the different layers of debt. [32213]

Ruth Kelly: The information is as follows:

Sources of funding

	Total	
	£ million	*Percentage*
Ordinary Shares	0.500	0.4
Shareholder Loan Stock	6.425	4.5
Mezzanine Debt	6.250	4.4
Bond	127.790	90.7
Total	140.965	100.0

Note:

The equity comprises the ordinary shares and the shareholder loan stock, a total of £6.925 million, or 4.9 per cent. of the total funding.

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total annual operating costs were for the Treasury Building in each of the four years prior to the Treasury building PFI deal, broken down by *(a)* cleaning, *(b)* security, *(c)* electricity, *(d)* water, *(e)* gas, *(f)* non-domestic rates, *(g)* basic maintenance, *(h)* exceptional maintenance and *(i)* other significant operating cost items. [32209]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury building is a Crown freehold so has not been subject to conventional rents. For the four years prior to the PFI deal a capital charge (an intra-Government transfer payment) has been payable on the Treasury building. The Treasury has another building—

Allington Towers (AT) in Victoria street—which is a leasehold building so subject to rental payments to a landlord. The intention is to surrender the Allington Towers lease when the staff there have moved into the refurbished Treasury building this summer. While the refurbishment of the west end of the Treasury building is going ahead, some two thirds of our staff remain in the east end of the building while the remaining third are housed at Allington Towers. The total costs of running the two buildings are set out in the table.

£ million

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
Items included in unitary payment:				
Rent/capital charge	4.71	4.91	4.69	6.62
Cleaning/security/maintenance	2.1	3.03	2.62	2.21
Items not included in the unitary payment:				
Rates, utilities' costs, copying, furniture and fittings	3.114	2.861	2.897	2.985

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Treasury Building PFI deal ends, how much at current prices he estimates the Treasury will pay in annual rent. [32208]

Ruth Kelly: At the end of the PFI deal in 2037 ownership of the building reverts to the Treasury. We then have a choice whether to negotiate a new deal with Exchequer Partnership, or another supplier, or to take responsibility for running the building ourselves once again.

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what he estimates the total amount of cash paid by the Treasury to Exchequer Partnership over the lifetime of the Treasury Building PFI deal would have been if the discount rate had been *(a)* 3.50 per cent., *(b)* 3.75 per cent., *(c)* 4.00 per cent., *(d)* 4.25 per cent., *(e)* 4.50 per cent., *(f)* 4.75 per cent., *(g)* 5.00 per cent. and *(h)* 5.50 per cent. [32201]

Ruth Kelly: Under current Treasury guidance to Departments on the carrying out of investment appraisals (the "Green Book") the discount rate to be used is 6 per cent. in real terms. Were the guidance to be changed in the future, other parts of the methodology might also vary. So simply changing one variable, in this case the discount rate, is not valid.

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what will be the total amount of cash paid by the Treasury to Exchequer Partnership over the lifetime of the Treasury Building PFI deal assuming no inflation. [32200]

Ruth Kelly: The Unitary Payment (UP) is set at £14.037 million per annum in March 1999 prices, to be indexed annually by the RPI. Assuming no inflation, therefore, the Treasury would pay £491.3 million over the 35 year contract term.

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer at the time of issue of the Exchequer Partnership bond for the Treasury Building PFI deal, what the total extra cash paid by the Treasury to Exchequer Partnership over the lifetime of the Treasury Building PFI deal would have been for every change of 0.1 per cent. in the bond spread. [32202]

Ruth Kelly: The total additional payment over the lifetime of the project would have been £6.568 million per 0.1 per cent. increase in the bond spread. The NPC impact of a 0.1 per cent. increase is £1.329 million (discounted at 6 per cent. real), and the annual increase in the Unitary Payment would have been £110,00 as at 31 March 1999.

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much he estimates the bond spread of the Exchequer Partnership bond issued for the Treasury Building PFI deal would have had to widen before the project had become unviable. [32203]

Ruth Kelly: The contract with EP provided for a cap of £14.2 million on the Unitary Payment (i.e £13.981 at the time the contract was signed in August 1999) if funding was subsequently secured through the bond route. If the cap had been exceeded, then it would have been for the Treasury to decide whether a new, higher figure would still have provided good value for money.

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer using the Treasury's inflation assumptions for the Treasury Building PFI deal, what he estimates the total amount of cash paid by the Treasury to Exchequer Partnership will be over the lifetime of the Treasury Building PFI deal. [32205]

Ruth Kelly: £838.154 million. This equates to £169.3 million in net present cost terms, discounted at 6 per cent. in real terms and assuming 2.5 per cent. inflation.

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what he estimates the total amount of cash paid by the Treasury to Exchequer Partnership will be over the lifetime of the Treasury Building PFI deal assuming a constant inflation rate of *(a)* 2.00 per cent., *(b)* 2.25 per cent., *(c)* 2.50 per cent., *(d)* 2.75 per cent., *(e)* 3.00 per cent., *(f)* 4.00 per cent. and *(g)* 5.00 per cent. [32206]

Ruth Kelly: These calculations have no bearing on the value for money assessment since the project appraisal is conducted in real terms.

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what he estimates the total net present cost of the annual unitary payments by the Treasury to Exchequer Partnership over the lifetime of the Treasury Building PFI deal would have been if the discount rate had been *(a)* 3.50 per cent., *(b)* 3.75 per cent., *(c)* 4.00 per cent., *(d)* 4.25 per cent., *(e)* 4.50 per cent., *(f)* 4.75 per cent., *(g)* 5.00 per cent. and *(h)* 5.50 per cent. [32216]

Ruth Kelly: Under current Treasury guidance to Departments on the carrying out of investment appraisals (the "Green Book") the discount rate to be used is 6 per cent. in real terms. Were the guidance to be changed in the future, other parts of the methodology might also vary. So simply changing one variable, in this case the discount rate, is not valid.

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the *(a)* gross and *(b)* net proceeds were from the Exchequer Partnership Bond issue. [32211]

Ruth Kelly: The gross proceeds were £127.790 million and the net proceeds £123.639 million.

Amateur Sports Clubs

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures have been introduced since 1997 to give tax and rate relief to amateur sports clubs; and what plans he has to give further assistance. [32152]

Mr. Boateng: A consultation document—"Promoting Sport in the Community"—was launched on 30 November 2001, seeking views on the best way to support community amateur sports clubs (CASCs) that make a positive contribution to the community. The Charity Commission also announced on 30 November that it would recognise as charitable the

> "promotion of community participation in healthy recreation by the provision of facilities for the playing of particular sports"

this will confer the tax benefits of charitable status to qualifying CASCs.

Financial Services Authority

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 12 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 890W, on the Financial Services Authority, (1) what new regulations will apply to mortgage and insurance intermediaries; [33773]

(2) if the new FSA powers will cover *(a)* residential mortgages, *(b)* commercial mortgages and *(c)* buy to let mortgages; and if he will make a statement. [33772]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury will be publishing consultation papers in due course setting out the mortgage and general insurance activities that are to be regulated by the financial services authority. A broad timetable has been published on the Treasury website www.hm-treasury.gov.uk. No change is envisaged to the definition of a regulated mortgage contract that was set out in articles 61 to 63 of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Regulated Activities) Order 2001 (SI2001/544) as amended by SI2001/3544. This means that, as before, regulation will be aimed at mortgages which put a person's home at risk.

UK GDP

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the performance of the UK recorded in the Eurostat reports, Statistics in Focus, General Statistics, No. 1/2002, "Regional Gross Domestic Product in the European Union 1999" and Statistics in Focus, General Statistics No. 2/2002, "Regional Gross Domestic Product in Candidate Countries 1999"; and if he will make a statement. [32870]

Ruth Kelly: Eurostat report that UK GDP per capita was above the EU average in 1999. More recent Eurostat labour market data show the employment rates of all the countries and regions of the UK are above the EU average.

The Government are committed to raising the rate of sustainable UK growth by improving employment and productivity in all regions. The Government's approach to achieving this is set out in detail in "Productivity in the UK:3—the Regional Dimension" published alongside PBR 2001 (Cm 5318).

Euro

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 17 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 438W, for what reasons he will not list the *(a)* officials, *(b)* special advisers and *(c)* Ministers of his Department who are involved in the preliminary technical work for joining the euro; and if he will make a statement. [31660]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to him on 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 224W.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 17 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 438–39W, (1) if he will list the names of the members of the cross-party HM Treasury Euro-Preparations Committee; and if he will make a statement; [31657]

(2) which members of the cross-party HM Treasury Euro-Preparations Committee attended the meeting on 5 December 2001; what the agenda of the meeting was; and if he will make a statement. [31658]

Ruth Kelly: All parliamentary parties are invited to nominate a representative to attend meetings of the Cross Party Group on Euro Preparations. Representatives from the Labour party, the Liberal Democrats, the Scottish National party and the Ulster Unionist party attended. Minutes of the meeting on 5 December have been sent to those representatives who attended.

Fraud

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for a common prosecution policy for tax credit fraud and benefit fraud. [32644]

Dawn Primarolo: The prosecution policy for tax credits is an integral part of the published policy of the Board of the Inland Revenue for all its tax prosecutions. The approach to prosecutions taken by the Board of the Inland Revenue and the criteria they use in deciding whether to proceed criminally with a case are set out in this published statement. The criteria used by the Board of the Inland Revenue are similar in kind to those used by the Department for Work and Pensions when they decide whether to prosecute for benefit fraud.

Tax Returns (Electronic Filing)

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of *(a)* individuals and *(b)* companies filed their tax returns electronically in 2000. [32949]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 4 February 2002]*: *(a)* 9.324 million tax returns were issued for the year ended 5 April 2001. Of these 324,296 individual tax returns were filed electronically.

(b) No companies filed their corporation tax returns electronically. We do not currently have an electronic system for corporation tax returns.

Tax Costs

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the *(a)* yield of, *(b)* cost of collection of and *(c)* number of employees collecting (i) the climate change levy, (ii) the aggregates levy, (iii) inheritance tax, (iv) capital gains tax, (v) corporation tax, (vi) income tax, (vii) value added tax, (viii) excise duty, (ix) stamp duty, (x) customs duty and (xi) national insurance. [32869]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* Inland Revenue's Annual Report contains an analysis of cost yield by tax head. No such analysis is maintained for indirect taxes, and Inland Revenue do not hold the analysis by staff numbers.

Inland Revenue's Annual Report for year ending 31 March 2001 was laid in Parliament on 18 December 2001 as Command Paper 5304. Links to this and other key documents for the two Departments will be found at http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/about/index.htm and http://www.hmce.gov.uk/about/reports/reports.htm

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what studies of tax compliance costs have been completed by the Inland Revenue since May 1997. [32862]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The Inland Revenue has completed a considerable number of studies of tax compliance costs since May 1997. The most significant are: some 20 Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs), the Bath Report on the tax compliance costs of PAYE and national insurance, and the UK approach to compliance cost assessment of tax changes at the Sydney 2000 International Tax Compliance Costs Symposium.

Inland Revenue (Informers)

Mr. Gray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many claims for rewards by informers were made to Inland Revenue in each of the last three years ended 31 March 2001; of those claims, what proportion in each year resulted in payment of a reward; what the average length of time was between an informer's claim and Inland Revenue's payment of the reward; of those claims rejected, how many resulted in expression of dissatisfaction by the informer; where reward was made, how many payments resulted in expression of dissatisfaction by the informer; what target standards of service Inland Revenue sets out to meet as regards its dealings with informers; whether these have been met in the last three years ending 31 March 2001; and if he will make a statement. [32719]

Dawn Primarolo: No details are recorded of the total number of claims made and, therefore, no details are available of the proportion rejected. Nor are details recorded of the total number of claimants dissatisfied at not being paid a reward.

The Inland Revenue's customer service standards for its dealings with informers are the same as for its dealings with other customers. Targets and results are set out in the Inland Revenue annual reports available in the House of Commons Library. No figures are collated separately for dealings with informers.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with regard to section 32 of the Inland Revenue Regulation Act 1890 and Inland Revenue's current practice, what is the process employed by Inland Revenue, from the point an informer makes a claim, oral or written, for a reward, leading to the payment of the reward to him/her; in which Inland Revenue manual this process is set out; whether the Inland Revenue officer dealing with the claim may deny a reward upon his sole authority without appeal by the informer; in which Inland Revenue manual this process is set out; in the case where an informer deals with the Special Compliance Office by virtue of IH 1295 but where the investigation is taken up by another office of Inland Revenue, whether it is a requirement that the Special Compliance officer dealing with the informer makes his own report of the informer's value to Inland Revenue in the matter; and in which Inland Revenue manual this process is set out. [32723]

Dawn Primarolo: The Board of Inland Revenue has discretion to pay financial rewards to informers. There is no right of appeal against the exercising of that discretion.

Reward payments are exceptional and are made only where information provided leads to a recovery of duty. It follows that no consideration as to whether to pay a reward can be made unless and until actions to recover duties are concluded. It also follows that where there is no recovery of duty there can be no reward payment and, therefore, no need for further consideration.

If following the recovery of duty it is considered that a reward payment should be made, or where the informer claims that a payment should be made, the facts are reported to technical advisers at Inland Revenue Cross-Cutting Policy for consideration in line with guidance at IH 1295. There is no requirement as to who should make that report.

Labour Productivity

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 6 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 521W, on labour productivity, if he will make a statement on the recent reforms which will promote labour supply and improve the economy's long-term growth potential. [32070]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Gentleman to paragraph 4.73 of the November 2001 pre-Budget report (Cm 5318). Further detail is available in "The Modernisation of Britain's Tax and Benefit System No. 6", published in March 2000.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many complaints he has received from *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public about the loss of working families tax credit for people on sickness leave from their employment; and if he will make a statement. [30965]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue does not hold the figures requested for complaints on this specific issue from either hon. Members or members of the public. Periods of sick leave during a working families tax credit (WFTC) award do not have any effect on the amount of tax credits payable, and do not count as being at work for the purpose of a new or renewal WFTC application.

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Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 323–24W, on the working families tax credit, what the total value was of the 478 penalties imposed for false WFTC applications between October 1999 and September 2001. [26472]

Dawn Primarolo: Further work on the number of penalties attributable to working families tax credit investigations has shown that there were 507 for the period between October 1999 and September 2001. The total value of these penalties was £512,223.78.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many working families have *(a)* claimed and *(b)* been awarded the working families tax credit in Shrewsbury and Atcham; and if he will make a statement. [32589]

Dawn Primarolo: No estimates are available for *(a)*. For *(b)*, I refer my hon. Friend to my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Hepburn) on 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 293W.

Public Sector Pay

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the percentage difference has been between the increase in public sector pay and private sector pay in each of the last five years. [27922]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information is as follows:

	Public sector (percentage increase)	*Private sector (percentage increase)*	*Difference (percentage)*
1997	2.3	5.1	–2.8
1998	3.7	5.3	–1.6
1999	3.9	5.0	–1.1
2000	3.6	4.4	–0.8
2001	5.4	3.9	1.5

The annual percentage increases are from the Average Earnings Index (published by ONS) for the 12 months to the end of November of each year.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the percentage increase in public sector pay has been in each of the last five years; and what the cost of that increase was. [27923]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information is as follows:

	Public sector (percentage increase)	*Value of increase (£ billion)*
1997	2.3	2.09
1998	3.7	3.45
1999	3.9	3.86
2000	3.6	n/a
2001	5.4	n/a

Note:

The percentage increases in public sector pay are from the Average Earnings Index, headline rate, for the 12 months ending November each year. The indication of the cost is derived by applying the percentages to the paybill for the public sector, which is the sum of the paybill for central and local government and of the paybill for public corporations.

Family Incomes

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* working families with children and *(b)* childless people in work had incomes below the tax threshold at the latest date for which information is available. [26218]

Dawn Primarolo: For 2000–01, the number of working families with children where there was no working adult with earned income above the personal tax threshold to be 700,000. The number of childless adults in work with income below the personal tax threshold is estimated to be 2,400,000.

Contingency Reserve

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his policy on the level of the contingency reserve in each of the next three years. [26133]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to him on 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 297W.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how much money has been spent on external consultants in the tendering process of the Private Finance Initiative in each of the last four years *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms, disaggregated by (i) legal fees, (ii) publicity costs, (iii) accountancy fees and (iv) management consultancy fees; [24822]

(2) what have been the running costs relating to the tendering process of the Private Finance Initiative in each year since its introduction *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* in cash terms disaggregated by (i) staff costs, (ii) information technology and (iii) other costs. [24821]

Mr. Andrew Smith: This information is not collected centrally. Information on PFI expenditure is published regularly in a form agreed by the Public Accounts Committee and the National Audit Office, most recently in the financial statement and Budget report 2001.

Annuity Reform

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to publish the consultation document on annuity reform. [34273]

Ruth Kelly: The joint Department for Work and pensions and Inland Revenue consultation document "Modernising Annuities" is published today. Copies are available in the Vote Office and in the Library. The Government will consider the responses carefully before deciding how to proceed.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to receive the Inland Revenue report on benchmarking the level of fraud in the working families tax credit; what his timetable is for responding to it; and if he plans to make public an assessment of the level of fraud following receipt of the report. [32642]

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has estimated the amount of fraud and error in *(a)* working families tax credit and *(b)* disabled persons tax credit. [33599]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue are currently analysing the data from their compliance benchmarking exercise. We shall be considering the results, and questions of publication, within the next few months.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 197W, how many instances of potentially fraudulent or improper claims to tax credits have been communicated to the Inland Revenue via *(a)* the Benefits Anti Fraud Hotline and *(b)* the Childcare Tax Credit Hotline; and in each case how many of these reports have resulted in (i) the recovery of over payments, (ii) the imposition of penalties and (iii) prosecutions. [25220]

Dawn Primarolo: The table shows the number of allegations about potentially improper applications for working families tax credit (WFTC) and disabled person's tax credit (DPTC), communicated to the Inland Revenue through the Benefits Anti-Fraud Hotline and the Childminder's Hotline.

	Number
Allegations communicated to IR via Benefits Anti-Fraud hotline[1]	16,676
WFTC/DPTC recoveries	530
WFTC/DPTC penalties	18
WFTC prosecutions	2
Allegations communicated to IR via Childminder's hotline[2]	1,672
WFTC/DPTC recoveries	4
WFTC/DPTC penalties	0
Prosecutions	0

[1] 1 October 1999 to 31 December 2001

[2] April 2000 to 31 December 2001

Child Poverty

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) of 24 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 980W, on child poverty, if he will set out the assumptions behind the statement that there are 1.2 million fewer children in poverty than there were in 1997. [33605]

Dawn Primarolo: As a result of personal tax and benefit measures announced in the last Parliament there are now 1.2 million fewer children living in households with incomes below 60 per cent. of the median (after housing costs) than there otherwise would have been.

Pension Schemes

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on delays in making the annual payment to the pension schemes of those who have opted out of SERPS. [33069]

Dawn Primarolo: There are currently no delays in making the annual payments to the pension schemes of those who have opted out of SERPS.

However, an IT server owned by the Inland Revenue which receives information from pension providers was decommissioned in error when an office move took place in April 2000 resulting in a delay in processing data on new personal pensions applications and terminations from existing personal pensions. This error is very much regretted.

The Inland Revenue is currently checking the cases affected and expect to process all of them and make the delayed payments and recoveries of age-related rebates during February.

New personal pension application and termination information is now being processed normally.

Gus O'Donnell

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer who produced, and at what cost to his Department, the four cartoons released by his Department on 17 January 2002, in the selection of slides presented by Mr. Gus O'Donnell on 30 November 2001; and if he will make a statement. [31659]

Ruth Kelly: The whole of Gus O'Donnell's presentation was produced within the Treasury, at no additional cost to the Department.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reasons UK productivity growth was described as lacklustre in the slides presented by Mr. Gus O'Donnell at a seminar with students on 30 November 2001; and if he will make a statement. [31661]

Ruth Kelly: The slide to which the hon. Gentleman refers shows a quadrant of possible risks to the Treasury's central forecast for the UK economy in 2002, and the reference to productivity growth appeared only in the worst case scenario.

Departmental Secondments

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 15 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 845W, on departmental secondments, if he will list the company employing each secondee in his Department; and if he will make a statement. [32603]

Ruth Kelly: Further to my answer of 15 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 845W, the number of people seconded into HM Treasury is listed in the table:

Company	*Number of employees*
National Audit Commission (NAO)	6
Deloitte Touche	1
Tidy Britain Group (Charity)	1
Institute of Fiscal Studies	1
Kent County Council	1
Oxfam	1
Pannell Kerr Foster Services	1
Financial Services Authority (FSA)	3
University of Bristol	1
UBS Warburg	1
Bank of England	2
DaLASER (District Auditor)	1

More comprehensive details of people seconded into HM Treasury are available on our website.

Arthur Andersen

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what contracts his Department has had since 1997 with *(a)* Arthur Andersen and *(b)* Accenture for (i) accountancy, (ii) audit and (iii) consultancy work; and what staff have been seconded (A) to his Department from and (B) from his Department to these firms. [32426]

Ruth Kelly: Since 1997 the Treasury has had two contracts with Arthur Andersen for consultancy work and none with Accenture. In line with Government policy these contracts were awarded following a competition. In the same period we have had three people seconded from Arthur Andersen to the Treasury, but none from Accenture. No Treasury staff have been seconded to the companies in question.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliament Square

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the President of the Council what discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues and others over proposals to pedestrianise part of Parliament Square; what steps he intends to take to ensure that right hon. and hon. Members are properly consulted about such proposals before work proceeds; and what assessment he has made of whether the proposals will cause disruption to right hon. and hon. Members when attending the House. [33110]

Mr. Robin Cook: In 1997, a steering group led by the Government Office for London and Westminster city council commissioned a master plan entitled "World Squares for All" prepared by Sir Norman Foster and a supporting team of professional firms. The aims of the master plan were to improve the setting of historic sites; reduce traffic congestion and make pedestrian movement safer and more pleasant; to improve bus services; and to improve street design.

The study area covered Trafalgar Square, Whitehall, Parliament Square and Old Palace Yard. A public exhibition displaying the master plan options was launched by the Deputy Prime Minister in December 1997, and the exhibition material was subsequently displayed for Members of both Houses of Parliament in the Royal Gallery. The Accommodation and Works Committee was consulted at that time.

From the results of the public consultation a preferred strategy was identified and the Government Office for London with Westminster city council began a feasibility study for just phase 1: Trafalgar Square.

In February 2000, a Minister from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and the Minister for London launched an exhibition and public consultation exercise on the Trafalgar Square proposals. 16,000 leaflets and questionnaires were distributed. The Greater London Authority took over the lead role later that year and they have recently let a contract to implement the Trafalgar Square works.

Beyond the master plan of 1997, no planning has yet been done on future phases for Whitehall and Parliament Square. However, the Mayor has indicated interest in seeing future phases progress. The Director of Parliamentary Estates represents parliamentary interests in the World Squares for All Steering Group and will ensure that there is proper consultation if plans for Parliament Square do progress.

Parliamentary Television Service

Ian Lucas: To ask the Chairman of the Information Select Committee if he plans to facilitate the broadcast of proceedings of the National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Parliament on the parliamentary television service. [32129]

Michael Fabricant: The proceedings of the Welsh Assembly are already available on channel 22 of the television annunciators.

The previous Information Committee took the view that consideration should be given to broadcasting the proceeding of the Scottish Parliament on the annunciators once there was an economic method of conveying the signal to Westminster. At present, unlike the proceedings of the Welsh Assembly, the Scottish Parliament is not broadcast by satellite and there are no plans to do so. House officials have been in regular discussion with their counterparts in the Scottish Parliament on this matter and will continue to keep it under review. In the meantime, there is a webcam service which can be seen at www.scottishparliamentlive.com.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Credit Card Fraud

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Solicitor-General how many prosecutions were instituted by the Crown Prosecution Service in England and Wales in respect of fraudulent credit card transactions by use of the Internet in 2001. [33560]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service does not collect statistics on prosecutions for particular offences.

DEFENCE

Low Flying

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints he has received regarding low flying military aircraft by constituency in the past year. [30628]

Dr. Moonie: Low flying complaints are not recorded by constituency. The hon. Member may, however, wish to be aware that in 2001 the number of individual complaints recorded by the Ministry of Defence Low Flying Complaints and Inquiries unit by unitary authority or county title was as shown in the table.

Wales	*Number*
Carmarthenshire	82
Ceredigion	33
Clwyd	8
Denbighshire	3
Dyfed	132
Glamorgan	17
Gwent	13
Gwynedd	26

Wales	*Number*
Monmouthshire	13
Pembrokeshire	61
Powys	88
Total	476

Scotland	*Number*
Aberdeenshire	42
Angus	14
Argyll and Bute	12
Ayrshire	15
Berwickshire	23
Borders	77
Central Scotland	19
Clyde	23
Dumfries and Galloway	171
Fife	32
Grampian	14
Highlands	122
Lanarkshire	12
Lothian	51
Moray	11
Orkney	11
Perthshire	32
Rosshire	18
Strathclyde	1
Tayside	47
Western Isles	3
Total	750

England	*Number*
Buckinghamshire	35
Cambridgeshire	113
Cheshire	21
Cleveland	6
Cornwall	89
Cumbria	168
Derbyshire	22
Devon	205
Durham	14
East Sussex	32
East Yorkshire	13
Essex	51
Gloucestershire	126
Greater Manchester	1
Hertfordshire	15
Humberside	18
Isle of Man	1
Kent	52
Lancashire	21
Leicestershire	13
Lincolnshire	120
London	12
Manchester	1
Merseyside	1
Middlesex	3
North Yorkshire	170
Norfolk	275
Northamptonshire	52
Oxfordshire	76
Rutland	1
South Yorkshire	17
Shropshire	66
Somerset	243
Staffordshire	33
Suffolk	129
Surrey	17
Tyne and Wear	1
West Yorkshire	33
Warwickshire	22
West Midlands	1
West Sussex	65
Wiltshire	107
Total	3,008

Although a number of the county, or unitary authority, boundaries have changed, complaints have been recorded by the address given by the correspondent. An additional 12 correspondents did not reveal an address when registering their complaint.Details of the pattern of military low flying activity by low flying area are included on the Ministry of Defence website under the address www.lowflying.mod.uk.

Throckmorton Airfield

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on the ownership of land at Throckmorton airfield; and what plans his Department has for the disposal of this land *(a)* to the Home Office or its agencies and *(b)* through the privatisation of QinetiQ; [31735]

(2) what account was taken of the land and property at Throckmorton used by QinetiQ in the preparation for the privatisation of the agency; and if he will make a statement; [31736]

(3) what impact the construction of the proposed asylum accommodation centre at Throckmorton would have on *(a)* the activities of QinetiQ and *(b)* the other defence-related activities at the airfield. [31726]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 17 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 142W. Most of the Throckmorton site, formerly known as the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) Pershore, is now owned by QinetiQ. The remainder of the site, used last year to deal with some of the consequences of the foot and mouth outbreak, is in the final stages of being transferred to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

As part of the PPP process, all activities carried out by DERA were reviewed, and those which did not need to be retained within Government were transferred to QinetiQ on 1 July 2001, including those carried out at Pershore. Legally enforceable safeguards are in place to ensure that QinetiQ continue to provide key strategic facilities and services required by the Ministry of Defence. Against this background the company is free to explore other business opportunities.

The future provision of an accommodation centre for asylum seekers is the responsibility of the Home Office, and although QinetiQ's site at Pershore has been identified as a potential site, a final decision has yet to be made. Subject to consultation, with QinetiQ as landowner, the local planning authorities, and the local community, the final decision with regard to siting one of these centres at Pershore rests with the Home Secretary.

Research and Development

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total expenditure by his Department is on research and development; and how much of the total is spent in Scotland. [32460]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* In financial year 1999–2000 the Ministry of Defence spent £2,345 million net inclusive of VAT on research and development.

I regret that it is not possible to state how much of that total figure represented expenditure in the United Kingdom or in Scotland since our data do not include a regional breakdown.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much funding has been allocated in the current financial year for research and development in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* Scotland; what proportion of the Scottish total is given (i) to DERA's own research and (ii) research funded in academic and non-DERA sites; and if he will list the non-DERA sites. [32457]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* The allocation for research in the Major Customers Research Budget is £502 million inclusive of VAT. This includes work undertaken by the Ministry of Defence, industry and universities.

The MOD does not have an allocation for development as such. The development expenditure is budgeted for within the overall equipment programme allocation and does not fall into a separate budget. The amount that is quoted for statistical purposes, in any one year, is largely a consequence of the state of the procurement cycle at which major equipment projects happen to be in, in the year in question.

I regret that it is not possible to state how much of the total research figure represents expenditure in the United Kingdom or in Scotland since our data do not include a regional breakdown. Since July 2001, DERA ceased to exist and under public-private partnership arrangements it has separated into QinetiQ, a wholly government-owned plc, and the Defence Science and Technology Laboratories (DSTL).

There are no available data which can provide a breakdown of research and development expenditure on MOD sites.

Service Pensions

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement listing the changes in tax legislation the interpretation of which has led to the mistaken tax treatment of some war disability pensions and service attributable pensions. [33610]

Dr. Moonie: The law on the tax exemption of wound and disability pensions awarded to service personnel first came into force in the Finance Act 1919. The relevant provisions have since been brought forward into the various consolidating Taxes Acts which have been introduced since then. The most recent consolidation Act was the Income and Corporation Taxes Act (ICTA) 1988 where the exemption can be found at section 315. A previous consolidation Act was passed in 1952 but this did not introduce or change this tax exemption.

Following further discussion with the Inland Revenue, we are undertaking further work to establish precisely when the error was introduced. Meanwhile, we continue to consider approaches from pensioners, widows or their families who may have been affected by this error.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many retired armed service officers and their widows in *(a)* the East Riding of Yorkshire and *(b)* Hull have been identified as paying tax on retired pay awarded since 1952 on the grounds of disability attributable to or aggravated by service. [32095]

Dr. Moonie: Information on the number of Army Pensioners resident in the East Riding of Yorkshire and Hull who are so far known to have been incorrectly taxed on their invalidity pensions could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Tempest

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much the complete work and modifications on the Tempest mine protected vehicles will cost; and if he will make a statement. [32160]

Dr. Moonie: Eight Tempest mine protected vehicles are being procured to replace the in-service Mamba. These vehicles are used for casualty evacuation and route proving operations where mines are present and provide high levels of protection from anti-tank/personnel mine blasts.

Contract negotiations have yet to be concluded. I am therefore, withholding information about the cost of the programme in accordance with Exemption 7a(2) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, which relates to information whose disclosure would prejudice commercial or contractual activities.

Strategic Defence Initiative

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British universities have contracts awarded under the auspices of the 1985 Strategic Defence Initiative Memorandum of Understanding; and if he will list them. [32767]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence does not maintain a central record of all contracts let by the US Government with British universities under the Strategic Defence Initiative.

Mutual Defence Agreement

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) of 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 733W, on the Mutual Defence Agreement, what proportion of each of the total of visits by UK personnel to the United States under the 1958 Mutual Defence Agreement were undertaken to facilitate the transfer or exchange of military nuclear materials. [32411]

Dr. Moonie: Information on the number of visits since 1997 by UK personnel to the United States under the 1958 Mutual Defence Agreement which involved the exchange or transfer of military nuclear materials is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Arthur Andersen

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what fees were paid to Arthur Andersen and Company for their work on the privatisation of DERA to QinetiQ. [33087]

Dr. Moonie: Payments to advisers such as Arthur Andersen in connection with the QinetiQ transaction are made under the terms of the relevant commercial contracts with these companies. It is Ministry of Defence policy not to release price information on individual contract values as this is commercial in confidence. This information is therefore withheld under Exemption 14 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answers of 8 January 2002 to the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne), *Official Report*, column 563W, on QinetiQ, on what date the contract for services in connection with the proposed flotation of QinetiQ was awarded to Arthur Andersen; and if he will make a statement. [32410]

Dr. Moonie: The contract with Arthur Andersen as reporting accountants on the public private partnership for the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA PPP) was awarded on 25 October 2000. The requirement for reporting accountants was competed under normal Ministry of Defence contracting practices through the MOD Contracts Bulletin. Arthur Andersen won the competition as they were considered to provide best value for money in comparison with their competitors.

Army Pensioners (Cumbria)

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his estimate is of the number of Army pensioners who have lost income through the taxation EMV who are resident in *(a)* Cumbria and *(b)* the Workington constituency. [32775]

Dr. Moonie: Information on the number of Army pensioners resident in Cumbria and the Workington constituency who are so far known to have been incorrectly taxed on their invalidity pensions could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Defence Employees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff are employed in Scotland by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* executive agencies responsible to his Department; where these staff are located; and how many staff are employed in (i) England, (ii) London and the south-east, (iii) Wales, (iv) Northern Ireland and (v) United Kingdom in total. [32439]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* The latest figures for the number of Ministry of Defence Service and civilian personnel employed in Scotland (i) England, (ii) the south-east, (iii) Wales, (iv) Northern Ireland and (v) the UK in total are published in the UK Defence Statistics 2001 (Table 2.4), copies of which are available in the Library of the House. A breakdown by location in Scotland is currently being collated. I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Research Contracts

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department has awarded in research contracts by region in the most recent financial year. [32452]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* Gross expenditure outturn for the Ministry of Defence's major customers, research budgets and the Appropriation Accounts for financial year 2000–01, published on 23 November was £513.458 million. This sum includes research work placed with Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) but excludes technology demonstrator programmes, and loans and grants to DERA. It is not possible to provide a regional breakdown of research expenditure from available data.

Service Accommodation (Scotland)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many single accommodation places exist for each of the services in Scotland for *(a)* officers and *(b)* other ranks, by location. [32443]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

Getfitta Scheme

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what role Ministers plan to play in the getfitta scheme launched on his Department's website. [32151]

Dr. Moonie: *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The time to getfitta campaign, launched on 28 December 2001, is a corporate marketing PR campaign to raise awareness of the Territorial Army (TA) and act as a prelude to a new TA television advertising campaign in March 2002. The campaign is intended to raise awareness of, and interest in, the TA in advance of the March TV campaign, by encouraging principally young people to contact their local TA for help in getting fit, and encouraging those who are already fit to join the TA and take their fitness one step further. The campaign has been a great success and has received widespread and favourable media coverage. At the end of January, some 25,500 registrations have been achieved, which is double the expected number, 70 per cent. of them via the internet. In view of this success, no direct ministerial involvement is currently planned for the campaign.

Armed Forces (Medical Downgrades)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the *(a)* Army, *(b)* Navy and *(c)* RAF were considered to be medically downgraded on 1 February, stating in each case the (i) number deployable to the front line, (ii) number deployable on military operations other than the front line, (iii) percentage of establishment this represents and (iv) percentage of trained forces in each service this represents; and if he will make a statement. [31817]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Cleaner Coal Technology

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will publish the conclusions of her review into the case for Government support for cleaner coal technology demonstration power plant. [34118]

Mr. Wilson: The report on the review has been published today. A copy has been placed in the House of Commons Library. The report can also be accessed from the DTI's website at http://www.dti.gov.uk/cct/cctdemohome.htm

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with the target on total overhead costs. [23162]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The National Weights and Measures Laboratory first included this Ministerial target in 2000/01. In the Annual Report and Accounts for 2000/01 the National Weights and Measures Laboratory reported that overhead costs were 53.9 per cent. of total costs, meeting the target that overhead costs are less than 55 per cent. of total costs. Overhead charges are defined as the costs not allocated to a specific service area.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many employers in Stathkelvin and Bearsden constituency have breached the national minimum wage regulations. [33654]

Alan Johnson: The Inland Revenue enforce the national minimum wage on behalf of the Department of Trade and Industry. They do not keep statistics for parliamentary constituencies. However, for Scotland as a whole, the number of employers found not to be complying with the national minimum wage legislation is:

	Number
1999–2000	103
2000–01	183
2001–02[1]	162

[1] Up to and including December 2001.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Police (Northern Ireland) Act

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what guidance the Chief Constable has issued under section 51.2 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2002; how many officers have responded; and what information is being collected to construct the statistical information to be presented in the annual report of the Chief Constable under section 58 of the Act. [297807]

Jane Kennedy: The Chief Constable has not yet issued guidance under section 51(2) of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000, though work is in hand. Before issuing any guidance to police officers, the Chief Constable will consult the Policing Board, the Secretary of State and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.

PHOENIX Database

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information contained on the PHOENIX database is accessible by police in Northern Ireland; what authorisation is required for an officer to access this information; and what penalties are available to prosecuting authorities to deter unauthorised use. [29941]

Jane Kennedy: The Chief Constable has advised me that members of the Police Service of Northern Ireland who have completed the necessary training course, the majority of whom are with the Criminal Records Office, can directly access the PHOENIX Criminal Record System via the Police National Computer (PNC). The use of a unique, personal password is required.

Authorised personnel can interrogate criminal records; access information on wanted or missing persons and impending prosecutions.

Penalties for unauthorised access are detailed in the relevant legislation—section 60 of the Data Protection Act 1998 and sections 1 and 2 of the Computer Act 1990.

Plastic Baton Rounds

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 878W, how many plastic baton rounds are held for training and potential use by the PSNI. [29808]

Jane Kennedy: The Chief Constable has advised me that the current stock of plastic baton rounds is 69,148 of which 7,200 are currently held by PSNI Firearms Training.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Central Office of Information

Mr. Love: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will report on the outcome of the quinquennial review into the Central Office of Information. [33837]

Mr. Leslie: The quinquennial review of the Central Office of Information has shown that the COI has performed very well over the past five years. It has provided good value for money in its procurement, project management and strategic consultancy services.

The COI will continue in its present status as a Department, an executive agency and a trading fund for a further five years.

The review recommended two significant changes which will now be implemented to create two centres of excellence.

The Chief Executive of COI will have an additional role as the Government's chief adviser on marketing communications and information campaigns reporting to the Director of Communications and Strategy at No 10. This will strengthen the co-ordination and planning of departmental publicity strategies across Whitehall and changes should be in place by 1 April 2002.

COI's Regional News Network and its News Distribution Service will be transferred to the Government Information and Communication Service in the Cabinet

Office. This will ensure more effective presentation of cross-departmental and regional issues while maintaining links with Government publicity and communications generally. It will also have stronger links with the Government offices in the regions to give a better service to both the regional media and the general public.

The review also recognised the importance of the need for major research studies which tackle cross-cutting issues. COI communications is in the ideal position to undertake this role.

I intend that these changes should be in place by 1 April 2002, supported by a revised Framework Document, which will be placed in the Library of the House.

PPP Contracts

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he is taking to ensure that the terms of PPP contracts are in the public domain; and if he will make a statement. [23647]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

It is for Departments to decide what contractual information to publish. But we took steps in 1998 to encourage greater openness of PFI contractual information, with Treasury Taskforce Policy Statement No 4 on "Disclosure of Information and Consultation with Staff and Other Interested Parties". This publication, which is available on the Office of Government Commerce website, built on the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information produced by the Cabinet Office (Second Edition 1997) which said that:

> "the approach to release of information should in all cases be based on the assumption that information should be released . . . except where disclosure would not be in the public interest or would breach personal privacy or the confidences of a third party."

Departmental Payments (Euros)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many Government Departments will, during the next 12 months, be paying costs for European services in euros. [33558]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

If a supplier wishes to invoice a Government Department in euro it can do. The Government Department does not take the exchange risk. The euro is treated just like any other major international currency.

Civil Servants

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of senior civil servants have held civil service posts based outside London. [32907]

Mr. Leslie: The information is not available in the form requested.

At 1 April 2001, 39.9 per cent. of senior civil service posts were based outside London. Data are not collected centrally on the numbers of senior civil servants who have worked outside London in the past.

Ministerial Guidance (Energy Industry)

Tom Brake: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what guidance has been given by his Department to Government Departments and agencies since May 1997 with respect to *(a)* contacts between civil servants and representatives from, *(b)* sponsorship of Government Departments or events by, *(c)* secondees working within Government Departments from and *(d)* secondees from Government Departments to (i) BP, (ii) Shell, (iii) Exxon-Mobil, (iv) Enron, (v) Conoco, (vi) Texaco and (vii) TotalFinaElf; on what dates the guidance was issued; and if he will place related documentation in the Library; [33222]

(2) what guidance has been given by his Department to Government Departments and agencies since May 1997 with respect to civil servants seeking employment within *(a)* BP, *(b)* Shell, *(c)* Exxon-Mobil, *(d)* Enron, *(e)* Conoco, *(f)* Texaco and *(g)* TotalFinaElf; when the guidance was issued; and if he will place related documentation in the Library. [33221]

Mr. Leslie: Civil servants on secondment to the private and public sectors continue to be civil servants and are, therefore, governed by the requirements of the Civil Service Code. Individuals from the private and public sectors on secondment to the civil service are also subject to the requirements of the Civil Service Code for the duration of their appointment. Individuals are advised of the terms of their secondment in their letter of appointment.

Civil servants wishing to take up employment outside the civil service are subject to the requirements of the Business Appointment Rules which are set out in full in the Civil Service Management Code.

The Directory of Civil Service Guidance sets out guidance for civil servants on sponsorship of outside events and contacts with outside interest groups, including lobbyists. Copies of the Codes and Directory referred to in this answer are in the Library of the House.

PRIME MINISTER

Hammond Inquiry

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister (1) under what circumstances official inquiries can be reopened; [34119]

(2) at whose request the Hammond Inquiry concerning the application for naturalisation by Mr. S. P. Hinduja was reopened; who gave authorisation for this reopening; and on what grounds. [34120]

The Prime Minister: I have asked Sir Anthony Hammond to review his earlier conclusions as a result of further papers that have now come to light.

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what is the estimated cost to the public funds arising from the reopening of the Hammond Inquiry into the application for the naturalisation by Mr. S. P. Hinduja in 1998. [34121]

The Prime Minister: It is not possible to provide a cost until the further work has been completed. However, the cost will be minimal.

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what role was played by *(a)* Ministers, *(b)* civil servants and *(c)* special advisers in contributing to the story in the *Sunday Times*, edition 3 February, concerning the reopening of the Hammond Inquiry into the application for naturalisation by Mr. S. P. Hinduja. [34122]

The Prime Minister: My press office responded to journalists' questions and confirmed the facts.

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what the terms of reference are for the reopened Hammond Inquiry; who will be able to give evidence to this inquiry; and if he will make a statement. [34123]

The Prime Minister: Sir Anthony Hammond QC has the following terms of reference:

> "To review the conclusions of his Inquiry into what approaches were made to the Home Office in connection with applications for naturalisation made by Messers SP and GP Hinduja with a view to determining whether further papers which were not previously available to the Inquiry but which have now come to light would have materially affected the conclusions reached."

The decision on who to invite for interview is a matter for Sir Anthony Hammond.

Afghanistan

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Prime Minister what key issues he raised with the group of Afghan women on his recent visit to the region; and if he will make a statement. [30430]

The Prime Minister: I met a group of Afghan women refugees in Pakistan on 7 January. They told me about the brutal repression they had faced in Afghanistan under the Taliban and their hopes for a better life in the new Afghanistan. I also met a group of Afghan women in the UK on 31 January at Downing Street.

I also discussed the issues facing women in Afghanistan with Hamid Karzai, Chair of the Afghan Interim Administration, and Dr. Sima Samar, Vice-Chair and Minister for Women, during my visit to Afghanistan on 7 January, and their visit to London on 31 January. We agreed that education and training are key in restoring rights to women in Afghanistan. Mr. Karzai confirmed that getting girls back to school is an urgent priority for the Interim Administration.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Assessment

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he takes to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of chief constables and police authorities. [30214]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 January 2002]:* The Police Act 1996 requires Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary to inspect and report on the efficiency and effectiveness of every police force in England and Wales. Where an inspection finds that a force is not efficient or effective, or is at risk of becoming so, the Home Secretary is empowered to require specific measures to be taken by the police authority.

Under the Local Government Act 1999 police authorities are required to secure continuous improvement in the way in which their functions are exercised. Where the Secretary of State is satisfied that an authority is failing in its duties under the Act, he may direct the authority to take such action as he considers necessary.

The White Paper "Policing a New Century" (CM 5326) set out the Government's intention to introduce a National Policing Plan, three year plans for police authorities, and a framework of Regulations, codes of practice and guidance. These and other measures are currently before Parliament in the Police Reform Bill. The new Standards Unit will also have a key role in performance and spreading best practice in the light of the proposed changes.

Police Service (Devon and Cornwall)

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many special constables there were in Devon and Cornwall constabulary in *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* 1997; and what the latest available figure is; [17274]

(2) how many special constables have left Devon and Cornwall Constabulary since 1997; how many have been recruited since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [17275]

Mr. Denham: Since 1997, 752 special constables have been recruited to Devon and Cornwall constabulary and 859 have left.

Annual strength figures for the specified years are set out in the table:

	Strength
December 1992	946
March 1997	1,148
March 2001	804

Source:

Figures for December 1992 provided by HMIC. Figures for March 1997 and 2001 provided by RDS.

Home Office-funded research into the premature wastage of special constables, completed last year, found that the primary reasons for leaving were often external to the service. However, the research identified some underlying management factors contributing to the decision to resign.

Recommendations aimed at reducing the wastage included making improvements to: the management structure within which specials operate; the quality of training provided locally; the flexibility of duties and hours offered and to local efforts to monitor and prevent wastage.

The Government are committed to increasing the special constabulary and as part of the police reform process we are looking at radical improvements in the management, welfare and deployment of special constables.

Fingerprinting

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many fingerprint experts have had training to deal with the non-numeric standard. [16954]

Mr. Denham: All registered fingerprint experts are trained to be capable of dealing with the non-numeric standard. There are currently 1,470 police fingerprint experts on the fingerprint register in England and Wales.

As part of the change to the evidential standard, the training programme for all fingerprint experts in England and Wales has been revised. All new fingerprint officers undergo the new modular training programme which incorporates the change from the previous 16 point standard. All fingerprint experts trained prior to 11 June have been made aware of these issues through their local bureau trainers.

Metropolitan Police

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Government plans to increase the number of officers in the Metropolitan police. [18726]

Mr. Denham: The Government are committed to increasing police numbers and have set up the Crime Fighting Fund (CFF) to enable forces to recruit 9,000 officers over and above previous plans in the three years to March 2003.

The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) has been allocated 2,044 recruits over the three years of the CFF. The number of police officers in the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) is the responsibility of the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) within funding limits defined by government grant and council tax precept set by the Mayor and Greater London Assembly. The mayor has indicated that he proposes to increase the police precept to secure a significant increase in the total number of police officers in London. The actual number will depend on the result of the budget process within the MPA and GLA.

I am advised by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis MPS that police officer recruitment to the Metropolitan police is at an all-time high with an average of over 1,100 applications received a month.

The MPS has also benefited from the Home Office funded National Recruitment Campaign, from the provision of free rail-travel within a 70-mile radius of London and from the last year's £3,327 increase in London Allowance for officers recruited on or after 1 September 1994 and not in receipt of housing allowance.

In addition, Metropolitan Police Officers will benefit from the starter home initiative through which about 550 London police officers and support staff will be helped to buy a first home over the next three years.

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many officers there are in the Metropolitan police; what the budgeted work force target is; and what the figures are for detective officers. [20390]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 5 December 2001]*: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the budgeted work force total for 2001–02 is 26,254 and on 31 December 2001 the actual strength of the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) was 25,994.

I am also told that the budgeted work force total for detectives for 2001–02 is 5,439 and the actual detective strength on 31 December 2001 was 4,228. The MPS is actively recruiting towards its budgeted work force total.

Police White Paper

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has received from members of the police force regarding the Home Office White Paper; and how many of these express concerns about the impact on retention and recruitment in the police force. [24265]

Mr. Denham: The White Paper invited comments by 21 January 2001. We received approximately 1,100 representations, of which the vast majority were from police officers. We are still considering representations and will place a summary in the Library.

Police Officers

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy on the award of early pensions on medical grounds to serving police officers. [25440]

Mr. Denham: Last month the Police Negotiating Board agreed in principle ways to deliver a fair and more consistent approach towards early retirement due to ill health, so that forces can ensure wherever possible that officers continue in employment where they are capable of performing sufficient duties to make their retention operationally justifiable. This should enable forces to reduce the level of ill-health retirement still further and match the performance of the best quartile of forces by 2005.

In the White Paper the Government also announced that they will establish a national occupational health strategy for the police service, which should assist forces to manage cases of ill health more effectively at the outset.

Revenue Support Grant

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the category and amount of each item of funding outside the revenue support grant which his Department made available to *(a)* Westminster city council and *(b)* Kensington and Chelsea in (i) 2000–01 and (ii) 2001–02. [26247]

Angela Eagle: The information is given in the table. The grants included are those paid solely to the councils except in the case of Drug Action Teams, the Crime Reduction Programme and the Partnership Development Fund. In those cases, the council is a member of a partnership and funding is allocated to one or more of the partners, for the benefit of the partnership as a whole.

£

	2000–01		*2001–02*[1]	
	Kensington and Chelsea	*Westminster*	*Kensington and Chelsea*	*Westminster*
Drug Action Teams				
Development Grant	35,782	37,484	35,782	37,484
Communities Against Drugs	—	—	31,497	31,497
Crime Reduction Programme and Partnership Development Fund	176,582	384,149	—	1,214,250
Adult and Family Asylum Seekers and Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking children	11,242,108	12,751,486	—	—
Referral Order Pilots	59,791	62,000	62,000	62,000
Communities Against Drugs	—	—	199,400	277,800

[1] Estimated

Child Curfew Orders

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which the issue of child curfew orders is appropriate. [28414]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 18 January 2002]:* We are ready to consider applications from local authorities or the police to set up local child curfews where:

> an area has been identified which has a particular problem of antisocial or criminal behaviour at night by unsupervised under 16-year-olds
>
> the local community has been consulted, in the way set out by statute
>
> the proposed curfew is necessary and proportionate to prevent crime and disorder.

Correspondence

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what target has been set for responding to hon. Members' letters to the Immigration Department. [31579]

Angela Eagle: The Home Office's published service delivery agreement for 2001–04 commits all Home Office Directorates, including the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND), to replying to 95 per cent. of public correspondence within 20 working days and 95 per cent. of ministerial correspondence within 15 working days by the end of 2001–02. Improving performance against published targets for dealing with correspondence is recognised as a priority for IND as part of the wider Home Office programme to modernise business processes and information management.

IND has dedicated resources to improve the service provided to MPs on casework related correspondence.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to provide a substantive reply to the letter of 25 September from the hon. Member for Christchurch about alcohol and under-age drinkers. [28425]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 18 January 2002]:* I wrote to the hon. Member, in reply to his letter, on 30 January 2002.

Crime (Coventry)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to combat gang violence and the gang culture in young people *(a)* in Coventry and *(b)* in the UK. [28883]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* Reducing all aspects of youth crime, including gang violence where this occurs, is a key priority within the Government's crime reduction programme. Our approach in all areas is to support the police, crime reduction partnerships and the Youth Offending Teams in developing effective local solutions. In addition, we have introduced a wide programme across Government including Youth Inclusion Programmes and Summer Splash schemes.

The Youth Inclusion Programme in Coventry includes organised intensive workshops and group discussions about group/peers behaviour, designed to provide young people with opportunity to voice their concerns and experiences of gang culture.

Burglary

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the detection rate for offences of burglary. [30110]

Mr. Denham: The detection rates for all recorded crimes of burglary, and the numbers of recorded burglaries, for the last four years for England and Wales as a whole are given in the table.

	Detection rate (percentage)	*Number of recorded burglaries*
1997	23	1,015,075
1998–99[1]	19	953,184
1999–2000[2]	13	906,468
2000–01	12	836,027

[1] There was a change in the counting rules for recorded crime on 1 April 1998 which placed a greater emphasis on counting crimes in terms of numbers of victims. Numbers of recorded crimes and detection rates after this date are therefore not directly comparable with previous years.

[2] There was a change in the rules for counting detections in April 1999, the new instructions providing more precise and rigorous criteria for securing a detection, with the underlying emphasis on the successful result of a police investigation. For example, detections obtained by the interview of a convicted prisoner were no longer included. Numbers of detections before and after this date are not directly comparable.

Jamie Nicol Connolly

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) for what reason Jamie Nicol Connolly was refused entry to the United Kingdom at Heathrow on 26 October 2001; and if he will make a statement; [31071]

(2) what representations he has received regarding the refusal to allow Jamie Nicol Connolly from Canada leave to enter the United Kingdom at Heathrow on 26 October 2001; and if he will make a statement. [31070]

Angela Eagle: I wrote to the hon. Member on 5 February 2002 about this matter.

Voluntary Sector Compact

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the outcome of the second annual meeting to review the compact on relations between the Government and the voluntary and community sector. [34086]

Angela Eagle: The second annual meeting to review the compact took place on 29 October 2001. A report of the meeting has been placed in the Library.

I am pleased to say that both the sector and Government welcomed progress made on developing the compact. The focus of Government and sector activities since the launch of the national compact in November 1998 has been the development of the five underpinning codes of good practice on funding; consultation and policy appraisal; black and minority ethnic organisations, and volunteering and community groups.

The annual review meeting recognised and agreed that implementation of compact principles and the spreading of good practice must be the future focus of compact activities. Implementation will be about ensuring that there is a practical and positive impact on Government/sector relations at all levels, particularly at local and community level. There is more to do and the sector and Government will need to continue to work in partnership to achieve our shared aims.

Animal Procedures Committee

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he proposes to reappoint Professor Michael Banner as Chairman of the Animal Procedures Committee. [34087]

Angela Eagle: Professor Banner completed his first four year term as Chairman of the Animal Procedures Committee on 31 January 2002. I am grateful to him for his work in leading this important committee, and am pleased that he has accepted another four year term as Chairman.

National Identity Card

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the cost of introducing a national identity card. [32078]

Mr. Blunkett: I have made no estimate of the cost of introducing a national identity card.

The Government are considering whether a universal card which allowed people to prove their identity more easily and provided a simple way to access a range of public services would be beneficial. Such an entitlement card scheme could also help to combat illegal working and could reduce fraud against individuals, public services and the private sector.

In reply to another question from my hon. Friend today, I have announced that the Government intend to publish a consultation paper in the spring or early summer. Work on the cost of an entitlement card scheme will be progressed in the run up to the publication of the consultation paper. This work is not yet sufficiently developed to make an estimate of costs.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received on a national identity card. [32077]

Mr. Blunkett: After the terrorist atrocities in the United States of America on 11 September, the issue of introducing an identity card scheme was raised by many people. I have received over 600 letters from right hon. and hon. Members and members of the public on identity cards since September 2001.

At the time the Government said that we were not planning to introduce an identity card scheme as part of our response to the events of 11 September, but that the policy was being kept under review. We said that we were considering whether a universal entitlement card which would allow people to prove their identity more easily and provide a simple way to access public services would be beneficial. We also said that a scheme could help to combat illegal working and it could also reduce fraud against individuals, public services and the private sector.

We have made it clear that the introduction of an entitlement card would be a major step and that we will not proceed without consulting widely and considering all the views expressed very carefully.

There are many arguments—both philosophical and practical—for and against a scheme. One of the options which the Government have already ruled out is making the failure to carry an entitlement card an offence. However there are a range of other issues to explore and we intend to publish a consultation paper in the spring or early summer. This will cover the whole issue of identity fraud and a range of possible responses in the short, medium and long-term including the advantages and disadvantages of an entitlement card scheme—but also other measures which might be taken to improve the security of existing forms of identification issued by the Government.

In order to ensure that the paper will be balanced and comprehensive and present to the public as full a picture as possible, the Government wish to discuss its emerging ideas with interested parties prior to publication.

Murder Trial Witnesses

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the practice is in regard to the provision of holidays and other benefits given to witnesses in murder trials by the *(a)* police and *(b)* prosecuting authorities. [32195]

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the practice is in regard to the provision of holidays and other benefits given to witnesses in murder trials by the *(a)* police and *(b)* prosecuting authorities. [32194]

The Solicitor-General: I have been asked to reply.

There is no distinct provision for holidays or other benefits given to witnesses in murder trials by the police or prosecuting authorities.

However, where the court necessarily lists a case for trial when a witness is due to be on holiday then some provision can be made to compensate the witness for any loss incurred by way of a financial loss allowance. Alternatively, arrangements can be made to return a witness from holiday to attend court.

Air-guns

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from ACPO regarding the Brocock Air Cartridge pistol; and what action he has taken. [31489]

Mr. Denham: The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) drew particular attention to the problems associated with this type of air weapon last July when they asked for the definition of "readily converted" under the terms of section 1(6) of the Firearms Act 1982 to be revised. But, this section only applies to imitation firearms and could not be used in respect of air cartridge pistols which are already defined as firearms (although not subject to certification). We have been consulting further with the Forensic Science Service who in turn have been liaising with the police in order to establish the full extent and nature of the problem. This has confirmed the ease with which these weapons can be converted to fire cartridge ammunition. This is wholly unacceptable and the company concerned has decided not to import these weapons pending a fully informed decision on what should be done either by way of further modification to the weapons or changes in existing controls.

People Trafficking

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his plans to legislate on trafficking people; and if the Government will incorporate the definition set out in the European framework. [31638]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Effective legislation to criminalise and punish trafficking in human beings is an essential component of any strategy to tackle this crime. Such a strategy must also encompass effective enforcement, alongside support and assistance for victims, prevention and education.

United Kingdom Ministers were among the first to sign the Trafficking Protocol to the United Nations Convention on Transnational Organised Crime and are committed to implementing its measures, one of which is the introduction of trafficking offences. The European Union Framework Decision on trafficking in human beings has been provisionally agreed by the Justice and Home Affairs Council and will be formally adopted by the Council as a legally binding document in the near future.

We will introduce legislation on the trafficking offences as soon as parliamentary time permits and will ensure that it meets the requirements necessary to implement the European Union Framework Decision.

Police Training (Street Patrols)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the minimum time period for elementary training of a police recruit before he or she is permitted to take part in a street patrol. [30454]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 29 January 2002]*: Police recruits undertake supervised street patrol with a tutor constable on completion of their initial training, normally after 20 weeks' service and follows their foundation training course (15 weeks at National Police Training, and 18 weeks at Hendon for the Metropolitan police). This training equips recruits with the knowledge and skills to perform the full range of police duties, and is consolidated through further training in force during the remainder of the probationary period of two years. Most recruits are considered ready for unsupervised street patrol after 32 weeks' service.

Football

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answers of 25 January 2002 of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn), *Official Report*, column 1112W, on football, if he will draw the attention of the Football Association to the Football (Disorder) Act 2000 in respect of its application to footballers and club officials; and if he will make a statement. [32080]

Mr. Denham: It is for the police and courts to enforce the measures introduced by the Football (Disorder) Act 2000 and the responsibility of the football authorities to determine whether or not to impose sporting sanctions in respect of player misbehaviour. The football authorities are aware that players are not exempt from the law of the land.

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional security measures are planned by his Department to deter and detect theft and fraud. [31800]

Angela Eagle: The Home Office has a wide ranging set of procedures and/or plans to deter and detect theft and fraud:

Fraud Strategy

An updated Home Office Fraud Strategy, Policy and Response Plan is in the final stages of consultation before being promulgated across the Office.

Existing advice and guidance on fraud and theft is formally documented.

Whistle-blowing

A documented departmental policy already exists and conforms to Cabinet Office guidance.

Risk Management

A Home Office Risk Management Team is now firmly established.

It is facilitating a risk management programme across the office.

Annual Systems Assurance Statements (ASAS)

A system of annual assurance statements operates with the purpose of providing an assurance to the Departmental Accounting Officer (DAO) from delegated budget holders on the adequacy and effectiveness of their systems of internal financial control.

As part of ASAS 2001 Directors signed up to specific statements on counter-fraud and corporate governance and risk management, respectively.

Corporate Governance Assurance Statements (CGAS)

CGAS reports are provided to the DAO by the Accounting Officers (AOs) of the Prison Service, Forensic Science Service and the Passport Records Agency.

Internal Control—Audit and Assurance Unit (AAU)

The Chief Internal Auditor provides an assurance to the DAO on the corporate governance framework and systems of internal control in the financial and operational systems across the wider Home Office through the internal audit programme which is based on an analysis of risk and priority.

In undertaking this work auditors consider the risk of fraud and report on this, as appropriate.

A high proportion of internal audit resource is dedicated to the Home Office's key financial systems and the Department's Agencies and NDPBs.

Internal Control—Other

Staff are expected to comply with the Finance Manual and other procedures that are issued by Accounts Branch from time to time.

Members of staff are not allowed to accept gifts, hospitality or benefits in kind as these could lead to a perception of a conflict of interest and/or of impropriety and guidance on this is available in the Staff Handbook.

Service level agreements between Directors/Chief Executives and the Departmental Security Officer underline the importance of protecting valuable assets and this is reinforced through security awareness training and publicity campaigns.

Staff are encouraged to lock away items such as lap-tops, mobile telephones and personal valuables.

Where there are guard patrols out of hours, guards are asked to check for unprotected assets and make them safe. This is reinforced by random sweeps by the Departmental Security Unit.

Authority to remove equipment is given by Heads of Unit and checked on exit by guards. There are also random checks of vehicles on exit.

Departmental Salary Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit in 2001–02 will be accounted for by salary costs and pension contributions. [32002]

Angela Eagle: Following the winter supplementary estimate, the total departmental expenditure limit for the Home Office stood at £9,862,267,000.

Salary and pension costs accounted for £1,702,987,000 or 17.25 per cent. of the department expenditure limit.

Passports

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many increases there have been in the cost of passports in the past 10 years; and what those increases have been. [32244]

Angela Eagle: There have been four increases to the cost of passports in the past 10 years. In November 1992, March 1998, December 1999 and the last recent increase in January of this year. The increases are as follows:

Fee increase November 1992

The adult fee increased by £3 from £15 to £18.

The child fee also increased by £3 from £15 to £18, but with a free renewal provided after five years.

Fee increase March 1998

The adult fee increased by £3 to £21.

The child fee became £11 for a five year issue, replacing the £18 fee for a 10 year issue which was then renewed free of charge after five years.

Amendments increased by £6 to £11.

Jumbo passports increased by £4 to £31.

An additional counter fee of £10 was introduced.

Fee increase December 1999

The adult fee increased by £7 to £28.

The child fee increased by £3.80 to £14.80 and became compulsory.

Amendments increased by £6 to £17.

Jumbo passports increased by £7 to £38.

The additional counter fee increased by £2 to £12.

Fee increase January 2002

The adult fee increased by £2 to £30.

The child fee increased by £1.20 to £16.

Amendments increased by £1 to £18.

Jumbo passports increased by £2 to £40.

The additional counter fee increased by £3 to £15.

The fee for a collective passport, for organised trips for schools and youth groups increased by £2 to £42.

Two new services were also introduced in January of this year. A one week guaranteed service now costs an additional £15 and a same day premium service, an additional £30.

Prison Service

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether additional financial commitments for the Prison Service resulting from the Prison Service pay review will be met through additional central Government funding; and if he will make a statement. [32551]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* This award will be contained within existing departmental expenditure limits. It will be funded by an adjustment to current Prison Service spending plans in the latter part of 2001–02 and during 2002–03. For example, some maintenance of the prison estate will be re-scheduled to take place later. Efficiency savings made from the wider Home Office budget will also contribute to the cost. Prison Service funding for 2003–04 onwards will be determined by the 2002 Spending Review process.

Non-Human Primates

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in *(a)* establishing an EU register of non-human primates in breeding, supply and research establishments and *(b)* enforcing minimum standards of housing and care across member states; and if he will make a statement. [32629]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 4 January 2002]:* We understand that the European Commission has no plans at present to establish such a register.

The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate monitors the implementation of minimum standards, as set out in published codes of practice, for the housing and care of animals bred, supplied and used for scientific procedures in designated establishments in Great Britain. Standards in designated Northern Ireland establishments are similarly monitored under separate inspection arrangements.

We are unable to comment on enforcement of minimum standards of housing and care in European Union (EU) states other than the United Kingdom, (UK) as set out in Annexe A of Directive 86/609/EEC, as that is not the responsibility of the UK Government.

The Home Office is playing a leading role in discussions within the Council of Europe that are expected to determine future, improved European provisions for the accommodation of animals used for experimental and other scientific purposes.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what steps have been taken to ensure that non-designated overseas breeding and supply establishments of non-human primates supplying the UK are complying with the Code of Practice for the Housing and Care of Animals in Designated Breeding and Supply Establishments; and if he will make a statement; [32630]

(2) how often non-designated overseas breeding and supply establishments of non-human primates supplying the UK are inspected in person by members of the Home Office Inspectorate; and if he will make a statement; [32631]

(3) how many wild-caught non-human primates, by *(a)* species and *(b)* purpose of procedure, are in UK facilities designated under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986; and if he will make a statement. [32628]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* The Home Office does not maintain a register of stock held at designated establishments, but there are no current project licences in force for the use of wild caught non-human primates under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986.

Non-designated overseas breeding and supply establishments do not comply fully with the provisions of the United Kingdom (UK) Code of Practice, which are considered by many to be the most stringent in the world. Overseas breeders who wish to supply animals for use in the United Kingdom are, however, expected to comply with the guidelines issued by the International Primate Society, and are visited by the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate, both prior to acceptance to supply non-human primates for use in the United Kingdom, and periodically thereafter.

Two sets of visits to particular overseas breeding and supply establishments were undertaken in the period October to December 2001. In addition all establishments currently supplying the UK have been visited during the last three years.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what grounds the ban on the use of great apes in research and testing in the UK was made; and if he will make a statement. [32632]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 4 January 2002]:* In announcing, in November 1997, that the Government would not allow the future use of great apes (chimpanzees, gorillas, pygmy gorillas, and orang-utans) as laboratory animals, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary explained that this was a matter of morality. The cognitive and behavioural characteristics and qualities of these animals are such that it is unethical to treat them as expendable for research.

This policy was set out in the Supplementary Note to the Home Secretary's response to the Animal Procedures Committee interim report on the review of the operation of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. Copies of this document were deposited in the Library.

Immigration Appeals

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the maximum delay he allows between the Secretary of State receiving appeal decisions under rule 15(2) and 16(5), and 18(9A) and 19(6) amended by SI 4014 (L.31) 2001 and serving them on the appellants. [27186]

Angela Eagle: We anticipate that almost all determinations received by the Home Office under these rules will be served within 48 hours. The remainder will be served within a further period which would exceed six weeks only in exceptional circumstances.

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the new arrangements for service of appeal decisions under rules 15(2), 16(5), 18(9A) and 19(6) will come into operation. [27188]

Angela Eagle: The new arrangements came into operation on 7 January 2002.

Exceptional Leave to Remain

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to come to a decision on the recommendation of the adjudicator on 17 October 2000, relating to the possibility of exceptional leave to remain being given to Mr. Mustaf Uka, his wife and children (Home Office Reference U48661 and Port Reference BDD/00/10800). [32261]

Angela Eagle: It is most regrettable that this case was not actioned earlier and that Mr. Uka's solicitor did not receive responses to their correspondence. A caseworker will now make a decision in this case as a matter of priority and notify the solicitor accordingly.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals were granted exceptional leave to remain in the UK in 2001. [29688]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* Between January and September 2001, inclusive, 15,060 grants of exceptional leave to remain were made. This figure refers to principal applicants only, and is provisional. Annual figures for 2001 are not yet available.

Information on asylum applications and initial decisions are published quarterly. The next publication will present data for the final quarter of 2001, and will be available from 28 February 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Immigration Service Personnel

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what disciplinary measures are in place for Immigration Service personnel who do not treat visa applicants with a basic level of courtesy; and if he will make a statement. [31227]

Angela Eagle: The Home Office, including the Immigration and Nationality Directorate, has clear procedures to be followed whenever there is an allegation of misconduct.

High standards of courtesy and professionalism are expected of all Immigration Service staff when carrying out official duties. Any complaint that there has been a failure to meet these requirements is treated very seriously, and if substantiated could result in disciplinary action.

The Immigration Service Complaints Unit has national responsibility for arranging and overseeing the formal investigation of allegations of misconduct or inefficiency made against Immigration Service personnel or other staff contracted to carry out work on behalf of the service. Written allegations of discourtesy are investigated in accordance with the formal complaint procedures. Verbal complaints about the conduct of staff are normally dealt with on the spot by a supervising officer.

The formal complaint procedures are monitored by the Complaints Audit Committee (CAC), an independent body appointed by the Immigration Minister.

Asylum Accommodation Centres

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment was made of the advantages and disadvantages of *(a)* rural and *(b)* urban sites for the proposed asylum accommodation centres. [31733]

Angela Eagle: No final decisions have been taken on the locations of any trial accommodation centres and an assessment of each potential site on its individual merits will be made in due course.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact on local public services, with specific reference to *(a)* health and *(b)* police, of the construction of a new asylum accommodation centre. [31734]

Angela Eagle: In making final decisions on preferred sites, we will take all the relevant factors into account including those to which the hon. Member refers. These assessments have not yet been made.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when work began on identifying the possible sites for the proposed asylum accommodation centres. [31729]

Angela Eagle: The Home Office began to identify possible sites for the trial centres following my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary's statement to the House on 29 October 2001.

Visas

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements are made for members of the public to visit the offices handling visa applications. [31954]

Angela Eagle: The Immigration and Nationality Public Enquiry Office based in Croydon provides a fast track service for all straightforward applications for further leave and indefinite leave to remain combined with an urgent return of passport facility. All callers are seen on the day. Three other regional inquiry offices based in Liverpool, Birmingham and Glasgow offer a more restricted service in terms of opening hours and the type of applications they are able to consider.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will announce to Parliament when the average time taken for completing applications for student visas has reached his target figure of three weeks. [31958]

Angela Eagle: We aim to decide 70 per cent. of all new general and settlement applications within three weeks. We are working hard to achieve this as soon as possible. Information on the Immigration Nationality Directorate website will be regularly updated to reflect the current position. This will also be included in information provided by the Immigration and Nationality Enquiry Bureau and in letters acknowledging receipt of applications.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what changes are being introduced to improve the administration of the issuing of student visas; [31952]

(2) what assessment has been made of the extra time required to reduce the backlog of work in which the Department processes one year student visas. [31957]

Angela Eagle: We are making best use of current resources and looking at options for additional staff in order to reduce the time taken to process new general immigration cases and to reduce the backlog of such cases, including those made by overseas nationals who are studying in the United Kingdom. We aim to reduce the turnaround time for new straightforward applications to three weeks as soon as possible.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will issue guidance to staff dealing with student visas on the importance of providing a fast, efficient and courteous service. [31951]

Angela Eagle: All staff are aware of the need to carry out their duties in a professional manner. Performance is continually monitored by management who would take appropriate action to remedy any weaknesses. Any allegations of inefficiency or discourtesy will be fully investigated.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what training is given to staff who deal directly with the public who visit the visa issuing office. [31953]

Angela Eagle: All staff within the Immigration and Nationality Directorate posted to the Public Enquiry Office in Croydon receive induction training on joining the service, plus a further two weeks of immigration rules based modular training. Additionally, during their initial six to eight weeks they are mentored by experienced public counter officers. All elements of the training focus on providing a fast, fair and professional service to the public.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the processing of one year student visas will achieve the target of completion in three weeks for 70 per cent. of applications. [31956]

Angela Eagle: As a result of the measures being taken we expect significant progress to have been made in deciding 70 per cent. of all new immigration applications within three weeks by the spring.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 18 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 550–51W, on visas, how he will calculate the average waiting time to process a one year student visa when applications are decided within three weeks. [32083]

Angela Eagle: We would expect the majority of student applications to be decided within three weeks. However, we are introducing a casework information database which, when fully operational, will enable us to monitor our performance on general immigration casework more effectively.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what training staff receive in answering telephone queries on visa applications. [31955]

Angela Eagle: Staff attend a 10-day training course in the Immigration Rules before joining the Immigration and Nationality Enquiry Bureau (INEB). They then join a mentoring programme in INEB where they progress from listening to calls with experienced members of staff to taking a number of calls with a mentor listening in.

When their mentor and the new agent feel they are ready they are listened in to by a senior mentor and their line manager before they are allowed to take calls without another member of staff listening in. The length of time this takes varies from person to person and can take between 10 days and several weeks. Also, agents receive regular mentoring and training on all aspects of the Immigration Rules throughout their time in INEB.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans NASS has to exclude the children of asylum seekers from mainstream education; and if he will make a statement. [31944]

Angela Eagle: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said in his statement to the House on 29 October that the new Accommodation Centres would offer education facilities. We are working with key stakeholders to establish the range of such facilities that will be available to children in the trial centres.

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for how long NASS placed asylum seekers in the Landmark Tower buildings in Liverpool. [31942]

Angela Eagle: The National Asylum Support Services has one contract with the Landmark Company and this came into effect on 3 April 2000. Asylum seekers were dispersed to the Landmark Tower buildings from 3 April 2000 but dispersals to that location were suspended in early July 2001 and have not yet resumed.

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time has been over the last six months that NASS has taken to respond to *(a)* telephone inquiries and *(b)* written inquiries on applications for asylum. [31940]

Angela Eagle: The National Asylum Support Service deals with applications for support from asylum seekers.

The information requested is not currently available.

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time has been over the last six months that NASS has taken to process a claim for emergency accommodation under section 98 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. [31941]

Angela Eagle: National Asylum Support Service (NASS) does not process claims for emergency accommodation. Emergency accommodation is provided by the voluntary sector agencies under contract to NASS.

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans NASS has to extend the deadline for appeal against a NASS decision to *(a)* refuse and *(b)* withdraw support from asylum seekers. [31943]

Angela Eagle: Following representations from the Chief Asylum Support Adjudicator, the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) decided to review the Asylum Support Appeals (Procedure) Rules 2000. No timetable has yet been set for this review, but we hope to complete it this year.

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum applicants who have been offered dispersal placements outside London have declined the offer of support in each of the last six months. [31948]

Angela Eagle: The information requested is not available.

It is not currently possible to track the number of National Asylum Support Service (NASS) cases where the asylum seeker has refused the offer of accommodation in the cluster areas.

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many unsuccessful asylum applicants have been removed in each of the last six calendar months. [31947]

Angela Eagle: The number of asylum seekers who were removed from the United Kingdom in the six months to September 2001 is given in the table. Information more recent than September is not yet available.

Month	*Total asylum seekers*[1] *removed*[2,3]	*Principal applicants removed*[2,3]	*Dependants removed*[2,3]
April	830	780	55
May	915	870	45
June	840	730	115
July	920	795	125
August	930	835	100
September	890	760	135

[1] Persons who had sought asylum at some point.

[2] Provisional figures, rounded to the nearest five. Figures may not sum due to rounding.

[1] Includes persons departing 'voluntarily' after enforcement action had been initiated against them and persons leaving under the Assisted Voluntary Returns Programmes run by the International Organisation of Migration (IOM).

Information on the number of asylum removals in the fourth quarter (October to December) of 2001 will be published on 28 February 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time has been over the last six months that NASS has taken to process an application for asylum; and if he will make a statement. [31939]

Angela Eagle: The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) deals with applications for support from asylum seekers. The information requested is currently unavailable. A project is currently under way to set up a procedure for calculating the time taken by NASS to process applications.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to involve asylum-seeking children and young people in the consultation on the forthcoming asylum White Paper. [31824]

Angela Eagle: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan) on 4 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 67W.

Citizenship Application

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the application for citizenship made by Mrs. Mehar of Southend, which was acknowledged by the IND of 28 February 2001, Reference M1103724CQ, to be determined; and if he will invite the IND to remove from such acknowledgments the phrase passed to a case worker who will contact you shortly. [32262]

Angela Eagle: Mrs. Mehar's application was received on 15 December 2000. It has now reached its turn for consideration and she has been asked to submit documentary evidence to confirm her eligibility for naturalisation as a British citizen. Once consideration has begun, decisions are normally made within six months.

The wording of the acknowledgment letter has already been amended to reflect changes in the way naturalisation cases are handled.

Immigration Office, Croydon

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department If he will make a statement on the delays involved in the treatment of post received at the Immigration Office, Croydon. [30492]

Angela Eagle: We aim to decide 70 per cent. of all new general and settlement cases within three weeks and met this for the first half of 2001. But because of the exceptionally high number of applications received and the introduction of process changes, it has recently been taking up to eight weeks to consider new applications. We are working to reduce this to three weeks or less as soon as possible.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Investors in People

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent consultations she has held with the Learning and Skills Council and other interested parties concerning the future financing and delivery of Investors in People. [30810]

John Healey *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* There is regular on-going consultation between my Department, the Learning and Skills Council, Small Business Service and Investors in People (IiP) UK about the future financing and delivery of Investors in People.

On 21 January 2002, in accordance with the Government's policy of conducting quinquennial reviews of all non-departmental public bodies, my Department started a review of Investors in People (IiP) UK. Following Cabinet Office guidelines, the terms of reference for the first stage of the review are:

> to review the role and functions of Investors in People UK as outlined in its remit letter, and the efficiency and effectiveness with which they have been carried out, and how these functions contribute to the delivery of wider DfES and Government objectives.
>
> to consider the continuing relevance and likely need for these functions in the future and whether there is a need for any reductions or expansion of these functions.
>
> to consider whether continued non-departmental public body status is the best way of delivering these functions or whether some, or all, of the functions could be delivered more efficiently and effectively through other means eg privatisation, contracting out, rationalisation or merger with other bodies.
>
> to consider what IiP UK's customers, end users of the Standard and other key stakeholders think about its role, performance and responsiveness to their needs.

We welcome comments on those matters to be covered by the review from all those with an interest in the work of IiP UK. Comments which may be made public unless respondents specifically request otherwise, should be sent by 8 March 2002 to:

Jan Gibbons
Department for Education and Skills
W8c Moorfoot
Sheffield S1 4PQ
Or by e-mail to janice.gibbons@dfes.gsi.gov.uk

I have asked that the first stage of the review should be completed by spring 2002.

Schools (Harwich)

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many new primary and secondary schools were opened in the Harwich constituency between 1979 and 1997; and what proposals have been made for building new schools within the Harwich constituency since 1997. [30982]

John Healey: Reliable information is not available on the number of new primary and secondary maintained schools opened prior to 1996. Since 1996, proposals have been made to establish one new maintained school in the Harwich constituency. The new community secondary school is expected to open on 1 September 2002 in Clacton.

We do not hold information on the building of new schools. It is for local education authorities to determine the need for additional school places in the maintained sector and, where necessary, to build or support the provision of new schools. The Department makes available capital funding for new school places; many of these are provided in existing schools.

Skills Shortages (Construction)

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of recent research by Communities Scotland on skill shortages in the construction industry; and what steps she will take to tackle such skills shortages. [31175]

John Healey: Skills policy for Scotland was devolved to the Scottish Parliament in 1999. However, the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB), which is sponsored by my Department, continues to exercise its statutory functions for Scotland as a cross-border public authority. In the first instance, it is therefore for the Board to consider, in conjunction with the Scottish Executive, how to address the findings of the report.

Temporary Classrooms

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the answer of 24 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1006W, if he will publish the latest available information on the overall floor area of temporary school accommodation in each local education authority; and if she will make a statement. [31609]

John Healey *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The data we have on temporary buildings will be appraised shortly with a view to publishing analysis later this year, to support benchmarking.

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what additional security measures are planned by her Department to deter and detect theft and fraud. [31787]

Estelle Morris: My Department takes the threat of fraud very seriously, and pursues those who attempt to perpetrate fraud against it, either internal staff or outsiders (eg contractors). This is set out clearly in the Department's "Fraud Policy Statement".

Current measures which are in place for determining and detecting theft and fraud are as set out:

(i) our Special Investigations Unit (SIU) is a specialist team which investigates cases of suspected fraud/irregularity

(ii) we have set out, in the Department's Fraud Response Plan, our strategy for dealing with the threat of fraud

(iii) the Fraud Sub Committee (a committee of the Department's Audit Committee) was set up in early 2000, to oversee the Department's Fraud Response Plan and the work of the SIU

(iv) we have a clear Whistleblowers Policy to which all staff have ready access. This enables staff, in confidence, to raise any concerns of wrongdoing

(v) the Standards of Behaviour and Departmental value which we expect all staff to practice are communicated to staff and reinforced in the Department's Fraud Policy Statement

(vi) SIU delivers a three year rolling programme of Fraud and Control Awareness to staff across the Department. This includes highlighting our anti-fraud policies, the actions that we have taken against offenders, lessons learned from cases which have been investigated, and stresses the need for sound systems of internal control as being key to combat the threat of fraud

(vii) we have a strong Internal Audit function, which promotes the delegation of risk management to operational managers, and the maintenance of risk registers as a management tool

(viii) Internal Audit is involved in programme design and project boards

(ix) the head of SIU chairs the Fraud Response Liaison Group, which provides a forum for the exchange and sharing of relevant information, and facilitates a co-ordinated approach to investigations by all interested parties.

Proposed enhancements to the current arrangements are:

(i) we are developing a Fraud Risk Assessment Strategy which will inform us as to those areas which represent the greatest threat of fraud and where resources can be targeted

(ii) SIU is to become more proactive in undertaking a programme of inspection work to detect irregularity in those areas most exposed to the risk of fraud. The results of this work will support the level of assurance given by Internal Audit to the Accounting Officer

(iii) we are forming a 'High Level Senior Management Risk Group' which will alert the board to key areas of risk, including the risk of fraud

(iv) we are in the process of reviewing the current contact procurement and management arrangements, which will include reviewing the policy for the Financial Appraisal and Monitoring of all DfES contracts in order to enhance the current contract monitoring arrangements

(v) consideration is also to be given to enhancing the current guidance to staff on contract management which will include raised awareness as to the possibility of fraud.

In our determination to prevent and detect fraud, the measures set out above have been developed over the years as we have taken on board concerns and lessons learned from past experiences.

School Computers (Pornographic Material)

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what systems are in place to monitor school computer systems for misuse by staff or students with particular reference to pornographic material; [31829]

(2) if she will make a statement on the course of action she recommends governors and headteachers should take when *(a)* a member of staff and *(b)* a student is discovered to have used school computers for viewing pornographic material. [31830]

John Healey: The monitoring of schools systems for misuse by staff or students with particular reference to pornographic material is the responsibility of the individual school. However, access to unsuitable materials is something we take very seriously and we have produced advice for schools and local education authorities on all aspects of the internet safety.

Schools deal with misuse through their normal disciplinary procedures, involving the police where appropriate. The Department ensures that information and advice is available to governors and head teaches who have to prevent access to unsuitable material and deal with any problem directly.

The Department's 'Superhighway Safety' guide includes such advice on how to monitor content and activity on the internet and take action if necessary.

Prisoners Learning and Skills Unit

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she expects the prisoners learning and skills unit to complete its review of the funding procurement and delivery of prison education. [32253]

John Healey *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The prisoners' learning and skills unit review of the funding and procurement arrangements for prison education should be completed by November 2002. The comprehensive review is designed to ensure that there are more equitable funding arrangements across the prison estate.

Student Funding

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average annual funding per student aged 16–18 is in 2001–02 in *(a)* school sixth forms, *(b)* sixth form colleges and *(c)* further education colleges; and what the average annual funding is per mature student studying for level 3 courses in colleges. [32263]

John Healey: Separate average funding figures by age and level of study are not available. However the latest estimate of the average delegated funding per sixth form student in schools for 2001–02 is £3,330. The total funding per full time equivalent student in further education sector colleges per year in 2001–02 is £3,660. A separate figure for sixth form colleges is not available. It should be noted that these figures are not directly comparable, as the FE funding figure includes total public funding allocated for further education, while the schools' figure is based only on delegated funds and excludes other funding which the school receive centrally from LEAs which impact on post-16 students. The Department intends to make more comparable funding figures available shortly.

Graduate Teacher Scheme

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how the funding for the graduate teacher scheme has been allocated; how many places are being provided on the scheme; and how many people have applied for the scheme. [32636]

Mr. Timms: For information on how graduate teacher programme places are allocated, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) on 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 290W.

In 2000–01, there were 1,507 new entrants to the graduate teacher programme. In 2001–02, 2,250 fully funded places are available. These attract grants of up to £4,000 towards training costs and of up to £13,000 towards the trainee's salary costs. In addition to that, over 1,000 places with funding of up to £4,000 each are being offered this year to schools willing to meet trainees' salary costs from their own budgets. In the current academic year to date, the Teacher Training Agency has received a total of 3,307 applications for places on the graduate teacher programme, 2,350 of which have been approved.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when schools were given details of the number of places on the graduate teacher scheme. [32637]

Mr. Timms: The Teacher Training Agency informs schools of the likely number of graduate teacher programme places that will be available in each of the three annual allocations rounds approximately six weeks before the deadline for submission of applications.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the number of teachers taken on by schools who have not received funding under the graduate teacher scheme. [32639]

Mr. Timms: Information on the number of unqualified teachers whose schools are not receiving funding under the graduate teacher programme is not collected centrally. There is no requirement that schools should appoint prospective trainees before receiving confirmation that a place on the programme will be offered.

Trailblazer Scheme

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what consultation he has with *(a)* the Department of Trade and Industry and *(b)* regional development agencies when determining Trailblazer status. [32852]

John Healey: A representative from the Department of Trade and Industry was part of an interdepartmental shortlisting panel selection workshop last December in Sheffield, where a consensus was reached on all 31 expressions of interest received for Trailblazer status.

The regional development agencies were not consulted during the selection process. An economic analysis of the skill needs of each sector was available to the shortlisting panel.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which sector skills councils were awarded Trailblazer status; and what is the *(a)* budget and *(b)* location of each. [32854]

John Healey: From the 31 expressions of interest received, the following five sectors were invited to form a Trailblazer Sector Skills Council:

Apparel, footwear and textile

Audio visual industries

Land-based industries

Oil and gas extraction; petroleum refining and distribution; and chemical manufacture

Retail.

Each will have up to £100,000 for their development phase and up to £1 million for support of core activities in their first year.

The Trailblazer SSCs will operate throughout the UK. Each Trailblazer SSC will be responsible for deciding the location of their own offices.

Ceramic Industry

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will meet the Chairman for

Ceramic Training and Development to discuss options for the ceramics industry in respect of sector skills councils. [32853]

John Healey: I am very pleased that the Chairman for Ceramic Training and Development has shown this level of interest in the development of sector skills councils. I understand that he has already met with an official from my Department to discuss options for the ceramics industry. It is, I believe, appropriate during the development of SSC's or during the negotiation of other arrangements, that contact remains between officials and potential SSC members. I have asked officials to continue the dialogue with the ceramics industry and look forward to receiving a report on the progress in due course.

School Standards Fund (Kensington and Chelsea)

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the Standards Fund received by schools in Westminster and in Kensington and Chelsea in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [33043]

Mr. Timms: The following table shows allocations for the Standards Fund for Westminster local education authority and for Kensington and Chelsea local education authority in 2000–01 and 2001–02. The figures include both Government and local authority contributions. The amount actually paid to schools depends on local expenditure decisions by schools and the local authority.

Standards Fund allocations	£
Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea	
2000–01	
Administrative Support for Small Schools	58,983
Beacon Schools	187,750
Best Practice Research Scholarships	2,500
City Learning Centres	703,331
Developing and Extending Maintained Nursery School Services	28,421
Devolved Formula Capital for Schools	292,590
Early Years Training and Development	16,168
Education and Health Partnerships	23,424
Ethnic Minority Pupils and Traveller Achievement	1,219,975
Excellence in Cities	818,518
Excellence in Cities: Excellence Challenge	10,584
Key Stage 3 Numeracy: Secondary Schools Conference	3,823
Literacy and Numeracy: Summer Schools and Key Stage 3	44,000
Local Education Authority Music Services	23,280
Maintained Nursery Capital	69,478
National Grid for Learning	226,701
New National Curriculum	23,200
Performance Management Training	67,930
Primary Literacy and Numeracy Strategies	259,500
Pupil Support Allowance	70,000
Qualifications	22,884
School Improvement	405,343
School Laboratories for the 21st Century	75,947
School Leadership	43,072
School Security	32,452
Seed Capital Challenge	82,294
Small School Support Fund	23,879
Social Inclusion, Drugs and Youth	304,361
Special Educational Needs	70,029
Study Support	56,281
Summer Schools for Gifted and Talented Pupils	18,000
Support for Parent Governor Representatives	1,200
Teacher Incentives	13,650
Teaching Assistants	32,613
Teenage Pregnancies	26,100
Working Environment Fund	36,165
Year 6 Literacy and Numeracy Booster Classes	62,921
Total	5,457,347
2001–02	
Advanced Skills Teachers	57,500
Beacon Schools	279,750
Children in Public Care	13,404
City Learning Centres	895,000
Classrooms of the Future	225,000
Devolved Capital	468,815
Drugs, Alcohol and Tobacco	37,530
Early Professional Development	124,900
Early Years Training and Development	24,239
Education Health Partnerships	23,065
Ethnic Minority Achievement	1,164,506
Excellence in Cities[1]	904,690
Excellence in Cities: Excellence Challenge	57,610
Induction of Newly Qualified Teachers	184,877
Information Management Strategy	44,510
Key Stage 3: National Implementation	214,743
Literacy and Numeracy Summer Schools	20,000
Local Education Authority Music Services	77,400
Maintained Nursery School Service	56,802
National Curriculum	23,996
National Grid for Learning	346,722
NDS Condition Funding	211,019
Performance Management	45,257
Primary Literacy and Numeracy Strategies	309,037
Pupil Learning Credits	84,496
Pupil Support Allowance	70,000
Qualifications	3,734
Recruitment and Retention Fund	204,000
School Achievement Awards	214,550
School Improvement	256,000
School Laboratories	119,894
School Leadership	75,081
School Security	32,641
Seed Capital Challenge	89,166
Sick Children	3,830
Small Schools Fund	88,159
Social Inclusion: Pupil Support	305,524
Special Educational Needs	139,784
Study Support	191,361
Summer Schools for Gifted and Talented Children	9,000
Supported Early Retirement Scheme for Heads	40,000
Teachers' Sabbaticals	12,000
Teaching Assistants	32,800
Teenage Pregnancies	26,100
Traveller Children Achievement	55,469
Year 6 Booster Classes	64,895
Year 9 Booster Classes	18,000
Total	7,946,856
City of Westminster	
2000–01	
Administrative Support for Small Schools	120,072
Advanced Skills Teachers	189,000
Beacon Schools	100,000
Best Practice Research Scholarships	3,000
Developing and Extending Nursery School Services	25,036
Devolved Formula Capital for Schools	443,863
Early Excellence Centres	76,260
Early Years Training and Development	57,038
Education and Health Partnerships	38,337
Ethnic Minority Pupils and Traveller Achievement	2,136,538
Excellence in Cities	1,364,696
Excellence in Cities: Excellence Challenge	11,303
Expanding Local Authority Music Services	363,500

Standards Fund allocations	£
Key Stage 3 Numeracy: Secondary Schools Conference	6,372
Literacy and Numeracy: Summer Schools and Key Stage 3	77,000
Maintained Nursery Capital	71,210
National Grid for Learning	365,898
New National Curriculum	40,300
Performance Management Training	47,967
Primary Literacy and Numeracy Strategies	363,518
Pupil Support Allowance	163,000
Qualifications	73,786
School Improvement	742,811
School Laboratories for the 21st Century	107,290
School Leadership	67,141
School Security	50,141
Seed Capital Challenge	104,705
Small School Support Fund	39,075
Social Inclusion, Drugs and Youth	656,125
Special Educational Needs	119,071
Specialist Schools	96,538
Study Support	107,586
Summer Schools for Gifted and Talented Pupils	9,000
Support for Parent Governor Representatives	1,200
Support for Performance Management Training	47,967
Teaching Assistants	336,453
Teenage Pregnancies	44,300
Working Environment Fund	51,562
Year 6 Literacy and Numeracy Booster Classes	93,408
Total	8,812,067
2001–02	
Adult:Pupil Ratios in Reception Classes	41,854
Advanced Skills Teachers	194,630
Beacon Schools	175,000
Child Protection Co-ordinators	39,600
Children in Public Care	21,780
Class Size Initiative	16,333
Devolved Capital	340,330
Drugs, Alcohol and Tobacco	44,060
Early Excellence Centres	170,000
Early Years Training and Development	38,108
Education Health Partnerships	25,160
Ethnic Minority Achievement	2,136,538
Excellence in Cities[1]	1,458,320
Induction of Newly Qualified Teachers	247,056
Information Management Strategy	68,988
Key Stage 3: National Implementation	230,343
Literacy and Numeracy Summer Schools	50,000
Local Education Authority Music Services	181,800
Maintained Nursery School Service	50,376
National Curriculum	41,528
National Grid for Learning	530,618
NDS Condition Funding	613,298
Performance Management	80,789
Primary Literacy and Numeracy Strategies	380,129
Pupil Learning Credits	232,713
Pupil Support Allowance	163,000
Qualifications	7,468
Recruitment and Retention Fund	343,000
School Achievement Awards	276,200
School Improvement	529,000
School Laboratories	107,290
School Leadership	66,269
School Security	50,591
Seed Capital Challenge	114,877
Sick Children	6,223
Small Schools Fund	160,289
Social Inclusion: Pupil Support	740,000
Special Educational Needs	201,928
Specialist Schools	269,816
Study Support	321,429
Summer Schools for Gifted and Talented Children	9,000
Supported Early Retirement Scheme for Heads	40,000
Teachers' Sabbaticals	84,0005
Teaching Assistants	511,567
Teenage Pregnancies	44,300
Truancy Buster Awards	8,000
Year 6 Booster Classes	103,329
Year 9 Booster Classes	36,000
Total	11,602,927

[1] Including Gifted and Talented Children, Learning Support Units and Learning Mentors

Threshold Transfers

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of difficulties experienced by schools in going from Threshold 1 to Threshold 2; and if she will make a statement. [33055]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* Crossing the performance threshold promotes a teacher to point 1 of the upper pay scale. Further progress is by discretionary performance points recommended by heads and awarded by governing bodies. Teachers on point 1 since September 2000 will first become eligible for a performance point from September 2002. To make best use of these points, heads and governors will need to distinguish the most effective teachers from those who are doing a satisfactory job. I recognise that these decisions will sometimes be difficult, but I believe that heads and governors are fully capable of making them.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she plans to announce the final disposal arrangements and plans for intermediate and high level nuclear waste; and what is the *(a)* quantity and *(b)* location of present (i) intermediate and (ii) high level waste in store. [29698]

Mr. Meacher: I refer my hon. Friend to my answers of 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 470–71W. The Government and the devolved Administrations on 12 September launched a national debate in our consultation paper "Managing Radioactive Waste Safely". A copy of the paper is in the Library. Disposal is one of the several waste management options that, the paper proposes, we need to review. The consultation period closes on 12 March and we would welcome comments from all over the UK.

Radioactive Waste

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she set up the Radioactive Waste Management Information Needs Research Project; what arrangements are in place for its co-ordination; what resources have been made available, covering what time period, for the research project; who has been appointed to the Steering Committee of the Research Project; and what criteria were used in making the appointments. [19883]

Mr. Meacher: I announced on 12 September that the Government had commissioned Wilkinson Environmental Consulting to carry out a review of information needs in relation to options for managing radioactive waste. This will help to inform the national debate and research programme which we propose in our 12 September consultation paper "Managing Radioactive Waste Safely". A Steering Group has been established to assist the Department in the management of the project and consists of the following people:

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Name	
Richard Wood (Chair)	DEFRA Radioactive Substances Division
Peter Barlow	British Nuclear Fuels Ltd.
Professor Geoffrey Bolton	Royal Society
Martin Courtis	Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee
Fred Dawson	Ministry of Defence
David Glazbrook	Nuclear Installations Inspectorate, Health and Safety Executive
Elizabeth Gray	Scottish Executive Environment and Radioactive Substances Division
Cllr. John Henney	Copeland borough council
Stewart Kemp	Nuclear Free Local Authorities
Ken Ledgerwood	Department of the Environment, Northern Ireland
Peter McKay	British Energy
Gordon McKerron	Social Policy Research Unit, Sussex University
Mike Squibbs	Department of Trade and Industry
Harvard Prosser	National Assembly for Wales
Jonathan Selwyn	United Kingdom Centre for Economic and Environmental Development
Julie Tooley	Scottish Environment Protection Agency
Rachel Western	Friends of the Earth
Clive Williams	Environment Agency

The members of the group were chosen in order to bring together a wide range of expertise in relation to radioactive waste management, including waste producers, non-government organisations, regulators, scientists and academics, and officials from Government Departments and from the devolved Administrations. Membership of the group will be kept under review.

The membership, terms of reference, and minutes of meetings of the Steering Group are published on the Department's website at http://www.defra.gov.uk

The contract was let to Wilkinson Environmental Consulting on 28 July 2000 following competitive tender. The contract provides for a final report to be handed over at the end of May 2002 then provides for further work up to the end of November 2002. The estimated cost of the project is £146,441 excluding VAT. Further details of the project are on the website.

Landfill

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what basis she calculates how many hours of inspectors' time is appropriate for landfill sites, with particular reference to the amount of material dumped per week. [25379]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* Under the waste framework directive, waste operations are subject to appropriate periodic inspections by the Environment Agency. In carrying out inspections at licensed sites, including landfill sites, the agency must have a regard to the guidance provided in Waste Management Paper No. 4, which provides a system of risk-based inspections, known as the Operator Pollution Risk Appraisal (OPRA). OPRA takes into account the performance of the operator and the environmental risks of the waste operation in determining how often a site is inspected, with a minimum inspection frequency of one every three months. The environmental risks include the type of waste operation and the amounts of waste involved.

The period of time of each inspection will vary and will depend on a number of factors, including the nature and size of the landfill, the terms and conditions of the licence, and any issues arising during the inspection.

The agency has issued guidance on an appropriate inspection methodology for use by their inspectors and is available at www.environment-agency.gov.uk/commondata/105385/methodology.pdf.

Fisheries Policy

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she next intends to meet the Fishermen's Association Ltd. to discuss their concerns on proposed changes in the enforcement of fisheries policy; and if she will make a statement. [28649]

Mr. Morley: The enforcement of fisheries policy in Scottish waters is a matter for the Scottish Executive.

Livestock Movements

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what regulations govern the transport of live animals; and what penalties can be imposed upon those who do not comply with them. [28847]

Mr. Morley: The principal regulations governing the transport of live animals are: The Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 1997, which makes general and specific provisions for the welfare of animals during transport—a breach of the Order is punishable on conviction by a fine not exceeding £5,000 (or £1,000 per animal if more than 10 animals are involved)—and The Transport of Animals (Cleansing and Disinfection) (England) (No.2) Order 2000, which requires vehicles to be cleansed and disinfected after the journey is completed. A breach of the Order is punishable on conviction by a fine not exceeding £5,000. A transporter's authorisation to transport live animals under WATO can also be suspended or revoked.

Sheep Industry

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact of the European Commission's decision on the levels of *(a)* the sheep annual premium and *(b)* the less favoured area supplement on the future viability of the UK sheep industry; and if she will make a statement. [31520]

Mr. Morley: At the Sheepmeat Management Committee on 18 January it was agreed to set the final rate of the Sheep Annual Premium (SAP) for 2001 at 9.086 euros (£5.62). The Less Favoured Area supplement remained at 6.641 euros (£4.11).

A number of factors depressed returns to sheep farmers in 2001, in particular the closing of export markets because of foot and mouth disease. We expect returns to improve in 2002, with the reopening of export markets and the introduction of a fixed rate Sheep Annual Premium set significantly above the final rate of the premium for 2001.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the level of the sheep annual premium that would be payable to United Kingdom sheep producers if the British market price for lamb were used in the calculation of the sheep premium in place of the average European Union price; and if she will make a statement. [31521]

Mr. Morley: The calculation of the rate of the Sheep Annual Premium prior to the changes agreed in December 2001 was based on several factors related to sheep production in the European Union, not only on the average market price; for this reason it is not possible simply to substitute the British average market price for the European Union one. However, in 2001 the average market price for sheepmeat in Great Britain was some 24 per cent. below the European Union average price, and calculating the rate of the Sheep Annual Premium separately for Great Britain and for the rest of the European Union would have increased the rate in Great Britain and reduced it elsewhere.

From 2002 the Sheep Annual Premium will be at a fixed rate of 21 euros per eligible animal, and will not be affected by fluctuations in market prices.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how CAP funding is spent in the United Kingdom broken down by *(a)* types of schemes and *(b)* nations. [31254]

Mr. Morley: Latest estimates of CAP funding paid directly to farmers in 2001 are shown in the table, broken down by nations of the UK. CAP funding also includes indirect market support measures which cannot be split by nation and direct payments to farmers. Indirect market support cost £497 million in 2000–01.

Subsidies paid directly to farmers in 2001

£ million

Subsidies on product	*England*	*Wales*	*Scotland*	*Northern Ireland*	*UK*
Crop subsidies					
Arable area payments on:					
Wheat	330	2	16	1	349
Barley	180	5	68	7	259
Other cereal crops	22	1	5	[1]—	27
Oilseed rape	94	[1]—	9	[1]—	103
Linseed	10	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	10
Peas and beans—stockfeed and human consumption	67	[1]—	1	[2]—	68
Other crops	7	1	[1]—	[1]—	8
Other crop subsidies	3	[2]—	[1]—	[2]—	3
Livestock subsidies:					
Beef special premium	126	24	46	46	242
Suckler cow premium	80	25	61	45	211
Slaughter premium	49	7	13	15	84
Extensification payment scheme	50	15	34	27	126
Over-30-month scheme	91	17	23	26	157
Beef national envelope	11	3	8	5	26
Sheep annual premium	74	53	42	13	182
FMD light lambs	1	2	2	[2]—	5
Other subsidies:					
Dairy agrimonetary compensation	56	8	6	9	79
Total subsidies on products	1,249	162	334	194	1,943
Other subsidies					
Set-aside	162	1	20	1	184
Other animal disease compensation	11	1	[1]—	16	29
Less favoured areas support schemes	42	42	61	18	164
Agri-environment schemes:	145	34	34	7	220
Countryside stewardship	49	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	49
Countryside premium (Scotland)	[2]—	[2]—	9	[2]—	9
Tir Cymen and Tir Gofal	[2]—	13	[2]—	[2]—	13
Organic farming	27	3	5	[1]—	35
Environmentally sensitive areas	48	7	10	5	71

Subsidies paid directly to farmers in 2001

£ million

Subsidies on product	*England*	*Wales*	*Scotland*	*Northern Ireland*	*UK*
Nitrate sensitive areas	3	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	3
Woodland schemes	8	[1]—	5	2	14
SSSI[3]	9	2	5	[2]—	16
Other	2	8	[1]—	[1]—	10
Total other subsidies	504	113	149	49	815
Total subsidies	1,754	276	482	243	2,760

[1] Negligible: less than 0.5

[2] Not applicable

[3] Payments for sites of special scientific interest are not part of CAP

Throckmorton Airfield

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with the *(a)* Ministry of Defence and *(b)* Home Office about the proposed asylum accommodation centre on land adjoining her Department's land at Throckmorton, Worcestershire; and what assessment she has made of the implications for compensation claims for local residents following the burial of foot and mouth carcases at the site. [31724]

Mr. Morley: No discussions of this matter have taken place with either the Ministry of Defence or the Home Office. Since the land does not belong to this Department nor does the possible use fall within its remit, we have not made an assessment of the implications for any compensation claims made by local residents following the burial of foot and mouth carcases in the area.

Departmental Leave Entitlement

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what has been the average annual leave entitlement of staff in her Department in each of the last four years. [31753]

Mr. Morley: Following the creation of DEFRA, all staff were given an annual leave entitlement of 30 days from 1 August 2001 as one of the first steps towards harmonising terms and conditions of service for then ex-MAFF and ex-Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions staff who joined together to form the new Department.

Prior to the creation of DEFRA, MAFF's entitlements, including those of its executive agencies (excluding the Veterinary Laboratories Agency, whose chief executive will reply direct), were determined by grade and length of service as given in the table. Details of average annual leave entitlements could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Days

	Total service			
Grade	*On entry*	*After one year*	*After 10 years*	*After 15 years*
From 1 April 1997				
Up to HEO	22	25	—	30
SEO and above	25	—	30	—
From 1 April 1998				
Up to EO	22	25	—	30
HEO and above	25	—	30	—
From 1 April 1999[1]				
Up to EO	22	25	—	—
HEO and above	25	—	30	—
From 1 April 2000–31 March 2001[2]				
Up to EO	25	—	—	30
HEO and above	25	—	30	—
From 1 April 2001–31 July 2001				
Up to EO	25	—	30	—
HEO and above	25	—	30	—

[1] After 13 years total service

[2] After 12 years total service

Days

	Total service			
Grade	*On entry*	*After one year*	*After 10 years*	*After 15 years*
Ex-intervention board before 1 August 2001				
Up to AO	22	25	—	30
EO and HEO	25	—	—	30
SEO to Grade 5	25	—	30	—
Above Grade 5	30	—	—	—

Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS)

Days

Grade	*On entry*	*After one year service*	*After 10 years service*	*After 15 years service*
From 1 April 1997				
Up to HEO	22	25	—	30
SEO and above	25	—	30	—
From 1 April 1998				
Up to HEO	22	25	30	—
SEO and above	25	—	30	—
From 1 April 1999				
All staff	22	25	30	—
From 1 April 2000				
All staff	25	—	30	—
From 1 April 2001				
All staff	25	—	30	—

Departmental Salary Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit in 2001–02 will be accounted *for by salary costs and pension contributions.* [32012]

Mr. Morley: Salary costs and pension contributions are forecast to account for 13.7 per cent. of the departmental expenditure limit in 2001–02.

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what additional security measures are planned by her Department to deter and detect theft and fraud. [31786]

Mr. Morley: For physical security the Department already has a wide range of measures in place which can be varied or adapted to meet specific needs or changed circumstances for any of our sites around the UK. Measures typically include access control (including guard services and pass wearing procedures), staff and visitor checks, staff awareness, intruder detection systems, good liaison with local police etc.

As to fraud, the Department has a fraud policy statement which is available to all staff. It has also issued guidance for managers on how to handle suspected instances of fraud. Staff are in no doubt that fraud is regarded very seriously, and that the Department will always prosecute perpetrators and also take disciplinary action against staff where these actions are considered appropriate. Professional investigation, legal and internal audit advice is always available in support, and the Department seeks to maintain an awareness of current practice and developments in the detection and prevention of fraud.

Aquatic Mammals

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her latest estimate is of the population of *(a)* grey seals, *(b)* common-seals and *(c)* dolphins in the waters around England and Wales. [32597]

Mr. Meacher: In 2000, the grey seal population around England and Wales was estimated at 10,100 individuals and the common seal population of eastern England (few breed elsewhere in England and Wales) was estimated to be between approximately 3,800 and 4,500.

The inshore populations of bottlenose dolphin (primarily off Wales) are estimated at about 160 (not including the Channel Islands). No separate estimate of numbers of other dolphins in waters around England and Wales has been made, but a 1994 survey of small cetacean abundance in the North Sea and adjacent waters gave an estimated population of white beaked and white sided dolphins of 11,760.

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the trends over the past 20 years in the populations of *(a)* grey seals, *(b)* common seals and *(c)* dolphins in the waters around England and Wales. [32596]

Mr. Meacher: *(a)* Surveys carried out by the Natural Environment Research Council for the Home Office and the Scottish Executive over the past 20 years have shown that the British population of breeding grey seals is growing at a rate of about 6 per cent. per annum since 1984. There is considerable variation around this rate of increase at English and Welsh colonies.

(b) The common seal population of eastern England (few breed elsewhere in England and Wales) crashed in 1988 due to an outbreak of phocine distemper virus. Prior to this, the population was over 4,000; in 1989 the numbers approximately halved. It has now recovered to between 3,800 and 4,500.

(c) The majority of the bottlenose dolphin population in English and Welsh waters is located in Cardigan Bay. The population has remained stable over the last decade, with an estimated population of 127 in mid 1990s compared with an estimated 121 in 2000. No assessment has been made of trends of other dolphin populations in the waters around England and Wales.

Marine Law

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action the Government are taking to implement proposals for the comprehensive reform of UK marine law and policy. [32243]

Mr. Meacher: The forthcoming Marine Stewardship report will set out our vision for the sustainable development and conservation of the marine environment. Within this context, and alongside existing initiatives such as the review of marine nature conservation, we are considering whether legislative changes are needed.

Environmental Protection Act

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many individuals have taken action against *(a)* Buckinghamshire county council and *(b)* Aylesbury Vale district council under Section 91 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990; and in how many cases they were successful. [32178]

Mr. Meacher: No individuals have taken action against (a) Buckinghamshire county council and (b) Aylesbury Vale district council under Section 91 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Litter

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many people in Buckinghamshire were prosecuted for littering in each of the last five years; and in how many cases they were convicted. [32176]

Mr. Meacher: In each of the last five years, no people in Buckinghamshire have been prosecuted for littering offences.

Water Meters

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many water meters were installed in houses *(a)* in England and Wales and *(b)* in the Buckingham constituency in each of the last five years. [32186]

Mr. Meacher: The net increase in the number of household customers charged on the basis of metering in each of the past five years, in England and Wales, was as shown in the table.

	Net increase in household customers charged on the basis of metering[1]
1996–97	[2]278,000
1997–98	559,000
1998–99	486,000
1999–2000	353,000
2000–01	244,000

[1] To the nearest thousand

[2] Figures for 1996–97 were not collected on the same basis as for later years.

Information is not collected on a constituency basis.

Noise/nuisance Complaint

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* noise and *(b)* nuisance complaints were investigated by (i) Buckinghamshire county council and (ii) Aylesbury Vale district council in each year since 1997; what proportion of reported complaints this represented; how many abatement notices were issued in each year; and how many fines were levied for non-compliance in each year. [32173]

Mr. Meacher: Buckinghamshire county council do not have responsibility for investigating or reporting noise complaints as this rests with the district councils within its area. Figures requested for Aylesbury Vale district council are shown in the table.

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*[1]
Total number of complaints received (including pest control)	4,171	4,698	5,022	6,437	4,648
Number of Pest Control Complaints	2,301	3,018	2,850	3,855	2,367
Number of Nuisance Complaints	380	356	312	349	239
Proportion of total complaints (percentage)	9.1	7.6	6.2	5.4	5.1
Number of Noise Complaints	531	410	531	683	639
Proportion of total complaints (percentage)	12.7	8.7	10.6	10.6	13.7
Number of Other Complaints	959	914	1,329	1,550	1,403
Number of Abatement Notices Served	21	7	16	11	9
Number of Fines Levied	0	0	0	0	0

[1] To 31 January 2002

Dog Fouling

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many fines for dog fouling were issued by *(a)* Buckinghamshire county council and *(b)* Aylesbury Vale district council in each of the last five years; what the average fine levied in each year was; and what the total sums raised in each year were. [32177]

Mr. Meacher: In each of the last five years there were no fixed penalty fines issued for dog fouling offences by *(a)* Buckinghamshire county council and *(b)* Aylesbury Vale district council.

Pollution

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many successful prosecutions have been undertaken by the Environment Agency concerning pollution in Buckinghamshire in the last five years; and what was the average level of fine imposed. [32181]

Mr. Meacher: Buckinghamshire is served by two Environment Agency regions, Anglian and Thames.

The Anglian region has successfully undertaken 13 prosecutions in the last five years and fines totalling £366,350 have been imposed averaging £28,180 per prosecution.

Since 1999, the Thames region have taken successful prosecutions on seven occasions and fines of £12,100 have been imposed averaging £1,871 per prosecution. Information on prosecutions in Thames region prior to 1999 is held manually and its retrieval from archives would involve disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many complaints have been received by the Environment Agency concerning pollution in the Buckingham constituency in each year since 1997. [32180]

Mr. Meacher: Since 1 June 2000, the Environment Agency has received 198 complaints about pollution in the Aylesbury Vale district council area, which equates approximately to the Buckingham constituency. Information on earlier complaints is held manually and its retrieval would involve disproportionate cost.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the cost savings resulting from energy efficiency measures introduced by *(a)* Buckinghamshire county council and *(b)* Aylesbury Vale district council in accordance with the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995. [32179]

Mr. Meacher: This Department has not made any estimates of the cost savings arising from the Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) 1995. Nor is there any requirement for energy conservation authorities to make such an assessment. This would be an extremely difficult exercise, since the financial savings resulting from energy saving measures under HECA fall to individual householders through cheaper fuel bills. This information is therefore not readily available.

Buckinghamshire county council does not have any responsibilities under HECA, which applies only to local housing authorities.

Maize

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of the UK's fodder maize is grown in *(a)* England and *(b)* each region. [32302]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* Estimates from the June 2001 Agriculture and Horticulture census indicate that England accounts for 93 per cent. of the maize area in the UK. Virtually all of the maize area is used for fodder.

Information by UK country and English regions is provided in the table.

Area of maize	*2000*	*2001*
UK area (hectares)[1]	104,090	129,208
Percentage of UK:		
England[1]	93.8	92.5
Wales[1]	6.1	6.4
Scotland[1]	0	0
Northern Ireland[1]	0.1	1.1
England (hectares)[2]	97,634	119,557
Percentage of England:		
North-east	0.2	n/a
North-west	8.4	n/a
Yorks and Humber	2	n/a
East midlands	7	n/a
West midlands	13.4	n/a
Eastern	6.4	n/a
South-east	18.7	n/a
South-west	43.9	n/a

n/a = not yet available

[1] Includes an adjustment in respect of minor holdings.

[2] These data refer to main holdings only, ie minor holdings excluded.

Rural Payments Agency

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many working days were lost within the Rural Payments Agency between 16 November 2001 and 31 January 2002 as a result of industrial action. [31973]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* The number of working days lost within the Rural Payments Agency between 16 November 2001 and 31 January 2002 as a result of industrial action was 3,704.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the *(a)* total and *(b)* percentage were of arable payments made by the Rural Payments Agency to arable farmers in the 16 November 2001 to 31 January 2002 window. [31972]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* The number of arable payments made by the Rural Payments Agency to arable farmers nationally in the 16 November 2001 to 31 January 2002 window was 39,697 paid, out of a total 42,738 received, representing 92.88 per cent.

Arable Payments

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the *(a)* level and *(b)* percentage were of arable payments made to farmers at her Department's Exeter office within the window period to 31 January. [31971]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* The number of arable payments made to farmers at the Department's Exeter office within the window period to 31 January were 6,740 paid out, of a total of 8,282 received, representing 81.38 per cent.

Refrigerators

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what advice she will give to councils in setting their budget for 2002–03 in advance of the Government deciding how much assistance will be given for the storage of refrigerators; [33602]

(2) whether she intends to make up shortfalls between individual councils' expenditure on the storage of refrigerators and the grant given for that purpose to each council for the period December 2001 to March 2002; [33603]

(3) when she expects to announce the level of assistance to councils for the storage of refrigerators for the financial year 2002–03. [33604]

Mr. Meacher: £6 million was added to the provisional local government finance settlement for 2002–03 to cover the costs of implementing the ozone depleting substances regulation relating to the period 1 January 2002 to 31 March 2002.

We are continuing to assess the impacts of the regulation and will determine what further action, including guidance to local authorities, is required for 2002–03.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the target time is for a response from her Department to a farmer's claim for compensation. [30975]

Mr. Morley: We aim to pay farmers compensation for livestock slaughtered for FMD control within three weeks of receipt of correct documents. At the peak of the outbreak this aim was not met due to the volume of claims being received at the same time.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the reports produced by the cattle plague commissioners following the outbreak of cattle plague in the 1870s were consulted by officials from her Department and MAFF the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food during the 2001 outbreak of foot and mouth disease; and if she will make a statement. [31455]

Mr. Morley: The veterinary and scientific advice that underpins the Government's disease control policies has evolved over many years. While no particular reference has been made during the current outbreak of foot and mouth disease to the recommendations made in the cattle plague reports, many of them are still relevant today and were implemented last year.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her policy on public access to *(a)* the Disease Control System Database and *(b)* the Veterinary Laboratory Agency Foot and Mouth Disease Care Database. [31218]

Mr. Morley: Under the Data Protection Act 1998, any individual, on request, may have access to their personal records held on either the Disease Control System Database and/or the Veterinary Laboratory Agency Foot and Mouth Disease Care database. General public access is not permitted to personal records.

Animal Movement Restrictions

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether all the passports of offspring under restriction on 21 January have been collected; what steps have been taken to prevent any more offspring being moved while under restriction; and when she expects the backlog of offspring under the cull to be slaughtered. [34085]

Alun Michael: There were 659 offspring of BSE infected or suspect cattle in Great Britain under restriction on 21 January 2002 with 44 passports outstanding. But all outstanding passports have now been collected.

Officials wrote on 18 January to all owners of offspring under restriction reminding them that their cattle must not be moved without permission. Farm visits to identify offspring, issue restriction notices and remove passports are again taking place.

I expect that the additional backlog of cases due to foot and mouth disease will have been cleared by 1 April 2002.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

European Convention on Human Rights

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the impact of incorporating the ECHR in the UK domestic judicial system. [32054]

Mr. Wills: We keep the impact of the Human Rights Act on the judicial system under continuous review. An analysis of its impact on the workload of the courts is produced quarterly, and is placed on the human rights part of our website. A breakdown of the cases in which the Human Rights Act has been raised and their outcome is also on the site.

There has been no significant increase in either the length of cases or the number of cases awaiting hearing, attributable to the Human Rights Act, since 2 October 2000.

Legal Services Commission

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the budget for the Legal Services Commission in the current financial year is; and what is her forecast for each of the next two years. [32045]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Legal Service's Commission's budget in the current financial year is £70.350 million, which is the baseline being rolled over into the next two years of the SR 2000 Spending Review period. The requirement for 2003–04 onwards will be under consideration in the SR 2002 Spending Review.

Data Protection

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many staff employed on data protection are employed outside London; and in which locations. [32573]

Mr. Wills: In respect of the Lord Chancellor's Department, none. Responsibility for administering and enforcing the Data Protection Act 1998 lies with the Information Commissioner, who carries out these responsibilities independently of Government, but is sponsored by the Lord Chancellor's Department. I understand that the Commissioner currently employs 169 staff on data protection matters at her offices in Wilmslow, Cheshire.

Mr. Wood: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is being done to protect businesses from companies which use threatening and confusing letters to demand excessive amounts of money in return for data protection registration. [32474]

Mr. Wills: The Information Commissioner, who carries out her responsibilities independently of Government, has a duty under the Data Protection Act 1998 to disseminate information about the operation of the Act. The commissioner launched a public information campaign on 17 January 2002 to alert organisations to the fact that while they may need to be on the register of data controllers, they should not be misled by businesses who have no statutory powers to maintain the register. Notices were placed in a number of national newspapers and the commissioner has set up a dedicated website at www.doineedtonotify.co.uk to help organisations establish whether they need to notify. She has also made available a self-assessment guide which can be obtained by phoning 0870 9027 522.

I understand that the commissioner is prepared to take legal action against the companies concerned wherever possible and appropriate and that she is liaising closely with the Office of Fair Trading, trading standards authorities and the police on the matter.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received about the regulatory burdens imposed by data protection legislation. [32076]

Mr. Wills: Since the Lord Chancellor's Department assumed responsibility for data protection issues in June 2001, I have received representations about the level of fees chargeable for subject access under the Data Protection Act 1998, in particular with regard to manually held health records. The issue here is to strike a balance between ensuring that cost is not a barrier to individuals requesting access to their health records and allowing the NHS to recoup costs incurred in servicing requests, so that essential resources are not diverted from patient care.

The Government are committed to continuing discussion with key interest groups and to working closely with the information commissioner with the aim of achieving a long-term solution.

I have also received representations about the effect upon small businesses of the Act's notification requirements, including the annual fee of £35, and of the commissioner's forthcoming employment practices data protection code. We do not consider the level of fee to be an undue regulatory burden, although it will be kept under review. We are carefully considering the other representations in consultation with the commissioner.

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what additional security measures are planned by her Department to deter and detect theft and fraud. [31792]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor's Department has a wide range of security measures in place to deter and detect theft and fraud. These include physical security standards for all departmental buildings, personnel security procedures and arrangements to safeguard valuable departmental assets. The security of buildings is reviewed on a periodic basis and security arrangements in general are reviewed in the light of any emerging threats or serious incidents. The Department's programme to achieve compliance with BS7799, the British Standard for Information Security Management, will quality assure existing practices and introduce improvements where these are found to be necessary. Measures include more extensive use of risk assessment, security education and awareness for staff and reviews of physical security arrangements.

The Department also maintains sound systems of internal control, which include controls to prevent and deter fraud. These systems are kept under review and are subject to regular audit coverage. All incidents of suspected or detected fraud are subject to rigorous investigation and appropriate action is taken against those found guilty of wrongdoing. Where fraud occurs, in addition to the investigation of the particular incident consideration is also given to whether controls need to be improved to prevent any further re-occurrence. The Department maintains an effective capability to investigate incidents of fraud. This includes a cadre of trained staff.

The Department has anti-fraud policies, together with policies on confidential reporting (whistleblowing), staff conduct and disciplinary procedures. These are communicated to all staff.

Land Registry

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many complaints he has received about the accuracy of the Land Registry in the last 12 months. [32049]

Mr. Wills: During the calendar year 2001, the Land Registry received 368 complaints relating to errors and incorrect information being supplied.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many staff from the Land Registry are employed outside London; and in which locations. [32574]

Mr. Wills: Currently there are 7,623 staff employed by the Land Registry outside central London. The breakdown by location is as follows:

	Number
Birkenhead	510
Coventry	302
Croydon	213
Durham	678
Gloucester	423
Harrow	257
Hull	291
Lytham	502
Leicester	286
Nottingham	633
Peterborough	402
Plymouth	757
Portsmouth	213
Stevenage	387
Swansea	618
Telford	330
Tunbridge Wells	275
Weymouth	389
York	157

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received on reform of the Land Registry. [32048]

Mr. Wills: Last year, I received the report of the Quinquennial Review of the Land Registry's status and business operations. This report was published in June 2001 and is available on the Land Registry's website www.landreg.gov.uk.

Ministers have accepted the independent reviewer's recommendation that the Land Registry should continue to operate as a separate Government Department and executive agency with trading fund status.

On 12 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 915W, I announced that the Government had approved an interdepartmental programme of work in response to the report of the Quinquennial Review. Recommendations in the report which relate to the business processes of the Land Registry are being taken forward under the framework of a 10-year strategic business plan which, subject to ministerial approval, will be published in the spring.

Public Guardianship Office

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what functions the Public Guardianship Office performs; and what her estimate is of its running costs. [32055]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The PGO provides an integrated service for its clients, safeguarding their financial interests while avoiding state intervention. In protecting their financial interests, the PGO works with others to meet the clients' broader social needs. The functions of the PGO are to protect and promote the interests of its clients by overseeing and supporting the activities of receivers appointed by the Court of Protection to manage their financial affairs; to manage the financial affairs of people whom the Court of Protection adjudges mentally incapable of doing so for themselves, where there is no one else willing or suitable to act as receiver, and to carry out the administrative functions arising from the Court of Protection's jurisdiction under the Enduring Power of Attorney Act 1985.

The current estimated running costs of the PGO are £21,790,000.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what targets she has set for reply to *(a)* letters from hon. Members and *(b)* letters from members of the public to the Public Guardianship Office. [32684]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Public Guardianship Office has a key performance measure which applies to letters from hon. Members as well as letters in general from the public. It currently required 85 per cent. of letters to be responded to within 15 days of receipt. In the period 1 April to 30 November 2001 this target was exceeded and 91.9 per cent. of letters received a response before the target date.

However, it is very unfortunate that the Public Guardianship Office mislaid my hon. Friend's letter dated 26 November and as a result a response was sent well outside of this target. The PGO has apologised for this unacceptable delay.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many properties the Public Guardianship Office controls on behalf of people for whom they take responsibility. [32685]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Public Guardianship Office (PGO) acts as receiver for clients where there is no other suitable person available to act or where for other reasons the court of protection considers it appropriate that there should be an independent receiver. The PGO acts as receiver to 110 clients who own property. Monitoring, guidance and advisory activities are carried out by the protection division of the PGO to ensure that there is adequate supervision of private receivers by means of issuing authorities and directions. 2,863 protection division clients own property.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many people are under the protection of the Public Guardianship Office. [32400]

Ms Rosie Winterton: There are approximately 1,000 clients under the direct receivership of the PGO and a further 20,000 clients within the protection division of the PGO. In addition the PGO performs a registration service for enduring powers of attorney (EPA): approximately 12,000 EPAs are registered annually.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what official foreign visits officials from the Public Guardianship Office have been made since it was established; at what cost; and for what purpose. [32401]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Nicholas Smedley, then Acting Chief Executive of the PGO, accompanied Denzil Lush, Master of the Court Protection, to the Biennial Conference of the Canadian Public Trustees and Guardians, which was held in Nova Scotia, Canada on 27–31 May 2001. The purpose of the visit was to build on existing relations, gather information, keep abreast of international legislation and enable the PGO to promote its radical programme of change. Both Mr. Smedley and Master Lush presented papers to the conference. The total cost of the visit was £4,008.56.

In September 2001, Julie Burlinson, (MERIS Project Manager) Chris Barnwell (Court Manager) and Neil Ross (Account Manager) visited Reykjavik, Iceland. The purpose of this visit was to conduct an evaluation of one of the short-listed suppliers for MERIS. MERIS (Mental Health Renaissance Information System) is the project which will provide an IS system to support the core functions of the PGO. The total cost of this visit was £2,095.50.

Website

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what arrangements he has in place for monitoring and updating his Department's website. [32404]

Mr. Wills: The LCD website www.lcd.gov.uk is monitored daily by its content editor and updated as required by the Department's technical web manager.

Law Commission

Ian Lucas: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many Law Commission bills have been introduced but failed to gain Royal Assent since 1979. [32166]

Mr. Wills: As far as can be ascertained within the time available, since 1979 three Law Commission Bills have been introduced but have not received Royal Assent. All three Bills were however enacted in subsequent parliamentary sessions. This does not include any Law Commission Consolidation Bills that may have been introduced but did not receive Royal Assent, as this information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ian Lucas: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the recommendations of the Law Commission that have been rejected by the Government since 1979. [32165]

Mr. Wills: The list of Law Commission reports since 1979 that have been wholly rejected by the Government, that can be ascertained in the time available, is set out in the table. The list does not include reports that were accepted only in part. A list of individual recommendations that have been rejected could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Report number/date	*Title*
96—9 November 1979	Criminal Law: Offences Relating to Interference with the Course of Justice
104—28 October 1980	Insurance Law: Non-Disclosure and Breach of Warranty
110—29 October 1981	Breach of Confidence
121—19 July 1983	Law of Contract: Pecuniary Restitution on Breach of Contract
127—26 January 1983	Transfer of Land: The Law of Positive and Restrictive Covenants
145—5 July 1985	Criminal Law: Offences Against Religion and Public Worship
149—25 September 1985	Criminal Law: Report on Criminal Libel
152—20 November 1985	Property Law: Liability for Chancel Repairs
168—3 September 1987	Private International Law: The Law of Domicile
175—8 December 1988	Family Law: Matrimonial Property
178—20 April 1989	Landlord and Tenant Law: Compensation for Tenants' Improvements
204—14 November 1991	Transfer of Land: Land Mortgages
219—7 December 1993	Contributory Negligence as a Defence in Contract
236—20 December 1995	Fiduciary Duties and Regulatory Rules

City Status (Golden Jubilee)

Ian Lucas: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the successful applicants for city status in celebration of Her Majesty's Golden Jubilee will be announced. [32584]

Ms Rosie Winterton: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor hopes to announce the results of the competition by the end of march.

Departmental Salary Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit in 2001–02 will be accounted for by salary costs and pension contributions. [32007]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The proportion of the departmental expenditure limit in 2001–02 of £2,754,934,000 to be accounted for by salary costs and pension contributions is 9 per cent.

This figure excludes expenditure on judicial salary costs which fall to the Department.

Departmental Leave Entitlements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what has been the average annual leave entitlement of staff in the Lord Chancellor's Department in each of the last four years. [31745]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information is as follows:

(a) The annual leave entitlements for staff below the senior civil service in LCD and its agencies is as follows:

LCD Headquarters (1998–99 to date)

Pay Bands A-E (AA to SEO)—22 days on entry; 25 days after one year's service; 30 days after 10 years' service

Pay Bands F-G (Grades 7 and 6)—25 days on entry; 30 days after 10 years

The Public Guardianship Office (1998–99 to date)

Pay Ranges 1–4 (AA to EO)—22 days on entry; 25 days after one year; 30 days after 10 years

Pay Ranges 5–8 (HEO to Grade 6)—25 days on entry; 30 days after 10 years

The Court Service

1998–99

Spans 1–4 (AA to EO)—22 days on entry; 25 days after one year; 27 days after 10 years; and 30 days after 20 years

Spans 5–6 (HEO)—22 days on entry; 25 days after one year; 27 days after 10 years; and 30 days after 15 years

Spans 7–9 (SEO to Grade 6)—22 days on entry; 25 days after one year; 30 days after 10 years

1999/2000

Spans 1–4 (AA to EO)—22 days on entry; 25 days after one year; 28 days after 10 years' service; and 30 days after 20 years

Spans 5–6 (HEO)—22 days on entry; 25 days after one year; 28 days after 10 years; and 30 days after 15 years

Spans 7–9 (SEO to Grade 6)—22 days on entry; 25 days after one year; 30 days after 10 years

2000–01

Spans 1–4 (AA to EO)—22 days on entry; 25 days after one year; 29 days after 20 years; and 30 days after 20 years

Spans 5–6 (HEO)—22 days on entry; 25 days after one year; 29 days after 10 years; and 30 days after 15 years

Spans 7–9 (SEO to Grade 6)—22 days on entry; 25 days after one year; 30 days after 10 years

2001–02

Spans 1–9 (AA to Grade 6)—22 days on entry; 25 days after one year, 30 days after 10 years.

(b) The annual leave entitlement for members of the senior civil service is currently set by the Cabinet Office at 30 days and has been so for the last four years.

Court Service

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many persons are employed in the Court Service. [31864]

Mr. Wills: There are 11,087 employees in England and Wales.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what humanitarian aid is being provided by the United Kingdom Government to prisoners in Afghanistan. [33607]

Clare Short: The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), acting under its mandate provided by the Geneva Conventions, is responsible for assisting war detainees in Afghanistan. ICRC delegates visit detainees, register them and, with the consent of the detaining authority, offer psychological support and extra help to make their conditions of detention more acceptable, such as exchanging correspondence with families. Since November 2001, the ICRC has registered almost 5,000 detainees, in some 40 places of detention.

My Department has so far provided £3 million to the ICRC in Afghanistan in response to the current crisis.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many refugee camps have been set up in Afghanistan; and what estimate she has made of the total number likely to be required. [32746]

Clare Short: The United Nations estimates that almost 1.2 million Afghans are displaced inside Afghanistan, primarily due to conflict and drought, with the north and west of the country accounting for over 60 per cent. of the total displaced. Significant numbers do not reside in camps, but are hosted by already vulnerable communities. The United Nations currently lists over 900 centres where significant numbers of internally displaced people (IDPs) have gathered, both in organised camps and among host communities.

International organisations are helping to support the return of IDPs to their homes. Nevertheless significant numbers remain displaced. The largest organised camps are at Maslakh in Herat, Spin Boldak near the Pakistani border, and in Mazar-i-Sharif city. The International Organisation for Migration is currently re-registering the estimated 200,000 population of Maslakh camp and opening a new camp in Herat to accommodate new arrivals. We are not aware of requirements for further new camps in Afghanistan.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many international troops are currently deployed to protect aid convoys in Afghanistan. [32745]

Clare Short: The responsibility for establishing and maintaining security across Afghanistan lies with the Afghan Interim Administration. The role of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is to help the Afghan Interim Administration provide security and stability only in and around Kabul; it is not involved in providing security for aid convoys.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimate she has made about the amount of aid required in Afghanistan; and how much has been delivered. [32743]

Clare Short: In late September last year, the UN launched an inter-agency donor alert for $584 million (£413 million) to cover the humanitarian needs of Afghans over the winter months from October 2001 to March 2002. This was subsequently revised to $657 million (£464 million). Latest UN figures indicate that donors have contributed almost $583 million (£412 million) towards that appeal. My Department has contributed £60 million since last September.

Based on a preliminary needs assessment, the UN Secretary General announced at the Tokyo conference on Afghan reconstruction last month that $10 billion (£7.1 billion) will be needed over the next five years to cover the costs of recovery, reconstruction and on-going humanitarian needs in Afghanistan. Of this some $1.3 billion (£0.9 billion) is needed in 2002 to cover immediate needs. Overall, donors have pledged $4.5 billion (£3.2 billion) over the next five years; $1.8 billion (£1.3 billion) of which is for commitments over this next year. The Department for International Development has committed £200 million over the next five years for both reconstruction and humanitarian assistance. This pledge is in addition to the significant sums that DFID contributes to the World Bank, European Union and Asian Development banks who will also be channelling funds into Afghanistan over coming years. DFID's share of the European Union pledge alone will be 20 per cent.

My Department has a well-earned reputation for rapid and flexible disbursement of funds. We will continue our efforts to turn pledges quickly into cash, and will encourage our counterparts in the international community to do likewise. Timely disbursement of support is critical if we are to continue to meet immediate and longer-term needs in Afghanistan.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the programmes funded by the UK Government which are targeted to support women's needs and interests in Afghanistan. [30423]

Clare Short: We strongly support the common programming approach under the United Nations-led Strategic Framework for Afghanistan, which is intended to provide a principled, co-ordinated and coherent approach to programming. One of its key themes is the protection and advancement of human rights, with particular emphasis on women's empowerment.

We recognise the need to build the capacity of Afghanistan's women to enable them to take full part in the reconstruction of their society, including the new Interim Administration, and to ensure that legal, constitutional and other provisions are not discriminatory against women. Our funding for support of Afghan women during the recovery and reconstruction of Afghanistan is being channelled through United Nations agencies and non-governmental organisations who will work closely with the Interim Administration and who have expressed a commitment to involving Afghan women in the design and implementation of their strategies and programmes.

To date this includes an allocation of $1 million to the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) for a programme to support Afghan women's leadership through awareness raising, capacity building and gender mainstreaming; as well as local level, quick impact recovery projects supporting women. We are also in discussion with the Ministry for Women on how we can provide other support to its activities.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what support her Department plans to give to micro-credit schemes for women in Afghanistan. [30425]

Clare Short: As recovery and reconstruction activities begin in Afghanistan, the programmes that we support will be carefully designed and monitored to ensure that women and girls benefit. Women are both often the poorest members of communities, and the best organisers. We are therefore identifying how we can support women's livelihoods. For example, we are currently funding a women's income generation project implemented by Ockenden International in western Afghanistan.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many people in her Department worked on Afghanistan in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000, *(c)* 2001 and *(d)* January 2002; and on what tasks and in which policy areas they were deployed. [33761]

Clare Short: Accurate figures are difficult to provide, as the number of staff in my Department working on Afghanistan over the years has varied according to the situation. However, within my Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department (CHAD), a London-based desk officer has dealt with Afghanistan, supported by a range of professional advisers as required. Since last September, a team of four people has been working full-time on the Afghanistan crisis supplemented by technical and project administrative support in the region.

Since the events of September last year, my Afghanistan team has been managing a £60 million programme, the objectives of which are to: help the process of stabilisation by supporting the peacemaking efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary General and the establishment of the Afghan Interim Administration; help kick-start the rehabilitation and recovery effort; help meet immediate life-saving needs within Afghanistan especially those over the remaining winter months; support refugee needs in neighbouring countries and assist with the resettlement of returnees and IDPs; assist with the promotion and protection of human rights, including the provision of objective information; and encourage forward planning for Afghanistan's post-conflict recovery.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the humanitarian situation in remote areas of Afghanistan. [32744]

Clare Short: Thanks to the efforts of the UN-led humanitarian system, and with the support of the international community, a potential humanitarian catastrophe has been averted in Afghanistan. However, there are some remote areas of Afghanistan (especially in the west) where the humanitarian situation remains serious because of the drought. Worsening weather conditions in the north and north-east are making food deliveries increasingly difficult. The precarious security situation in some parts of Afghanistan continues to restrict access for humanitarian agencies. As a result there are pockets of unmet needs where vulnerable people cannot be reached. WFP and other humanitarian agencies are continuing to do their best to deliver life-saving assistance to those in need.

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much food aid has been deployed in Afghanistan since 11 September 2001 utilising UK Government resources. [32540]

Clare Short: The lead agency for the provision of emergency food aid is the UN World Food Programme (WFP). In October 2001, WFP appealed for $257 million (approximately £185 million) to feed 7.5 million people for six months. They estimated that almost 500,000 metric tonnes of food (mainly wheat) would be required for this period.

We have contributed £6 million towards WFP's operations inside Afghanistan—for both direct procurement and transportation of food, and for logistical support to help speed up the movement of food aid into the country. We have also supported a number of agencies—the UN, Red Cross and non-governmental organisations (NGOs)—for supplementary feeding and secondary distribution of food inside Afghanistan.

DFID Office (Kabul)

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the personnel appointed to her Department's Office in Kabul by *(a)* rank and *(b)* gender. [30429]

Clare Short: The DFID Kabul office consists of a Head of Office (male), two humanitarian advisers (one male, one female), one administrator (female), and 20 Afghan support staff (19 male, one female).

Central Africa

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what help the Government are giving to *(a)* the people of Goma and *(b)* the Governments of Congo and Rwanda. [30322]

Clare Short: During the present financial year we have committed over £10 million to meet the most urgent humanitarian needs in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), as well as providing practical and political support for the peace process and Inter-Congolese Dialogue. This support is channelled through United Nations agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Some £2 million of this has been provided in response to the needs of the people of Goma and the surrounding area in the wake of the Nyiragongo volcanic eruption. We are funding the UN, the British Red Cross Society and a number of other NGOs to provide emergency relief goods; water, sanitation and medical services support; and co-ordination of the overall relief response.

DFID is the leading bilateral donor in Rwanda, providing £30 million in development assistance this financial year. We are committed to help Rwanda meet the International Development Targets (IDTs) within a sustainable economic and social framework that facilitates peace and security, reconciliation, economic growth and inclusive government.

Fairtrade Fortnight

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to encourage participation by her Department in Fairtrade Fortnight from 4 to 17 March. [33552]

Clare Short: My Department is providing £120,000 to the Fairtrade Foundation over three years (2001–03) in support of its efforts to target new groups through its annual Fairtrade Fortnight campaigns. In addition, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will be attending the launch of this year's campaign on 4 March 2002.

Global Health Fund

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what further funds her Department will direct towards the Global Health Fund and from which part of her Department's budget. [32116]

Clare Short: The UK was one of the first donors to make a pledge to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and malaria. DFID has committed £200 million over five years from its budget. As the fund gets up and running, we will closely monitor its effectiveness and the value it adds to the international effort against the three diseases, and review our contributions accordingly.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what work her Department is undertaking to ensure the Global Health Fund meets its pledge to leverage additional financial resources. [32115]

Clare Short: The UK and others have worked hard to ensure that one of the criteria for assessing applications to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and malaria (GFATM) will be the level of domestic Government, public sector and civil society commitment (both financial and political) to fighting the three diseases. This will be a strong in-built incentive for increased domestic health spending.

The UK has also made clear that for the fund to realise its full potential, donors will need to increase spending on health through bilateral and multilateral channels in tandem with their fund contributions, not least to ensure that health systems are able to deliver the drugs and commodities the fund will finance. The UK has committed over £1 billion since 1997 to such health systems strengthening.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress was made at the first board meeting of the Global Health Fund in Geneva; and if she will make a statement. [32112]

Clare Short: The first board meeting of the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and malaria took place on 28–29 January. The fund was legally established as a foundation in Switzerland. The board approved a call for proposals and finalised a set of guidelines for their submission, which are designed to help potential recipient country partnerships apply for funding. The guidelines also explain the proposal review process. The fund is therefore on target to make its first decisions on disbursing resources to countries at the second board meeting, due to take place in the week beginning 22 April.

Great Lakes Region

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what resources are available to the Great Lakes region through the Africa conflict prevention pool. [32276]

Clare Short: Resolving the conflict in the Great Lakes region is a priority for the UK Government. In the current financial year 2001–02, £3.6 million has been allocated to support programmes in the Great Lakes region through the Africa pool. In addition to this, the UK contribution to United Nations peacekeeping in the region is forecast to be £27.3 million.

In addition, DFID also contributes indirectly to conflict prevention through governance and humanitarian work.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list her Department's total expenditure by month in each financial year since 1997–98. [32793]

Clare Short: The Department's spend by month since 1997–98 is:

£ million

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
April	70	49	159	76	177
May	66	63	72	79	86
June	50	152	122	118	200
July	186	163	80	103	139
August	71	112	112	149	105
September	61	121	158	230	170
October	140	117	101	111	195
November	126	152	119	117	157
December	133	145	161	518	361
January	64	118	141	142	71
February	177	116	163	146	—
March[1]	438	462	611	396	—

[1] March expenditure includes moneys advanced earlier in the year and brought to account during April and May.

Note:

Figures rounded to the nearest £ million.

Departmental Secondments (Energy Industry)

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many staff were seconded between *(a)* BP, *(b)* Shell, *(c)* Enron, *(d)* Exxon-Mobil, *(e)* Conoco, *(f)* Texaco and *(g)* TotalFinaElf and her Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33200]

Clare Short: No staff have been seconded between DFID and these companies since 1999.

Tanzania

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions she has had with *(a)* the Department of Trade and Industry, *(b)* the Ministry of Defence and *(c)* the Foreign Office concerning the advice given to the World Bank by the International Civil Aviation Organisation on 8 November on the Tanzanian air traffic control system. [32904]

Clare Short: When I received a copy of the letter of 8 November from the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) to the World Bank, I sent copies to the Department of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign Office. I have since had discussions and correspondence with these Departments on the content of the ICAO letter.

The Government of Tanzania are working with the ICAO during their follow-up visit to Tanzania this week, to address the issues of technical applicability and value for money of the proposed air traffic control system for Tanzania.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will place a copy of the letter dated 8 November 2001 from the International Civil Aviation Organisation to the World Bank concerning the Tanzanian air traffic control radar project in the Library. [32226]

Clare Short: I will place in the Library of the House a copy of the letter of 8 November 2001 from the International Civil Aviation Organisation to the World bank regarding the proposed air traffic control system for Tanzania.

Zambia

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action her Department is taking to divert resources into free primary education in Zambia to assist poor parents with the cost of schooling. [31672]

Clare Short: We are participating in the Basic Education Sub-Sector Investment Programme (BESSIP) launched in mid-1999. Its main targets are to ensure that all children of school-going age have access to primary education in 2005, and to reduce the costs to parents.

The Ministry of Education is developing this experience with our support into a five-year sector-wide strategic plan, based on Zambia's poverty reduction strategy. It is intended that the plan will be co-financed by the Zambian Government in partnership with the private sector, churches, civil society and donors. Education is a priority use of additional funds released through debt relief under HIPC.

Ghana

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has made on the education fees charged to rural families in Ghana. [31668]

Clare Short: The Government are committed to the principle that primary education should be free. We are supporting the Government of Ghana's policy to deliver all Ghanaian children free, good quality basic education by 2005 through our education sector support programme. This amounts to £50 million over five years and helps to help achieve improved primary education outcomes through working in partnership with the Ministry of Education and other donors. Our assistance is also closely aligned with the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy, which includes a commitment to enforce the regulations on illegal school fees in primary schools.

Theft and Fraud

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what additional security measures are planned by her Department to deter and detect theft and fraud. [31788]

Clare Short: We are constantly monitoring the adequacy and effectiveness of our security arrangements. As part of the refurbishment of my Department's new building in London, we have installed new access control equipment, including security pillars and card readers which operate on the presentation of a valid security pass. Asset-control tagging of valuable and attractive DFID equipment has also been introduced. We propose to extend these systems to our other UK buildings.

The Internal Audit Department are due to review internal guidance for handling fraud and study individual cases to detect systems weaknesses and identify areas for improvement. Our corporate governance procedures require heads of department to confirm that they have identified all instances of fraud in their area of responsibility and have taken appropriate action.

Overseas Service Aid Scheme

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what figures are held on the number of people recruited to the Overseas Service Aid scheme who had children born overseas while they served on this scheme; and how many people hold British citizenship by descent as a result of being born abroad while their parents were serving on this scheme. [30330]

Clare Short: The Department does not maintain these figures on the Overseas Service Aid Scheme which has been run down over a number of years.

It is highly unlikely that the information on British citizenship by descent was ever held in any systematic way. Any attempt to determine the figures, therefore, could only be at disproportionate cost to the Department.

HEALTH

Food Standards Agency

Ms Christine Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Food Standards Agency annual report and accounts for the year ended 31 March 2001 will be published. [34117]

Yvette Cooper: The Food Standards Agency's annual report and accounts for the year ended 31 March 2001, was laid before Parliament today. Copies are available in the Library of the House. A version in Welsh as required by the Welsh Language Act 1993 is in preparation and will be published shortly.

Young Mothers

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children were born to women under the age of 18 years, per year, between 1990 and 2001 *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in Bassetlaw. [33510]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to John Mann, dated 5 February 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question on how many children were born per year since 1990, to women under the age of 18 years in the UK and in Bassetlaw. (33510)

Figures for 1990 to 2000 are given in the table below. Data for 2001 are not yet available.

Live births to women under the age of 18 years, 1990–2000

	(a) UK[1]	*(b) Bassetlaw*[2]
1990	17,996	34
1991	17,215	37
1992	16,141	26
1993	15,806	22
1994	14,648	35
1995	15,401	24
1996	17,698	42
1997	18,213	53
1998	18,063	36
1999	17,200	30
2000	16,206	31

[1] Includes births registered in England, Wales and Scotland to non-residents of the country in which the birth was registered. Births to non-resident mothers in Northern Ireland are excluded from these figures.

[2] To women resident in Bassetlaw.

Source:

Office for National Statistics

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Public Service Agreement target of efficiency and other value for money gains in the NHS equivalent to 3 per cent. per annum of health authority unified allocations. [14902]

Mr. Hutton: Allocations to health authorities are based on an overall assessment of the resources required to cover inflationary pressures and deliver national targets. Allocations to health authorities in 1999–2000 and 2000–01 were made net of 3 per cent. efficiency savings. This means that health authorities needed to achieve the efficiency target to fully fund delivery of national targets and inflation.

A new Public Service Agreement target for value for money was agreed as part of Spending Review 2000:

> The cost of care commissioned from trusts which perform well against indicators of fair access, quality and responsiveness, will become the benchmark for the NHS. Everyone will be expected to reach the level of the best over the next five years, with agreed milestones for 2003–04.

The aim of this new target is to ensure that cost-savings are not at the expense of service quality. The year 2001–02 is the first year covered by this new Public Service Agreement target. We will be monitoring progress against this new target as data become available.

NHS Prescriptions

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the fee paid to community pharmacists for dispensing NHS prescriptions. [27866]

Ms Blears: Remuneration paid to community pharmacies is intended to reward them for the national health service pharmaceutical services they provide. The total remuneration to be paid for services in any given year is known as the global sum. The global sum is distributed through a system of fees and allowances, some of which relate directly to the number (and type) of prescriptions dispensed, some of which do not. For 2001–02 the global sum for England and Wales is £806.6 million, an increase of 3.7 per cent. over 2000–01.

The fees paid to community pharmacies for dispensing NHS prescriptions vary according to the item prescribed. The large majority of prescriptions attract the basic dispensing fee, the current rate for which is 87.4 pence per item.

Bioaerosols

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the effect of the inhalation of bioaerosols on human health. [29621]

Yvette Cooper: The health effects of bioaerosol inhalation depend upon the type of biological material contained in the aerosol, its pathogenicity and virulence, the quantity inhaled and the susceptibility of the individual who inhales the aerosol. Health effects from the inhalation of a bioaerosol range from none to very serious, often fatal, disease. It is not possible to detail all the potential health effects of bioaerosol inhalation within the scope of this answer, as there are many pathogens that can be transmitted through the bioaerosol route. There are also non-pathogenic bioaerosols that can have adverse health effects varying from mild allergic reactions to acute asthma attacks.

While the health effects of many specific pathogenic microbial bioaerosols, such as those containing Anthrax spores, Legionella bacteria or Aspergillus fungal spores, are well known, the health response to non-specific diverse bioaerosols is less well understood. For these bioaerosols, such as those produced during harvesting or composting, which contain a mixture of micro-organisms in combination with organic and inorganic particles. The nature of the human response varies greatly and can also change as a result of sensitisation due to repeat exposure to the bioaerosol. For such bioaerosols there has been no detailed study undertaken into the associated health effects.

Consideration of the health effects of bioaerosols inhalation falls to a number of bodies within us.

The Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens (ACDP) advises Health and Agriculture Ministers and the Health and Safety Commission on the health risks to workers and the public from dangerous pathogens, including bioaerosol risks. The ACDP assesses risks and advises on the containment measures and precautions to be taken to minimise the risk of exposure to dangerous pathogens. The Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 and the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1999 cover occupational exposure to bioaerosols. These place obligations upon employers to prevent, or minimise, the risk of exposure to harmful bioaerosols.

The Environment Agency are funding a range of research projects to evaluate the wider health effects of bioaerosols such as those that arise from incineration or composting of waste.

Inhaled bioaerosols containing naturally occurring pathogens can pose a particular threat to patients in hospitals. Specific environmental and general control strategies have been put in place to prevent exposure to this bioaerosol risk in hospitals through National Health Service Estates.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many *(a)* named day written questions and *(b)* ordinary written questions to his Department tabled before 30 November 2001 have yet to receive a substantive reply; [33708]

(2) what the tabling date was of the earliest written question to his Department which is still awaiting a substantive reply. [33709]

Ms Blears: Our records show that 25 ordinary written questions and 16 named day questions tabled before 30 November 2001 have yet to receive a substantive reply.

The earliest tabling date was 18 October.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason he has not replied to the written question on stroke research ref. 14028, from the hon. Member for Coventry, South. [32658]

Jacqui Smith: I replied to my hon. Friend on 1 February.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will state *(a)* the reasons why he has not replied to question 19322 tabled by the hon. Member for Aylesbury on 26 November 2001 and *(b)* when he intends to provide a reply. [33710]

Ms Blears: I replied to the hon. Member today. I am sorry that the hon. Member did not get an earlier substantive reply; this was due to an administrative error within the Department.

Out-patient Treatment

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list in *(a)* rank and *(b)* alphabetical order of NHS trust, by NHS region, the (i) proportion and (ii) numbers of patients waiting (A) over 12 and (B) over 18 months or more for out-patient treatment (1) at the latest available date, (2) in March 1997 and (3) in June 1997. [17928]

Mr. Hutton: Data are only collected on the number of patients waiting over six months for a first out-patient appointment. Beyond this time period, data are not broken down into those patients waiting over 12 or 18 months.

Diabetes

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from Leicester University hospitals about the timescale for delivering a diabetes national service framework; and if he will make a statement. [18479]

Jacqui Smith: To date, we have received seven letters from local hon. Members enclosing a letter from a consultant at the University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust about the delayed implementation of the diabetes national service framework.

Digital Hearing Aids

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have *(a)* been tested for digital hearing aids and *(b)* had them fitted under the NHS in (i) England and (ii) Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency. [19058]

Jacqui Smith: By the end of December 2001, 19,353 adult patients had been assessed for digital hearing aids and 14,856 adult patients had been fitted by the 20 trusts involved in the pilot project. There are currently no pilot sites in the Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East constituency.

I announced on 24 December 2001 that a further £20 million would be made available in 2002–03 so that a further 30 NHS sites can join the modernising hearing aids project during that year. Decisions on which sites will become involved in the project from April will be made shortly.

Critical Care Beds

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many funded critical care beds were closed in *(a)* each health authority area and *(b)* England at the latest available date. [19322]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 29 November 2001]:* The number of funded critical care beds that were closed in each health authority is not collected.

The latest published figures showed that there were 3,011 available adult critical care beds in national health service trusts in England at midnight on the 29 November 2001. Details are available along with the results of the census of general and acute beds that was carried out as at midnight on Thursday 29 November 2001.

Elderly Patients (Emergency Re-admissions)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the level of emergency readmissions of elderly patients for each quarter of the last five years. [20866]

Mr. Hutton: The table shows the rate of emergency re-admission within 28 days for people aged 75 and over.

Quarter	*Percentage*[1]
1996–97	
Q1	6.7
Q2	6.6
Q3	6.8
Q4	7.0
1997–98	
Q1	7.2
Q2	6.7
Q3	8.0
Q4	8.2
1999–2000	
Q1	7.7
Q2	7.3
Q3	7.2
Q4	7.6
2000–01	
Q1	7.4
Q2	7.1
Q3	7.3
Q4	7.7

Quarter	*Percentage*[1]
2001–02	
Q1	7.3
Q2	7.1

[1] Percentage of people aged 75 and over re-admitted as an emergency within 28 days of discharge from hospital.

Mental Health

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will inquire of the NHS acute trusts in London in order to ascertain the occupancy rate of beds in acute mental health wards in each London hospital; and if he will make a statement. [22085]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 13 December 2001]:* The latest data available are for 2000–01 and are shown in the table.

The data are collected annually at national health service trust level, rather than by individual hospital site.

Trust[1]	*Available beds*	*Occupied beds*	*Occupancy rate (percentage)*
2000–01			
Barnet Community Health Care NHS Trust	207	187	90.5
BHB Community Health NHS Trust	245	223	91.3
Brent, Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster Mental Health NHS Trust	732	621	84.8
Camden and Islington Community Health Service NHS Trust	358	352	98.2
Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham Mental Health NHS Trust	567	543	95.8
East London and the City Mental Health NHS Trust	514	480	93.4
Enfield Community Care NHS Trust	262	244	93.1
Forest Healthcare NHS Trust	213	190	89.0
Great Ormond Street Hospital For Children NHS Trust	8	6	77.1
Hammersmith Hospitals NHS Trust	72	65	90.4
Haringey Healthcare NHS Trust	240	235	98.1
Harrow and Hillingdon Health Care NHS Trust	83	81	97.7
Hillingdon Hospital NHS Trust	116	109	93.9
Hounslow and Spelthorne Community and Mental Health NHS Trust	164	162	98.8
Kingston and District Community NHS Trust	308	289	94.0
Oxleas NHS Trust	391	354	90.7
Redbridge Health Care NHS Trust	245	203	83.2
Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust	122	114	93.4
South London and Maudsley NHS Trust	947	916	96.7
South West London and St. Georges Mental Health NHS Trust	595	541	90.9
University College London Hospitals NHS Trust	13	10	75.2

[1] Pre-April 2001 trust configurations

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proportion of *(a)* men and *(b)* women aged over 65 years have clinical depression; [24540]

(2) what proportion of *(a)* men and *(b)* women aged over 65 years with clinical depression live (i) alone, (ii) alone in private households and (iii) in residential care. [24536]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* The information requested is not available centrally.

It is estimated that around 10–15 per cent. of the population aged 65 and over have depression. More severe states of depression affect about 3–5 per cent. of older people.

The recent Office for National Statistics report "Psychiatric morbidity among adults living in private households, 2000" contains information about the prevalence of mental disorders among adults in private households.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the UK have dementia; and how many of them are *(a)* over and *(b)* under 65 years. [24537]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* The information requested is not available centrally. The 1998 Medical Research Council Cognitive Function and Ageing Study estimated that around 600,000 people in the United Kingdom suffer from dementia, including around 17,000 people under the age of 65.

"Winning the Generation Game"

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out for each of the conclusions in section 6.4 of the Performance and Innovation Unit report, "Winning the Generation Game", *(a)* what progress his Department has made and *(b)* what future plans his Department has for acting on them; and if he will set out against each of the conclusions the targets and deadlines that have been set. [24209]

Ms Blears: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 335W.

Alzheimer's Disease

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women in England suffer from Alzheimer's disease. [24693]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* This information is not routinely collected. The 1998 Medical Research Council Cognitive Function and Ageing Study estimated that about 600,000 people in the United Kingdom have dementia. Alzheimer's disease causes up to 60 per cent. of cases of dementia.

The only available statistical returns are for hospital admissions. The number of admissions in England, by sex, for Alzheimer's disease in 2000–01 is shown in the table.

	Number
Male	1,984
Female	3,538
Sex not known	41
Total	5,563

NHS Direct

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average time taken to answer NHS Direct's telephones *(a)* at weekends, *(b)* between 6 pm and 11 pm, *(c)* between 11 pm and 6 am and *(d)* during daytime office hours in the last 12 months. [24700]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* It is not currently possible to provide the information on average time taken to answer NHS Direct calls as requested. However, the average time it takes for NHS Direct to answer the telephone is approximately 30 seconds after the confidentiality message finishes.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many calls NHS Direct received in each of the last six months. [24699]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* The information on the number of calls to NHS Direct for each of the last six months is shown in the table.

Month/year	*Total calls*
2001	
June	401,000
July	409,000
August	398,000
September	369,000
October	427,000
November	416,000
December	511,000

Source:
NHS Direct sites

St. John Ambulance Volunteers

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many times in 2001 St. John Ambulance volunteers carried out duties normally the responsibility of London ambulance service personnel. [24308]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* Figures are not held centrally for the number of times the London ambulance service have called upon the individual services of St. John Ambulance.

Head Injuries

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans there are to increase support and training for head injury survivors. [25453]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* We are keen to help ensure that all disabled people, including those with head injury, are able to play a full part in society. One important way of doing this is by helping people return to work whenever possible. Currently local authorities are taking the lead on Joint Investment Plans on Welfare to Work for disabled people initiative. The idea of these plans is to provide effective and joined up services for disabled people who want to work, to stay in work, or to move closer to the world of work.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government have to compile up-to-date epidemiological data on the extent and severity of traumatic brain injury. [25454]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 9 January 2002]:* There are no plans to extend our data collection. We already collect data on the number, extent and severity of traumatic brain injury, as shown in the table, which has data for the last five years. Around one million people a year receive a head injury in the United Kingdom, and over 100,000 of those attend hospital.

Finished consultant episodes (FCEs) by main diagnosis NHS hospitals, England 1995–96 to 2000–01

S00—S09 Injuries to the head	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
S00 Superficial injury of head	9,731	10,829	11,000	10,875	12,293	11,379
S01 Open wound of head	20,180	23,186	23,824	23,668	27,184	25,883
S02 Fracture of skull and facial bones	29,839	31,419	30,265	27,837	30,825	28,318
S03 Dislocation sprain and strain of joints and ligaments of head	317	381	367	410	349	314
S04 Injury of cranial nerves	78	63	94	96	106	68
S05 Injury of eye and orbit	3,655	3,503	3,320	3,255	3,591	3,230
S06 Intracranial injury	23,226	20,036	16,529	11,942	12,790	11,892
S07 Crushing injury of head	30	16	11	19	16	5
S08 Traumatic amputation of part of head	127	116	102	111	123	123
S09 Other and unspecified injuries of head	40,912	42,193	41,102	40,163	43,271	39,175
Total	128,096	131,742	126,615	118,376	[illegible]	120,387

Note:

A Finished Consultant Episode (FCE) is defined as a period of patient care under one consultant in one health care provider. The figures do not represent the number of patients, as one person may have several episodes within the year. Data for 1995–96 to 1997–98 are adjusted for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data. 1998–99 to 2000–01 data are not yet adjusted for shortfalls.

Hospital Management

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria will be used to assess the need for franchised management of persistently failing hospitals. [29398]

Mr. Hutton: If a national health service body is not performing one or more of its functions adequately or at all, or there are significant failings in the way the trust is being run, the Secretary of State for Health has the powers, under section 13 of the Health and Social Care Act 2001, to intervene.

In the case of trusts that have recently received a zero star performance rating they are required to provide an action plan, agreed with the Department, to address the particular areas of performance which they need to improve. Franchise arrangements will be considered only if these trusts fail to make progress against their action plan.

GPs

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to attract back retired general practitioners to work in the medical profession; and if he will make a statement. [29968]

Mr. Hutton: We are committed to increasing general practitioner numbers in line with the NHS Plan target for at least an extra 2,000 by 2004. To deliver this we are, in consultation with the profession and others, exploring and implementing change to make general practice more attractive.

These changes already include increasing the number of training places, recruiting from overseas, providing additional training and support for new GPs; improving GPs' working lives by reducing bureaucracy and introducing family friendly packages; giving better support by providing better information technology, better buildings and different ways of working; developing flexible career options; and offering cash incentives to new GPs or returning GP retainees. These measures are intended to attract new GPs, to retain those now practising, and to encourage the return of those who are qualified but not currently working in general practice.

Primary Care Trusts

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria he has used in the evaluation of primary care groups in their applications to become primary care trusts; and if he will make a statement. [29969]

Mr. Hutton: Primary care trusts are established after full and open consultation locally. Each application to establish a PCT is assessed against the nationally published criteria for assessment contained in Health Service Circular 1999/167. Applications must demonstrate:

The benefits of what will be achieved

The degree of support for the proposal

The 'fitness' of the proposed organisation to deliver

The impact on other organisations.

Mobile Phones

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his definition is of other sensitive sites referred to in the Stewart report on "Mobile Phones and Health"; and whether this includes sites directly on top of homes. [31345]

Ms Blears: In May 2000, the Independent Expert Group on Mobile Phones (IEGMP), chaired by Sir William Stewart, issued a report on "Mobile Phones and Health". This report included a number of recommendations designed to provide more information to people about base stations in their area. It included a recommendation that there should be an independent random on-going audit of all base stations to ensure that exposure guidelines are not exceeded outside the marked exclusion zones and that the base stations comply with their agreed specifications. The group said that particular attention should be paid initially to the auditing of base stations near to schools and other sensitive sites. The group was particularly concerned about schools, as at open meetings held by the group around the country, concern had been expressed about the potential exposure of children in schools and this was seen as a sensitive issue. The group was not specific about other sensitive sites. There was no specific concern about homes directly underneath base stations as the radio signals are generally directed to the horizon and not downwards.

The IEGMP was also concerned about possible interference caused by the use of mobile phones in hospitals and other sites where the radio frequency radiation could possibly interfere with sensitive equipment. They, therefore, made a recommendation that health authorities/health boards should issue guidance on the use of mobile phones and should ensure that all hospitals comply. This guidance includes the placing of visible warning signs at entrances to buildings to indicate that mobile phones should be switched off. In addition, health care establishments have liaised carefully with mobile phone organisations to ensure that any risk is negligible to patients and staff when considering the location of base stations on their premises.

Mortality Rates

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out for each NHS *(a)* region, *(b)* health authority and *(c)* trust the mortality rate (i) in hospital and (ii) within 30 days of discharge of people aged 75 and over in each quarter in the last four years, giving (A) the actual number and (B) the proportion of the total of those aged 75 and over admitted in each case. [31876]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 31 January 2002]:* The information requested is shown in the tables.

The mortality rate in hospital for patients aged over 75 is only available at national, regional and health authority level. (Table 1—regional rate and table 2—health authority rate).

The mortality rate within 30 days of discharge for patients aged 75 and over is available only at national level (table 3).

Hospital episode statistics: Discharge episodes aged 75 and over with death rates by regional office of treatment: NHS hospital trusts in England 2000–01

Regional office	Discharged Live	 Death	Total number discharged	Death rate (percentage)
Northern and Yorkshire regional	247,466	21,057	268,523	7.8
Trent regional office	198,438	17,330	215,768	8.0
West midlands regional office	185,538	17,812	203,350	8.8
North-west regional office	266,002	22,366	288,368	7.8
Eastern regional office	201,050	17,659	218,709	8.1
London regional office	213,809	21,605	235,414	9.2
South-east regional office	278,148	26,701	304,849	8.8
South-west regional office	225,356	18,159	243,515	7.5
Total	1,815,807	162,689	1,978,496	8.2

Note:

Figures in this table have not yet been adjusted for shortfalls in data

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

Hospital episode statistics: Discharge episodes aged 75 and over with death rates by health authority of treatment, England 2000–01

	Health authority	Discharged Live	 Death	Total number discharged	Death rate (percentage)
QA2	Hillingdon HA	5,602	710	6,312	11
QA3	Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster HA	17,696	1,170	18,866	6
QA4	Enfield and Haringey HA	6,199	976	7,175	14
QA5	Redbridge and Waltham Forest HA	16,522	1,972	18,494	11
QA6	Bedfordshire HA	14,509	1,296	15,805	8
QA7	Berkshire HA	21,828	2,370	24,198	10
QA8	Buckinghamshire HA	16 144	1,577	17,721	9
QAA	Bexley and Greenwich HA	11,626	1,412	13,038	11
QAC	Bromley HA	9,755	881	10,636	8
QAD	Croydon HA	7,141	841	7,982	11
QAE	East Kent HA	24,630	2,526	27,156	9
QAF	West Kent HA	27,773	3,191	30,964	10
QAG	Kingston and Richmond HA	10,261	1,120	11,381	10
QAH	Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham HA	20,026	1,888	21,914	9
QAJ	Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth HA	20,732	2,226	22,958	10
QAK	East Surrey HA	210	18	228	8
QAL	West Surrey HA	21,790	2,156	23,946	9
QAM	East Sussex, Brighton and Hove HA	31,561	2,789	34,350	8
QAN	West Sussex HA	37,532	3,412	40,944	8
QAP	Barking and Havering HA	13,197	1,515	14,712	10
QAQ	Barnet HA	12,654	1,438	14,092	10
QAR	Brent and Harrow HA	9,329	722	10,051	7
QAT	Camden and Islington HAS	24,016	1,483	25 499	6
QAV	Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow HA	15,234	1,757	16,991	10
QAW	East London and The City HA	13,819	1,494	15,313	10
QAX	North Essex HA	28,385	3,138	31,523	10
QAY	South Essex HA	23,575	2,426	26,001	9
QC1	South Lancashire HA	5,312	462	5,774	8
QC2	Liverpool HA	16,559	1,140	17,699	6
QC3	Manchester HA	29,300	1,974	31,274	6
QC4	Morcambe Bay HA	14,022	1,287	15,309	8
QC5	St. Helens and Knowsley HA	10,171	1,041	11,212	9
QC6	Salford and Trafford HA	13,526	1,259	14,785	9
QC7	Sefton HA	20,779	1,776	22,555	8
QC8	QC8 Stockport HA	11,801	1,006	12,807	8
QC9	West Pennine HA	16,935	1,546	18,481	8
QCC	Northamptonshire HA	17,419	1,615	19,034	8
QCE	Oxfordshire HA	18,907	4,659	20,566	8
QCF	Suffolk HA	23,106	2,189	25,295	9
QCG	Barnsley HA	8,086	778	8,864	9
QCH	North Derbyshire HA	13,020	1,105	14,125	/
QCJ	Southern Derbyshire HA	20,738	1,550	22,288	7
QCK	Doncaster HA	13,781	1,071	14,852	7
QCL	Leicestershire HA	27,738	2,383	30,121	8
QCM	Lincolnshire HA	21,548	2,236	23,784	9
QCN	North Nottinghamshire HA	17,233	1,650	18,883	9
QCP	Nottingham HA	27,675	2,450	30,125	8
QCQ	Rotherham HA	8,323	821	9,144	9
QCR	Sheffield HA	26,214	2,130	28,344	8
QCT	Bury and Rochdale HA	11,143	1,127	12,270	9
QCV	North Cheshire HA	11,273	1,034	12,307	8

Hospital episode statistics: Discharge episodes aged 75 and over with death rates by health authority of treatment, England 2000–01

	Health authority	*Discharged* *Live*	*Death*	*Total number discharged*	*Death rate (percentage)*
QCW	South Cheshire HA	20,213	1,884	22,097	9
QCX	East Lancashire HA	18,782	1,450	20,232	7
QCY	North West Lancashire HA	31,735	1,914	33,649	6
QD1	North and Mid Hampshire HA	13,281	1,119	14,400	8
QD2	Portsmouth and South East Hampshire HA	23,407	2,039	25,446	8
QD3	Southampton and South West Hampshire HA	19,487	1,681	21,168	8
QD4	Isle of Wight HA	4,179	549	4,728	12
QD5	Somerset HA	18,688	1,556	20,244	8
QD6	South and West Devon HA	28,871	2,227	31,098	7
QD7	Wiltshire HA	17,097	1,770	18,867	9
QD8	Avon HA	47,221	3,899	51,120	8
QD9	Birmingham HA	45,941	4,288	50,229	9
QD1	Wigan and Bolton HA	19,071	1,988	21,059	9
QDC	Wirral HA	15,380	1,478	16,858	9
QDD	Bradford HA	20,381	1,563	21,944	7
QDE	County Durham HA	17,109	1,498	18,607	8
QDF	East Riding HA	17,181	1,461	18,642	8
QDG	Gateshead and South Tyneside HA	12,451	1,323	13,774	10
QDH	Leeds HA	28,376	2,284	30,660	7
QDK	Newcastle and North Tyneside HA	24,365	1,430	25,795	6
QDK	North Cumbria HA	11,960	1,086	13,046	8
QDL	South Humber HA	14,082	1,156	15,238	8
QDM	Northumberland HA	17,031	1,638	18,669	9
QDN	Sunderland HA	13,949	1,192	15,141	8
QDP	Tees HA	22,906	1,916	24,822	8
QDQ	Wakefield HA	12,655	1,111	13,766	8
QDR	North Yorkshire HA	29,737	2,762	32,499	8
QDT	Calderdale and Kirklees HA	19,365	1,793	21,158	8
QDV	Cornwall and Isles of Scilly HA	19,636	1,506	21,142	7
QDW	Dorset HA	44,830	3,358	48,188	7
QDX	North and East Devon HA	26,547	1,888	28,435	7
QDY	Gloucestershire HA	22,466	1,955	24,421	8
QEA	Coventry HA	13,579	1,440	15,019	10
QEC	Dudley HA	10,272	1,115	11,387	10
QED	Herefordshire HA	7,598	596	8,194	7
QEE	Sandwell HA	7,852	856	8,438	10
QEF	Shropshire HA	16,038	1,242	17,280	7
QEG	Solihull HA	155	12	167	7
QEH	North Staffordshire HA	20,646	1,710	22,356	8
QEJ	South Staffordshire HA	15,019	1,411	16,430	9
QEK	Walsall HA	6,123	989	7,112	14
QEL	Warwickshire HA	14,326	1,446	15,772	9
QEM	Wolverhampton HA	11,986	1,040	13,026	8
QEN	Worcestershire HA	16,273	1,667	17,940	9
QEP	East and North Hertfordshire HA	14,465	1,393	15,858	9
QEQ	West Hertfordshire HA	14,095	1,254	15,349	8
QER	Cambridge HA	27,959	2,384	30,343	8
QET	Norfolk HA	54,956	3,579	58,535	6
Total		1,815,807	162,689	1,978,496	8

Note:
Figures in this table have not yet been adjusted for shortfalls in data
Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

Deaths in hospital within 30 days of surgery

England	*Number of patients[1] with operations*	*Number of deaths*	*Percentage who died*
Emergency admissions:			
1997–98	120,500	12,400	10.26
1998–99	136,000	14,600	10.71
Non-emergency admissions:			
1997–98	204,200	2,800	1.38
1998–99	224,400	3,200	1.41

[1] Aged 75 and over
Notes:
1. Rounded to the nearest 100.
2. "Surgery" includes many medical interventions and is consistent with definitions used in Clinical Indicators.
Source:
NHS Performance Indicators, Department of Health, July 2000, ad hoc analysis

Lister Hospital

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future of the accident and emergency department at the Lister hospital. [32298]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* The Hertfordshire and south Bedfordshire acute services review aims to explore the best way to provide local people with much better acute services and to meet NHS plan targets for modernising and improving patient services over the next 10 years.

The proposals have not progressed as far as to put forward specific recommendations for accident and emergency departments and the review will continue with ongoing work.

Primary Care Groups

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what instructions he has given to health authorities on the distribution of funding to *(a)* primary care groups and *(b)* primary care trusts for 2002–03; and what arrangements he is putting in place for the funding of primary care trusts from 2003 onwards. [30617]

Mr. Hutton: Health Service Circular 1998/171 set out the principles for health authorities to follow in setting primary care group and primary care trust allocations. For 2002–03 these principles continue to apply but are supplemented by additional guidance set out in HSC 2001/34, "Health Authority Revenue Resource Limits 2002–03". Copies of these documents have been placed in the Library.

From 2003–04, the intention is that allocations will be made direct to primary care trusts. This is subject to the passage of legislation through Parliament. Allocations will continue to be based on the principle of weighted capitation.

Epsom Hospital

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which postcodes are included in the catchment area for Epsom hospital's maternity unit; and how many patients came from each of those postcode areas in the last year for which information is available. [33706]

Mr. Hutton: For the year 2000–01 the following information was collected:

Postcodes within catchment area	*Delivery episodes*
CR5	20
KT11	85
KT17	199
KT18	171
KT19	329
KT20	172
KT21	107
KT22	208
KT23	60
KT4	103
SM2	46
SM7	142
Other postcodes (outside defined catchment)	249
Total	1,891

Note:

Postcodes listed fall wholly or partly within the catchment area, which is defined as that area for which Epsom general hospital was the designated district hospital prior to becoming a trust hospital in 1991.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 6 February 2002

PRIME MINISTER

Commonwealth Games

Q15. **Mr. Lloyd:** To ask the Prime Minister what preparations are being undertaken for the commencement of the jubilee baton relay in celebration of the Manchester 2002 Commonwealth Games. [30928]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him earlier in the House.

Policy Units

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the performance of the performance and innovation unit. [30894]

Dr. Cable: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the roles of the *(a)* forward strategy unit, *(b)* performance and innovation unit and *(c)* policy unit. [30885]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Members for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on 14 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 86–87W.

Camp David Talks

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his talks with President Bush at Camp David on 23 February 2001. [31662]

The Prime Minister: My visit to Camp David on 23 and 24 February 2001 was the first opportunity for face-to-face talks with the newly-elected President Bush. The joint statement we agreed and issued on 23 February 2001 covered our key concerns: NATO, a European security and defence policy, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, Iraq, the Lockerbie tragedy, Northern Ireland, developments in Africa and trade issues. The terrible events of 11 September have underlined the importance of the United Kingdom's close working relationship with the United States in pursuit of our common aims.

Coal Bed Methane

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Prime Minister whether the performance and innovation unit's energy review considers the exploitation of coal bed methane vital to the UK's energy needs; and when the review will be published. [30888]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) on 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 816W.

Child Care Review

Caroline Flint: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the performance and innovation unit's role in relation to the cross-cutting review of child care. [30890]

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury announced on 25 October that an inter-departmental review of child care would be undertaken with conclusions feeding into the 2002 spending review. The performance and innovation unit are project managers for the review. It is being led by my noble Friend Baroness Ashton, and involves the Department for Education and Skills, the Department for Work and Pensions, HM Treasury, the Department of Trade and Industry and the women and equality unit.

Energy Review

Bob Spink: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the recent work of the PIU on the energy review. [30912]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) on 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 816W.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Civil Service Appointments

11. **Helen Jackson:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what role his Department has in establishing the criteria for making senior appointments to the civil service. [30898]

Mr. Leslie: Individual Departments are responsible for deciding the criteria used for selection to fill their own senior management posts. The Cabinet Office has a role in ensuring that senior appointments policy as a whole meets the objectives of the civil service reform programme. This includes monitoring progress against targets to increase diversity and to bring in new skills and experience from outside the service.

Youth Homelessness

12. **Mr. Bryant:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what recent work the social exclusion unit has carried out on youth homelessness. [30899]

Mrs. Roche: The SEU has produced a number of reports, such as "Teenage Pregnancy", "Bridging the Gap", and "Truancy and Exclusion", which have focused on children at risk of social exclusion and the underlying issues which can lead to youth homelessness.

The SEU is currently leading a project on young people who run away from home or care, many of whom are at risk of rough sleeping and homelessness in later life.

A number of youth homelessness projects have been supported by the rough sleepers' unit since the 1998 SEU "Rough Sleeping" report.

Regional Economy (East Midlands)

13. **Mr. Reed:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what assessment he has made of the way in which the Government office for the east midlands contributes to the regional economy. [30900]

Mrs. Roche: The performance of the Government office for the east midlands is regularly assessed against the targets set out in its annual business plan. For example, grants offered to businesses by the Government office have generated further investment of nearly £6.5 million and with the support of the office £119 million has been allocated to the region to support local transport plans. A further £90 million is allocated through the Government office to support the regional development agency.

Social Exclusion

14. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State if he will make a statement on combating social exclusion. [30901]

15. **Charlotte Atkins:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State if he will make a statement on the reduction in social exclusion since 1997. [30902]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The social exclusion unit is currently working on four new projects, looking at:

re-offending by ex-prisoners;

young runaways;

educational attainment of children in care; and

transport and social exclusion.

Public Appointments (Women)

16. **Linda Gilroy:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what recent discussions his Department has had about increasing the number of women seeking public appointments. [30903]

Mr. Leslie: The Government as a whole are determined significantly to increase the number of women who hold public appointments.

My Department produced best practice guidance on making public appointments which will be continuously updated.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) is also hosting a series of seminars around the country to encourage more women to apply for public appointments.

Modernising Government White Paper

17. **Brian White:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what progress has been made in attaining the targets set out in the Modernising Government White Paper. [30904]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The Modernising Government White Paper set out the following commitments:

Better policy making—The Centre for Management and Policy Studies in the Cabinet Office encourages effective policy making which produces results via training and development; networking and good practice and improved resources for research and evaluation

A recent survey report—"Better Policy Making"—provides over 40 worked examples of good practice in policy making. It also shows that policy-makers have assimilated and are taking action to modernise the policy process. More information is available at www.cmps.gov.uk.

Responsive, consumer focused public services—The Office of Public Service Reform is working with Departments to raise awareness of the principles of public sector reform and to increase feedback from customers to support policy making, service delivery and monitoring of performance, to ensure that services are designed around customers and are responsive to them.

Improving public services—The Prime Minister's Delivery Unit has been established to ensure that the Government achieve their delivery priorities during this Parliament across the key areas of public service: health, education, crime, asylum and transport.

E-government—The office of the e-Envoy published e-government: a strategic framework for public services in the information age, in April 2000, which set out the Government's strategy for Departments progressing towards the target of having 100 per cent. electronic service delivery by 2005.

The proportion of Government services available online has risen from 33 per cent. in spring 2000 to 51 per cent. in summer 2001, and is expected to reach 74 per cent. by the end of 2002. The UK online citizens' portal and the Government Gateway are providing the core infrastructure for the further development of e-government services. See website http://www.e-envoy-gov.uk/ukonline/strategy.htm

Valuing public service—We are creating a civil service for the 21st century. My Department continues to drive the Civil Service Reform programme, and good progress has been made. A report on progress was published in December 2000, and a further report in January 2002.

These reports, and information on progress across the many separate strands of the Civil Service Reform programme, are published on our dedicated website: www.civil-service.gov.uk/reform.

Regional Government

18. **Andrew George:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State when he expects the Government to publish new proposals for directly elected regional government in England. [30905]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) on 2 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 80W.

23. **Lawrie Quinn:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State if he will make a statement on establishing an elected regional assembly for Yorkshire and the Humber. [30911]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The Government's plans for taking forward the manifesto commitment on elected regional government will be set out in the forthcoming White Paper on Regional Governance.

Ministerial Code of Conduct

19. **Mr. Gray:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State if he will make a statement on the operation of the ministerial code of conduct. [30907]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The Government's response to the Third Report of the Public Administration Select Committee on the ministerial code sets out their views on the operation of the code.

Personal Care (Scotland)

20. **Annabelle Ewing:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what co-ordination he has undertaken of Departments' assessment of the implications of the free personal care for the elderly in Scotland. [30908]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: In July 2000, DH Ministers announced that they intended to make care from a registered nurse free when provided in a nursing home. This was implemented in October 2001. At the same time, it was announced that personal care services—such as help with dressing and bathing—would continue to be provided on a means-tested basis.

The Scottish Executive similarly decided to make nursing care free in nursing homes. In January 2001 they also announced that, unlike in England, personal care would be made free too. These policies have not yet been implemented.

Both the Government and the Scottish Executive are committed to improving health and social care services for older people, but a different approach has been taken.

IT Management

21. **Mr. Todd:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what recent progress has been made in improving the quality of information technology management in government. [30909]

Mr. Leslie: Successful implementation of IT enabled projects is important for the Government's delivery of improved public services and we are strengthening their management in a number of ways. During the last year all major procurement projects in central civil government have been required to undergo Gateway reviews at key decision points by teams of experts independent of the project team; projects can proceed to the next stage only when these rigorous tests have been met. We launched the Successful Projects in an IT Environment (SPRITE) Programme in January 2001 to work with Departments, agencies and non-departmental public bodies to ensure that the recommendations to improve project delivery in the Successful IT: Modernising Government in Action report become embedded in their working cultures.

Climate Change

22. **Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what part his Department has in co-ordinating the Government's policy on climate change. [30910]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The Cabinet Office provides support to me in my continuing role on international climate change discussions and negotiations on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. It assists me in my work to foster effective relationships internationally at the highest political level. The UK's negotiating positions for international negotiations on climate change are agreed through the Cabinet Committee on the Environment, which I chair, and which is serviced by the Cabinet Office.

The lead Department for climate change is DEFRA, which retains policy responsibility, leads the negotiations in both international and EU fora and deals with day-to-day progress and implementation of the UK's policies. The Cabinet Office works closely with them and with other Departments with a key interest in strategic and cross-departmental issues.

Private Medical Insurance

Mr. Laws: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State how many employees in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies have had private medical insurance provided for them in each year since 1997–98; what the total cost is; and if he will make a statement. [32314]

Mr. Leslie: The Civil Service Management Code (CSMC) prohibits Departments and agencies from providing staff with private medical insurance. The Cabinet Office and its agencies comply with this long-standing policy.

Although non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) are not bound by the conditions of the CSMC, I can confirm that none of those sponsored by Cabinet Office have paid for private medical insurance on any occasion.

Civil Servants

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what proportion of retired senior civil servants have undertaken paid work within the private sector in each of the last five years. [32908]

Mr. Leslie: Figures are not held centrally, but I can answer on behalf of my own Department. Civil servants who wish to take up outside appointments within two years of their retirement are required to seek permission in the circumstances set out in the Business appointment rules. These rules are included in full in the civil Service Management Code.

Within the Cabinet Office in the last five years 18 people have retired from the Senior Civil Service. Of these, four, who retired in the years shown in the table, have submitted applications under the rules to take up paid work in the private sector.

	Retirements	Made application to work in the private sector
1997	7	—
1998	3	1
1999	4	2
2000	3	1
2001	1	—

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what proportion of civil servants have spent the whole of their career within a single Department. [32909]

Mr. Leslie: The information, by length of service, is given in the table.

Staff in post by known length of service—April 2001

Headcount

Length of service (years)	Staff who remain in the same Department	Total staff in post	Proportion who remain in the same Department (percentage)
Less than one	33,860	36,900	91.7
1–5	96,700	121,530	79.6
6–10	62,800	78,860	79.6
11–15	63,660	90,530	70.3
16–20	32,640	51.040	64.0
21–25	31.030	51,460	60.3
26–30	20,960	34,250	61.2
31–35	10.170	16,780	60.6
36–40	3,830	6,700	57.2
41–45	740	1,190	62.2
46+	20	50	38.3
Total	356,390	489,270	72.8

This information depends for its accuracy on the reliability of data supplied by Departments to the Cabinet Office's Mandate database. Mandate covers around 97 per cent. of civil servants in Departments supplying information electronically.

Departmental Costs

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what the employment costs are, including benefits, of *(a)* Ministers representing the Cabinet Office and *(b)* special advisers and their supporting staff retained by the Cabinet Office. [8163]

Mr. Leslie: The employment costs, including benefits, of Ministers representing the Cabinet Office is £248,000 per annum and the cost of their special advisers is £196,000 per annum. The estimated cost of Minister's private office supporting staff is £580,000.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State if he will list his Department's total expenditure by month in each financial year since 1997–98. [32787]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Gentlemen to the answer given on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 692W.

Empty Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what his estimate is of the *(a)* annual cost and *(b)* total value of the empty properties owned by (i) his Department, (ii) his agencies and (iii) other public bodies for which he has responsibility in each of the last four years. [30078]

Mr. Leslie: Information requested, covering 1997–98 to 2000–01 (inclusive), is set out in the table.

£

Year	Annual running costs	As at 31 March	Net book value
1997–98	484,000	1998	130,270
1998–99	562,000	1999	1,437,943
1999–2000	462,000	2000	173,875
2000–01	451,000	2001	139,400

Notes:

1. The above figures are for the 'Core' of the Department as none of its agencies nor non-departmental public bodies have owned any empty properties.
2. Figures are given on a net book value basis, as compiled for annual accounts purposes.
3. Excluded from the above figures is the project, commenced in 1998–99, to refurbish three vacant buildings. The first of those buildings (Admiralty Arch) was completed and occupied by staff in 2000–01. When the other two buildings (Kirkland House and the Ripley Building) are completed in 2002–03, they will form 22 Whitehall, one of the Department's major buildings.

With one exception, which is the subject of a forthcoming PFI, all buildings were surplus to the Department's requirements and were in the process of being disposed. This has now been completed.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what the total external spend by his Department was on Private Finance Initiative consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PFI consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by his Department over this period; and if he will make a statement. [31037]

Mr. Leslie: The information on the Cabinet Office's use of Private Finance Initiative consultants from 1 April 2000 is as follows. Information prior to that date can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

£

	2000–01	2001–02[1]
Total expenditure	[2]69,123	[2]55,919
Number of full time equivalent consultants[3]	[3]0.38	[4]—
Number of billed consultancy days	82	57.5
Number of consultancy firms used	1	1

[1] To date

[2] Excludes VAT

[3] Calculated on the basis of 215 working days in the year.

[4] Represents the average cost over the two year period

[5] Not available

Note:

The average cost per year for each of the two individual consultants used is £4,800, £57,721 excluding VAT[4]

Retirement Age Review

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State if he will publish the results of the reviews of the mandatory age of retirement undertaken by each Department. [32667]

Mr. Leslie: Each Department has conducted its own review. The overall picture is being collated for Ministers. We have no plans to publish a separate document.

Older People

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 335–36W, on older people, when he expects the Cabinet Office to have completed collecting the data from Departments; and when he will write to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam. [32760]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office has now collected the data from departments and is currently putting together a report for me to send to ministerial colleagues. When I have presented this to ministerial colleagues I will write to the hon. Member.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Ministerial Transport

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his estimate is of the cost of *(a)* ministerial cars and drivers and *(b)* taxis for his Department in each of the last four years. [27908]

Mr. MacShane: On *(a)*, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 406W.

On *(b)*, FCO expenditure on taxis for the last five years was:

Financial year	*£*
1998	226,736.15
1999	329,903.63
2000	380,830.36
2001	[1]378,158.43

[1] Costs incurred from 1 April to 31 December 2001

Afghanistan

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the United States concerning the observance of the Geneva Convention and its protocols relating to the treatment of prisoners captured in the course of conflict in Afghanistan. [29798]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed the treatment of those detained by the US in Afghanistan with US Secretary of State Colin Powell on the telephone on 12 January and in Washington on 31 January.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Afghan Interim Government regarding provision of security across Afghanistan. [33187]

Mr. Bradshaw: Security is a key issue for the Afghan Interim Authority (IA) and for the International Community. It is clear that a stable environment is needed for the IA to be able to function effectively and for reconstruction work to begin. We have been working closely with the IA on this issue and the UK is currently acting as lead nation of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). ISAF was mandated by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1386 (2001) to assist the IA in the maintenance of security in Kabul and its surrounding areas, so that the IA as well as UN personnel can operate in a secure environment.

There has been regular discussion with the IA on the issue of security, including between my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Chairman of the IA during the latter's visit to the United Kingdom on 31 January.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 776–77W, on stolen equipment, what the security classification was of the stolen computers and related hardware; from which Departments they came; whether breaches of security were deemed to have resulted in each case; whether equipment was lost outside the Department buildings; and if he will make a statement. [31486]

Mr. MacShane: The computers and hardware were stolen from South East Asian Department, South and South East Asia Research Group, Information Department, Human Rights Policy Department, Global Citizenship Unit, IT Support Services, Eastern Department, Finance Branch, Latin America and Caribbean Department, Middle East Department, Management Consultancy Services, IT Strategy Unit, Research Analysts, Personnel Command Training and Conference and Visits Group.

All the equipment concerned was "unclassified" and went missing from within the FCO buildings. No breaches of security resulted to any of the Departments.

International Criminal Court

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking on behalf of the UK to ensure that when the International Criminal Court begins to function it will do so with *(a)* an independent prosecutor, *(b)* financial independence and *(c)* without risk of political interference from the UN Security Council. [31765]

Mr. MacShane: The arrangements for the election of an independent Prosecutor for the International Criminal Court, for the funding of the Court and the Court's relationship with the UN Security Council are set out in the Rome Statute of the ICC. The United Kingdom took a significant part in the drafting of that statute and was among the 139 states subsequently to sign it. The UK ratified the Rome Statute on 4 October 2001.

The Prosecutor will be elected by secret ballot of the Assembly of States Parties. In addition, Article 53 provides that the Prosecutor is independent with respect to the initiation and conduct of investigations and prosecutions, subject to review, in limited circumstances, by the Pre-Trial Chamber.

The budget of the Court will be provided through Assessed Contributions levied from states which have ratified the Rome Statute. The precise United Kingdom share will not be determined until the Court comes into existence.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will ensure that the International Criminal Court, once functional, has retrospective jurisdiction over defendants involved in unlawful international events. [31766]

Mr. MacShane: Article 11 of the Rome Statute of the ICC deals with the temporal jurisdiction of the Court. The Court will have no jurisdiction in respect of crimes committed before the entry into force of the Statute.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what involvement the United Kingdom has in the practical preparations for the staffing of the International Criminal Court; and what steps have been taken to ensure that it is adequately and expertly staffed; [31756]

(2) what role the UK is taking in the Preparatory Commission for the International Criminal Court. [31758]

Mr. MacShane: The United Kingdom has been an active participant in the eight (to date) Preparatory Commissions (Prepcoms) for the ICC. The election of Judges and senior Officers of the Court will be a matter for the Assembly of States Parties, which will meet once 60 states have ratified or acceded to the Rome Statute of the Court. 49 states, including the UK, have done so to date. The staffing of the Court has been discussed at the Prepcoms in the context of the Court's budgetary requirements. Work is continuing on this. The appointment of suitably qualified and expert staff will ultimately be the responsibility of the Registrar of the ICC.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what steps he is taking to encourage states which have not yet ratified the Statute establishing the International Criminal Court to do so; [31764]

(2) what assistance he is giving to the UN Secretary General in his aim stated at the Preparatory Conference for the International Criminal Court on 27 September 2001 that the International Criminal Court should be functioning within a year; [31759]

(3) what additional steps he will take to hasten the transition of the International Criminal Court into a working court. [31757]

Mr. MacShane: The United Kingdom will continue to urge other states, in our bilateral contacts and in partnership with other EU and associated states (in pursuance of the EU Common Position on the ICC) to ratify the Rome Statute. 49 states have ratified to date, the 60th ratification will cause the Court to come into existence. The United Kingdom will liaise with the Officers of the Court, when they are appointed, to determine what practical assistance we may offer in facilitating the smooth commencement of the Court's activities.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he is making representations to the USA in respect of its ratification of the Statute of the International Criminal Court. [31822]

Mr. MacShane: Officials are in regular contact with the US Administration in respect of this issue. We have also joined with EU partners in a written demarche to Secretary of State Powell on 30 October and a verbal demarche on 20 December 2001, both in support of the EU Common Position on the ICC of June 2001.

Departmental Leave Entitlement

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the average annual leave entitlement of staff in his Department in each of the last four years. [31743]

Mr. Bradshaw: In 1998, leave entitlements for FCO staff in the UK were as follows:

Grade	*Days*
(a) Up to Higher Executive Officer[1]	
On entry	22
After one year	25
After 15 years (HEO equivalent)	30
After 18 years (up to EO equivalent)	
(b) HEOD equivalent up to Senior Management Structure[2]	
On entry	25
After 10 years	30
Senior Management Structure	30

[1] HEO equivalent (except HEO Development (HEOD) equivalent)

[2] Senior Civil Service equivalent

Notes:

1. In January 2000, all staff at (a) became entitled to 25 days leave on entry and 30 days after 12 years. Staff at (b) became entitled to 30 days after 10 years.
2. In January 2002, all staff at (a) and (b) had their entitlements increased to 25 days on entry and 30 days after 10 years.

Staff serving overseas are entitled to additional leave. In 1998 it was between four and 14 days (on a seven day week basis) depending on grade and length of service. After several changes, the entitlement is now five or 10 days (on a five day week basis) depending on grade and length of service.

Holocaust

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 18 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 259W, if he will make a statement on progress toward resolution of outstanding restitution issues relating to the Holocaust and other victims of Nazi Germany by EU accession candidate countries. [31868]

Peter Hain: The Government continue to encourage the settlement of Holocaust-era claims in the relevant EU candidate countries. There has been some progress—notably in Poland, where the Prime Minister has announced that a new restitution Bill compensating victims of all nationalities will be brought to Parliament probably next year. Budgetary difficulties have hampered claims settlement in several of the countries concerned, though all the candidate countries emphasise the importance they attach to this process, as we do.

Middle East (UN Observers)

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is his policy to support the sending of UN observers to the occupied Palestinian territories. [31949]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Government believe that third-party monitoring, accepted by both parties, would serve the interests of Israel and the Palestinian Authority in their search for peace. We would support any monitoring accepted by both parties, including UN monitoring. Such monitoring could assist both sides in implementing the Mitchell recommendations.

EU General Affairs Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the outcome was of the General Affairs Council held in Brussels on 28 and 29 January; what the Government's stance was on each issue discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [31831]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I attended the 28 January General Affairs Council. There were no formal votes taken at this Council, but Conclusions were adopted on a range of subjects, in each case reflecting UK positions.

The Council held a public debate on the Spanish presidency programme for the first half of 2002. The UK underlined the importance of anti-terrorism co-operation, enlargement, economic reform, effectiveness in external policy, trade liberalisation, the middle east peace process and Zimbabwe.

On Zimbabwe, the Council concluded that the essential elements defined in Article 9 of the Cotonou Agreement were not being respected. It decided to close the Article 96 consultations with Zimbabwe and to implement targeted sanctions if:

> the Government of Zimbabwe prevent the deployment of an EU observation mission starting by 3 February 2002, or if they later prevent the mission from operating effectively. Likewise, if the Government of Zimbabwe prevent the international media from having free access to cover the election; or
>
> there is a serious deterioration in the situation on the ground, in terms of a worsening of the human rights' situation or attacks on the opposition; or
>
> the election is assessed as not being free and fair.

The Council took note of a presentation by the presidency of its work programme on enlargement. The presidency's programme is aimed at ensuring that negotiations with candidate countries which are ready can be concluded by the end of the second half of 2002.

The Council discussed Council Secretariat and Commission papers on conflict prevention. The presidency stressed the need to identify priority areas for action. Member states endorsed the themes of the papers and agreed that EU action should continue to be targeted, joined up and timely.

The Council adopted Conclusions calling for conclusion of the EU/Chile agreement before the EU Summit with Latin American and Caribbean countries in May this year, and agreed Conclusions welcoming progress in the EU/Mercosur negotiations.

The Council agreed that the two Vice Presidents of the Praesidium to the Convention on the Future of Europe should remain independent of their nation states. The Council agreed a general framework for the convention budget to be extracted from the current Community budget. This will not, therefore, require any additional expenditure by member states.

The General Affairs Council issued Conclusions on the middle east peace process. Ministers were concerned at the recent violence and condemned recent Palestinian terrorism. Ministers reaffirmed the importance of the Laeken declaration, which set out the steps required by both sides in the short term, called on Israel and the Palestinian Authority to implement the Tenet and Mitchell recommendations immediately and unconditionally and reaffirmed the need for security and political steps to be taken in parallel. Ministers also expressed their concern at the destruction of Palestinian infrastructure and other facilities which help Palestinians in their economic, social and humanitarian development and which are financed by the European Union and other donors. The GAC urged the Government of Israel to put an end to this practice and reserved the right to claim reparations in the appropriate fora.

The Secretary General/High Representative and the Commissioner for External Relations presented a joint paper consisting of an annual review on Common Strategies. The first of the existing three Common Strategies (on Russia, Ukraine and the Mediterranean) expires in June 2003. The SG/HR and Commissioner Patten agreed to work together on further ideas for improving the effectiveness of Common Strategies.

The Council discussed the Western Balkans and welcomed signs of steady improvement in relations between Croatia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Bosnia and Herzegovina and encouraged the three countries to continue this rapprochement. The Council urged Belgrade, Zagreb and Sarajevo to work with increased resolve on all matters related to the return of refugees and displaced persons. The Council supported efforts undertaken by SG/HR Solana to facilitate dialogue between Belgrade and Podgorica. It also expressed its concern at the continuing failure of the Assembly in Kosovo to elect a President. The Union's willingness to start negotiations with Albania for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Albania was stressed, but the Council noted that attention has recently been diverted from vital reforms. The Council took the decision to conclude the Interim Agreement with Croatia. The adoption of the Local Self-Government Law in Macedonia was welcomed as a critical step in the process of implementation of the Framework Agreement. This opens the way to the holding, on 12 March 2002, of a Donors' meeting.

The Council discussed the possibility of an unarmed EU-led policing mission to succeed the International Police Task Force (IPTF) in Bosnia when it completes [illegible] mandate at the end of 2002. Its aim would be to consolidate the achievements of the IPTF and the international community's work to establish sustainable policing arrangements under Bosnian ownership in accordance with best European and international practice. The Council agreed that more detailed work was required in order to allow it to take a decision at its 18 February meeting on whether the EU should make a formal offer to run the IPTF successor mission.

Council discussion on EU/Russia focused mainly on Kaliningrad. The presidency said it would accelerate work on Kaliningrad in time for the EU-Russia Summit in May. The importance of dialogue on Kaliningrad between Poland, Lithuania and Russia was also highlighted.

The presidency debriefed partners on recent EU efforts to defuse tensions between India and Pakistan. The presidency said that the EU should continue its efforts to encourage de-escalation and a return to dialogue.

The Council discussed the situation in Afghanistan and in particular the satisfactory outcome of the International Donors Conference in Tokyo on 21–22 January 2002. It reiterated the Union's commitment to playing a significant role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan and in supporting the political process agreed in Bonn.

Gibraltar

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many UK nationals he estimates live full-time in Gibraltar; and how many UK-registered businesses operate in Gibraltar. [32019]

Peter Hain: The latest figures published by the Gibraltar Government show that some 3,700 non-Gibraltarian British passport holders were living in Gibraltar in 2000.

Details on how many UK registered businesses operate in Gibraltar are not available but there is a substantial number of business interests of UK origin.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what present trading arrangements exist between Gibraltar and the United Kingdom. [32066]

Peter Hain: The same trading arrangements apply to trade between Gibraltar and the UK as between Gibraltar and the rest of the EU.

The EC treaty applies to Gibraltar by virtue of Article 299(4). But Gibraltar is exempt from the VAT and Common Agriculture and Fisheries provisions of the Treaty. It is also excluded from the Common Commercial Policy and Community Customs Territory. In consequence, intra-Community rules on Customs and free movement of goods do not apply to Gibraltar, and Gibraltar is a third country under the common regime for imports.

United Kingdom exports to Gibraltar were £128 million in 2001.

Gibraltar was the United Kingdom's 73rd export market in 2000.

Mohamed Mustafa Kamel

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the release by the Government of Yemen of a British citizen held on terrorism charges. [31666]

Mr. Bradshaw: Mohamed Mustafa Kamel, a British national, was released from Mansoura Prison, Aden, on 26 January 2002 following the completion of his three-year sentence.

British Detainees (Mazar-i-Sharif)

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether UK nationals are being held in Shebhargen prison near Mazar-i-Sharif. [32234]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are not aware of any UK nationals being held in Shebhargen prison near Mazar-i-Sharif.

Burundi

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to encourage a comprehensive military and political agreement with the FDD and other armed movements excluded from Burundi's peace process. [32282]

Mr. MacShane: The UK has pledged £250,000 in support of the facilitation efforts of President Bongo of Gabon and Vice President Zuma of South Africa. They are working hard to bring together all the disparate elements in the Burundi conflict with the aim of a peaceful negotiated settlement.

Kosovo

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in identifying the bodies found in Dragodan and Suva Reka in Kosovo. [32169]

Mr. MacShane: The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) has exhumed 210 bodies from individual graves at the cemetery in Dragodan. According to the Missing Persons Unit of the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), 52 of the 210 bodies have been identified to date.

ICTY completed its exhumations in Suva Reka in October 2000. The 73 bodies identified to date have been Kosovo Albanians.

In accordance with last November's UNMIK-FRY Common Document, UNMIK will launch a comprehensive programme of exhumation and identification in Kosovo this year. This will include Suva Reka where 300 unidentified bodies, exhumed by ICTY from graves across Kosovo, were re-interred by UNMIK.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has UNMIK made in tracing the missing Serbs in Kosovo. [32168]

Mr. MacShane: Action to trace missing Serbs from Kosovo is being taken forward by both the UNMIK-FRY Contact Group on Missing Persons and the new High Ranking Working Group, established following signature of the UNMIK-FRY Common Document in November 2001.

In the Common Document, UNMIK agreed to launch a programme of exhumation and identification in Kosovo this year. As a first step in this process, three joint protocols covering cross-border repatriation of identified remains, joint verification teams and an exchange of forensic information were signed by UNMIK and the Yugoslav authorities in Belgrade on 24 January.

UNMIK is also in the process of transferring 800 bone samples to the International Commission on Missing Persons' (ICMP) state of the art DNA testing facilities in Sarajevo. The UK is supporting the work of the ICMP with a donation of £250,000.

UN Security Council

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what developments in respect of enhanced counter-terrorism protection measures for (*a*) civil and (*b*) military nuclear facilities were transmitted by the Interdepartmental Group on Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1373 (2001) to the UN Security Council, pursuant to SCR 1373 in December 2001. [32728]

Mr. MacShane: The defence of civil and military nuclear facilities was not mentioned in either UN Security Council Resolution 1373 (2001) or in the guidance for the report.

A copy of the UK's response to the Counter Terrorism Committee has been placed in the House of Commons Library, and can also be found at www.un.org/docs/sc/committees/1373.

Nuclear Terrorism

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his European Union and United States counterparts on the threat of nuclear terrorism. [32289]

Mr. MacShane: The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has had regular discussions with his European Union and United States counterparts about terrorist threats, including the threat of nuclear terrorism.

Saudi Arabia

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what access British diplomats have had to *(a)* Mr. Sandy Mitchell, *(b)* Mr. Jimmy Cottle, *(c)* Mr. James Lee and *(d)* Mr. Les Walker; what evidence against them has been provided by the Saudi authorities; what legal assistance has been made available to them; what charges have been made against them; what date has been set for their trial; and what representations have been made to the Saudi Government regarding their treatment. [32925]

Mr. Bradshaw: British embassy consular officials have visited Sandy Mitchell, Jimmy Cottle, James Lee, Les Walker and Peter Brandon as often as allowed. This has been about once a month since we secured consular access to the men. The Saudi authorities have shown us no evidence against the men. Four of the men have been shown on Saudi television saying they carried out bombings. We pressed hard for the men to be allowed to appoint lawyers. This has been allowed and the men have now done so. Their lawyers now have unrestricted access to them. We have not been told what the men may stand trial for. No date for a trial has been set.

We are extremely concerned about various aspects of this case, including that our access to the prisoners has been restricted. We are in close touch with the detainees' families. The majority of them agree that we should not discuss the cases in detail in public. Throughout we have raised these cases at the highest levels with the Saudi authorities. We continue to do so.

Kashmir

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking to encourage a reduction of tension between India and Pakistan about Kashmir; and if he will make a statement. [32838]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth affairs is in frequent contact with his Indian and Pakistani counterparts, and other international partners. We are urging Pakistan to continue its crackdown on terrorism. We continue to reiterate to both countries that their differences will best be resolved through dialogue.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received about human rights violations in Kashmir; and if he will make a statement. [32839]

Mr. Bradshaw: We remain very concerned over the human rights situation in Kashmir. We condemn all acts of violence that bring suffering to the people of Kashmir.

We continue to receive regular correspondence from the public and from non-governmental organisations with interests in human rights in Kashmir. We have urged the Government of India to allow greater access to Kashmir, including for international human rights organisations and for UN Rapporteurs. Most recently the Secretary of State discussed human rights in Kashmir on 29 January with Jaswant Singh, the Indian Foreign Minister.

We continue to impress on the Indian authorities the benefits of greater transparency and importance of investigating abuses.

Visitor Visas

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many visitors visas were granted to citizens of *(a)* India, *(b)* Pakistan and *(c)* Sri Lanka in each of the last three years. [32901]

Mr. Bradshaw: We do not maintain overseas statistics on nationalities of applicants received at Posts. Indian, Pakistani and Sri Lankan nationals are free to apply at any Post.

The numbers of visitor category applications granted in India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan are:

	India	*Pakistan*	*Sri Lanka*
1999	152,040	47,968	15,215
2000	154,081	82,099	14,671
2001[1]	177,756	[2]75,746	17,156

[1] The collection of annual statistics on the breakdown of applications by category is currently moving from a calendar year to a financial year basis. So the best available 2001 statistics are for the total number of non-settlement type visas issued in 2001.

[2] We still await November and December 2001 statistics from Islamabad.

Television Sets

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)* integrated digital and *(b)* analogue television sets have been bought by his Department in each of the last 24 months; and if he will publish the guidance given to officials making decisions on television purchases. [33226]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 4 February 2002]*: Details of the television sets bought by UK Departments of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and overseas posts could be provided only at disproportionate cost since the FCO does not maintain a central record of such purchases.

Standard FCO guidance applies to the purchase of television equipment. This is based on achieving value for money.

Israel

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the oral statement by the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 414, on Israel, what assessment he has made of the circumstances surrounding the arrest of Dr. Mustapha Barghouthi by Israeli forces. [32761]

Mr. Bradshaw: I replied to my hon. Friend by letter on 30 January. Copies of this letter have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Private Medical Insurance

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many employees in (*a*) his Department and (*b*) his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies have had private medical insurance provided for them in each year since 1997–98; what the total cost is; and if he will make a statement. [32320]

Mr. Bradshaw: The FCO does not provide private medical insurance for any of its staff. Staff serving overseas receive medical care in line with NHS standards via a contract with Guy's and St. Thomas's NHS Trust. In some countries where medical standards do not meet those in the UK, and it is not practicable to bring staff home, they are treated by private practitioners.

TREASURY

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the cost of buildings refurbishment carried out by his Department in each of the last four years. [27916]

Ruth Kelly: The information is as follows:

	£
1997–98	215,560
1998–99	329,255
1999–2000	355,080
2000–01	303,525

The information relates to essential refurbishment and redecoration works in the two Treasury office buildings and in 11 Downing street. It excludes refurbishment works arising from the PFI contract for the Treasury's new office accommodation.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many environmental appraisals have been published by his Department since 1 January 2001; and if he will list the last four. [28999]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* The Government publish an environmental appraisal and evaluation of Budget measures in each Budget and pre-Budget report. However, no stand-alone environmental appraisals have been published by my Department since 1 January 2001.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last requested an environmental appraisal before making a policy decision. [29000]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* Where environmental considerations are relevant, they form an integral part of policy advice to Ministers.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what procedures his Department has to ensure environmental appraisals are undertaken prior to (*a*) administrative and (*b*) policy decisions being made. [29001]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* Environmental considerations are taken into account in taking important administrative and policy decisions.

The Department's policy checklist includes a section on environmental appraisals.

Where relevant goods and services are procured, prospective suppliers are asked to include an assessment of the major environmental impacts of the contract, as part of the tendering and evaluation process.

Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Methods (BREEAM) assessments are undertaken for new buildings and for the major refurbishment of existing buildings within the Department's estate.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many officials from his Department have attended the Environmental Appraisal and Integration into Policy training course run by the civil service college. [29002]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 21 January 2002]:* No representative from HMT has attended the course referred to to date.

Ministerial Trips

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list each of the overseas trips made by himself and other members of his ministerial team in each of the last four years, specifying the purpose and cost of each trip. [30173]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by the Deputy Prime Minister on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 707W.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether special advisers have sight of replies to written parliamentary questions from hon. Members before the replies are sent; and if he will make a statement. [32977]

Ruth Kelly: The Code of Conduct for Special Advisers states that the work of special advisers may include "reviewing papers going to the Minister" and that "they may give advice on any aspect of departmental business".

Private Medical Insurance

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many *(a)* civil servants and *(b)* special advisers working in his department are provided with private medical insurance; how many individuals have been covered by such insurance in each year since 1997–98 and at what total cost to the Exchequer; and if he will make a statement; [32312]

(2) how many employees in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies have had private medical insurance provided for them in each year since 1997–98; what the total cost is; and if he will make a statement. [32319]

Ruth Kelly: Paragraph 7.1.7 of the Civil Service Management Code prohibits Departments from providing staff with private medical insurance. This condition also applies to special advisers.

Tax Receipts

Mr. Swire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish forecast receipts for (i) 2002–03, (ii) 2003–04 and (iii) 2004–05 from *(a)* income tax, *(b)* VAT, *(c)* corporation tax, *(d)* capital gains tax, *(e)* inheritance tax, *(f)* total taxation in Scotland and *(g)* North sea oil and gas revenues. [34311]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Projected receipts for 2002–03, 2003–04 and 2004–05 from income tax, VAT, non-North sea corporation tax and North sea revenues are shown in Table B9 of the November 2001 pre-Budget report, expressed as a percentage of GDP. Receipts for 2002–03 from capital gains tax and inheritance tax are shown in Table B11 of the November 2001 pre-Budget report. No separate projections are made of tax receipts in Scotland.

Euro

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what work has been commissioned by his Department from outside Her Majesty's Treasury on the appropriate long-term exchange rate of the pound against the euro; and if he will make a statement; [33611]

(2) if he will list those university academics and economic research establishments he has asked to carry out work relating to the technical preparations for the five economic tests for euro entry; what this work consists of; what cost to public funds is involved; and if he will make a statement. [32874]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Treasury is in regular contact with academics and other outsiders on a wide range of issues, including aspects of the preliminary and technical work. However, the assessment of the five economic tests will be a Government assessment and the work will be undertaken by the Treasury.

The Treasury published a note in November 2001, "Preliminary and Technical Work to Prepare for the Assessment of the Five Tests for UK Membership of the Single Currency", which addressed the issues of content and timing of the preliminary and technical work to prepare for the assessment of the five economic tests for UK membership of the single currency. A copy can be found in the Library of the House.

Arthur Andersen

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which partners or senior employees of *(a)* Andersen, *(b)* Arthur Andersen, *(c)* Andersen Consulting and *(d)* Accenture have been appointed to (i) informal roles giving advice to the Treasury, (ii) task forces reporting to the Treasury, (iii) ad hoc advisory groups reporting to the Treasury and (iv) other formal roles reporting to Treasury Ministers since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [32917]

Ruth Kelly: Information about task forces and ad hoc advisory groups are set out in annual reports, published by the Cabinet Office. Copies of the annual report on task forces and similar bodies have been placed in the Library of the House and the annual report is available on the Cabinet Office's website.

Information about informal advisory roles are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

WALES

Refurbishment

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what his estimate is of the cost of buildings refurbishment carried out by his Department in each of the last four years. [27960]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Since its creation in July 1999, Wales Office spending on refurbishment/minor works was £217,000 in 1999–2000; and £281,000 in 2000–01. In the current year to date some £21,000 has been spent.

Contracts

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many contracts were let by his Department and agencies for which he is responsible to *(a)* PWC Consulting or PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst and Young, *(c)* Deloitte and Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen for consultancy services for the financial years (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000, (iv) 2000–01 and (v) 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, indicating the remuneration in each case. [33841]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Wales Office has not let any consultancy contracts to these firms since it came into being on 1 July 1999 and has no NDPBs or agencies. Under the former Welsh Office, £52,000 was paid to PricewaterhouseCoopers in 1997–98 and £4,000 in 1998–99; £20,000 to Deloitte and Touche in 1997–98 and £16,000 in 1998–99; £4,000 to KPMG in 1997–98 and £21,000 in 1998–99.

Secondments

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many staff were seconded between *(a)* PWC Consulting and PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst and Young, *(c)* Deloitte and Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen and his Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33875]

Mr. Paul Murphy: There have been no such secondments with the Wales Office since its creation in July 1999. Prior to that date there were in 1999–2000 the following secondments with the former Welsh Office: *(a)* nil *(b)* nil *(c)* one *(d)* two *(e)* nil.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many staff were seconded between *(a)* BP, *(b)* Shell, *(c)* Enron, *(d)* Exxon-Mobil, *(e)* Conoco, *(f)* Texaco and *(g)* TotalFinaElf and his Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33209]

Mr. Paul Murphy: None.

Market Research

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what expenditure has been incurred by his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public bodies in each of the last four years on (i) opinion polling, (ii) focus groups and (iii) other forms of market research; and if he will list the surveys commissioned and the purpose of each. [27948]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on 24 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 590W.

Departmental Retirement Ages

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the retirement ages that apply to the employees of his Department and its agencies, including how many and which categories of employees are affected by each; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on flexible retirement. [32828]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) on 25 October 2001, *Official Report*, Column 351W.

Information Provision

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the provision of Government information and publicity in Wales. [30897]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department has run no television, newspaper, radio advertising or any other kind of promotional campaign since its creation in July 1999. It has no agencies or departmental public bodies within its responsibilities. We are not responsible for campaigns that may be run by the National Assembly or other Government Departments in Wales.

Private Medical Insurance

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many employees in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies have had private medical insurance provided for them in each year since 1997–98; what the total cost is; and if he will make a statement. [32326]

Mr. Paul Murphy: None.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Departmental Salary Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit in 2001–02 will be accounted for by salary costs and pension contributions. [32014]

Ms Hewitt: The Department of Trade and Industry has a departmental expenditure limit of £4,766 million following the 2001–02 Winter Supplementary Estimate. Of this £795 million is capital budget and £3,971 million is resource budget. Of the £3,971 million resource budget, 4.2 per cent. (excluding ACAS) is planned to be accounted for by salary costs and pension contributions.

Departmental Payments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the instances in which her Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies failed to pay valid invoices within 30 days or after the agreed credit period in the financial year 2000–01. [32038]

Ms Hewitt: Information on the instances where by Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies failed to meet the payment target can be collected only at disproportionate cost. However, I can say that the percentage of bills which were paid by my Department and its agencies within 30 days of receipt of a valid invoice was 98 per cent. for the financial year 2000–01. The average percentage of bills paid by my Department's executive non-departmental public bodies over the same period was 89 per cent.

Fossil Fuel Power Projects

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total carbon emissions are that have been omitted from all Export Credits Guarantee Department supported fossil fuel power generation projects since 1997. [31837]

Ms Hewitt: Since ECGD does not have readily available information on the completion dates and operating schedules of all the power projects that the Department has supported, it is not possible to easily calculate actual total carbon emissions since 1997.

However, for the power projects for which a guarantee has been issued since 1997 it is estimated that upon completion of these projects total annual carbon emission will be of the order of 13.3 million tonnes. This is based on the following assumptions.

Fuel type	*ECGD*[1]	*CO_2*[2]	*Carbon*[2]
Coal	11,260	40.6	11.1
Oil	492	1.1	0.3
Gas	4,367	7.1	1.9
Total	16,139	48.8	13.3

[1] Estimated capacity (MW)
[2] Tonnes per year (million)

It has been assumed the plants operate for 60 per cent. of the time (5,256 hours per year). CO_2 emissions are calculated using the following conversion factors—Coal: 0687 tonnes of CO_2 per MW per hour, Oil 0.417, Gas: 0.309. These are taken from The Greenhouse Gas Protocol website www.ghgprotocol.org and are the 1999 average values for power plants in "Economies in Transition". These are the markets where ECGD most commonly provide guarantees.Carbon emissions are calculated by assuming that carbon makes up 27.3 per cent. of the atomic mass of CO_2.

It should be noted that for most large power projects ECGD is only one of several finance providers. Scaling the carbon emissions by the proportion of finance guaranteed by ECGD would give a figure of less than six million tonnes per year of carbon that is directly attributable to ECGDs participation.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much finance has been made available by the ECGD to support UK businesses involved in fossil fuel power projects since 1997. [31836]

Ms Hewitt: The total value of guarantees and insurance provided by ECGD in respect of fossil fuel power projects since 1997 is £1.754 million.

Sual Power Plant (Philippines)

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what level of financial support the ECGD has provided to UK companies involved in the construction and operation of the Sual power plant in the Philippines; what precedent there was for such support at that time; and whether and on what projects this level has been matched in the case of other instances of ECGD support. [31832]

Ms Hewitt: In 1995 ECGD provided financial support to the Sual power project worth £432 million. The guarantee was provided on a limited recourse, project finance basis.

Prior to Sual, ECGD had supported one limited recourse power project, although with a much smaller loan value. ECGD has also supported a number of power projects on a non-limited recourse finance basis.

Since 1995, ECGD provided support in excess of £300 million for eight other projects:

Project	*Country*
Guangdong power project	China
Hawk aircraft	Indonesia
Air Force equipment and services	Saudi Arabia
LNG plant	Oman
Boilers for the Shandong power project	China
Patrol vessels	Brunei Darussalam
Manjung power project	Malaysia
Defence equipment	South Africa

Power Generating Projects

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what applications have been received by the ECGD relating to power generating projects in the past 12 months. [31835]

Ms Hewitt: In 2001, ECGD received 32 applications related to power generation projects. For reasons of commercial confidentiality ECGD is unable to provide details of individual applications prior to any guarantee being issued. No guarantees or insurance have yet been issued in respect of any of the 32 applications.

Coal Plants (Thailand)

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry from which United Kingdom companies the ECGD has received applications for support of their activities in relation to the proposed coal plants *(a)* Bo Nok and *(b)* Ban Krut in Thailand. [32483]

Ms Hewitt: ECGD has not received formal applications in relation to either of these projects. However an initial inquiry has been received in relation to the Bo Nok project. The identity of the UK company involved is commercially confidential and, in line with ECGD's normal policy relating to discussions prior to issue of guarantees, cannot be disclosed.

Fossil Fuel Energy Sector

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the UK companies that have benefited from ECGD support in the fossil fuel energy sector and have been prosecuted for contravening environmental protection regulations. [32521]

Ms Hewitt: The projects that ECGD supports are by definition located overseas. Therefore ECGD cannot determine whether, and if so how many, such prosecutions have taken place.

Details of UK prosecutions for breaches of environmental legislation are published by the Environment Agency.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the five companies in the fossil fuel energy sector that have received the most in ECGD funding since 1997 and the amount received by each. [32229]

Ms Hewitt: ECGD does not provide direct funding, but rather issues guarantees and insurance against loss. Since 1997 the five companies in the fossil fuel energy sector that have received guarantees in respect of the largest amounts of business are:

£ million

Company	*Value*
Alstom Power	902
Mitsui Babcock	347
Kier International	49
Allen Power Engineering	39
Wier Westgarth	36

Post Offices

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* directly operated post offices, *(b)* other main post offices and *(c)* sub-post offices there were in (i) each English region, (ii) Wales, (iii) Northern Ireland and (iv) Scotland in each year since 1979; how many of each category of post office in each case were opened or closed since 1979; and how many have changed their status since 1979. [33779]

Mr. Alexander: I am informed by Post Office Ltd. that historic data on numbers of directly operated post offices and sub post offices are only held on a UK basis and historical data on numbers of post office openings and closures and status change are not maintained separately.

I am also informed by Post Office Ltd. that data by country are not available before 1998. The numbers of post offices operating in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, in the last three financial years are as follows:

Wales

End March 1998: 1,513
End March 1999: 1,501
End March 2000: 1,470
End March 2001: 1,402

Northern Ireland

End March 1998: 650
End March 1999: 640
End March 2000: 636
End March 2001: 611

Scotland

End March 1998: 2,051
End March 1999: 2,026
End March 2000: 1,999
End March 2001: 1,936.

I am informed by Post Office Ltd. that an on-going revision of data has affected individual country totals.

Civil Servants

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many new entrants to the civil service employed in her Department were aged 50 years and over in each of the last five years. [32887]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested for my Department and executive agencies, in each of the last five calendar years, is shown in the table.

	Number
1997	33
1998	61
1999	66
2000	50
2001	81

Staff Appointments

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what procedures have been adopted for the appointment of business executives to a strategy role in her Department; and for which posts applicants are being recruited at present. [32556]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) on 1 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 619W.

Foreign Investment

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the level of foreign investment in the Greater London area has been in each of the last three years. [33557]

Ms Hewitt: The figures in the table are based on information provided by companies at the time of the announcement of the decision to invest in the UK. They are based on the companies' best estimate, at that time, of the number of new jobs to be created.

There is no requirement to notify inward investment decisions and so the figures include only those projects where Invest UK and its regional partners were involved or which have come to their notice.

London region	*Number of projects*	*Number of new jobs*
1998–99	105	4,125
1999–2000	159	7,200
2000–01	222	8,306
Total	586	19,631

Your Guide System

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive on the funding arrangements for implementing the Your Guide system; and if she will make a statement. [33066]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* Officials in my Department have met with officials in the Scottish Executive on a number of occasions to discuss the longer-term future of Your Guide. These discussions have included some initial consideration of funding. If the current pilot of Your Guide demonstrates that the concept meets the needs of citizens and can provide value for money for Government, funding proposals will be worked up in the light of the emerging form and content of a potential national service.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the Your Guide system will be introduced throughout the United Kingdom at the same time. [33065]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* The pilot of Your Guide currently running in Leicestershire and Rutland is being thoroughly evaluated and this work should be completed in June. If the outcome of the evaluation and of additional work on the costs and benefits of a national Your Guide service indicate that a national service should go ahead, the intention is that this should be introduced throughout the United Kingdom. (Of course national roll-out of an ambitious programme of this kind would be a major undertaking and it is to be expected that the service would be phased in over a period of time.) However, roll-out of a Your Guide service in the devolved regions would be subject to discussion with the devolved Administrations.

Sub-Post Offices

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many sub-post offices have *(a)* closed and *(b)* reduced opening hours which are located in (i) Galloway and Upper Nithsdale, (ii) the Dumfries and Galloway region and (iii) Scotland in each of the last five years. [33067]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* I am informed by Post Office Ltd. that data by country before 1998 are not available and that regional data are not collated in the form requested. Data on reduced hours opening of sub-post offices are not held historically.

The numbers of post offices operating in Scotland over the last three financial years are as follows:

End March	*Number*
1998	2,051
1999	2,026
2000	1,999
2001	1,936

I am also informed by Post Office Ltd. that an on-going revision of data has affected individual country totals.

Christmas Day Trading

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many customers shopped on Christmas day 2001 in England and Wales. [30946]

Miss Melanie Johnson: No data are available on the number of customers shopping on Christmas day 2001.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will publish the results of the regulatory impact assessment on the Christmas Day (Trading) Bill. [30940]

Miss Melanie Johnson: No regulatory impact assessment has been completed in respect of the Bill.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will publish the representations her Department has received from retailers about the Christmas Day (Trading) Bill. [30861]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department has so far received no representations from retailers about the Bill.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many retailers have indicated to her Department that they *(a)* would never open on Christmas day, *(b)* would consider opening on Christmas day and *(c)* intend to open on Christmas day, in the last five years. [30945]

Miss Melanie Johnson: No retailers had indicated their intentions on these matters to the Department.

Sunday Trading

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will publish recent representations her Department has received from retailers about Sunday trading hours when Christmas eve falls on a Sunday. [30943]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department has received no representations from retailers since it became responsible for this subject in June 2001.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will publish recent representations her Department has received from large garden centres about trading on Easter Sunday. [30942]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department has received no representations since it became responsible for this subject in June 2001.

Consignia

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 17 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 419, on Consignia, what sums are being invested by the Government with respect to the steps that need to be taken to maintain the delivery service in rural areas and the rural network, broken down by *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland. [30872]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* The Postal Services Act 2000 provides that it is the primary responsibility of the postal regulator (Postcomm) to exercise its functions in a manner best calculated to ensure the provision of a universal postal service. It is therefore for Postcomm to determine how the universal service obligation is implemented in the interests of consumers. Currently Postcomm requires Consignia plc, in the licence, to provide a universal postal service.

£480 million has been invested by Government in the Horizon programme to automate the entire post office network and £270 million of support over three years has been committed by Government for modernisation of the network. In addition, we have made available a £2 million fund to support volunteer and community initiatives to maintain or reopen post office facilities in rural areas where traditional services would otherwise close. Advice on transitional financial assistance on a UK-wide basis to the rural post office network from the Postal Services Commission is currently under consideration.

Competition Commission

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the remit is of the Competition Commission with respect to considering the need for firms to compete globally when investigating merger and acquisition activity in the UK. [33006]

Miss Melanie Johnson: When conducting an inquiry into a merger, the Commission is required to determine whether the creation of a merger situation operates, or may be expected to operate, against the public interest. In conducting its inquiry into the public interest effects of the merger the Commission considers all matters which appear to it to be relevant.

Fair Trade Fortnight

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to encourage participation by her Department in Fair Trade Fortnight from 4 to 17 March. [33553]

Ms Hewitt: The Department's catering contractor is going to run special promotions throughout this period for all its fairly traded goods such as tea and coffee.

Technology Transfer

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress is being made to encourage the transfer of new technologies from universities to industry. [33033]

Ms Hewitt: We have introduced a number of complementary initiatives designed to encourage better interaction between universities and industry. This will enable businesses to access and benefit from the universities' research capabilities, and universities themselves become more responsive to the needs of industry.

In October 2001 the Government made awards in excess of £100 million under three competitions (the Higher Education Innovation Fund £80 million, Science Enterprise Challenge £15 million and University Challenge £15 million) to encourage the transfer of knowledge from the science base to industry.

This builds on the previous funding allocated to the first round of University Challenge, £45 million in 1999, and Science Enterprise challenge, £28.9 million in 1999–2000.

We have expanded the successful TCS scheme which enables high-quality graduates to draw on academic support and expertise while working in a company on research projects of value to industry. We have increased TCS activity by 25 per cent. during 2001; from 730 to 918 current TCS Programmes.

DTI and its co-sponsors have approved 18 Faraday Partnerships focused on areas of major industrial importance to the UK. Each partnership is designed to promote better exploitation of research and technology by creating partnerships between universities, intermediary bodies (eg research and technology organisations, private sector laboratories, etc.), business end-users and suppliers of finance. A further six partnerships will be selected later this year to enable us to fulfil our White Paper commitment to set up a national network of 24 Faraday Partnerships by 2002.

The Government have continued to support the LINK collaborative research scheme which is aimed at promoting the development and transfer of new technologies between universities and companies. Expenditure across Government in support of LINK was £41 million in 2000–01. The Government announced seven new LINK programmes and committed £12 million in 2000–01 to a further round of Foresight LINK Awards projects, complementing current LINK programmes in Foresight priority areas. There are currently a total of some 380 LINK university/company research projects under way.

Clothing/textile Industries

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if she will make it her policy to promote innovation in the textile and clothing industry by supporting a series of sector-specific events highlighting best practice in product innovation; [33269]

(2) if she will make it her policy to encourage wool textile manufacturers and trade associations to promote British wool textile as a generic brand; [33278]

(3) if she will undertake a study of the reasons for the differing performance of the clothing industries in *(a)* Italy, *(b)* Germany, *(c)* France and *(d)* the UK; [33275]

(4) what steps her Department is taking to broker the participation of UK textile manufacturers in collaborative EU programmes, with particular reference to *(a)* LINK and *(b)* Eureka; [33279]

(5) if she will undertake to fund activities that will lead to the development of stronger networks among *(a)* technical textile manufacturers, *(b)* universities and colleges and *(c)* other parts of the supply chain in the textile industry; [33272]

(6) if her Department will arrange a series of regional seminars to highlight the availability of funding for technological innovation in the textile and clothing industry; [33271]

(7) if she will establish a flexible support fund to support individual companies in the textile and clothing industries undertaking small-scale innovation and developmental work; [33270]

(8) if her Department will continue to fund technology transfer activities involving technical textile companies and academic institutions; [33277]

(9) if she will undertake to fund a study of best practice in the Italian textile and clothing industry and how it might be adapted to the UK; [33276]

(10) if she will make it her policy to ensure the availability of funding to support technological innovation in the textile industry; and if she will make a statement; [33280]

(11) what steps she is taking to enable traditional textile companies to diversify into technical textiles. [33273]

Ms Hewitt: It is a priority for my Department to support a healthy UK textiles and clothing industry and to work alongside the industry's own Textile and Clothing Strategy Group (TCSG) in helping to improve the industry's productivity and competitiveness. I attach particular importance to helping the industry to innovate and develop new world-beating products. The Government have invested more than £80 million in the industry since 1997. And in the last year alone, we have invested about £8 million focused principally on developing the technical textiles market, employment and training opportunities, help for the supply chain, design skills, the benefits of 3-commerce and export support.

My Department is working closely with the TCSG to raise awareness and encourage participating of textile and clothing manufacturers in a variety of research, technology transfer and best practice programmes.

A programme of 10 regionally tailored road shows, "Textile and Clothing Funding Unzipped", is under way in key textiles and clothing regions underpinned by a dedicated website signposting companies to sources of help and support for technological innovation, for R&D and for capital investment, including information on collaborative EU programmes such as Link and Eureka. "Unzipped" road shows have so far been held in Melton Mowbray—east midlands in March 2001, Bolton—north-west region in October 2001, Huddersfield—Yorkshire and Humber region in October 2001, Port Talbot—south Wales in November 2001, Llandudno—north Wales in November 2001, London in December 2001 and continues in Sunderland—north-east region on 6 February 2002, Solihull—west midlands on 5 March 2002, Edinburgh on 14 March 2002 and Belfast on 20 March 2002.

Particular focus has been given by my Department to supporting the development of Technical Textiles. Since 1998 22 collaborative and innovative technical textiles projects have been supported and a further seven new projects are currently in development. In April 2001 a Technical Textiles Project Co-ordinator was appointed to increase networking within the sector and bring together project consortia of technical textile companies and academic institutions. To help in this objective regional seminars have been held to highlight the availability of funding for technical textile innovation and to encourage traditional textile companies to diversify into this sector. My Department is supporting the work of TechniTex—the Faraday Partnership for technical textiles comprising hub partners Heriot-Watt university, the university of Leeds, UMIST and BTTG. We welcome the industry initiative to explore the possibility of setting up of a TT trade association, which would help broker stronger links across the sector.

We continue to seek to involve UK textile manufacturers in research collaborations with universities. Currently we are funding two such research partnerships through Foresight LINK Awards. The two projects are aimed at researching new fire resistant textiles, and a prototype automated sorter for the detection and removal of natural and synthetic contaminants in wool and cashmere. We are also funding a EUREKA project with the objective of creating a pilot line for the manufacture of texturised, mass stained, fine polypropylene yarn.

We are already supporting a variety of collaborative initiatives in the textile and clothing sector as a whole aimed at fostering stronger networks between strategic partners through the Innovation Budget and through best practice programmes such as the Industry Forum Adaptation scheme, which is currently funding a major initiative aimed at improving supply chain efficiency in the textiles and clothing sector.

My Department is aware that the industry has been in discussions with a view to developing British wool textile as a generic brand. In consultation with the TCSG my Department is carrying out a comparative study of the UK and Italian clothing manufacturing industries, focused on the wool and worsted weaving and men's tailoring sectors. The results of this study will be disseminated to the industry and will inform decisions about any future research projects.

Azerbaijan

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many export credit guarantees were issued to support projects in Azerbaijan in the last year. [33771]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* ECGD has issued no guarantee in the last year in support of projects in Azerbaijan.

Private Sponsorship

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the events which have been sponsored by a private organisation in her Department since May 1997 and the names of the sponsoring organisations; and if she will make a statement. [32511]

Ms Hewitt: Information about events where the Department works with outside organisations is not held centrally, and could not be obtained without disproportionate cost. The Department does not have responsibility for the Office of Government Commerce, Inland Revenue or HM Customs and Excise.

Timeshares

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) whether she plans to revise the Timeshare (Cancellation Notices) Order 1992 and the Timeshare (Repayment of Credit on Cancellation) Order 1992 on which her Department consulted in 2000; [30107]

(2) what discussions her Department has had with the European Commission in the last two years on the effectiveness of current controls on the sale of timeshares and holiday club membership; [30109]

(3) whether she plans to regulate the sale of membership of holiday clubs; and if she will make a statement. [30108]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Officials from the Department and the UK Permanent Representation in Brussels have discussed the timing of review of the timeshare directive with Commission officials on a number of occasions.

The Department launched a consultation on timeshare legislation in April 2000, which invited views on a number of issues including revision of the Timeshare (Cancellation Notices) Order 1992 and the Timeshare (Repayment of Credit on Cancellation) Order 1992 and whether the legislation should be widened to include new products such as holiday clubs.

The consultation was a means of informing the UK input into discussions on the review and raised a number of complex issues, which the Department is considering.

Secondments

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many of her Department's officials are seconded to work at *(a)* Arthur Andersen, *(b)* Andersen Consulting and *(c)* Accenture; and how many employees of those firms are seconded to work at her Department. [31698]

Ms Hewitt: None.

Retirement Ages

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the retirement ages that apply to the employees of her Department and its agencies, including how many and which categories of employees are affected by each; and if she will make a statement on her Department's policy on flexible retirement. [32831]

Ms Hewitt: The normal retirement age in my Department is 65 for staff in Band A (covering administrative and support staff). For all other staff (covering staff at range 5—formerly Executive Officer level—and above) the retirement age is 60. At 1 April 2001 there were 1,103 staff in Band A and 3,189 staff above this level.

Flexible retirement is considered on a case-by-case basis under the criteria laid down by the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme.

I have asked Agency Chief Executives to reply to the hon. Member.

EU Enlargement

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on EU enlargement and prospects for UK business; and what measures have been brought in to assist businesses in dealing with enlargement. [32529]

Miss Melanie Johnson: There is a broad consensus that EU enlargement will benefit the UK economy since it will provide new opportunities for trade and investment. These opportunities will increase as the economies of the EU candidate countries grow and integrate further with those of the existing EU member states.

The DTI and Trade Partners UK have produced information about EU enlargement, aimed at alerting UK businesses and helping them work out the practical consequences and opportunities for them. The DTI's publication "EU Enlargement and the single Market: Opportunities for Business" published in September 2000 provides information about the enlargement process and the details of the candidate markets.

Television

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* integrated digital and *(b)* analogue television sets have been bought by her Department in each of the last 24 months; and if she will publish the guidance given to officials making decisions on television purchases. [33240]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* Parts *(a)* and *(b)* of this question could be answered only at disproportionate cost because the information is not held centrally. However, all equipment purchased by the Department must provide value for money and be fit for purpose. In many cases the Department purchases televisions as monitors for the viewing of educational videos and not for the viewing of television broadcasts.

Information about digital television sets is available on the digital television website www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk and the guidance it contains is as relevant to public sector purchasers as to consumers. There is, therefore, no specific guidance for officials.

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what events *(a)* she is and *(b)* other Ministers in her Department are planning to attend as part of the Golden Jubilee celebrations; and what events her Department is planning to arrange to celebrate the Golden Jubilee. [33258]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply which he has received from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport.

Radioactive Waste

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what efforts her Department has made to monitor the *(a)* condition and *(b)* safety of the radioactive waste dumped approximately 250 miles out of Land's End during the 1960s and 1970s. [27192]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

Results obtained under the OECD's Co-ordinated Research and Environmental Surveillance Programme (CRESP) related to sea disposal of radioactive wastes have demonstrated that the radiological impacts on human and oceanic populations emanating from the north-east Atlantic dumpsites are exceedingly small compared to the natural background levels, and are likely to remain so. This view was reiterated in the OSPAR Convention's Quality Status Report 2000, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

CRESP reported that the peak critical group individual dose as a result of sea dumping of solid radioactive waste would be 0.00002 millisieverts per annum, compared with 2 millisieverts per annum derived from natural radionuclides. The critical group is the hypothetical group of individuals who are calculated to be most exposed to the source of radioactivity being assessed—in this case coastal consumers of very large quantities of fish, crustaceans and molluscs (approximately 220 kg/year of fish, 37 kg/year of crustaceans and 37 kg/year of molluscs). The peak doses were calculated to occur approximately 200 years after dumping, by which time some of the activity would have leached from the disposal site and dispersed through the ocean.

The Government fund extensive environmental monitoring of the waters around the UK, and this has not detected any adverse effects which could be attributed to radioactivity from Atlantic disposal sites. The monitoring shows that doses to critical groups from man-made sources of radioactivity are very small, and considerably less than doses due to natural background levels of radioactivity. In view of this, we have no plans to undertake any direct monitoring of the north Atlantic disposal sites.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Unfurnished Cells

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times unfurnished cells have been used in each of the prisons in the juvenile estate since April 2000. [29601]

Beverley Hughes: Provisional data are given in the table.

Prison	*Number*
Ashfield	0
Brinsford	0
Castington	240
Feltham	25
Hindley	7
Hollesley Bay	40
Huntercombe	121
Lancaster Farms	0
Onley	32

Prison	*Number*
Portland	31
Stoke Heath	72
Thorn Cross	0
Werrington	0
Wetherby	32

Control and Restraint

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children have been injured during control and restraint since April 2000. [29597]

Beverley Hughes: Records on injuries received during the application of control and restraint measures are not held centrally. However, inquiries with establishments within the juvenile estate show that during the stated period, 296 trainees have been injured during the use of control and restraint measures. Only five of these incidents resulted in outside hospital treatment and these were for fractures or suspected fractures. Many of the remainder were for tender wrist or reddening around the wrist.

Young Offenders

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children were locked out of prisons overnight; at which prisons; and at which police stations they were held since April 2000. [29603]

Beverley Hughes: Since April 2000, approximately 1,720 15 to 17-year-olds have been held overnight in police cells following a failure to return them to prisons designated to hold juveniles. The prisons concerned and the numbers associated with each are set out in the table. Information relating to the police stations at which they were held is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Figures for Ashfield, Brinsford and Portland may be understated as some information is available for the year commencing April 2001 only. Figures for Feltham and Onley may include some young offenders (18 to 21-year-olds).

Designed establishments	*Lodged in police cells April 2000 to date*
Juveniles only	
Hollesley Bay	117
Huntercombe	79
Werrington	54
Wetherby	237
Holding both juveniles and young offenders	
Ashfield	27
Brinsford	49
Castington	145
Feltham	192
Hindley	2
Lancaster Farms	110
Portland	38
Onley	283
Stoke Heath	387

Immigration

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the level of backlog of immigration applications from *(a)* work permit holders, *(b)* people with UK ancestry, *(c)* EEA nationals and their spouses, *(d)* fiancés and fiancées, *(e)* spouses and *(f)* asylum seekers has been for each of the last five years; and what levels of backlog he predicts for the next two years. [30995]

Angela Eagle: I regret that information on predicted backlogs for the next two years and on individual types of general and settlement cases undecided is not available.

The number of asylum applications awaiting an initial decision on 31 December in each of the last five years is shown in the table. There were 43,000 asylum applications awaiting an initial decision on 30 September 2001, the latest date for which information is available.

Applications for asylum awaiting initial decision, 1996–2000, principal applicants only[1]

Year	*Asylum applications outstanding at end of year*[2]
1996	57,405
1997	51,795
1998	64,770
1999	119,700
2000[3]	89,100

[1] Figures rounded to nearest five, except for 1999 and 2000 which are rounded to nearest 100.

[2] Figures for 1998 and earlier years are not directly comparable with figures for later years.

[3] Provisional

Information on the number of asylum cases awaiting an initial decision is published quarterly on the Home Office website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.htm. Information on the number of asylum applications awaiting an initial decision at the end of 2001 will be published on 28 February 2002.

Asylum Seekers

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment the Government have made of the appeal facilities that would be available to asylum seekers who would be housed in the proposed accommodation centre at RAF Turnhouse. [32518]

Angela Eagle: Accommodation centres will provide asylum seekers with access to legal advice for their appeals. The location of appeal hearing centres is a matter for the Immigration Appellate Authority. However, the Home Office will make provision for asylum seekers to travel to their appeal hearings if they wish to attend.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions his Department intends to have with representatives of *(a)* the City of Edinburgh council, *(b)* the Scottish Executive and *(c)* others regarding the proposed new asylum seeker accommodation centre at RAF Turnhouse. [32520]

Angela Eagle: The Home Office intends to consult widely within the constraints of the planning process, time and departmental resources.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers who purport to be children have subsequently been found to be adults in the last two years. [32193]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* Between November 2000 and September 2001, inclusive, there were 1,120 age disputed cases (rounded to the nearest five) of principal applicants who applied in-country. These cases are not included in the published data on unaccompanied minors. Information is not available on either the number of age disputed cases who lodged their application at port, nor on other months in 2000 and 2001.

Information on unaccompanied minors is published annually in the statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom", a copy of which is available in the Library, and from the RDS website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 15 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 180W, on asylum seekers, if he will list the categories of data to be stored on the micro-chip on the asylum seeker identification card. [31329]

Angela Eagle: The data held in the Application Registration Card micro chip are:

1. Name
2. Address
3. Immigration Fingerprint Bureau (IFB) Ref. No.
4. Home Office Ref. No.
5. Port/Local Enforcement Office (LEO) Reference
6. National Asylum Support Service (NASS) Ref. No.
7. NASS Status
8. Originating Port/LEO Code
9. Date of Birth
10. DOB disputed?
11. Sex
12. Nationality Code
13. Nationality sub group
14. Reason printed
15. Asylum/Non Asylum
16. Place of original issue
17. Date of original issue
18. Next report date
19. Card Issue No.
20. Card Serial Number
21. Photo Image
22. Fingerprint template
23. Issuing Officer
24. Fingerprints taken?
25. Number of dependants
26. Dependant of
27. Language 1
28. Language 2
29. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Child (UASC)—Responsible authority
30. Employment status.

All items will be readable by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) officials using portable 'QuickCheck' readers. Name, National Asylum Support Service (NASS) Reference Number, Next Report Date and Card Issue Number will also, in due course, be readable by those issuing NASS benefit payments.

Application Registration Card data will remain subject to review and change.

Computer Hacking

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish for each Department contributing to the Unified reporting and Alert Scheme for *(a)* internal hacking and *(b)* external hacking incidents the number of incidents categorised as (i) access denied, (ii) browsing, (iii) password abuse, (iv) privilege abuse, (v) data stolen/disclosed, (vi) files deleted/damaged, (vii) fraud and (viii) other. [31875]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 31 January 2002]:* Reports are made to the United Incident Reporting and Alert Scheme (UNIRAS) by a wide variety of critical national infrastructure organisations, including Government Departments, on an in-confidence basis.

For the period of 1 January 1999 to 29 January 2002 the totals for reports submitted by Government Departments, not capable of being split between external and internal incidents without disproportionate cost, are:

	Number
Hacking incidents of all kinds	13,146
Browsing	47
Password abuse	11
Privilege abuse	30
Data stolen/disclosed	10
Files deleted/damaged	23
Access denied	12,929
Fraud	2

Terrorist Videos

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to prevent the *(a)* import, *(b)* copying and *(c)* distribution of videos similar to those produced by GSPC and available in Finsbury Park mosque; [31965]

(2) if he will make a statement about the action he proposes to take in relation to the videos produced by GSPC being distributed at Finsbury Park mosque. [31963]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 31 January 2002]:* I have already made it clear that anyone breaking the law and inciting violence, whether under the provisions of the Terrorism Act, Race Relations Act or the Public Order Act will be prosecuted. Importation of obscene material is an offence under section 42 of the Customs Consolidation Act 1876. The Obscene Publications Act 1959 makes it a criminal offence to publish any article (including videos) which is considered to be obscene.

In the first instance it is the responsibility of the police to decide whether there are sufficient grounds to launch a criminal investigation and that of the Crown Prosecution Service to decide whether there is sufficient evidence to bring a prosecution. The Metropolitan police are investigating the content and sale of these videos and are discussing with the Crown Prosecuting Service to determine whether prosecutions are possible.

Drug Co-ordinator Annual Report

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the next annual report by the drug co-ordinator will be published. [32110]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Following the election last year, responsibility for delivering the National Drugs Strategy transferred to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. The Home Office will publish a report on progress in the summer.

Child Prostitution

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines the Department issues to police forces on dealing with child prostitution and promoting relevant inter-agency protocols; and if he will make a statement. [32157]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Government believe that children involved in prostitution are primarily the victims of abuse and that those adults who take advantage of them whether by pimping or by buying their sexual services, are child abusers.

We also believe that a multi-agency approach to this problem is needed, including local authority, educational establishments and Area Child Protection Committees as well as the police. We are committed to raising awareness and providing clear guidance to police forces and other relevant agencies.

The Home Office and the Department of Health published "Safeguarding Children Involved in Prostitution" in May 2000. This provided guidance on establishing a framework and a protocol for successful multi-agency working.

The guidance stresses that those under 18 who engage in prostitution are victims and ought to be treated as such. Wherever possible criminal justice action should be pursued against those who directly abuse children through prostitution or seek to exploit them commercially as prostitutes.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions for child abuse involved child or youth prostitution in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [32219]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Statistics for convictions for the last 12 months are not yet available.

More generally, statistics detailing prosecutions for offences related to child abuse do not indicate whether the child victim was commercially sexually exploited or not. The recommendations made by the Sex Offences Review to Government on reforming the law on sex offences were published in "Setting the Boundaries" in July 2000. One of the proposals was to create a new offence of commercial sexual exploitation of a child through prostitution or pornography. We are currently analysing more than 700 responses received during the consultation process.

Anti-terrorism Crime and Security Act

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people had been detained under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 by 28 January; how many have applied for bail (*a*) successfully and (*b*) unsuccessfully; and if he will make a statement. [32552]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 350W.

Appeals are proceeding in relation to each of those detained before the Special Immigration Appeal Commission. A directions hearing was held on 28 January and a substantive hearing will be set in due course.

Intrusive Surveillance

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many covert surveillance operations were authorised in each year from 1999 to date under (*a*) the Police Act 1997 and (*b*) the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000. [32635]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* I refer to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State on 24 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1093W. In addition the Prison Service Agency has carried out several intrusive surveillance operations since 22 March 2001. The intelligence services have carried out a number of intrusive surveillance operations or investigations: I do not intend to comment further on these.

No other records are centrally held of the number of non-intrusive covert surveillance operations authorised under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000.

Burglaries (Telford)

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many recorded burglaries have taken place in Telford in each year since 1992. [32585]

Mr. Denham: Information on numbers of certain offences has been collected centrally at police Basic Command Unit (BCU), and Crime and Disorder Reduction partnership level, since 1 April 1999. The Home Office statistical bulletin "Recorded Crime England and Wales, 12 months to March 2001", published on 19 July 2001, shows that in the Telford BCU there were 1,507 burglaries in a dwelling in the year ending March 2000, and 1,065 such offences in the year ending March 2001, a decrease of 29 per cent.

Fear of Crime

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research his Department has commissioned into fear of crime among older people; how actual crime levels compare to perceptions of crime; and what measures his Department is taking to tackle (*a*) the perception and (*b*) the reality. [illegible]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The Home Office is in the process of carrying out a research study on how crime and fear of crime affects older people. The findings of this study will be published in due course and will cover prevalence of crime against older people, the reporting of such crime to the police, and repeat victimisation. It will also examine how fear of crime among older people is affected by the area in which they live, by past experiences and by other characteristics and their perceptions of the police and criminal justice system.

The Home Office Public Service Agreement (PSA) fear of crime target relates specifically to fear of violent crime, burglary and vehicle crime—the categories of crime which are of most concern to the public as measured by the British Crime Survey (BCS). The BCS shows that perceptions of crime do not necessarily follow actual trends in crime. This is particularly the case for older people where the percentage of people who feel it is very or fairly likely that they will be a victim of crime within the next year is significantly higher than the number who actually do become victims.

A communication strategy is being developed to address this misperception, with key themes identified by research and targeted at geographical areas where fear of crime is greatest and groups of people who fear crime the most.

The assurance agenda within the police reform programme can also be expected to increase feelings of public safety while the Home Office's Reducing Burglary Initiative includes a number of programmes which will target burglary against the elderly in particular.

Police

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if police officers in Scotland receive a housing allowance. [33120]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* This is a devolved matter for Scottish Ministers.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 355–56W, on Brixton police, which London police stations were not accepting reports of minor crime over the telephone *(a)* at times during 2001 and *(b)* between 24 December 2001 and 11 January 2002. [31338]

Mr. Denham: I understand that the information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Extremist Religious Groups

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has collated on levels of recruitment to extremist religious groups; and if he will make a statement. [31342]

Mr. Blunkett: The police and the Security Service are aware of the activities of individuals connected with extremist religious groups and the police continue to monitor their statements for any evidence of offences being committed. Particular attention is given to the possibility of any offences under Part III of the Public Order Act 1986 which deals with incitement to racial hatred and other legislation relating to racial hatred.

The police and the Security Service take all threats seriously and attach a high priority to monitoring and countering any possible activities in the country by foreign extremists. Any credible information is fully investigated. An investigation which yields evidence that an organisation or individuals are supporting terrorism will result in the appropriate action being taken.

Sex Offenders

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for voluntary chemical castration of habitual sex offenders. [26924]

Beverley Hughes: At any one time a small number of sex offenders will be being treated with antilibidinal drugs in prison. Research has shown these drugs to be effective only where libido is an important contributor to a person's offending behaviour. The majority of sex offenders, who act from feelings of rage, power or violence, would not be expected to benefit from this form of treatment.

Treatment with antilibidinal drugs in prison is initiated only after assessment by, and on the recommendation of, a consultant psychiatrist specialising in the treatment of sex offenders, taking account of the nature of the particular individual's sex offending and whether the likely benefits of treatment outweighed the risks and side effects. Treatment would only go ahead with the informed consent of the prisoner concerned. The specialist would also be expected to advise on arrangements for the continuation of treatment on the prisoner's release, as the drugs need to be taken regularly to maintain their effect.

The national health service has commissioned a study of the feasibility of undertaking further research on the effectiveness of a different group of drugs in the management of sex offenders in both prison and the community.

Leicestershire Constabulary

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers are employed in the Leicestershire Constabulary; and on what grade. [31981]

Mr. Denham: The latest information available is for 30 September 2001 and is given in the table.

Rank	*Number of officers*
Chief Constable	1
Assistant Chief Constable	2
Superintendents	17
Chief Inspectors	20
Inspectors	90
Sergeants	261
Constables	1,671
Total all ranks	2,062

Source:

Home Office Statistical Bulletin—Police Service Strength 30 September 2001

Leicestershire Constabulary also employed 691 civilian support staff on 30 September 2001.

Crime and Disorder Partnerships

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how he will allocate the money being made available from the Capital Modernisation Fund to Crime and Disorder partnerships in England and Wales to assist small retailers in deprived areas. [34088]

Mr. Denham: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced on 27 June 2001 the provision of £15 million over three years from the Capital Modernisation Fund to assist small retailers in deprived areas to improve the security of their businesses. £3 million is available in the 2001–02 financial year, with a further £6 million in both 2002–03 and 2003–04.

This money, which is being spent on schemes identified by regional crime reduction directors, in conjunction with Crime and Disorder Reduction partnerships, will be used to help small retailers to improve security. This will be achieved by employing a variety of interventions, including enhancing the security of individual premises and improving the environment of shopping centres.

I am now able to announce the specific projects which will receive funding from the 2001–02 allocation. £100,000 of the first year funding of £3 million has been set aside for administration and evaluation. The remaining £2.9 million has been distributed to regions in England and Wales using a straightforward formula based on relevant and readily available information. The formula shares 30 per cent. of funds equally between the nine regions in England and Wales, allocates 30 per cent. based on the proportion of population living in the 10 per cent. most deprived wards and 40 per cent. on levels of recorded crimes which impact most on retailers. The regional allocation of project funds for 2002–03 and 2003–04 will be announced in due course.

I have placed in the Library a paper showing the allocation of funds to individual projects. I have also written to hon. Members in England and Wales who have projects in their constituencies.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Qualified Teacher Status

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many newly qualified teachers had failed to achieve the award of qualified teacher status by 31 December 2001. [33427]

Mr. Timms: Newly qualified teachers have, by definition, achieved the award of qualified teacher status. However, the Induction Standards include a requirement that teachers who qualified between 1 May 2000 and 30 April 2001 must pass the numeracy skills test before the satisfactory completion of induction. As of 31 December 2001, there were 79 newly qualified teachers who had registered for the numeracy skills test but still had not passed. These teachers have until 31 August 2002 to pass the test.

Teachers

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers will reach the age of 60 in each of the next five school years. [33961]

Mr. Timms: The numbers of teachers in regular full-time service in the maintained schools sector in England at 31 March 2000 who will reach the age of 60 in the next five academic years are as follows:

Date of birth	*School year in which teacher will reach age 60*	*Number of teachers*
1 September 1941 to 31 August 1942	1 September 2001 to 31 August 2002	3,380
1 September 1942 to 31 August 1943	1 September 2002 to 31 August 2003	4,700
1 September 1943 to 31 August 1944	1 September 2003 to 31 August 2004	6,010
1 September 1944 to 31 August 1945	1 September 2004 to 31 August 2005	6,870
1 September 1945 to 31 August 1946	1 September 2005 to 31 August 2006	8,810

Note:
The data are provisional.

Student Teachers

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how the decision on the cut-off point for incentive payments to PGCE students was arrived at. [34044]

Mr. Timms: Teacher training bursaries were designed to encourage more graduates to apply for and enter courses of initial teacher training from 2000–01 onwards. Consequently, it was decided in March 2000 that those graduates who had commenced training before 1 September 2000, or before 1 September 1999 in the case of those following two-year full-time Postgraduate Certificate in Education courses, would not be eligible for these payments. Following representations from hon. Members and others, my right hon. Friend subsequently announced that, for reasons of equity, eligibility for the training bursaries would be extended to those whose courses had begun before 1 September 2000 and who remained in attendance on 20 April 2001.

Tuition Fees

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of the sums raised by tuition fees in higher education has been directly remitted to higher education institutions; and if she will make a statement. [31978]

Margaret Hodge: Tuition fees, whether paid by students or the taxpayer, are paid directly to higher education institutions.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

School Sports Co-ordinators

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the total cost of the school sports co-ordinator programme in 2001–02; and if she will estimate the total cost of the school sports co-ordinator programme in September 2004. [28610]

Dr. Howells: Sport England estimate the cost of implementation in 2001–02 to be £15 million.

Sport England have been allocated £90 million to implement the school sports co-ordinator programme by September 2004, which is supplemented by £19.76 million from the New Opportunities Fund for out of school hours sporting activities run by school sports co-ordinators.

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many school sports co-ordinators will be in post by *(a)* September 2002, *(b)* September 2003 and *(c)* September 2004. [28611]

Dr. Howells: Sport England estimate there will be 518 school sports co-ordinators in place by September 2002. Sport England are on course to reach the target set for 1,000 school sports co-ordinators by September 2004. The figure of school sports co-ordinators for September 2003 is not possible to predict accurately at this time.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the total external spend by her Department was on Private Finance Initiative consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PFI consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by her Department over this period; and if she will make a statement. [31043]

Dr. Howells: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport's total external spend on PFI consultants was: 1998—£27,000; 1999—£45,992; 2000—£20,247; and 2001—£25,759. All of this was incurred by the Royal Parks Agency, which used four consultancy firms. The information relating to the number of full-time equivalent consultants, billed consultancy days and the implied average cost of each consultant could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Golden Jubilee

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the state of preparations reached for celebrations between 1 and 4 June for the Queen's Jubilee celebrations. [30705]

Tessa Jowell: Preparations for the programme of events that I announced on 3 August 2001, are on schedule. Further announcements will be made about the concerts in Buckingham Palace gardens and the carnival pageant when the final details have been settled.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will publish the objectives of the Golden Jubilee Office and make a statement on its progress in achieving its objectives so far. [31081]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* The Queen's programme is being planned by Buckingham Palace. Working closely with the Palace, the Golden Jubilee Office is liaising with key Government Departments and other organisations in supporting and facilitating the celebrations. The 61 separate initiatives for the celebrations are being delivered effectively through 12 project plans, all of which are on target.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the effectiveness and organisation of the planning of the celebration of the Queen's Golden Jubilee. [31605]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* The Queen's programme is being planned by Buckingham Palace. Working closely with the Palace, the Golden Jubilee Office is liaising with key Government Departments and other organisations in supporting and facilitating the celebrations. The 61 separate initiatives for the celebrations are being delivered effectively through 12 project plans, all of which are on target.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she has taken since her appointment to ensure that the Queen's Golden Jubilee is celebrated in a manner that reflect the wishes of the public. [31083]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 28 January 2002]:* The Government are working closely with Buckingham Palace to facilitate the celebrations for the Queen's Golden Jubilee in a way that embraces the six themes for the jubilee celebration: giving thanks; service; involving the whole community; looking forward as well as back; and the Commonwealth, while adhering to her wish that there should be no undue expenditure from public funds. It is for local communities to decide how they wish to celebrate the Jubilee.

To help communities plan their local celebrations, the Golden Jubilee Office has distributed 20,000 Golden Jubilee celebrations toolkits to councils, Citizens' Advice Bureaux, libraries, a wide range of organisations across England, Scotland and Wales and the media. A further 10,000 copies have been subsequently requested. A reprint has been ordered to meet the current high level of demand. In addition, a team of representatives from Buckingham Palace and the Golden Jubilee Office are delivering joint briefings across the United Kingdom. To date, they have briefed over 450 organisations. More briefings are planned.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action she is taking to encourage local authorities to organise events to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the accession of Her Majesty the Queen, and if she will make a statement. [31755]

Tessa Jowell: The Government are working closely with Buckingham Palace to facilitate the celebrations for the Queen's Golden Jubilee in a way that embraces the six themes for the jubilee celebration: giving thanks; service; involving the whole community; looking forward as well as back; and the Commonwealth, while adhering to her wish that there should be no undue expenditure from public funds. It is for local communities to decide how they wish to celebrate the Jubilee.

To help communities plan their local celebrations, the Golden Jubilee Office has distributed 20,000 Golden Jubilee celebrations toolkits to councils, Citizens' Advice Bureaux, libraries, a wide range of organisations across England, Scotland and Wales and the media. A further 10,000 copies have been subsequently requested. A reprint has been ordered to meet the current high level of demand. In addition, a team of representatives from Buckingham Palace and the Golden Jubilee Office are delivering joint briefings across the United Kingdom. To date, they have briefed over 450 organisations. More briefings are planned.

Invoice Payments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the instances in which her Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies failed to pay valid invoices within 30 days or after the agreed credit period in the financial year 2000–01. [32031]

Dr. Howells: The information requested on the Department and its agency, the Royal Parks is in the following table:

	DCMS	*The Royal Parks Agency*
Number of valid invoices paid	6,125	4,411
Number of invoices paid outside 30 days or after the agreed credit period	62	249
Percentage of invoices paid on target	99	94

The Department has 66 non-departmental public bodies and does not keep central records of their invoice payment performance. The details requested can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Overseas Visitors

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many overseas visitors came to the United Kingdom in each year from 1998; and if he will make a statement. [32485]

Dr. Howells: The number of visits was as follows:

Thousand

Year	*Visits from overseas*
1998	25,745
1999	25,394
2000	25,209

Visit numbers fell slightly between 1998 and 2000, but overall these were strong years for inbound tourism to the UK, with a record level of spending by overseas visitors in 2000 of £12.8 billion, compared to £12.7 billion in 1998 and £12.5 billion in 1999. Figures for the full year 2001 are not yet available.

Seal Watching

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many seal-watching establishments there are in England and Wales; how many visitors are estimated to visit these establishments each year; how many people are estimated to work in such establishments each year; and what the total gross revenue per annum of the industry is estimated to be. [32600]

Dr. Howells: The Department does not have the information to answer the questions raised.

Departmental Secondments (Energy Industry)

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many staff were seconded between *(a)* BP, *(b)* Shell, *(c)* Enron, *(d)* Exxon-Mobil, *(e)* Conoco, *(f)* Texaco and *(g)* TotalFinaElf and her Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33205]

Dr. Howells: The Department has seconded no members of staff to these organisations during the periods quoted.

Licensing Laws

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the impact of licensing pubs and clubs to sell alcohol 24 hours a day on residents of the cities of London and Westminster. [33004]

Dr. Howells: Our assessment was set out clearly in the White Paper "Time for Reform" (Cm. 4696) published on 10 April 2000. We proposed that the conditions attached to the licences of pubs and clubs should be set locally by the local authority on the basis of the balance of the operator's requirements, resident views, and police and fire authority assessments. To counter and minimise public disorder resulting from fixed closing times, we intend to introduce flexible opening hours as a condition of the licence for each premises, with the potential for some venues to operate up to 24 hour-opening, seven days a week, subject to consideration of the impact on local residents. We intend to implement these proposals by means of primary legislation as soon as parliamentary time permits. The changes will beneficial to the police because it will help them cope with late night disorder and reduce crime; for business because it will sweep away red tape and offer them real flexibility; for citizens and visitors to this country alike by creating a safer environment in which they can have greater choice; for families by creating more opportunities for them to spend leisure time together without fear of intimidation or disorder; and for local residents, who will acquire a bigger say in the licensing process which will be properly accountable to them.

National Lottery

Mr. Mahmood: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will establish an inquiry into the national lottery sales improvement programme, in particular the proposal to remove terminals from retailers with less than £1,500 per week turnover. [33725]

Dr. Howells: We have no plans to do so.

Digital Television

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport by what geographical areas statistics on take up of digital television are collated. [33311]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* Take-up figures are not currently available for the regions, but we are currently examining whether useful data may be collected cost effectively.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on what date the viewers panel established to advise the Government on the consumers' view on digital switchover reported. [33329]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The Viewers' Panel Report: Digital Decisions: Viewer Choice and Digital Television was submitted to me on 6 December 2001. Copies are in the Libraries of both Houses.

Secondments

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many staff were seconded between *(a)* PWC Consulting and PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst & Young, *(c)* Deloitte & Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen and her Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33863]

Dr. Howells: The Department has seconded no members of staff to these organisations during the periods quoted.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Refrigerator Disposal

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish a diary of events leading to the implementation of the EU Directive on the disposal of refrigerators and freezers; what discussions her Department has had in the last five years with the retail industry on this matter; and if she will make a statement. [33600]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* In 1998, the original European Commission proposal for a regulation on substances that deplete the ozone layer (ODS) did not require the recovery and recycling of ODS from the refrigeration equipment unless it was "practicable". An amendment to the article on recovery in the draft regulation was agreed in February 1999 at the EC Environment Council meeting. Between February 1999 and mid-2001, UK officials repeatedly asked the Commission for formal clarification of the position of ODS in the insulating foam of refrigeration equipment. The occasions on which this was raised by the UK and other member states, either directly or implicitly during discussion of items for clarification, are as follows:

EC Regulation 3093/94 Management Committee meeting, 23 February 1999;

EC Regulation 3093/94 Management Committee meeting, 11 October 1999;

EC Regulation 3093/94 Management Committee meeting, 1 March 2000;

Margins of the Montreal Protocol meeting in Geneva, July 2000;

DETR letter to European Commission dated 11 September 2000;

EC Regulation 2037/2000 Management Committee meeting, 4–6 October 2000;

DETR letter to European Commission dated 30 January 2001;

EC Regulation 2037/2000 Management Committee meeting, 13–14 March 2001;

EC Regulation 2037/2000 Extraordinary Management Committee meeting, 11–12 June 2001.

EC Regulation 2037/2000 entered into force on 1 October 2000. In June 2001, the European Commission formally clarified that mandatory recovery and recycling also applied to ODS in fridge insulating foam as of 1 January 2002.

The Department, with assistance from colleagues in DTI, has been in regular contact with the refrigeration retail industry on the effect of legislation. Retailers were represented at refrigeration sector group meetings at which the regulation was discussed.

Since the middle of last year, the Department has worked closely with retailers and other stakeholders on practical arrangements to deal with the disposal of waste fridges and freezers. Representatives of the retail industry attended several stakeholder meetings and a number of smaller meetings to discuss the impact of the regulation on retailer take-back schemes. We are continuing to work with retailers to identify means to encourage the reinstatement of take-back schemes.

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much funding Oxfordshire county council will receive in order to dispose of refrigerators. [33587]

Mr. Meacher: £6 million has been added to the provisional local government finance settlement for 2002–03 for the costs of implementing the ozone depleting substances regulation relating to the period 1 January 2002 to 31 March 2002. This will be distributed to local authorities using standard spending assessments (SSA). The extra money has been added to the upper tier sub-block of the Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services SSA. We are continuing to assess the impacts of the regulation and will determine what further action is required beyond that.

Hedgerow Protection

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to revise the legislation on protection of hedgerows. [33652]

Mr. Meacher: A consultation document that includes proposals for changes to the Hedgerows Regulations 1997 is in preparation. We hope to issue it shortly.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list for Buckinghamshire by *(a)* tonnage and *(b)* percentage, the amount of waste disposal by (i) landfill, (ii) recycling and (iii) incineration in each of the last five years. [30061]

Mr. Meacher: Based on estimates from the Department's Waste Management Survey, the amounts of municipal waste for Buckinghamshire are listed as follows:

Thousand tonnes

	Landfill	*Percentage*	*Recycled*	*Percentage*
1996–97	287.0	96	11.4	4
1997–98	216.1	96	9.7	4
1998–99	200.1	94	12.9	6
1999–2000	206.6	91	20.3	9

Thousand tonnes

	Incineration	*Percentage*	*Total*
1996–97	0	0	298.3
1997–98	0	0	225.8
1998–99	0.3	less than 0.5	213.3
1999–2000	0.2	less than 0.5	227.1

Notes:

1. 2000–01 data are currently being collected from local authorities.
2. Totals and percentages may not add, due to rounding.

Information, including the amounts of industrial and commercial waste, for Buckinghamshire are published in Strategic Waste Management Assessment 2000: South East, Environment Agency. Data are available for one year only and based on estimates from the Environment Agency's National Waste Production Survey.

Industrial and commercial waste 1998

	Thousand tonnes	*Percentage*
Land disposal	416	51
Land recovery	1	less than 0.5
Re-used	29	4
Recycled	253	31
Thermal	6	less than 0.5
Other	117	14
Total	822	100

Note:

Totals and percentages may not add, due to rounding.

Rural White Paper

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) of 27 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 859W, on the Rural White Paper, what proportion of the announced funds and schemes, broken down by category, has been spent to date during 2001–02. [33778]

Alun Michael: For 2000–01, £80 million has been allocated to local education authorities through the small schools fund, including those covering predominantly rural areas. Information on actual expenditure of the small schools fund for 2001–02 is not available. Local education authorities will return monitoring forms in May, which will give a broad indication for the 2001–02 financial year.

In 2001–02, £30 million has been allocated (by means of a formula) under the rural policing fund to the 31 rural police authorities. Forces are expected to include in their best value annual policing plan information on how they expect to spend or have spent the additional funds. The Home Office do not routinely keep information on how much has been spent in any financial year—it is a matter for each individual police authority.

The £2 million Government fund to support volunteer and community initiatives to maintain or reopen post office facilities in rural areas came into operation in September 2001. Since then just over £29,000 has been spent on five initiatives.

The child care figure of 8,728 new places refers to the financial year between April 2000 and March 2001. From April 2001 to September 2001 Cornwall, Devon, Durham and Lincolnshire partnerships have reported the creation of 4,804 child care places. Figures for October to December are not yet available.

For 2001–02 £62 million has been allocated to improve rural bus services. Up until the end of January £28.8 million had been spent on Rural Bus Subsidy Grant and £8.8 million on Rural Bus Challenge. I understand that the DTLR expect to spend a total of £60 million by the end of the financial year.

The new Countryside Agency Grant schemes have spent the following up until 31 December 2001: Community Services Grant £597,000; Parish Plans Fund £143,000; and Parish Transport Fund £80,000.

Information on expenditure and assistance to date on market towns is not currently available.

Abandoned Cars

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she *(a)* has taken and *(b)* plans to take to reduce the number of abandoned cars; and if she will make a statement. [31587]

Mr. Meacher: The Government recently consulted on a package of measures to help deal with the abandoned vehicles problems. The main proposals were: reducing the notice periods used by local authorities so that abandoned vehicles could be removed more quickly; enabling local authorities to use DVLA's powers to remove unlicensed vehicles and to provide better access for them to DVLA's records; and promoting exchanges of best practice between local authorities with a view to deterring vehicles from being abandoned, bringing forward changes to vehicle registration and licensing procedures to ensure greater accuracy of DVLA's vehicle record.

The consultation period closed on 31 January and the Government are now considering the responses.

Landfill Sites

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will list, by constituency, the number of landfill sites accepting *(a)* domestic and *(b)* toxic waste, within a two mile radius of residential property; [32225]

(2) if she will list, by constituency, the number of domestic residences located within a two mile radius of landfill sites accepting *(a)* domestic and *(b)* toxic waste. [32240]

Mr. Meacher: The Department does not hold this information and to collate it would be disproportionately costly.

The Small Area Health Statistic Unit study on "Health Outcomes in Populations Living Around Landfill Sites" published last year found that about 80 per cent. of the population of Great Britain lived within 2 km of a landfill site. However, the majority of these sites are closed and therefore are no longer accepting any waste for disposal. This figure includes sites that accept both special (hazardous) waste and non-special waste or have taken such wastes in the past.

Carbon Trust

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the work programme is of the Carbon Trust; and if she will make a statement. [33352]

Mr. Meacher: The Carbon Trust is setting up a range of initiatives to accelerate the take up of cost effective, low-carbon technologies and measures in the non-domestic sector. The strategy is published on the Carbon Trust's website www.thecarbontrust.co.uk.

The Carbon Trust is currently preparing a business plan outlining programme work for the next financial year.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proposals she has for the provision of free farm business and environmental assessment advice by her Department on Common Agricultural Policy support for individual farms; what plans she has to increase environmental and rural development scheme funding via the redirection of CAP subsidy payments; and if she will make a statement. [33382]

Alun Michael: The report of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food has made recommendations both on the provision of free farm business and environmental assessment advice and increasing funding for agri-environment schemes by increasing the rate of modulation of CAP subsidy payments. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said when the report was launched on Tuesday 29 January, the Government will publish their strategy for sustainable farming, in response to the report, in the summer.

UK Nuclear Plants

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the levels of radioactive contamination are around UK nuclear plants; and what the best safety distance is. [25249]

Mr. Meacher: There is no simple, direct relationship between the dose arising from any radioactive discharges from UK nuclear plants and proximity to them. All radioactive discharges from UK nuclear plants are well within the national and international limit of 1 millisievert a year. In setting discharge limits, the Environment Agency has to be sure that no one would be exposed to a dose from man-made sources of ionising radiation greater than this. (There are separate dose limits for a single site and for a single new source of ionising radiation of 0.5 and 0.3 millisieverts respectively). There are no cases in the UK where any of these limits are breached. In all cases the most exposed members of the public receive a dose which is considerably below the appropriate limit.

The Environment Agency has recently published its report "Radioactivity in the Environment Report for 2000". This is the latest in a series of such reports and contains a summary and radiological assessment of the agency's monitoring programmes.

The principal conclusions were that discharges of radioactivity into the environment reported by the operators of the major sites during 2000 were well below the authorised discharge levels; concentrations of radionuclides in water, sediment, soil and grass were broadly similar to those in previous years; activity concentrations in air, rain, and sources of drinking water remained low during 2000; and all the estimated doses from radionuclides in sediment, soil and water were below the public dose limit and in many cases the estimated doses were much less than 1 per cent. of the dose limit.

Foot and Mouth

Liz Blackman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether she intends to review the existing contingency plans for foot and mouth disease. [34740]

Margaret Beckett: An interim operational contingency plan is being prepared, based on current policy and experience of the recent disease outbreak, and building on existing relationships with other Government Departments and stakeholders. The plan in no way seeks to prejudge the outcomes of the official inquiries, but is a sensible interim response. It codifies and pulls together the operational response regime that was developed during the recent outbreak to compliment the existing strategic framework and the detailed veterinary guidance and instructions.

DEFENCE

Northern Ireland

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers were *(a)* sent to and *(b)* withdrawn from Northern Ireland in each of the past five years; what plans he has for the further reduction of army presence; what provisions have been made for the return of military personnel; and if he will make a statement. [31630]

Mr. Ingram: The level of armed forces personnel in Northern Ireland fluctuates throughout the year depending on the security situation. I have therefore based the answer on the number of personnel under the command of the General Officer Commanding Northern Ireland (GOC NI) at 31 December in each of the last five years:

As at 31 December	*Number of armed force personnel*
1997	17,183
1998	16,824
1999	15,910
2000	15,112

As at 31 December	*Number of armed force personnel*
2001	14,551

These figures include those troops stationed in Northern Ireland as well as those troops under the command of the GOC NI that are rear based in Great Britain and can be called forward to the Province as and when required. In addition, other troops can be made available to the GOC NI from Land Command if required, for example, during the height of the summer marching season.

The armed forces are in support of the police who have primacy for security and liaison between the PSNI and the Army which ensures military support is kept under review and at the right level. When it is assessed that the level of threat has reduced sufficiently, consideration will be given to further reductions in the number of armed force personnel based in the Province. Should it be assessed that the level of threat has increased, consideration will be given to returning military personnel that are currently rear based.

Scottish Barracks

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are to alter barrack accommodation in Scotland; and where these alterations are located. [32449]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* Plans to alter or expand barrack accommodation in Scotland were included in the Single Living Accommodation improvements that were announced by the Secretary of State on 14 March 2001.

On current plans the programme in Scotland includes an investment of around £170 million in 5,200 bed-spaces in the period 2002–10. 11 service establishments are involved: HMNB Clyde, HMS Caledonia Rosyth and RM Condor Arbroath, the Army barracks at Edinburgh Castle, Craigie Hall and Glencorse, and the RAF stations at Kinloss, Lossiemouth, Saxa ford, Leuchars and Buchan.

The bed-spaces will be delivered by prime contracts, including the new Defence Estates Regional Prime Contract for Scotland, which is expected to be awarded in autumn 2002.

No-fly Zones (Iraq)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions *(a)* coalition aircraft and *(b)* UK aircraft patrolling the southern no-fly zone in Iraq have (i) detected violations of the no-fly zones, (ii) a direct threat to coalition aircraft and (iii) released ordnance, in each quarter since January 1999 to date stating for each quarter the tonnage of ordnance released; in percentage terms what has been (A) the nature of the violation detected, (B) the nature of the threat detected and (C) the category of target attacked; and if he will make a statement. [31015]

Mr. Ingram: The information is as follows:

(i) The numbers of southern NFZ violations by quarter since January 1999 are:

	1999	*2000*	*2001*
First quarter	35	3	3
Second quarter	9	0	2
Third quarter	6	4	4
Fourth quarter	3	1	1
Total	53	8	10

No-fly zone (NFZ) violations can be detected in several ways, including by tactical aircraft. 100 per cent. of violations were incursions into the NFZ by Iraqi military aircraft.

(ii) We do not hold information in the form requested about recorded threats prior to 2000. In 2000 and 2001 coalition aircraft recorded threats on a total of 918 occasions. Reports from UK aircraft indicated that they were threatened or attacked as follows, by quarter:

	2000	*2001*
First quarter	4	73
Second quarter	8	71
Third quarter	36	45
Fourth quarter	28	15
Total	76	204

In 2000 and 2001, 7 per cent. of the total were radar threats; 6 per cent. were attacks by surface-to-air missiles; and 87 per cent. others, primarily attacks by anti-aircraft guns.

(iii) The tonnage of ordnance released by coalition aircraft in the no-fly zone, by quarter, is as follows.

	1999		*2000*		*2001*	
	Coalition	*UK*	*Coalition*	*UK*	*Coalition*	*UK*
First quarter	120.5	31.5	35	3.5	50.5	8.5
Second quarter	79	21	45.5	6	11.5	2.5
Third quarter	135	23.5	42.5	5	39	13
Fourth quarter	45	12.5	32	6	6	1
Total	379.5	88.5	155	20.5	107	25

100 per cent. of ordnance released was in self-defence responses by coalition aircraft against military targets in the Iraqi Integrated Air Defence System.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when, since January 1999, coalition aircraft patrolling the *(a)* northern and *(b)* southern no-fly zones in Iraq have hit targets that were different from the intended target, stating in each case (i) the nature of the intended target, (ii) the nature of the actual target hit, (iii) the estimated number of civilians killed and (iv) the reason why the unintended target was hit; and if he will make a statement. [31016]

Mr. Ingram: All targets attacked in self defence by coalition aircraft patrolling the no-fly zones are military elements of the Iraqi Integrated Air Defence System.

On the rare occasions where ordnance has failed to hit the intended target, it has almost invariably landed on open ground. It is extremely difficult to assess collateral damage, or numbers of civilian casualties caused by the remainder, despite the painstaking Battle Damage Assessment (BDA) that the coalition carries out every time ordnance is released. However, it is possible to demonstrate categorically that many of the Iraqi claims of collateral damage and civilian casualties are untrue. There have, for example, been several instances when Iraqis have claimed civilian casualties when coalition aircraft have not been flying, or when BDA has confirmed that only military targets were hit. Indeed, there is good evidence that, on several occasions where Saddam has made claims of civilian casualties, it has been caused by Iraqi artillery shells or missiles, recklessly fired at coalition aircraft, falling to earth in built up areas.

In all cases of failure to hit the intended target by ordnance released from UK aircraft, the failure was caused by ordnance malfunction. We do not hold information for coalition partners.

Coalition aircraft only attack military targets in self-defence. We make every effort to select targets and to employ precision guided munitions in order to minimise the possibility of collateral damage and civilian casualties. Despite these efforts, regrettably, on occasions civilians may have suffered as a result of coalition activity. However, this would be completely avoided if the Iraqis desisted from attacking coalition aircraft.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of changes to the nature and strength of Iraqi air defences since January 1998; whether improvements to the Iraqi air defence system constitute a threat to coalition aircraft patrolling the no-fly zones; what contribution strikes against Iraqi air defences by coalition aircraft in response to violation of the no-fly zones have made to his assessment; and if he will make a statement. [31017]

Mr. Ingram: Since January 1998, Saddam has continually sought to upgrade his air defence system. Developments since January 1998 include increased use of digital technology and greater mobility and dispersal of radars and weapons.

Its capability is very carefully monitored to assess the impact of any changes on coalition aircraft patrolling the no-fly zones. The danger to our aircraft is demonstrated by the fact that the Iraqi air defence system has threatened coalition aircraft on around 1,000 occasions over the last two years. The coalition has on occasion responded purely in self-defence using high precision weapons against elements of the Iraqi Air Defence System. There is no doubt these self-defence responses do have an impact in terms of reducing the threat posed to aircraft patrolling the no-fly zones. Other important initiatives, including the UN-sponsored arms embargo on Iraq, also have an impact on the capability of Saddam's air defence infrastructure.

As long as the Iraqis persist in attempts to shoot down our aircraft, the coalition will continue to take action in self-defence to ensure the safety of our aircrew.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what activities are deemed violations of the no-fly zones in Iraq; from what date every such activity has been deemed to be a violation; what changes have been made to the definition of a violation of the no-fly zones since January 1998; what changes have been made to authorised reaction to any particular violation since January 1998; and if he will make a statement. [31013]

Mr. Ingram: A violation of the no-fly zones is defined as entry into a zone by Iraqi military aircraft. These activities have been considered violations since the inception of the zones, in April 1991 (north) and August 1992 (south) respectively. There have been no material changes to this definition since January 1998.

From time to time minor adjustments are made to the authorised self-defence responses to violations of the no-fly zones. I am withholding details for reasons of operational security in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. However, the basis for any coalition response—self-defence—remains unchanged.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what activities are deemed to be threats to coalition aircraft in the no-fly zones in Iraq; from what date every such activity has been deemed to be a threat; what changes have been made to the definition of a threat in the no-fly zone since January 1998; what changes have been made to the authorised reaction to any particular threat since January 1998; and if he will make a statement. [3[illegible]14]

Mr. Ingram: Threats to coalition aircraft patrolling the no-fly zones in Iraq include attacks from Iraqi aircraft, Anti-Aircraft Artillery and/or Surface To Air Missile fire, and acquisition by radar. These activities have been considered threats since the inception of the zones, in April 1991 (north) and August 1992 (south) respectively.

Detailed procedures governing the operations conducted by coalition aircraft patrolling the no-fly zones are reviewed and amended from time to time. I am withholding details for reasons of operational security under Exemption 1 of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. But there have been no fundamental changes to the definition of a threat justifying a response in self defence since January 1998.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total external spend by his Department was on Private Finance Initiative consultants in each of the last four years; how many full-time equivalent consultants were employed over this period; how many billed consultancy days there were per year; what the implied average cost of each PFI consultant was; how many consultancy firms were used by his Department over this period; and if he will make a statement. [31044]

Mr. Ingram: The recorded expenditure on External Assistance specifically in support of PPP/PFI projects in the financial year 2000–01 was £42.67 million. This information was not recorded as a discrete category in the preceding three years.

The recorded number of consultancy companies used by the Ministry of Defence over the last four years in support of PPP/PFI projects is 52, which includes 18 firms providing legal advice.

The other information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. More general information is published in the Ministry of Defence's "External Assistance—Expenditure" report; copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Departmental Salary Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit in 2001–02 will be accounted for by salary costs and pension contributions. [32010]

Dr. Moonie: Our current estimate is that civilian salary costs and pension contributions will account for 11.5 per cent. of departmental spending.

Territorial Army

Mr. Francois: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who is the most senior serving officer in the Territorial Army; and when he was appointed to his post. [31803]

Dr. Moonie: The most senior serving officer in the Territorial Army (TA), by virtue of the date he was appointed, is Brigadier the Duke of Westminster OBE, TD, DL. His appointment is Brigadier AG HQ and his seniority date is 17 January 2000. The Brigadier serving in the most senior TA appointment is however, Brigadier J. R. Thomson, TD, ADC, BA (Hon), MBA, MIMGT, MCIM. His appointment is Brigadier Private Office, Headquarters Land Command and his seniority date is 31 March 2000.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the latest actual strength of the TA by unit and location set against its establishment. [33086]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Armed Forces (Outflow)

Mr. Francois: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the net outflow was of *(a)* officers and *(b)* other ranks from the (i) Army, (ii) Royal Navy, (iii) Royal Air Force and (iv) Royal Marines in 2001. [31805]

Mr. Ingram: The net flow for officers and other ranks over the last 12 months is as follows:

	Strength as at		
	1 December 2000	*1 December 2001*	*Net flow over 12 months*
Naval Service			
Officers	7,714	7,753	39
Other ranks	34,791	34,037	–754
Army			
Officers	13,844	13,894	50
Other ranks	95,531	95,627	96
RAF			
Officers	11,007	10,833	–174
Other ranks	43,200	42,346	–854

Notes:

Naval Service includes both Royal Navy and Royal Marines.

Figures are for UK regular forces (including both trained and untrained personnel), and therefore excludes Gurkhas, full-time reserve service personnel, the Home Service battalions of the Royal Irish Regiment, mobilised reservists and activated reservists.

Warships

David Cairns: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the trade unions' submission to his Modernising Warship Maintenance Initiative. [32413]

Mr. Ingram: The proposals from the trade unions have been analysed in detail and the results are being considered by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. The Secretary of State plans to meet representatives of the trade unions shortly, before he reaches a decision on the way ahead.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans have been made for the use of HMS Invincible once she has been withdrawn from service; and if he will make a statement. [32134]

Mr. Ingram: No plans have yet been made for the use of HMS Invincible after she is withdrawn from Royal Navy service, which is expected to be towards the end of this decade. Arrangements for her final disposal will be established nearer that time after a careful examination of the most cost beneficial options.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the in-service date for HMS Bulwark will be met; if the construction cost increased during the pre-launch stage; what the final cost of the construction and fitting out stages was; what caused the increases in cost; and if he will make a statement. [32159]

Dr. Moonie: There is every confidence that HMS Bulwark's expected in-service date of December 2003 will be achieved. All opportunities are being taken in close consultation with the prime contractor, BAES Marine Barrow-in-Furness, to ensure that there is no slip to the vessels's programme acceptance date. There have been no cost increases during the pre-launch stage. The final construction cost of HMS Bulwark including the fitting out stages is expected to be of the order of £186 million at contract price basis.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the projected cost is of maintaining HMS Invincible once she is out of service; and if he will make a statement. [32133]

Mr. Ingram: HMS Invincible is not planned to leave service until towards the end of this decade. It is too early to determine the costs of any maintenance after the vessel has left service.

Eurofighter

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the training requirements of RAF pilots for the Eurofighter; what plans there are to use the Hawk 127 system for training; and if he will make a statement. [32135]

Mr. Ingram: The training requirements of all fast jet pilots, including the Eurofighter, are currently being assessed as part of the UK Military Flying Training System (UKMFTS) project. The project is examining the flying training needs of all three services and covers training from entry into formal flying training until arrival at the operational conversion unit. Training Needs Analyses (TNAs) have been carried out to identify the training requirements of Eurofighter pilots once they reach their Operational Conversion Unit. Courses are being designed to ensure their specific training needs are fully met. For UK MFTS, Hawk 127 is one of a number of options for a future advanced fast jet training aircraft. No decisions have yet been made.

Nuclear Weapons

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what discussions his Department has had with its US counterparts concerning Sandia National Laboratory's refurbishment programme for the W76 nuclear package and its arming, fusing and firing mechanism; [32711]

(2) what discussions his Department has had with its counterparts in the US concerning development of the W76–1 warhead; and if he will make a statement. [32710]

Dr. Moonie: Staff from the Defence Procurement Agency's Nuclear Weapons Team hold discussions with their US counterparts as a matter of routine. Conducted under the auspices of the 1958 Mutual Defence Agreement and the 1963 Polaris Sales Agreement, as amended for Trident, the discussions cover all issues of mutual interest, including work on the US W76 warhead, relevant to the safety and reliability of the UK's Trident warhead.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the expected service life is for the Mk-4 re-entry vehicle for the Trident D5 missile; and if his Department has plans to extend it. [32713]

Mr. Ingram: The service life for the UK's Re-entry Assembly (RBA) has been assessed as sufficient, with periodic refurbishment as necessary, to satisfy the needs of the Trident programme as defined in the Strategic Defence Review. As with other key military capabilities, studies into options for obtaining the optimum service life and value for money are undertaken as a matter of routine.

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost is of work conducted for the UK Trident programme in the past year by *(a)* Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, *(b)* Los Alamos National Laboratory and *(c)* Sandia National Laboratory. [29956]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence contracts with the Department of Energy (DoE) and the Department of Defense rather than direct with the US national laboratories and, as a result, the costs associated with the individual laboratories are not held by the MOD. However, the DoE has provided the following figures for expenditure on the UK Trident programme in US fiscal year 2001, which runs from 1 October 2000 to 30 September 2001:

	$	£
Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory	0	0
Los Alamos National Laboratory	401,586	249,649
Sandia National Laboratory	2,343,384	1,456,785

Note:

Average rate of $1.6086/£1 used for conversion

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Trident D5A missiles his Department intends to purchase. [32712]

Mr. Ingram: None. We have purchased 58 Trident II (D5) missiles and have no plans to purchase any more.

Chinook

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the fleet of Boeing CH-47D Chinook helicopters is due to be replaced; and what interest the United Kingdom has in the Franco-German award of a study contract to Boeing for a jumbo Chinook. [33017]

Dr. Moonie: The CH-47D Chinook helicopters in service with the British armed forces comprise the Chinook Mark 2 and the Chinook Mark 2a variants. The out of service date of the Chinook Mark 2 is the middle of the next decade, but we are looking at the possibility of extending its life. The Chinook Mark 2a is expected to remain in service until the mid 2030s.

We maintain a keen interest in defence-related technological developments and possibilities for collaboration with Allies on procurement projects. However, we do not currently foresee a requirement for a 'jumbo' Chinook.

Aircraft (Afghanistan)

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average length of the working day of aircrews in C130Ks operational in Afghanistan. [33097]

Mr. Ingram: Currently C130K aircrews are working an average of around 10 hours per day.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many C130Js and C130Ks from RAF Lyneham are operational in Afghanistan; how many of them are deployable; and how many are undergoing repair. [33096]

Mr. Ingram: As of 4 February there were eight C130Ks from RAF Lyneham flying into Afghanistan. All of the aircraft are currently serviceable, and undergo routine maintenance. NO C130Js are currently engaged on operations into Afghanistan.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many 130Ks in Afghanistan have defensive aids suites. [33098]

Mr. Ingram: All C130Ks operating into Afghanistan are provided with defensive aids. Details vary but for all flights into Afghanistan self protection measures are adequate against the perceived threat.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Airline Disinfectants

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list *(a)* the commercial airline flights arriving or departing in the United Kingdom that use pesticide disinfectants, *(b)* the commercial flights arriving or departing the United Kingdom that require pesticide disinfectants, *(c)* the different methods used to apply pesticide disinfectants to commercial aircraft arriving or departing in the United Kingdom, *(d)* the monitoring procedures in place governing the use of pesticides applied to international flights arriving in the United Kingdom and *(e)* which flights arriving or departing within the United Kingdom use the chemical permthrin as a pesticide disinfectant. [25214]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 10 January 2002]:* I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Open Skies

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if it is his policy to pursue an open skies agreement with the US prior to the European Court ruling on such agreements; [30028]

(2) what his policy is on securing access to the domestic US market for UK cargo airlines as part of an open skies agreement. [30027]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport to the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 727–28W.

Railway Land Sales

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much ex-railway land has been sold in each of the last five years. [30746]

Mr. Spellar: This information is not readily available in the form requested. However, I understand that 218 sites have been sold by the British Railways Board and BRB (Residuary Ltd.) under the revised guidelines implemented when the moratorium imposed on the sale of non-operational railway land was lifted in September 1999. The sale of operational railway land is a commercial matter for Railtrack, and other privatised companies owning such land.

Lancet Report

Mr. Benton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will suspend implementation of the decision of the Planning Inspectorate with regard to the land between Harris drive and Netherton way, Bootle, Merseyside until the Government's investigation has concluded, following the Lancet report on landfill sites of 26 January. [31639]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* It is not possible for the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to suspend implementation of the planning appeal decision to allow the landfill of derelict land between Harris drive and Netherton way, Bootle. This case was transferred to an inspector and his decision is final unless it is successfully challenged in the High Court on a point of law. Two local residents have made such a challenge and the whole matter is now sub judice.

Council Rents

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what real terms percentage increase in each year he predicts for formula rents for council tenants in York local authority until 2011; [32033]

(2) what real terms percentage increase in each year he predicts for formula rents for council tenants in Selby local authority until 2011. [32034]

Ms Keeble: The underlying rate of increase of formula rents will be the same for all local authorities. In 2002–03, we predict that the average rate of increase in real terms for formula rents for council tenants will be 1 per cent. Taking into account the policy that registered social landlord rents increases should be limited to RPI plus ½ per cent. a year, it is likely that local authority formula rents will have to rise by an average of about 1½ per cent. a year in real terms over the next 10 years to achieve Ministers' intention that similar rents should be charged for similar council and housing association properties by 2012. This is about half the average rate of council rent increases over the last 10 years.

However, the precise path of social rents over the next 10 years will depend, among other things, on the outcomes of future spending reviews and the decisions taken by individual landlords who retain responsibility for rent setting.

Rail Passengers (Woodlesford)

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the new train operating franchise for trains operating on the Castleford to Leeds line will provide for sufficient capacity to allow passengers to and from Woodlesford to travel in comfort. [32221]

Mr. Spellar: The terms of extension of Arriva Train Northern's franchise to February 2003 included a commitment to procure 18 additional vehicles. On expiry this franchise will be replaced by two new franchises, Northern and TransPennine Express. The Strategic Rail Authority will be expecting to secure further improvements in capacity and new rolling stock in these franchise negotiations.

Rail Services

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 532–33W, on targets for improving the reliability of train services, what enforcement actions can be taken upon train operating companies if they fail to meet targets; upon which train operating companies enforcement action has been taken as a result of a failure to meet performance targets; and what the dates and the nature of the enforcement were. [32417]

Mr. Spellar: Franchise agreements provide for a special call-in meeting where performance in any four-week period falls below the pre-set thresholds. Call-in meetings are formal and give the Strategic Rail Authority the chance to investigate with the operator the causes or the problem and remedial measures. Three call-ins in three years may be deemed a breach of the franchise agreement. Particularly poor performance in a period can lead straight to a breach, or, in extreme circumstances, to default upon which the authority can terminate the agreement. Enforcement action under section 55 of the Railways Act is available where breaches occur. The authority's annual reports, copies of which are in the Library of the House, list the breaches of franchise agreements registered in the year and the action taken.

Housing (Wandsworth)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will take steps to agree with the London borough of Wandsworth that in all housing developments taking place within the borough there will be an agreed percentage of affordable housing built for local people. [32903]

Ms Keeble: We have made our views known to the London borough of Wandsworth on this matter for some time and have objected to the absence of an adequate affordable housing policy in the current unitary development plan review. Where schemes have been drawn to our attention we have issued Article 14 "holding" directions, to give us time to consider whether insufficient regard has been had to affordable housing needs, and we will continue to do this. In at least one of four recent schemes, the applicant has revised the scheme to include a percentage (25 per cent.) of affordable housing. We are monitoring closely the other three schemes to see if there is a case for calling them in for public inquiry.

Rail Safety

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has undertaken of the need for safety barriers on roads adjacent to railway embankments. [32773]

Mr. Spellar: General guidance on the provision and location of safety barriers is centrally reviewed in the light of accident statistics and the safety performance of the road network. A special review was carried out after the incident at Selby of nearside safety barriers. It is the responsibility of the highway authority regularly to review the safety of the road network in general and at specific locations such as roads adjacent to railways.

Council Tax

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many homes in *(a)* the City of Westminster and *(b)* the City of London were valued in each of the council tax bands in 1991; and if he will estimate the numbers that would be in each band based on current market valuations. [33008]

Dr. Whitehead: Ever since the introduction of the council tax in 1993, dwellings have been allocated to council tax bands on the basis of their estimated values as at 1 April 1991. The following table gives figures for the City of Westminster and the City of London, as used for the first and most recent years of operation of the council tax. There are likely to have been several reasons for the changes between 1992 and 2001. These include the demolition or construction of dwellings, movements to lower bands as a result of successful appeals, the splitting or merging of dwellings, and the conversion of domestic dwellings into non-domestic properties, and vice versa.

Valuation for council tax purposes as at 1 April 1991

	Number as at:	
Band	*December 1992*	*16 October 2001*
City of Westminster		
A	1,161	1,486
B	2,845	6,043
C	12,426	15,364
D	20,160	12,249
E	20,370	20,292
F	15,436	14,891
G	20,494	20,033
H	13,829	13,214
Total	106,721	112,572
City of London		
A	0	9
B	119	238
C	207	629
D	518	734
E	1,245	1,747
F	323	835
G	507	794
H	66	91
Total	2,985	5,077

No estimate is available of the number of homes that would be in each council tax band based on current market valuations.

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will estimate for *(a)* the City of Westminster and *(b)* the City of London the change in council tax yield if domestic properties were assigned council tax properties on the basis of current market value rather than 1991 values. [33007]

Dr. Whitehead: We have no information on which to make an accurate estimation of the change in council tax yield should domestic properties in Westminster and the City of London be re-valued at current market prices.

Skateboarding

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the councils that have by-laws which restrict the use of skateboards in *(a)* town or city centres and *(b)* other areas; if he will list the councils that have skateboard parks; and how many prosecutions have taken place of skateboarders by local councils. [33001]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested is not held centrally.

Baldock Bypass

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on progress on the construction and funding of the Baldock bypass. [32300]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* The Baldock bypass was originally proposed by Hertfordshire county council to be funded through the private finance initiative. However, in re-evaluating the scheme Hertfordshire decided that conventional funding would be the best method of procurement and agreed to provide a revised estimate of costs involved.

In order to ensure the most cost effective method of procurement and value for money for public resources we are currently discussing with Hertfordshire the details of the funding package for the scheme. We hope to be able to reach agreement on this in the very near future.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list his Department's total expenditure by month in each financial year since 1997–98. [32801]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 692W.

Departmental Retirement Ages

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the retirement ages that apply to the employees of his Department and its agencies, including how many and which categories of employees are affected by each; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on flexible retirement. [32825]

Dr. Whitehead: Following the Performance and Innovation Unit report on active ageing, "Winning the Generation Game", DTLR is currently considering its retirement policy. Information on the current retirement ages for my Department and for the executive agencies are as follows:

Grades listed at[1] (5,600 to 5,650 members of staff)—normal retirement age of 65.

Bands 3 up to 7 (and equivalents) and those not covered by the previous Grades (ie EO, HEO, SEO, G7, G6 and equivalents) (11,520 to 11,600 members of staff)—normal retirement age of 60.

Senior Civil Servants (195 to 215 members of staff)—normal retirement age of 60.

There are the following exceptions:

Subject to the terms and conditions when they joined DTLR, there is a "short-service concession" for most non-senior civil servants in Bands 3 and above with less than 20 years accumulated service to continue to work until they reach 20 years or age 65, whichever is the earlier. This is not available to Air Accident Inspectors, or those who became Crown employees working in the former Department of Transport after 31 March 1997.

The Department may also invite staff to stay beyond the normal retirement age but not beyond age 70.

Variations within the agencies

The following executive agencies have these variations:

Driving Standards Agency: Senior Driving Examiners and Supervising Driving Examiners have a normal retirement age of 63 (circa 300 staff); at present, to stay until 65 they would have to revert to Driving Examiners (circa 600 staff).

The Fire Service College: Industrial staff have a retirement age of 65 (30 staff).

The Planning Inspectorate: Planning Inspectors re-employed on flexible short-term contracts up to a maximum age of 65 (30 staff).

The QEII Conference Centre: Normal retirement age of 60 for all staff (49 staff).

The Rent Service: Those staff transferred under TUPE protection from their local Government employer have remained within the Local Government Pension Scheme. They may retire at age 65, although the scheme does allow them to retire at 60 should they so wish.

Vehicle Inspectorate: Industrial employees Band 1 (Tester/Handy Person) in post by 1 May 1994 and over 50 can remain until 65. In other cases the retirement age is 60, with the exception of a short service concession for Band 1 Testers and Band 2 A VEs provided they were in post prior to 31 March 1997 (169 staff).

Flexible retirement

Offers of compulsory or flexible early retirement, or approved early retirement, are made at management discretion and depend on the operational needs of the Department.

[1] *Notes:*

Crown employees who worked in the former Department of the Environment

Administrative Assistant
Administrative Officer
Assistant Scientific Officer
Chief Typing Manager
Communication Officer
Communication Officer II
Communication Officer III
Communication Officer IV
Personal Secretary
Process and General Supervisory Grades
Senior Personal Secretary
Superintendent and Deputy Superintendent Custody Guards
Support Manager I
Support Manager II
Support Manager III
Support Grade I
Support Grade II
Support Grade IIA
Technical Grade 1 and 2
Trainee Typist
Typing Manager
Typist

Crown employees who worked in the former Department of Transport

Administrative Assistant
Administrative Officer
Assistant Scientific Officer
Chief Typing Manager
Civil Engineer (SPTO and below)
Personal Secretary
Process and General Supervisory Grade D
Process and General Supervisory Grade E
Senior Personal Secretary
SGB2 (Cleaner—less than 10 hours weekly)
Stores Officer Grade D
Support Grade 1
Support Grade 2
Support Grade 2A
Support Manager 1
Support Manager 2
Support Manager 3
Teleprinter operator
Typing Manager
Typist and Trainee Typist

Chancellor of the Exchequer

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will provide details of the subjects discussed at meetings with the Chancellor of the Exchequer over the weekend of 26 and 27 January; and what outcomes emerged from such discussions. [33724]

Mr. Byers: Information about any such discussion is exempt from disclosure under Section 2 Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

A36

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the plans he has for detrunking the A36 through west Wellow. [33629]

Mr. Spellar: The Secretary of State confirmed in December 2000 that the A36/A46 route was to remain non-core, and would be detrunked in due course. Negotiations on detrunking between the Highways Agency and the local highway authorities commenced early in 2001. However, the South West Regional Assembly placed a holding objection to detrunking, pending the outcome of a further study into the management of the route and the traffic problems in Bath. This study, entitled the "Bristol/Bath to South Coast Study" is to be commissioned shortly, and is due to report at the end of 2002. Detrunking negotiations are therefore likely to be on hold until early 2003.

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 320W, ref 30241, from which budget within the SRA these costs are being drawn; if these funds are directly or indirectly provided *(a)* in part or *(b)* in total by public funds and on what legal basis the SRA is financing the bid costs. [33408]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The costs are being met by the SRA through its existing public funds. The SRA is exercising its functions in accordance with its statutory duties to secure the development of the railway network and to promote its use and will ensure a viable bid is put to the administrator.

M6

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his plans are for widening the M6 motorway; and if he will make a statement. [33664]

Mr. Spellar: The Government have set up a multi-modal study to consider the transport issues of the M6 corridor. The Steering Group for the study has presented the outline recommendations to the Regional Planning Bodies for the West Midlands and North West Regions, who will consider them as part of the Regional Planning Guidance and their Regional Transport Strategy. We expect the Regional Planning Bodies to submit their recommendations to the Minister in the spring. The Secretary of State will make a statement after this date.

Liquefied Petroleum Gas

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to extend the eligibility for transport action PowerShift grants for converting cars over five years old to use LPG. [33622]

Mr. Spellar: Following the changes we announced last year on the future shape of the PowerShift programme, grants towards the cost of conversion to LPG have been made available for vehicles up to five years old for which quality LPG conversions are available. We have no plans to extend grants to cars over five years old, both because they provide fewer years of environmental benefits, and because the emissions improvements from gas conversions of older vehicles tend to be less certain.

Inner-City Regeneration

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to encourage regeneration in inner city areas. [33738]

Ms Keeble: Deprivation is so ingrained in some inner city areas that only long-term regeneration programmes rooted in the needs and aspirations of local people, can make a significant impact on these areas.

A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal National Strategy Action Plan which was launched by the Prime Minister in January 2001 recognises this. The national strategy is a new long-term initiative which aims to deliver neighbourhood renewal—the process of delivering real change to England's most deprived areas. The Government's vision is reflected in its goal: to narrow the gap between deprived neighbourhoods and the rest, so that within 10 to 20 years, no one should be seriously disadvantaged by where they live. It aims to deliver economic prosperity, safe communities, high quality schools, decent housing, and better health to the poorest parts of the country.

This approach will focus main Government programmes explicitly on deprived areas, many of which are located in inner city areas, and will require local people and public and private sectors to work in partnership. The strategy is being spearheaded by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, a cross-cutting unit based in DTLR and staffed by officials from across Whitehall and the public sector, with secondees from the private and voluntary sectors.

In addition, the regional development agencies are providing support to deprived urban areas through the Single Regeneration Budget and physical regeneration programmes. In April 2002, the RDA's new single programme will include working with LSPs and other stakeholders to tackle poverty and social exclusion through promoting economic development in the most deprived areas.

Concessionary Travel Schemes

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many local authorities in England and Wales provide concessionary travel schemes for public transport for *(a)* pensioners, *(b)* the blind, *(c)* the disabled, *(d)* children aged under 16 years and *(e)* 16 to 18-year-olds in full-time education. [33556]

Ms Keeble: The Transport Act 2000 requires that from 1 June 2001 all local authorities provide their resident pensioners, blind and disabled people with at least half-fares on local buses. Local authorities suing their discretionary powers may also provide concessionary travel for children aged under 16 years, and for 16 to 18-year-olds in full-time education.

Marine Pollution

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make it his policy to introduce a statutory duty on coastal local authorities to plan for and undertake shoreline clean-ups following marine pollution incidents; and if he will make a statement. [33523]

Mr. Spellar: This is a subject which my Department has addressed in the context of the Cabinet Office's review of "The Future of Emergency Planning in England and Wales". One of the proposals for consideration under that review is that existing emergency planning legislation be replaced with a new statutory duty for emergency planning. The result of the review is awaited.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received from *(a)* local government associations and *(b)* individual local authorities concerning the introduction of a statutory duty on coastal local authorities to undertake shoreline clean-ups following marine pollution incidents. [33525]

Mr. Spellar: Since the beginning of 1998, my Department has received representations arguing for the introduction of a statutory duty on coastal local authorities to plan for or undertake shoreline clean-ups following marine pollution incidents from: *(a)* the Local Government Association, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and KIMO (Kommunenes Internasjonale Miljøorganisasjon); and *(b)* Aberdeenshire council, Ceredigion county council, Devon county council, Dumfries and Galloway council, Dundee city council, Fife council, Pembrokeshire county council, Purbeck district council, Shetland Islands council, South Ayrshire council and the Tyne and Wear Emergency Planning Unit.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the effect on local authorities of *(a)* the recommendations of the "Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas" report of 1995 and *(b)* the Sea Empress incident in West Wales in 1996. [33527]

Mr. Spellar: The Government's action to address the recommendations of Lord Donaldson's 1994 report "Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas" following the sinking of the oil tanker Braer off Shetland in 1993, and the further reviews following the grounding of the Sea Empress on rocks in the entrance to Milford Haven in 1996 (the report of the Sea Empress Environmental Evaluation Committee, and the report of Lord Donaldson's Review of Salvage and Intervention and their Command and Control) has necessarily involved consideration of the role of, and impacts on, local authorities. This process has culminated, after a wide-ranging review which included local authorities and local authority associations, in the publication in February 2000 of the UK's revised "National Contingency Plan for Marine Pollution from Shipping and Offshore Installations", which sets out how the relevant agencies and authorities in the UK will respond to such incidents.

Emergency Planning

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish his Department's contribution to the Cabinet Office's review of the future of emergency planning. [33756]

Mr. Spellar: I am advised that copies of all the responses to the Emergency Planning Review will be placed in the House of Commons Library soon, and that a summary of the responses to the Emergency Planning Review will be put on the Cabinet Office website within the same time scale. There are no plans to publish my Department's response separately.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much funding has been awarded by central Government to local authorities to cover the expense of *(a)* preparing plans, *(b)* training staff and *(c)* engaging in multi-agency exercises to promote the integrated emergency management approach advocated by central Government. [33524]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

I informed the House on 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 891W, that, subject to the Civil Defence (Grant) Bill completing its passage through Parliament, the Government will maintain the total level of grant at this year's level, currently estimated at some £18.6 million. A high proportion of this year's grant is used by local authorities to meet the costs of preparing plans, training staff and engaging in exercises.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much each local authority has spent on combating benefit fraud in each financial year since 1997. [33627]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested is not available centrally.

IT Contracts

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what has been the total expenditure of his Department on IT systems and support in each year from May 1997 to date; how many IT contracts have been let in each of those years; of the other main contracting party in each of those contracts, how many have been *(a)* companies whose registered office is in (i) England and Wales, (ii) Scotland, and (iii) Northern Ireland and *(b)* foreign companies; and what are the names of the companies falling within category *(a)*. [33690]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Deprivation Indices

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the means used by his Department to determine relative deprivation. [33073]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions uses the Indices of Deprivation 2000 (ID 2000) as a means of determining how multiply deprived an area is, relative to other areas in England.

The Indices of Deprivation 2000 is made up of:

Six domain indices at ward level (Income, Employment, Health, Education, Housing and Geographical Access to Services),

An overall ward level Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD 2000),

A supplementary Child Poverty Index at ward level, which gives the percentage of children living in households that claim means tested benefits.

Six summaries at local authority level of the overall IMD 2000, which allow all 354 local authority districts to be ranked according to each measure. These summaries take account of the different patterns of deprivation found in different areas.

Each ward in England is ranked according to how multiply deprived it is, with the most deprived ward being assigned a rank of one and the least deprived a rank of 8,414, for presentation. The ranks show how a ward compares to all the other wards in the country.

The IMD 2000 is constructed from 33 indicators using the most robust and up-to-date information available to describe deprivation at ward level. This includes information from sources such as Department of Social Security benefits data and University and College Admissions Service data. The indicators were chosen after wide consultation with a number of interested parties including central Government, local government, academics and practitioners.

The Index is based on the premise that multiple deprivation is made up of separate dimensions or 'domains' of deprivation. These domains reflect different aspects of deprivation. However, low income remains a central component of the working definition of multiple deprivation for the ID 2000.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Retired Clergy

Mr. Burstow: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners (1) what was the average length of retirement for clergy who serve until the mandatory retirement in the last 10 years; [32675]

(2) what the average age of retirement of clergy was in the last 10 years; and what their average length of retirement was. [32674]

Mr. Bell: Clergy are generally obliged by law to retire no later than the age of 70. In practice, most do so at or fairly soon after the normal minimum pension age of 65.

The following table gives data for clergy retirements and deaths in 2001 and in 1993—the earliest year for which details are readily obtainable—(1) for those who retired at or after age 65 and (2) for all cases including early retirements whether voluntarily or on grounds of ill-health. Complete statistics on which to base a 10-year average are not available.

	Number of clergy retiring in year	*Average age at retirement*	*Number of clergy pensioners who died in year*	*Average age at death*
2001 at or after age 65	324	65.9	272	83.5
2001 total including the above	542	63.4	327	82.0
1993 at or after age 65/60 (M/W)	312	66.0	320	81.2
1993 total including the above	470	64.0	372	80.9

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

Mrs. Roe: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what progress has been made by the House of Commons Commission in nominating a candidate for the post of Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. [34477]

Mr. Kirkwood: The Commission's report recommending to the House Mr. Philip Mawer, at present Secretary General of the General Synod of the Church of England and Secretary General of the Archbishops' Council, is being published at 3.30 p.m. today as House of Commons Paper 598. Copies are available from the Vote Office.

Statues

Sir Patrick Cormack: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what arrangements have been made for the siting of the statue of the right hon. Baroness Thatcher commissioned by the Speaker's Advisory Committee on Works of Art. [34501]

Derek Conway: I am pleased to announce that in the short term the statue of the right hon. the Baroness Thatcher will be loaned to the Corporation of London for display at the Guildhall. Work is under way to identify a suitable site in the Guildhall complex.

In the longer term, the statue will be displayed in the Palace of Westminster. Hon. Members will wish to know that Mr. Speaker has amended the "10-year rule", governing the display of representations of politicians in the main building of the Palace. A portrait, bust or statue of a politician other than a Prime Minister may be displayed once 10 years have passed after their death. A portrait, bust or statue of a former Prime Minister may now be displayed either once five years have passed after their death, or after the elapse of three Parliaments (with the proviso that this should be a minimum of 12 years) after they have left this House, whichever of these events comes first. There remain no restrictions on the siting of representations of living politicians in the outbuildings of the Palace.

The Accommodation and Works Committee will make a recommendation to Mr. Speaker on the siting of the statue at an appropriate time.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Departmental Retirement Ages

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the retirement ages that apply to the employees of her Department and its agencies, including how many and which categories of employees are affected by each; and if she will make a statement on her Department's policy on flexible retirement. [32823]

Clare Short: All permanent and pensionable staff of DFID (1,596 staff) have a normal retirement age of 60. This is occasionally extended where there are particular business reasons to retain an officer's services beyond that age. In addition there are two groups of fixed term employees, Corps of Specialists (29 staff) and Technical Co-operation Officers (295 staff), who similarly have a normal retirement age of 60 which may occasionally be extended where there are particular business reasons. Staff appointed in country by DFID's offices (818 staff) are subject to a wide variety of retirement ages depending on local labour market practice or local legislation (the details are not currently held centrally and could not be produced except at disproportionate cost).

My Department is currently reviewing its policy on flexible retirement.

Education for All

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has made on identifying the financing gap for basic education within national Education for All plans. [31669]

Clare Short: DFID's "Children out of school paper" makes clear what action we believe should be taken on this. The main approach for delivering on the Dakar resource commitment should be through nationally owned poverty reduction strategy papers and similar planning frameworks. They should indicate how country plans to move towards the education Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will be met, including through the release of HIPC (Heavily Indebted Poor Country) savings and with the assistance of the international community. So far as possible, this should be through sector-wide approaches and budget support.

This approach should be underpinned by detailed analysis of the funding implications for achieving UPE and gender equality in schooling at a country level. The World bank is supporting work of this nature, including the tracking of expenditures from debt relief and identification of the scope for additional national resources within countries. Where necessary, assistance should be given to help countries undertake resource analysis of this type. The bank's findings will be submitted to Governors at their spring meeting in April. We are consulting with the bank about this work.

Humanitarian Assistance

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the pilot initiative to create an international ombudsman for humanitarian assistance to improve the accountability of agencies in emergency situations. [32788]

Clare Short: The Humanitarian Accountability Project (HAP) is a two-year inter-agency project launched in 2001 in Geneva in response to concerns among humanitarian organisations about the lack of accountability to crisis-affected populations. The project will investigate and test the feasibility of creating an Ombudsman for the humanitarian sector and seek to strengthen accountability towards those affected by crisis situations. It will also facilitate improved performance within the humanitarian sector and is part of a wider effort within the international humanitarian sector to improve transparency, accountability and performance.

Over the period April 2001 to January 2002 DFID will be providing funding of up to £500,000 in support of the project.

Global Health Fund

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what steps she will take to ensure poor countries have sufficient say on where money is distributed within their countries from the global health fund; [32118]

(2) what progress has been made in ensuring that the global health fund will utilise countries' existing co-ordination mechanisms and experience. [32119]

Clare Short: An underlying principle of the global fund to fight AIDS, TB and malaria, for which the UK argued strongly, is that, except in narrowly defined circumstances, proposals must come from country co-ordination mechanisms which bring together developing country governments, private sector, non-government organisations and civil society. The fund will use existing country co-ordination mechanisms wherever possible. These mechanisms will be free to shape their applications around their own assessment and experience of in-country priorities. A final decision on which proposals to support will be made by the GFATM Board which has equal representation of donors and developing countries.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what work the global health fund will undertake to ensure necessary drugs will be more freely available in less developed countries to combat *(a)* HIV/AIDS, *(b)* tuberculosis and *(c)* malaria; [32113]

(2) what direct assistance the global health fund will provide for poverty reduction in Africa. [32114]

Clare Short: The global fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria has been established as a new public-private partnership to mobilise additional financial resources to make more and better drugs and commodities for the prevention and treatment of malaria, TB and HIV/AIDS available in the poorest countries, many of which are in Africa. It will also provide some associated health systems strengthening to ensure supplies are delivered safely, effectively and equitably. As the recent report of the Commission for Macro-economics and Health indicated[1], such investment in health will play a vital role in the wider fight against poverty in Africa and elsewhere.

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[1] Macro-economics and Health: Investing in Health for Economic Development, Jeffrey D. Sachs, 20 December 2001, World Health Organisation

Private Medical Insurance

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many employees in *(a)* her Department and *(b)* her Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies have had private medical insurance provided for them in each year since 1997–98; what the total cost is; and if she will make a statement. [32322]

Clare Short: All DFID permanent and pensionable employees (as well as those in non-departmental public bodies) have access to the NHS (or while overseas, NHS standards of treatment on a cost reimbursement basis) and do not have private medical insurance provided for them. In certain countries overseas some of our locally appointed employees have access to private medical insurance (where it is normal practice in those countries) on a part contributory basis. However, no details are currently held centrally and they could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

SCOTLAND

Forth Rail Bridge

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the answer from the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), of 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 627–28W, on the Forth Rail Bridge, if she will make a statement on which Scottish transport issues are reserved matters. [33432]

Mr. Foulkes: Schedule 5, Part II, Head E to the Scotland Act 1998 as amended by subsequent secondary legislation, sets out the matters of transport policy and direction within Scotland that are reserved to this Parliament. These responsibilities include the provision and regulation of rail services and rail transport security, with the exceptions set out.

Scottish Ministers have responsibility for issuing Directions and Guidance to the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) in relation to passenger rail services that both start and end in Scotland, within a national framework for franchising of the railways. Funding powers and public expenditure responsibility have been transferred to the Scottish Executive in respect of the ScotRail franchise.

The Scottish Executive has the power to issue Directions and Guidance to the SRA in respect of ScotRail sleeper services, subject to the Directions and Guidance not impacting adversely on the SRA's costs outside Scotland or the operation of passenger or freight services generally. The Scottish Executive is able to issue non-binding guidance in respect of other cross border services (currently operated by GNER and Virgin).

The Scottish Parliament has legislative competence to determine the rail responsibilities of Strathclyde Passenger Transport Authority and Executive and of any new such bodies which might be established in Scotland, subject to these falling within the overall framework of the new railway regulatory structure.

The Scottish Parliament has legislative competence over grants for passenger rail services and the Scottish Executive has responsibility, under executive devolution, for the payment and administration of freight facilities grants and track access grants in Scotland, working within the rules of the schemes agreed at GB level for these subsidies.

Scottish Ministers have responsibility for appointing the Chairman of the Rail Users' Consultative Committee for Scotland (RUCCS). The reports of the Rail Users' Consultative Committee for Scotland and a copy of the Central Rail Users Consultative Committee (CRUCC) are laid before the Scottish Parliament.

Private Medical Insurance

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many employees in *(a)* her Department and *(b)* her Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies have had private medical insurance provided for them in each year since 1997–98; what the total cost is; and if she will make a statement. [32325]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999.

No employees in my Department have had private medical insurance provided for them.

Air Traffic Control (Prestwick)

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations she has received from the National Air Traffic Services about the timetable for building the new Air Traffic Control Centre at Prestwick. [33937]

Mr. Foulkes: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I met Mr. Richard Everitt, CEO of National Air Traffic Services Ltd. (NATS), on 16 January. Mr. Everitt confirmed that NATS remain committed to a two-centre strategy and to the construction of the new Scottish centre at Prestwick that will be brought into operation within a time scale of 2008–09. Mr. Everitt has agreed to keep me informed over the coming months about NATS plans for the implementation of the project at Prestwick.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Housing Benefit

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much money has been spent on housing benefit by local authorities in each of the last 15 years. [25009]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information is in the table.

Housing benefit expenditure since 1988–99

£ million

	Expenditure
1988–89	3,774
1989–90	4,300
1990–91	5,147
1991–92	6,494
1992–93	7,877
1993–94	9,210
1994–95	10,104
1995–96	10,876
1996–97	11,380

Housing benefit expenditure since 1988–99

£ million

	Expenditure
1997–98	11,176
1998–99	11,068
1999–2000	11,177
2000–01	11,172

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest £ million and are consistent with, and underlie, the forecasts published in the Chancellor's pre-Budget report, November 2001.

2. The figure for 2000–01 is estimated. All other figures are actual annual expenditure but are subject to change as local authority activity is fully audited.

3. Information is not available for years prior to the introduction of the current housing benefit scheme in April 1988.

Source:

Annual subsidy returns by local authorities to Department for Work and Pensions; Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions; and National Assembly for Wales.

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the expenditure was, inclusive of outturn or estimated outturn expenditure, on *(a)* housing benefit rent rebates, and *(b)* housing benefit rent allowances for (i) housing association tenants and (ii) private tenants in each year from 1992–93 to 2000–01. [25276]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information is in the table.

Housing benefit expenditure

£ million

		Rent allowance		
	Rent rebates	*Registered social landlord tenants*	*Private tenants*	*Total*
1992–93	4,593	—	—	3,284
1993–94	5,019	—	—	4,195
1994–95	5,228	1,309	3,567	4,876
1995–96	5,430	1,641	3,806	5,446
1996–97	5,569	1,991	3,820	5,810
1997–98	5,495	2,208	3,473	5,681
1998–99	5,403	2,427	3,238	5,665
1999–2000	5,362	2,725	3,090	5,815
2000–01	5,319	2,988	2,865	5,853

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest £ million and are consistent with, and underlie, the forecasts published in the Chancellor's pre-Budget report, November 2001.

2. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

3. The figures for 2000–01 are estimated. All other figures are actual annual expenditure but are subject to change as local authority activity is fully audited.

4. The split of total rent allowance expenditure between tenants of social landlords and those of private landlords has been estimated.

5. No estimate is available for the split in rent allowance paid prior to 1994–95.

6. Figures for rent allowance paid to social landlord tenants includes housing association and non-housing association accommodation. Separate data on rent allowance paid to housing association tenants only are not collected.

Source:

Annual subsidy returns by local authorities to Department for Work and Pensions; Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions; and National Assembly for Wales.

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the budgeted expenditure is for *(a)* housing benefit rent rebates, and *(b)* housing benefit rent allowances for (i) housing association tenants only, and (ii) private tenants in each year from 2001–02 to 2003–04. [25277]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information is in the table.

Planned housing benefit expenditure (£ million)

		Rent allowance	
Year	*Rent rebates*	*Registered social landlord tenants*	*Private tenants*
2001–02	5,361	3,385	2,932
2002–03	5,275	3,827	3,086
2003–04	5,048	4,477	3,248

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest £ million and are consistent with, and underlie the forecasts published in the Chancellor's pre-Budget report, November 2001.

2. Figures for rent allowance paid to social landlord tenants include housing association and non-housing association accommodation. Separate data on rent allowance paid to housing association tenants only are not collected.

Source:

Estimated outturn expenditure calculated using actual and forecast caseload information.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 376W, on housing benefit, what the estimated expenditure on the housing benefit under occupation pilot is expected to be in 2001–02. [30134]

Malcolm Wicks: For 2001–02 the estimated expenditure on the under-occupation pilot is £255,000.

Council Tax Benefit Restriction Scheme

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the savings to his Department in 2001–02 as a consequence of the council tax benefit restriction scheme. [26954]

Malcolm Wicks: It is estimated that the council tax benefit restrictions for people living in properties in Bands F, G and H will reduce spending on council tax benefit by £7 million in 2001–02.

Since 2 July 2001, local authorities have been able to make discretionary housing payments to those people entitled to housing benefit and council tax benefit who require additional financial assistance with their rent or council tax. This includes those whose council tax benefit has been restricted. These payments are at the discretion of the local authority and subject to an annual cash limit.

Disability Rights Commission

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the impact of the Disability Rights Commission on the work of Government Departments. [30906]

Maria Eagle: The Disability Rights Commission is working closely with a range of Government Departments and has made a positive contribution in a number of areas. For example, it has prepared statutory Codes of Practice for my Department to support the October 2004 duties under Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act and for the Department for Education and Skills on the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act. It has responded to a range of government consultation exercises including on the future of social care and charging, the operation of the Human Rights Act, transport reform and disputes resolution. The commission has also been working extensively with the National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Executive on a range of cross-cutting disability issues of particular relevance to those countries.

Appeals Service

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what additional *(a)* staff and *(b)* money have been allocated to the Appeals Service in anticipation of the child support reforms. [30957]

Maria Eagle: Additional funding of £1.7 million has been allocated for 2002–03. This sum includes the staffing costs for 50 additional staff. A further £398,000 has been allocated to implement the necessary changes to IT procedures, and develop new training material for staff and panel members, resulting from the new child support legislation.

CSA

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many CSA cases from *(a)* the Angus constituency and *(b)* Scotland have been considered by the Independent Case Examiner in each year since the creation of the post. [31580]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the table.

Details of the number of cases received by the Office of the Independent Case Examiner

	Complaints received	*Accepted for investigation*
Angus constituency		
1997–98	4	2
1998–99	1	0
1999–2000	1	0
2000–01	1	1
2001–02[1]	1	1
Scotland		
1997–98	70	31
1998–99	102	46
1999–2000	86	34
2000–01	108	57
2001–02[1]	80	42

[1] Position as at 28 January 2002

Note:

Figures subject to a small amount of error

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what is the average time taken by the Independent Case Examiner to issue a determination in cases referred to him from *(a)* Angus and *(b)* Scotland in each year since the creation of the post. [31581]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is in the table.

Details of the average time taken by the Office of the Independent Case Examiner to clear cases accepted for investigation

	Complaints accepted for investigation	*Average clearance time (weeks)*
Angus constituency		
1997–98	2	20
1998–99	0	—
1999–2000	0	—
2000–01	1	36
2001–02[1]	1	21
Scotland		
1997–98	31	29
1998–99	46	41
1999–2000	34	38
2000–01[1]	57 (46 completed)	33
2001–02[1]	42 (12 completed)	17

[1] Position as at 28 January 2002

Note:

Figures subject to a small amount of error

Private Medical Insurance

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many employees in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* his Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies have had private medical insurance provided for them in each year since 1997–98; what the total cost is; and if he will make a statement. [32329]

Mr. McCartney: The Department of Work and Pensions has no policy which would allow employees to have medical insurance provided for them. Therefore, no employee has had medical insurance provided for them since 1997 to date.

Personal Capability Assessments

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many successful appeals there have been in each of the last four years against personal capability assessments involving people whose medical condition fluctuates or varies in severity; and what proportion this represents of the total number of successful appeals. [32664]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: It was not possible to obtain specific information detailing cases where an appellant's medical condition fluctuates or varies in severity.

Pensions Schemes Registry

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the work of the Pensions Schemes Registry in tracing lost pensions contributions. [33718]

Mr. McCartney: The Pension Schemes Registry helps people trace the contributions they have paid to occupational or personal pension schemes that they have lost touch with. The registry does this by providing—at no cost—the current name and address of the relevant pension scheme. The person concerned can then contact the scheme to find out what pension they may have.

In 2000–01 the registry received over 21,000 tracing requests and found a contact name and address in 92 per cent. of cases, responding to 100 per cent. of requests within four days.

State Second Pension

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if the decision by an employer whether to contract-out from the state second pension scheme is *(a)* a matter of negotiation between the parties involved in that employment and *(b)* is subject to fiduciary duties to maximise benefit to employees. [33720]

Mr. McCartney: The decision on whether or not an employer wishes to set up an occupational pension scheme through which his employees may contract out of the state second pension, is entirely a matter for the employer. Any subsequent change in the contracting-out status of the scheme would require a change to the scheme rules. Such a change could only be made if an actuary certified to the trustees that, in his opinion, the change would not adversely affect any member of the scheme, without his or her consent, in respect of his or her entitlement.

Cold Weather Payments

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many cold weather payments have been triggered this winter as a result of low temperatures, broken down by *(a)* weather station and *(b)* nation and region of the United Kingdom. [25948]

Malcolm Wicks *[pursuant to his reply, 21 January 2002, c. 631–32W; holding answer 11 January 2002]:* Cold weather payments are a key part of our strategy to tackle fuel poverty. They provide extra help towards heating costs for the poorest and most vulnerable members of our society in periods of exceptionally cold weather. They are paid to pensioners receiving the minimum income guarantee, and to people receiving income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance who have children under the age of five or who have a premium for disability or long term sickness.

The payments are made automatically and are triggered when the average temperature is recorded as, or forecast to be, 0 degrees centigrade or below over seven consecutive days at the weather station linked to the customer's postcode. So far this year we estimate that payments to the value of almost £16.8 million have been triggered. Available information on the breakdown of the payments is in the tables.

Estimated number and value of cold weather payments triggered by weather station

Weather station	*Estimated number of payments triggered from 1 November 2001 to 14 January 2002*	*Estimated value of payments triggered (£)*
Andrewsfield	39,790	338,215.00
Aviemore	3,099	26,341.50
Bedford	60,529	514,496.50
Bingley	86,283	733,405.50
Bishopton	178,525	1,517,462.50
Boltshope Park	9,370	79,645.00
Boulmer	10,793	91,740.50
Bracknell	53,193	452,140.50
Braemar	228	1,938
Brize Norton	22,139	188,181.50
Carlisle	9,896	84,116.00
Cassley	208	1,768.00
Coleshill	249,130	2,117,605.00
Coltishall	34,663	294,635.50
Dumfries	5,128	43,588.00
Dyce	22,024	187,204.00
Edinburgh Gogarbank	65,607	557,659.50
Eskdalemuir	8,712	74,052
Fylingdales	25,142	213,707.00
Great Malvern	37,578	319,413.00
Lake Vyrnwy	1,398	11,883.00
Leeds	143,964	1,223,694.00
Lerwick	829	7,046.50
Leuchars	32,244	274,074.00
Linton on Ouse	62,637	532,414.50
Loch Glascarnoch	525	4,462.50
Lyneham	24,040	204,340.00
Marham	14,914	126,769.00
Newcastle	122,657	1,042,584.50
Nottingham	147,861	1,256,818.50
Redhill	32,551	276,683.50
Ringway	199,291	1,693,973.50
Salsburgh	12,027	102,229.50
Sennybridge	47,119	400,511.50
Shawbury	48,288	410,448.00
Tulloch Bridge	1,931	16,413.50
Waddington	95,223	809,395.50
Wattisham	35,582	302,447.00
Wick Airport	1,956	16,626.00
Wittering	30,163	256,385.50
Total	1,977,237	16,806,514.50

Estimated number and value of cold weather payments triggered by country

Country	*Estimated number of payments triggered from 1 November 2001 to 14 January 2002*	*Estimated value of payments triggered (£)*
England	1,595,677	13,563,254.50
Scotland	333,043	2,830,865.50
Wales	48,517	412,394.50
Total	1,977,237	16,806,514.50

Notes:

1. Figures are not available by Government office region.
2. Those weather stations where cold weather payments have not been triggered are excluded from the tables.

3. Cold weather payments are payable for periods of cold weather between 1 November and 31 March each winter.

4. Social security matters in Northern Ireland are the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

5. The figures provided are estimates. The final number and value of actual payments made will be reconciled after 31 March 2002.

Source:

Estimates are based on a scan in November 2001 of income support and jobseeker's allowance live load linked to weather station postcodes.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

EU Policy

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent meetings Ministers in his Department have held bilaterally on European union policy with representatives of other EU Governments. [32594]

Mr. Wills: Baroness Scotland and I met Jose Maria Michavila, the State Secretary of the Ministry of Justice in Spain on 1 November 2001. Baroness Scotland also met Diogo Machado, the Portuguese Secretary of State for Justice, on 30 July 2001.

The Lord Chancellor has not had any recent meetings with representatives of other EU Governments.

Crown Dependencies

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what his estimate is of the cost of his Department's responsibilities for the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands. [32047]

Mr. Wills: The estimated costs incurred since my Department assumed responsibility in connection with the Crown Dependencies on 8 June 2001 are as follows:

	£
Staff costs, including legal advice	240,428
Visits by Ministers and senior officials	5,985
Other (non-pay) running costs	213,369
Total costs	459,782

Law Commission

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department who *(a)* sits on and *(b)* appoints those who sit on the Law Commission; and what criteria are used to select those who sit on it. [32566]

Mr. Wills: The Law Commission is an advisory non-departmental public body which is governed by the Law Commissions Act 1965. The 1965 Act requires the Lord Chancellor to appoint five Commissioners of which one is the Chairman. Currently the Chairman is Lord Justice Carnwath CVO, and the Commissioners are: Professor Hugh Beale; Judge Alan Wilkie QC; Professor Martin Partington and Mr. Stuart Bridge.

The 1965 Act further requires that the Commissioners be chosen from those who are either a holder of judicial office, or a barrister, or a solicitor or a teacher of law in a university. The Lord Chancellor also considers the specialist skills, experience and expertise of prospective Commissioners against the requirements of the Commission's programme of work.

Church Issues

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many Church issues have been referred to him since taking office. [32591]

Mr. Wills: The Lord Chancellor has made appointments to 77 livings and six canonries which are in his Patronage. Additionally he has been involved in 167 other Church appointments by virtue of the fact the Royal Warrants are addressed to him as Keeper of the Great Seal. The other main Church issue concerns the Report on Royal Peculiars chaired by Professor Averil Cameron which was submitted to the Lord Chancellor last year.

Council on Tribunals

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what functions the Council on Tribunals performs; and what its budget was in each year since 1992–93. [32056]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Council on Tribunals keeps under review, and reports on, the constitution and working of tribunals under its supervision, and where necessary considers and reports on the administrative procedures of statutory inquiries. The Council seeks to ensure, through the advice it gives, that tribunals and inquiries meet the needs of users through the provision of an open, fair, impartial, efficient, timely and accessible service.

The budget of the Council in each year since 1992–93 has been as follows: 1992–93: £485,055; 1993–94: £568,970; 1994–95: £537,866; 1995–96: £547,682; 1996–97: £566,700; 1997–98: £575,401; 1998–99: £601,270; 1999–2000: £651,600; 2000–01: £681,719.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, who *(a)* sits on and *(b)* appoints members of the Council on Tribunals; and what criteria are used to select those who sit on it. [32564]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information is as follows:

(a) The current membership of the Council is as follows: Lord Newton of Braintree PC OBE (Chairman); Mr. John Elliot DKS (Chairman of the Scottish Committee of the Council); Mrs. Carolyn Berkeley JP; Mr. Michael Brown JP; Mr. John Eames; Mrs. Anne Galbraith; Mrs. Susan Howdle; Mr. Ian Irvine CA; Mr. Samuel Jones CBE DL; Mr. Stephen Mannion; Mr. Douglas Readings; Professor Genevra Richardson; Mr. Emrys Roberts; Mr. Sandy Russell CB; Mr. Patrick Waring and Mr. Michael Buckley (Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration).

(b) Appointments to the Council are made jointly by the Lord Chancellor and the Scottish Ministers. The criteria for appointment to the Council depend upon the vacancy but all candidates will need to have proven communication skills, a record of effective committee work and some knowledge of tribunals and inquiries. Supplementary criteria will be needed for certain posts.

Public Guardianship Office

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what training she has arranged for staff at the Public Guardianship Office in dealing with the public in an efficient and courteous manner. [33297]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Public Guardianship Office recognises the need to train its staff to ensure efficient, effective and proactive customer service. All PGO staff have attended a one day training event in Customer Service and training in letter writing and telephone skills has been arranged for staff in Client Services. In addition, leadership and team building programme is under way, focusing on new ways of working and all staff have attended, or are due to attend, a one day diversity awareness session, helping them to recognise and appreciate the needs of the diverse society the PGO serves. Following the recent relocation to Archway Tower and changes to the way staff in the Client Service area work, a specialised call centre training session has been devised.

Performance Indicators

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what performance indicators she uses to monitor the performance of the *(a)* Legal Services Commission, *(b)* Law Commission, *(c)* Judge Advocate-General, *(d)* Public Guardianship Office and *(e)* CAFCASS. [32044]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information is as follows:

(a) The Legal Services Commission's objectives are framed in the context of the Public Service Agreements (PSAs), the Lord Chancellor's Department's Service Delivery Agreements and the Lord Chancellor's Strategic Objectives. The Commission's Annual Concordat, signed by the Commission's Chair and the Lord Chancellor, establishes the key outputs and performance targets the Commission will deliver in order to meet its objectives, and sets milestones against which the Commission's progress is reviewed. The Commission publishes an annual report each year reporting on progress against targets in its corporate plan, which can be found in the Libraries of both Houses.

(b) The Lord Chancellor has a statutory duty to approve the Law Commission's programme of work which sets out the terms of reference and the timetable for each individual project and the Law Commission's targets for its consolidation and statutory revision work. The Law Commission's programme of work, currently the 8th Programme, is laid before Parliament and published by the Stationary Office.

(c) Performance indicators for the Office of the Judge Advocate-General are:

> "1. To ensure that we are able to provide a judge advocate to conduct hearings as requested to meet the demands of the Army, Air Force and Royal Marines. We aim to appoint the judge eight weeks before the hearing date.
>
> 2. Monitor the military justice system so that wherever possible a fair and consistent approach is taken. Tender judicial advice to reviewing authorities in respect of findings and sentences of courts-martial and Standing Civilian Courts on the 29th day following trial or within three days of receipt of a petition.
>
> 3. To provide information and documents from courts-martial files in response to inquires from the public or other interested parties.
>
> 4. Contributing to the development of primary and secondary legislation affecting the Criminal Justice Systems of the Army and Royal Air Force.
>
> 5. Monitoring the criminal justice system of the Army and Royal Air Force so as to ensure the efficient and proper working of it.
>
> 6. Maintaining contact with foreign military lawyers, especially in Eastern Europe, attending foreign conferences and direct visits.
>
> 7. Recruiting and training part-time Judge Advocates/Judicial Officers. Hold a one day training event for all judges."

(d) The Public Guardianship Office's Key Performance Measures and Targets 2001–02 were announced to Parliament on 29 March 2001. Two additional key performance indicators were announced on 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 257W. A full list has today been placed in the House Libraries.

(e) The Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000, the Lord Chancellor's Strategic Objectives and the Lord Chancellor's Department's Public Service Agreements provide the framework within which CAFCASS's Key Objectives are set out in its Framework Document, which is available in the House Libraries. Key Performance Indicators relating to these will be set out in CAFCASS's Corporate Plan for 2002–06. CAFCASS will also publish its first annual report in the summer.

Official Visits

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what official foreign visits his officials from the International Legal Service have undertaken since 1997; at what cost; and for what purpose. [32399]

Mr. Wills: In the course of their everyday duties and consistent with the Government's active membership of the EU, those officials concerned with international trade in legal services, international legal policy and international legal relations attend meetings outside the United Kingdom, including regular and frequent meetings of European Union and Council of Europe working groups in Brussels and Strasbourg. Travel costs for the majority of these meetings are met from European Union and Council of Europe funds. Information is not held centrally in the form demanded, and it would be disproportionately expensive to provide it in that form.

International Legal Services

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the caseload is of the international legal services section of his Department; and how many staff are employed *(a)* whole-time and *(b)* part-time on international legal services work. [32569]

Mr. Wills: In the Lord Chancellor's Department there is one official working specifically on international trade in legal services and 15 officials employed across the wider field of international legal policy and international legal relations. Their work includes matters of policy advice and discussions and negotiation. The officials are involved in opening up the market in international legal services, which earn the UK significant sums of foreign earnings, in promoting the rule of law and human rights in emerging economies and democracies, and in the detailed formulation and negotiation of policy in respect of European Community initiatives. This very important work is not measurable in terms of a caseload.

Judicial Appointments

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many judicial appointments she has made since taking up office; what criteria are used to select people suitable for judicial appointments; and how many judicial appointees she has made who are *(a)* women and *(b)* from ethnic backgrounds. [32582]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Drawing on information currently held on the judicial appointments database, we estimate that the Lord Chancellor has appointed or recommended for appointment a total of 15,703 judicial officers in the courts and tribunals, between 2 May 1997 and 31 January 2002. This figure includes full-time and part-time professional legal judicial officers and professional non-legal judicial officers (including first appointments and re-appointments), lay magistrates and General Commissioners of Income Tax. Of all these appointments, the database shows that 5,326 were women and 1,530 declared themselves as from minority ethnic backgrounds, with 2,953 appointments being of unknown ethnic origin.

The criteria and personal qualities against which candidates for judicial office are assessed are as follows:

Professional judicial appointment

Criteria

> Legal knowledge and experience, intellectual and analytical ability, sound judgment, decisiveness, communication and listening skills, authority and case management skills.

Personal qualities

> Integrity and independence, fairness and impartiality, understanding of people and society, maturity and sound temperament, courtesy and commitment, conscientiousness and diligence.

Lay magistracy

Personal qualities

> Good character, understanding and communication, social awareness, maturity and sound temperament, sound judgment, commitment and reliability.

General Commissioners of Income Tax

Personal qualities expected include:

> Good reputation, personal integrity, a manner which inspires confidence, the ability to identify and comprehend relevant facts reasonably quickly, the ability to think logically, ability to communicate effectively, the ability to advance views firmly but tactfully, combined with a readiness to listen to and take on board others' views, the ability to work with others, awareness of personal prejudices and readiness to put them aside, the ability to reach a decision reasonably quickly having weighed all relevant evidence and arguments, some experience, understanding or knowledge of life outside the candidate's own immediate circle of family and work.

Statutory Publications Office

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many staff from the Statutory Publications Office are located outside London. [32572]

Ms Rosie Winterton: There are no staff from the Statutory Publications Office located outside London. All staff of the Statutory Publications Office are located within the Lord Chancellor's Department headquarters in Selborne House in central London.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many staff are employed *(a)* whole-time and *(b)* part-time in the Statutory Publications Office. [32571]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The total number of *(a)* whole-time staff employed by the Statutory Publications Office is 25. The total number of *(b)* part-time staff employed by the Statutory Publications Office is two.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many publications were processed by the Statutory Publications Office in each year since 1992. [32570]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Responsibility for all hard copy publications previously processed by the Statutory Publications Office was, with one exception, transferred on 1 April 1997 to Her Majesty's Stationery Office within the Cabinet Office. The exception related to the publication "Statutes in Force" (SIF) which contained the revised text of all in-force UK Acts and Measures. All revision work on SIF was suspended in September 1993 when the work had been revised to 1 February 1991. Work in relation to the issue of newly enacted Acts for inclusion in SIF continued until the end of 1999. Except as mentioned above, during the period mentioned in the question, the Statutory Publications Office has been concerned solely with the development of the Statute Law Database, a historical database of in-force statute law which represents the electronic successor to SIF.

Official Solicitor

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what official foreign visits the Official Solicitor has made since his appointment; and what was the purpose of such visits. [32398]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Official Solicitor has made one foreign visit. In April 2000 he attended and spoke as the sole representative for England and Wales at the 4th International Conference of Public Trustees and Public Guardians held in Singapore.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* whole-time and *(b)* part-time staff work in the Official Solicitor's office; and how many were employed *(a)* whole-time and *(b)* part-time when he took up his office. [32568]

Ms Rosie Winterton: On 1 August 1999 there were 99 full-time staff and five part-time staff in the office of the Official Solicitor. On 1 April 2001 30 members of staff left the Office of the Official Solicitor for the newly established Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS), and on the same date 90 staff from the former Trust Division of the Public Trust Office transferred into the office of the Official Solicitor, which became the office of the Official Solicitor and Public Trustee. There are currently 154 full-time staff and nine part-time staff working in the combined office.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the case load has been for the Official Solicitor in each month since he took up his office. [32567]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Official Solicitor's records show that his active cases (in all areas of his then work) as at August 1999 numbered 3,921; as at December 2001 the active cases for the combined office of the Official Solicitor and Public Trustee numbered 5,647. Annual figures are published in the Official Solicitor's annual reports, which are available in the Library of the House. A monthly breakdown, if required, may be obtained from the Official Solicitor and Public Trustee's office.

Legal Aid

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many legal aid applications have been *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused in each year since 1992. [32578]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The number of legal aid applications granted and refused was as follows:

	Granted	*Refused*
Civil legal aid applications[1]		
1991–92	382,642	101,715
1992–93	431,072	125,869
1993–94	379,908	125,961
1994–95	400,813	123,126
1995–96	387,614	125,103
1996–97	334,469	133,975
1997–98	277,847	156,289
1998–99	315,084	97,870
1999–2000	277,336	65,477
2000–01	174,017	52,087
Criminal applications[2]		
1992[3]	144,938	7,638
1993[3]	140,148	6,691
1994[3]	150,784	6,343
1995[3]	158,190	6,606
1996[3]	150,863	7,502
1997	543,549	49,013
1998	506,124	42,903
1999	596,861	45,339
2000	585,704	31,608

[1] Financial year

[2] Calendar year

[3] Excludes applications granted or refused in the magistrates courts as these figures are not available prior to 1997.

Domestic Legal Services

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many staff employed on domestic legal services are located outside London; and in which locations. [32577]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Court Service has staff located throughout England and Wales, providing a wide range of services to court users, including family related work. We are unable to provide a breakdown of the number of staff working on family related work, although the total number of staff employed by the Lord Chancellor's Department, by region of the UK, was provided in an answer given to the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) on 15 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 1017W.

Community Legal Services

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many staff employed by her Department on community legal services are located in offices outside London; and in which locations. [32576]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor's Department employs nobody outside London on community legal services. The Community Legal Service is delivered by the Legal Services Commission through the Community Legal Service Partnerships and contacted suppliers, and these include both lawyers in private practice and organisations in the not-for-profit sector.

Public Trustee Office

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many trusteeships the Public Trustee Office holds; and under what categories. [33296]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Public Trustee holds 1,472 trusteeships divided into the following categories:

Executorships with continuing Trusts—647

Will Trusts—265

Settlement Trusts—445

Statutory Trusts—17

Supreme Court Declarations of Trust—44

Declarations of Trust—45

Custodian Trusts—5

Miscellaneous Trusts—4.

In addition, the Public Trustee is conducting 105 Executorships and 24 Pension and Institutional Funds.

Family Court Casework

Matthew Green: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans she has to ensure that magistrates courts continue to carry out the function of family courts. [32999]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government are considering the future work of the magistrates courts, including family work, in the light of the recommendations in Sir Robin Auld's Report of his Review of the Criminal Courts of England and Wales. The Government will announce their conclusions on the report by way of a White Paper in the spring.

Departmental Retirement Ages

Mr. Webb: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the retirement ages that apply to the employees of the Lord Chancellor's Department and its agencies, including how many and which categories of employees are affected by each; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on flexible retirement. [32819]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The normal retirement ages for the Lord Chancellor's Department and its executive agencies are as follows.

	Retirement age
HEO equivalent and above[1]	60
EO equivalent	62
AO equivalent and below	65

[1] Including Senior Civil Service

However, staff can stay on above the normal retirement ages at management discretion, subject to business needs.

The table shows the numbers of staff affected.

	Age of retirement			
Business area	*65*	*62*	*60*	*Grand total*
Court service	6,774	2,083	1,591	10,448
LCD HQ	248	263	759	1,270
Public G'ship Office	165	50	107	322
Grand total	7,187	2,396	2,457	12,040

Flexible retirement policy

Our Corporate Board will shortly be considering proposals to create greater flexibility in our retirement policy, in line with the recommendations set out in the Performance and Innovation report entitled "Winning the Generation Game". The new retirement policy will allow the retention of staff who are performing to the required standard who want to stay beyond 60; have the flexibility to keep staff on for key posts and open up choices for staff about the ages at which they may retire.

Private Medical Insurance

Mr. Laws: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many employees in *(a)* her Department and *(b)* her Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies have had private medical insurance provided for them in each year since 1997–98; what the total cost is; and if she will make a statement. [32323]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In accordance with paragraph 7.17 of the Civil Service Management Code, the Lord Chancellor's Department, including its agencies and non-departmental public bodies, does not provide private medical insurance to any of its staff.

Legal Services Ombudsman

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many cases the Legal Services Ombudsman has *(a)* found in favour of, *(b)* declined to investigate and *(c)* rejected after investigation in each year since his office was established. [32579]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information requested is provided in the table.

	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Reports issued by the LSO containing recommendations/orders/criticisms[1]	54	226	241	260	260	399	464	542	557	659
Number of complaints which the LSO has declined to investigate[2]	122	106	107	157	135	156	117	157	107	77
Number of cases where the LSO was satisfied with the professional body's investigation	116	535	339	579	781	989	1,055	1,116	965	1,019

[1] Reports may contain more than one recommendation

[2] Figures relate to complaints received where the professional body has completed its investigation

HEALTH

Private Health Care

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how *(a)* the extra accident and emergency nurses and *(b)* the elective operations to be placed in the private sector will be distributed, broken down by health authority. [10927]

Mr. Hutton: We have set out a strategy for reducing long waits in accident and emergency departments. £40 million of a £118 million investment will be used to fund an additional 600 or more nursing posts in accident and emergency. Allocations for each accident and emergency department, of the distribution by health authority are set out in the table.

Health authority	*Extra A&E nurses*
Bradford	4
Calderdale and Kirklees	6
County Durham	20
East Riding	2
Gateshead and South Tyneside	4
Leeds	16
Newcastle and North Tyneside	2
North Cumbria	4
North Yorkshire	8
Northumberland	4
Sunderland	2
Tees	6
Wakefield	2
Barnsley	2
Doncaster	6
Leicestershire	8
Lincolnshire	6
North Derbyshire	2
North Nottinghamshire	2
Nottingham	8
Rotherham	2
Sheffield	2
South Derbyshire	8
South Humber	4
Birmingham	20
Coventry	2
Dudley	2
Herefordshire	2
North Staffordshire	2
Sandwell	2
Shropshire	4
South Staffordshire	4
Walsall	2

Health authority	*Extra A&E nurses*
Warwickshire	4
Wolverhampton	2
Worcestershire	4
Bury and Rochdale	10
East Lancashire	4
Liverpool	8
Manchester	12
Morecambe Bay	4
North Cheshire	2
North West Lancashire	10
Salford and Trafford	4
Sefton	10
South Cheshire	6
South Lancashire	2
St. Helens and Knowsley	8
Stockport	2
West Pennine	4
Wigan and Bolton	4
Wirral	2
Bedfordshire	10
Cambridgeshire	6
Hertfordshire	32
Norfolk	6
North Essex	12
South Essex	10
Suffolk	4
Barking and Havering	16
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	24
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	24
Brent and Harrow	16
Camden and Islington	6
Croydon	2
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	26
East London and The City	24
Hillingdon	8
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	4
Kingston and Richmond	8
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	24
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	18
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	8
Berkshire	4
Buckinghamshire	12
East Kent	6
East Surrey	16
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	18
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	4
North and Mid Hampshire	4
Northamptonshire	10
Oxfordshire	16
Southampton and South West Hampshire	8
West Kent	14
West Surrey	26
West Sussex	6
Avon	22
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	2
Dorset	6
Gloucestershire	4
North and East Devon	4
Somerset	4
South and West Devon	4
Wiltshire	4

£40 million has been allocated to buy additional elective cases in the private sector this year. It has been targeted on those health authorities most in need of short term support.

The funding will be used to free up NHS capacity but the exact number of cases purchased is not yet known. This will depend on the final details of contracts negotiated with the private sector. We will make the final figures available after the end of the financial year. However, the allocations by health authority are shown in the table.

Health authority	*£000*
Avon	2,650
Barking and Havering	534
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	989
Bedford	669
Berkshire	235
Birmingham	1,607
Brent and Harrow	586
Bromley, Bexley and Greenwich	577
Buckinghamshire	1,150
Calderdale and Kirklees	310
Cambridge	460
Camden and Islington	424
Coventry	300
Croydon	197
Dudley	320
Durham and Darlington	285
East London and City	245
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	850
East Kent	1,590
East Surrey	488
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	1,245
Herefordshire	144
Hertfordshire	600
Hillingdon	282
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth, South East Hampshire	816
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	894
Kingston and Richmond	207
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	1,010
Leeds	500
Leicestershire	219
Lincolnshire	420
Liverpool	2,040
Manchester	1,958
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	604
Morecambe Bay	400
Newcastle and North Tyne	500
Norfolk	265
North and Mid Hampshire	438
North Cheshire	525
North Cumbria	228
North Derbyshire	150
North Essex	562
North Staffordshire	1,516
North Yorkshire	350
Northamptonshire	74
Nottingham	800
Oxfordshire	1,425
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	520
Salford and Trafford	300
Sheffield	882
Shropshire	42
Solihull	50
South and West Devon	250
South Cheshire	270
South Essex	573
South Humber	90
South Staffordshire	460
Southampton and South West Hampshire	672
Suffolk	164
Tees	261
Wakefield	300
Walsall	250
Warwickshire	180
West Kent	372
West Surrey	1,470
West Sussex	579
Wirral	300
Worcestershire	1,200

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase the number of NHS patients treated privately by allowing consenting patients to contribute a part of the cost; and if he will make a statement. [33532]

Mr. Hutton: There are no plans to increase the number of national health service patients treated privately by allowing consenting patients to contribute a part of the cost of treatment.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the saving to public funds in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 is from the abolition of 14 administrative forms, referred to on page 17 of the 2001 departmental report. [14910]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not hold information on the savings to public funds from this measure. The 14 forms abolished were administrative forms which the Department issued in respect of applications for grants, licences, registration etc. These forms were abolished in pursuance of Government policy to reduce regulatory burdens on business, charities and voluntary organisations including reducing the burdens of form filling where this can be done without removing the necessary controls.

NHS Pensions Agency

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the cost in 2001–02 of the NHS Pensions Agency. [16938]

Mr. Hutton: The total costs of the national health service Pensions Agency for 2001–02 are estimated to be £16,743,000.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the performance of NHS trusts in meeting the external financing limits set by his Department. [16947]

Mr. Hutton: The performance of national health service trusts against 2000–01 external financing limits is shown in the table.

2000–01 trust external financing limits	*Number*	*Percentage*
Total NHS trusts meeting EFL	343	96
Total NHS trusts meeting EFL after £10,000 de minimus applied	350	98

Note:

The data are taken from the 2000–01 NHS Trust Summarised Accounts. The data remain provisional, and are subject to continuing audit by the National Audit.

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what performance indicators NHS trusts are required to publish regularly. [31727]

Mr. Hutton: In the past we published a number of clinical indicators at national health service trust level. The national figures for the first full set of NHS trust performance indicators were published on 1 February 2002. The indicators for each NHS trust will be published shortly. The set of indicators will develop over time as more data become available, and will in future be published by the Commission for Health Improvement.

In addition, NHS trusts are required to publish an annual report, which must include financial information and information on the number of complaints received. It is also recommended that the report include information on waiting times and cancelled operations.

Recruitment

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action the Government are taking to recruit more *(a)* nurses, *(b)* physiotherapists, *(c)* occupational therapists and *(d)* GPs in the North East; and if he will make a statement. [17406]

Mr. Hutton: The Government's plans for modernising the national health service work force are set out in the document "Investment and reform for NHS staff—Taking forward the NHS plan" published on 15 February 2001. This details activity in hand to modernise work force planning including the establishment of work force development confederations at local level. These bring together NHS and non-NHS employers to plan the healthcare work force. They will work with health authorities (HAs) to produce an integrated work force plan which underpins the service plans set out in their Health Improvement Programme (HimP).

The Northern Workforce Development Confederation is engaged in a number of initiatives to recruit more nurses, physiotherapists and occupational therapists in the north-east. The confederation is running four return-to-practice nursing courses and in-house returner training for some physiotherapists and occupational therapists. Study courses for nursing assistants to train to access pre-registration nursing courses are being run and two trusts are seconding nursing assistants onto nurse training.

Individual trusts in the north-east are recruiting nurses from the Philippines and holding fast track recruitment days for all professions. Open days at hospitals are being held emphasising family friendly working and support groups. The confederation and three trusts were represented at the *Evening Chronicle* Jobs Event at the Telewest Arena in Newcastle on 23 and 24 November. One trust is recruiting newly qualified nurses over establishment for expansion plans.

The confederation is also giving presentations to schools and colleges, careers fairs and recruitment days; placing posters/leaflets in various public places such as libraries, sports centres, general practitioners surgeries, village halls, and running an advertising campaign on the back of buses until the end of December for general recruitment in all careers and for return to practice advertisements.

We are committed to boosting GP numbers and have already introduced a number of measures to encourage more doctors into primary care. These include a "Golden Hello" scheme which will give £5,000 to every GP who joins the NHS, with an extra payment of up to £5,000 if they work in an under-doctored area and a new £22 million GP training package whereby new GPs will be eligible for additional training of up to 20 days a year. We have also given a commitment to ensure trainee GPs'

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pay is increased in line with that of junior hospital doctors in the future and increased funding for locum cover for family doctors on maternity, paternity and adoptive leave.

The Northern Workforce Development Confederation has allocated £12,000 to fund recruitment and retention initiatives within primary care in the North East. The flexibilities afforded by the Personal Medical Services pilots allow opportunities for further GP recruitment, particularly as employees rather than independent contractors. Sunderland, which has the highest average GP patient list sizes in England, has been particularly successful in boosting its GP numbers through this scheme.

The measures announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 5 November to improve the quality of, and expand, GP premises, especially in under-doctored areas, are likely to act as a lever in boosting GP recruitment to hitherto difficult to recruit areas. The north-east health authorities have, in the two years to September 2001, increased GP numbers by over 90 additional GPs, representing an increase of seven per cent. in the GP work force.

Walk-in Centres

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what level of funding will be available in the NHS Plan for the future funding of walk-in centres in England. [18477]

Mr. Hutton: NHS walk-in centres are being piloted as a new initiative to offer convenient access to primary care services. 42 centres are now open. As pilots, they are being independently evaluated, and are funded in part locally and in part by the Department. Decisions on their future development and funding will be informed by the independent evaluation and by the outcome of the current spending review.

Hospital Waiting Times

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were waiting *(a)* more than six months and *(b)* more than 12 months for in-patient treatment in the South Cheshire health authority in (i) March 1997 and (ii) September 1997 and in each reporting period in between. [16532]

Mr. Hutton: The number of residents of South Cheshire health authority recorded as waiting more than six months and 12 months for in-patient and day case treatment at the 31 March, 30 June and 30 September 1997 is shown in the table.

	Over 6 months	*Over 12 months*
March 1997	4,043	338
June 1997	5,126	978
September 1997	5,148	914

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the 10 health authorities with the *(a)* highest and *(b)* lowest expenditure by weighted head; and if he will estimate the number of people waiting for more than six months in each of these health authority areas for (i) in-patient treatment and (ii) out-patient treatment; and if he will make a statement. [32561]

Mr. Hutton: For the reasons set out in the notes to the table, expenditure per head cannot be reliably compared between health authorities, nor necessarily be correlated with waiting times information.

The 10 health authorities with the highest and lowest expenditure per weighted head of population in 2000–01 are shown in the table. The numbers of people waiting for more than six months for in-patient and for out-patient treatment are shown both as total numbers waiting and also as the numbers waiting per 1,000 head of weighted population.

		Number of patients waiting over 6 months		*Number of patients waiting over 26 weeks (= 6 months)*	
Health authority	*Expenditure per weighted head of population (£)*	*For in-patient treatment*	*For in-patient treatment per 1,000 head of weighted population*	*For 1st out-patient appointment following GP referral*	*For 1st out-patient appointment following GP referral per 1,000 head of weighted population*
10 health authorities with highest expenditure per weighted head					
Morecambe Bay	1,346.04	1,085	3.4	722	2.3
Camden and Islington	1,067.88	1,147	2.3	821	1.6
Sefton	1,040.25	1,811	6.1	779	2.6
Dorset	1,023.69	47	0.1	19	0.0
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	1,011.24	838	1.7	324	0.6
Bromley	971.74	1,913	6.5	186	0.6
Barnet	959.87	1,298	3.9	654	2.0
East Surrey	958.66	3,009	7.9	184	0.5
Sheffield	956.59	1,868	3.3	1,236	2.2
Croydon	925.44	2,145	6.5	92	0.3
10 health authorities with lowest expenditure per weighted head					
Stockport	759.28	1,389	5.0	605	2.2
Solihull	756.17	473	2.4	16	0.1
Buckinghamshire	755.09	3,419	5.6	559	0.9
Hillingdon	753.76	987	4.0	421	1.7
St. Helens and Knowsley	749.06	1,782	4.7	1,140	3.0
West Pennine	746.22	1,939	4.0	449	0.9
North Derbyshire	744.33	1,649	4.5	221	0.6
East Lancashire	740.66	2,405	4.3	613	1.1

		Number of patients waiting over 6 months		*Number of patients waiting over 26 weeks (= 6 months)*	
Health authority	*Expenditure per weighted head of population (£)*	*For in-patient treatment*	*For in-patient treatment per 1,000 head of weighted population*	*For 1st out-patient appointment following GP referral*	*For 1st out-patient appointment following GP referral per 1,000 head of weighted population*
County Durham and Darlington	738.32	1,852	2.8	441	0.7
Wigan and Bolton	732.65	2,638	4.3	1,601	2.6

Notes:

1. In many health authorities there are factors which distort the expenditure per head. These include:
the health authority acting in a lead capacity to commission healthcare or fund training on behalf of other health bodies;
asset revaluations in NHS Trusts being funded through health authorities; and
some double counting of expenditure between health authorities and primary care trusts within the health authority area.
Allocations per weighted head of population provide a much more reliable measure to identify differences between funding of health authorities.

2. Expenditure is taken from health authority and primary care trust summarisation forms which are prepared on a resource basis and therefore differ from allocations in the year. The expenditure is the total spent by the health authority and by the primary care trusts within each health authority area. The majority of General Dental Services expenditure is not included in the health authority or primary care trust accounts and is separately accounted for by the Dental Practice Board.

3. Health authorities and primary care trusts should account for their expenditure on a gross basis. This results in an element of double counting where one body acts as the main commissioner and is then reimbursed by other bodies. The effect of this double counting within the answer cannot be identified.

Sources:

Health authority summarisation forms 2000–01
Primary care trust summarisation schedules 2000–01
Weighted population estimates 2000–01
QFO1/QMO8R Waiting times data quarterly returns, end March 2001.

Protection of Children Act

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he has taken to ensure that employers of child care workers report to the police suspicions concerning a child care worker under the provisions of the Protection of Children Act 1999. [19094]

Jacqui Smith: The Protection of Children Act 1999 makes no provision for the reporting of concerns by employers to the police. The Act requires child care organisations to notify the Secretary of State when they have dismissed a person from a child care position on the grounds of misconduct (whether or not in the course of his employment) which harmed a child or placed a child at risk of harm. They are also required to notify my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in certain other circumstances specified in the Act.

GPs

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the number of GPs due to retire over the next 10 years. [19969]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not collect information about retirement intentions of general practitioners. All unrestricted principals and equivalents. (UPEs) have to retire as a principal by the age of 70. Around 2,200 UPEs will reach 70 by 2011.

In addition there are a further 8,880 doctors who are currently aged between 48 and 58. We might expect a proportion of these doctors to also leave by 2011. A number of doctors continue to work in the national health service after they have claimed their NHS pension until they retire fully.

The target increase in the NHS Plan for GPs is at least 2,000 more by 2004. The increases are based on an assessment of what is deliverable given the numbers expected to come out of training, and what is achievable through action on recruitment and retention. This assessment is set against the number of staff we expect to leave the NHS (leavers and retirements).

Procurement

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his Department's partnering relationships with the private sector to achieve better capital procurement and value for money. [15762]

Mr. Hutton: The Department's partnering programme was launched in "Sold on Health" in May 2000, and included proposals to pilot partnering frameworks in schemes in the west midlands and north-west. Final selection is currently under way, and we expect to appoint the successful partners in April 2002. Our programme follows best practice in the public and private sectors, and we anticipate that once partnering is fully developed it will delivery significant time savings; greater value for money, and better facilities for patients.

Equal Opportunities Fund

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the expenditure level of the Equal Opportunities Fund in *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03 and *(c)* 2003–04. [17165]

Mr. Hutton: We plan to spend £10,000 in each of the three years 2001–02, 2002–03, 2003–04 to employ staff whose costs will be reimbursed from the Employment Opportunities Fund.

Reforming Emergency Care Allocation

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional allocation for 2001–02 under Reforming Emergency Care has been given to *(a)* Forest health care trust, *(b)* Redbridge hospital trust and *(c)* Redbridge and Waltham Forest health authority; and for what purpose they will be used. [20014]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* Forest health care national health service trust and Redbridge hospital NHS trust ceased to exist in April 2001. Acute services are now provided by Whipps Cross university hospital NHS trust and Barking, Havering and Redbridge NHS trust.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced a £118 million package for Reforming Emergency Care over two years. Whipps Cross university hospital NHS trust received £78,563 for 2001–02 and £322,110 for 2002–03 for additional accident and emergency nurses and £4,100 as a contribution towards providing the infrastructure in emergency care networks and local leadership through emergency care leads for 2001–02 and £16,600 for 2002–03.

Barking, Havering and Redbridge NHS trust received £154,203 for 2001–02 and £632,243 for 2002–03 for additional accident and emergency nurses and £4,100 as a contribution towards providing the infrastructure in emergency care networks and local leadership through emergency care leads for 2001–02 and £16,600 for 2002–03.

This money was distributed directly to trusts with accident and emergency departments, not through health authorities.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on progress towards the Public Service Agreement target of a national average annual increase of 10 per cent. on whole-time equivalent GPs from 1997 to 2002; [14885]

(2) if he will make a statement on the Public Service Agreement target for the number of new practice nurses by 2002; [14908]

(3) if he will make a statement on progress towards meeting the Public Service Agreement target for the improvement of primary care premises in areas of deprivation. [14907]

Mr. Hutton: The Public Service Agreement target on general practitioner numbers relates to a "1 per cent." annual increase not "10 per cent.". We are currently on course to achieve all of these targets.

Doctor's Incomes

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average income is for *(a)* a hospital consultant and *(b)* a GP. [23896]

Mr. Hutton: We estimate that at August 2000, medical consultants were paid, on average, £65,000 basic salary, £72,000 total earnings, by national health service employers.

Note:

Doctors figures relate to medical consultants

Source:

Department of Health's August 2000 NHS staff earnings survey

For 2000–01 the intended average net income for a full time general practitioner principal delivering general medical services is £60,655.

Citizens Council

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which of the Nolan principles will not be applied to the appointees to the Citizens Council. [24608]

Mr. Hutton: The appointment of members to Citizens Council is a matter for the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, but we would expect the appointment process to be equitable, open and transparent. We understand that the creation of a pool of members will rely on a mixture of open advertisement and then selecting from the electoral register to ensue that there is a cross-section of society in the membership. We believe this process would satisfy the Nolan principles.

Nursing

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether, in those areas covered by NHS professionals, NHS trusts will continue to be allowed to contract directly with private nursing agencies for the provision of services. [24425]

Mr. Hutton: National health service trusts are undertaking joint procurement processes in order to ensure temporary staffing is better co-ordinated and more consistent. It is believed that this will minimise local anomalies, lower administration costs, and in turn lead to better quality patient care and value for money, whatever the source of supply, private nursing agencies included.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the *(a)* average length of time and *(b)* longest time it has taken to (i) process applications by nurses to be put on its books and (ii) pay nurses for placements by NHS Professionals for each month since its establishment. [32882]

Mr. Hutton: Currently this information is not collected centrally. Improvements in collecting management information will be made following a review of the early implementation sites.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if NHS Professionals will be required to comply with the Nurse Agency National Minimum Standards and Regulations; and if NHS Professionals will be inspected by the National Care Standards Commission. [32884]

Mr. Hutton: As NHS Professionals is a national health service employer it does not have to comply with the Nursing Agency Minimum Standards and Regulations nor will it be inspected by the National Care Standards Commission. The standards required of NHS Professionals will be those required of any other NHS employer.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if nurses registered with NHS Professionals but not directly employed by an NHS organisation will be covered by the nurse agency standards and regulations. [32883]

Mr. Hutton: As NHS Professionals is a national health service employer nurses registered with it will not be covered by the Nursing Agency Minimum Standards and Regulations. However because those nurses will be working for an NHS employer and within the NHS they will be required to meet the standards expected of full time NHS nurses.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if *(a)* the Commission for Health Improvement and *(b)* the National Care Standards Commission will be responsible for monitoring compliance with standards for agency nursing staff supplied by a private agency but placed by NHS Professionals. [32881]

Mr. Hutton: The Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) considers staffing and staff management issues when carrying our clinical governance reviews of national health service trusts. In a routine clinical governance review, CHI may look at how agency bank and locum staff are inducted, and what training they have.

The National Care Standards Commission will be responsible for inspecting private nurses agencies on the basis of the national minimum standards. These standards will govern the operation of agencies and how they conduct the supply of temporary nursing staff. The standards will apply to an agency whether or not NHS Professionals uses that agency's services.

Palliative Care

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what new training is available for district and community nurses dealing with palliative care. [24343]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* We have made £6 million available over the next three years to support over 10,000 nurses in primary care to take part in new training in the general principles and practice of palliative care.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many district and community nurses have received new training in palliative care. [24342]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* The information requested is not collected centrally.

The English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and health Visiting records nurse post registration training information. However, their records do not differentiate between different types of nurses.

We have funded a £2 million initiative to provide training to help nurses support people with cancer at home for as long as possible during their illness. We expect that over 10,000 nurses in primary care will take part in the training programme over the next three years.

Empty Properties

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the *(a)* annual cost and *(b)* total value of the empty properties owned by (i) his Department, (ii) his agencies and (iii) other public bodies for which he has had responsibility in each of the last four years. [30071]

Mr. Hutton: The Department, its agencies and executive non-departmental public bodies have only one property that has been empty since July 2000 at an annual cost of £321,000 and a value of £3.7 million. This property is intended to be used by the national health service shortly.

No information is available centrally on vacant properties held by NHS bodies.

Health Bodies (Composition)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people from the Knowsley, North and Sefton, East constituency sit on *(a)* local health trusts and *(b)* other health bodies sponsored by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [30972]

Jacqui Smith: Six people who live in the Knowsley, North and Sefton, East constituency currently serve on national health service boards. The bodies involved are given in the table.

NHS body	*Number of members*
Aintree Hospital Trust	1
North Mersey Community NHS Trust	1
St. Helens and Knowsley Community NHS Trust	2
St. Helens and Knowsley Health Authority	1
St. Helens and Knowsley Hospital NHS Trust	1
Total	6

Laura Touche

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action the Government proposes to take following the coroner's verdict on the death of Laura Touche at the Portland hospital, London. [30854]

Jacqui Smith: We have already taken steps to improve the regulation of private health care services. From 1 April this year, a new independent body, the National Care Standards Commission, will take over from health authorities the regulation of independent health care providers.

For the first time, providers will have to meet national minimum standards. The guiding principles when producing these standards was that the needs of patients were paramount, and that the standards must be compatible with national health service standards where possible. The standards comprise core standards with which all independent health care providers will have to comply, including the requirement that they have in place a formal complaints policy and procedures. Complainants who are dissatisfied with a hospital's complaints system may approach the Commission direct.

Apart from core standards, providers will be required to meet standards specific to the services they provide. For the first time, the owners and managers of private hospitals will be held accountable for the quality of care provided in their establishment.

NHS Concordat

Andy Burnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have been treated to date under the NHS concordat in *(a)* the south-east, *(b)* the south-west, *(c)* London, *(d)* Trent, *(e)* the west midlands, *(f)* the north-west, *(g)* north and Yorkshire and *(h)* England. [31107]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 29 January 2002]:* Since November 2000 the Independent Healthcare Association has collected monthly data from independent health care providers about the number of national health service patients treated by them. A breakdown of the information will shortly be placed in the Library.

According to this data, at least 80,000 procedures have been treated in the independent sector in England, paid for by the NHS. This figure includes out-patient appointments, day cases and in-patient treatment. Information for the regions requested is in the table.

The Department has recently surveyed health authorities and trusts on the amount of activity they are purchasing for NHS patients within the private sector and will make available key results soon. The Department is also currently reviewing its information needs as far as NHS-funded activity in the private sector is concerned.

Region[1]	*Procedures*[2]
London	3,162
North-west	18,542
Northern and Yorkshire	15,172
South-east	19,047
South-west	6,636
Trent	6,978
West Midlands	7,029

[1] May differ slightly from NHS regions.

[2] Procedures undertaken by the independent sector facilities in each region (may differ slightly from NHS regions) paid for by the NHS between November 2000 and December 2001 (including out-patient appointments, day cases and in-patient treatment).

Parliamentary Questions (PFI)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many written parliamentary questions regarding private finance initiatives have been tabled since 1 January 2000; and in answer to how many of these information has not been provided on the grounds of commercial confidentiality. [31855]

Mr. Hutton: No information has been withheld on the grounds of commercial confidentiality to all the 109 written parliamentary questions which have been tabled since 1 January 2000 relating to the private finance initiative.

Departmental Salary Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the departmental expenditure limit in 2001–02 will be accounted for by salary costs and pension contributions. [32006]

Mr. Hutton: The total departmental expenditure limit in 2001–02 is £49.8 billion. The current estimate of the hospital and community health service paybill in 2001–02 is £22.7 billion (45 per cent. of the planned expenditure).

The estimate of the HCHS paybill includes all salary costs—including pension contributions.

Children in Care

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children in care turned 16 in the academic years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99, *(d)* 1999–2000 and *(e)* 2000–01. [31763]

Jacqui Smith: The information in the table approximates to the number of school children in their GCSE year, who had been looked after at any time during their secondary education up to and including that year.

Estimated number[1,2] *of children who were looked after at any time during their year 11 at school, or at any time during the previous four school years*

Academic year	*Estimated number*
1996–97	12,100
1997–98	11,300
1998–99	11,100
1999–2000	11,000
2000–01[3,4]	10,400

[1] The table excludes children who were looked after under a series of short term placements.

[2] All figures in the above table have been rounded to the nearest 100.

[3] All CLA data for financial year ending 31 March 2001 are provisional.

[4] Incomplete year. Latest information on DH database relates to year ending 31 March 2001. The estimated figure relates to children who were 16 during the period 1 September 2000 to 31 August 2001, and were looked after at any time during the period 1 September 1996 to 31 March 2001.

Source:

CLA Episode system.

Silicone Cosmesis

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been allocated to each health authority for silicone cosmesis from the funding for 2001–02; and how much has been spent. [31664]

Jacqui Smith: On the 9 January 2001 the Government announced that funding totalling £4 million to provide silicone cosmesis to prosthetic limb users was to be made available over the next three years. The funding started with £0.5 million for 20[illegible]2, £1.5 million for 2002–03 and £2 million for 2003–04. This was an addition to the baseline allocations to the 99 health authorities. Each local health authority will provide funding to individual disablement service centres (DSCs) to provide silicone cosmesis.

The contract for purchasing silicone cosmesis covers was awarded on 1 October 2001. To support this initiative officials in my Department wrote, on 12 December 2001, to all health authorities reminding them that this funding has been provided to them in their allocations.

The contractor is required as part of the contract to provide the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency with quarterly contract sales figures which will include:

total sales figure in £s;

£s spent by each DSC; and

what span of products are purchased.

These data are currently being collected by the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency.

Strategic Health Authorities (Board Papers)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if members of the public will have the same right of access to the board papers of strategic health authorities as they currently do to the board papers of health authorities. [32296]

Mr. Hutton: Yes. The provisions relating to open board meetings and access to board papers will be exactly the same for strategic health authorities as currently apply to health authorities.

Mental Health

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were *(a)* admitted to hospital for formal detention and *(b)* informally admitted to hospital in each year since 1997. [32751]

Jacqui Smith: The Department collects and publishes information annually relating to patients detained under the Mental Health Act 1983. The most recent publication "In-patients formally detained in hospitals under the Mental Health Act 1983 and other legislation, England: 1990–1991 to 2000–2001" summarises the position at 31 March 2001.

Table 1 of the publication shows that all formal admissions to national health service facilities, during the period 1 April 1997 to 31 March 2001 increased from 25,415 to 26,707.

Table 7 of the publication shows that the numbers of patients whose legal status changed from informal to formal admission, during the period 1 April 1997 to 31 March, increased from 68,027 to 73,751.

The total number of admissions to NHS hospitals for treatment for mental illness is shown in the table.

	Mental illness
1997–98	203,800
1998–99	188,700
1999–2000	187,600
2000–01	181,500

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines were issued to health authorities and mental health trusts following the House of Lords judgments in the Bournewood case. [32753]

Jacqui Smith: The House of Lords gave its decision in the case of L *v.* Bournewood Community and Mental Health NHS trust on 25 June 1998. On 10 July 1998 the Department issued a circular (HSC 1999/122) informing the chief executives of national health service trusts and other interested parties of the decision of the House of Lords. It also gave "preliminary guidance" on the practical consequences of the House of Lords decision.

Further guidance was included in the "Code of Practice: Mental Health Act 1983" published in March 1999. The code provides guidance on the admission to hospital and the treatment of patients who are mentally incapable of giving consent.

Autism

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research projects into the causes of autism have been supported by the Government since 1997. [32420]

Jacqui Smith: Details of research projects on autism can be found on the National Research Register (NRR) at www.doh.gov.uk/research.nrr.htm. The NRR includes information on research commissioned through the national and regional programmes of national health service research and development and the Department's Policy Research Programme, as well as work supported by NHS Support for Science funding that has been commissioned by the Medical Research Council (MRS) and others. The NRR shows that there are currently 58 on-going and 109 completed projects on autism.

The MRC (which is largely funded by Government) published a detailed review of the epidemiology and causes of autism on 13 December 2001. The report, commissioned by the Department in March 2001, provides a clear, authoritative picture of what scientific research has revealed about the occurrence and causes of autism spectrum disorders. The report encourages the research community to develop high quality research proposals that address the key issues identified in the report.

We are discussing with the MRC the implications of their report for their research programme.

Care Homes

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost was of *(a)* a grade F nursing home place and *(b)* a residential home place, paid for by each county social services authority in England in (i) 1997, (ii) 1999 and (iii) 2001; and what the county average was. [32706]

Jacqui Smith: The information is not available in the form requested.

Health Bodies (Budgets)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued to NHS regional chief executives on *(a)* the need for health bodies to balance their budgets and *(b)* advice to give where overspends are anticipated. [32703]

Mr. Hutton: The Department issued "NHS Plan Implementation Programme" which provided guidance on priorities. Within this guidance, a target of financial balance has been set which is managed in year by the Department's regional offices.

Where health bodies require support at year-end this will be provided principally through brokerage from elsewhere in the national health service.

Primary Care Trusts (Overspending)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he expects overspends by primary care trusts to be offset by savings by other health bodies. [32704]

Mr. Hutton: By the end of this financial year we expect all primary care trusts to live within their agreed resource limits. Where they require support at the year-end this will be provided principally through brokerage from elsewhere in the national health service. This is normal practice in managing the end of year financial position.

Smallpox Vaccine

Mr. Robert Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance has been issued to public health professionals in the event of a large scale smallpox outbreak. [33338]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* The Department issued guidance to all health authorities and regional directors of Public health on the procedures to be followed in the event of a deliberate release of smallpox and other biological agents on 17 October 2001. At the same time, guidance for medical and laboratory staff was issued by the Public Health Laboratory Service on 17 October 2001. This is available on the PHLS website: http://www.phls.co.uk/advice/smallpox guidelines.pdf

Mr. Robert Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 22 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 410W, how many smallpox vaccine doses are held by his Department. [33337]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* It is not possible to expand upon the answer given on 22 November 2001, as details concerning quantities of vaccine could aid planning of a bioterrorist attack. A strategic stock of vaccine is held which could be rapidly deployed to contain an outbreak.

Mr. Robert Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 22 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 410W, whether Britain will have a smallpox vaccine stockpile ensuring a dose for every citizen by January 2003. [33333]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* It is not possible to expand upon the answer given on 22 November 2001, as details about vaccine supplies could aid planning of a bioterrorist attack. A strategic stock of smallpox vaccine is already held which could be deployed to contain an outbreak, and this is being kept under review together with the United Kingdom's future requirements for smallpox vaccine.

Mr. Robert Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the proportion of the population which has some protective immunity to smallpox. [32973]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* Routine vaccination for smallpox stopped in the United Kingdom and in all countries by 1980 when eradication was declared by the Word Health Organisation. We now have a population which either has never been vaccinated or who were vaccinated 20 or more years ago and who have waning immunity.

A Departmental funded study by the Centre for Applied Microbiology and Research has been looking at how best to estimate the protective immunity within the UK population, as part of a wider study on microbial risk assessment. Recent estimates put the level of immunity at about 18 per cent., though it must be stressed that this is only a crude estimate.

Mr. Robert Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 22 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 410W, how many smallpox vaccine doses would be required to contain a smallpox outbreak in the UK. [33332]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* The number of smallpox vaccine doses depend on a number of factors including scale of release, number, time to disease recognition, location and site. Such factors and the need to consider different scenarios are integral to the Department's contingency planning.

The use of smallpox vaccine would depend upon the circumstances of the outbreak of the disease and whether or not it could be confined to a particular location.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will answer the question tabled by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam on 6 November 2001, ref. 13108, concerning beta interferon. [32668]

Ms Blears: I replied to the hon. Member on 31 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 560W.

Social Workers

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many whole-time equivalent social work staff there were on local authority establishments in each of the last 10 years; and how many of these posts were left unfilled in each year. [32662]

Jacqui Smith: For the numbers of whole-time equivalent social work staff, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) on 18 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 530W. Information on the number of unfilled social work staff posts is not held centrally.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment her Department has made of the trends in the use made by social services departments of agency staff in each of the last four years. [32663]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the use of agency staff by local authority social services departments is not held centrally.

Health Authority Budgets (London)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the latest forecast figures are for *(a)* underspending or overspending for the present financial year, *(b)* recurring funding pressures which impact on the 2002–03 planning round and *(c)* deficits in the local health economy in each health authority in London submitted to the London regional office. [32677]

Mr. Hutton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 793W.

National Care Standards Commission

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many pharmacists the National Care Standards Commission employs; and when the full complement of pharmacists will be in post. [32670]

Jacqui Smith: The National Care Standards Commission has a complement of 66 pharmacist inspectors and one national pharmacist professional adviser. None are currently employed by the NCSC, as the responsibility for regulation will not be passed until 1 April 200. The national post is due to be advertised in mid-February. The full complement of pharmacist inspectors is unlikely to be in post for some time, as there are insufficient pharmacist inspectors eligible to transfer to the NCSC from 1 April 2002. Pharmacy inspection services will therefore be obtained by various local arrangements to fulfil the complement from 1 April.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what new outcome measures for residents in care homes will be collected by the National Care Standards Commission. [32889]

Jacqui Smith: The National Minimum Standards for care homes focus on achievable outcomes for service users constructed around separate topics, for example, choice of home, health and personal care, daily life and social activities and environment. The standards will form the basis for judgments made by the National Care Standards Commission concerning registration. The standards are not only qualitative, providing a tool for judging the quality of life of service users, but also measurable.

Strokes

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how he will ensure that every hospital that cares for older people with strokes will have established clinical audit systems by April 2003, as required by the National Framework for Older People. [32975]

Jacqui Smith: The Department's Priorities and Planning Framework 2002–03, issued 6 December 2001 sets the achievement of the milestones of the National Service Framework (NSF) for Older People within one of the three major priorities for local action. The initial milestones set for the improvements in stroke care, provide that:

> by April 2002 every general hospital which cares for people with stroke will have plans to introduce a specialised stroke service as described in the stroke service model from 2004;
>
> by April 2003 every hospital which cares for older people with stroke will have established clinical audit systems to ensure delivery of the Royal College of Physicians clinical guidelines for stroke care.

The achievement of each of the milestones will be monitored.

The NSF for Older People recommended that the clinical audit methodology developed by the Royal College of Physicians be used as the basis for agreeing local priorities for action in ensuring the establishment of integrated stroke services and for the continued auditing of service improvement.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what resources will be made available to support the continuation of the National Sentinel Audit for Stroke. [32976]

Jacqui Smith: The Department provided £233,000 for the initial development of the stroke audit. Responsibility and funding for the National Sentinel Audits was transferred from the Department to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence in December 1999. Following a review last year by NICE of their completed audits topics, the Department is considering a proposal to commission further work on the stroke audit.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he will take to further *(a)* his Department's policy research and *(b)* the NHS Research and Development Programme to deal with strokes; and if he will make a statement. [32974]

Jacqui Smith: We have set standards to improve the provision of integrated stroke services in the National Service Framework for Older People, and research will underpin this strategy. The Department continues to support stroke research through the national health service health technology assessment programme (HTA), the Department's policy research programme and other NHS research and development programmes. In addition to the new research referred to in the reply given on 1 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 624W, the HTA programme has recently advertised further calls for proposals for primary research in the treatment of high blood pressure immediately after stroke.

The NHS research and development programmes use a range of methods to identify, prioritise and commission work in all areas including stroke. Further details can be found on the website www.doh.gov.uk/research.

Correspondence

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he will reply to the letter of 28 November 2001 from the hon. Member for Walsall, North, regarding a constituent, ref: P0001146; [27311]

(2) pursuant to the interim reply of 15 January (ref: PQ 4078/2001/2002), when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a substantive reply to his letter of 28 November 2001 (ref: P0001146 (27311)). [31287]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answers 15 January and 29 January 2002]:* A reply was sent on 30 January 2002.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 7 February 2002

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

38. **Roger Casale:** To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make a statement on the arrangements in place between Crown Prosecution Service, the police and local authorities to ensure that antisocial behaviour proceedings are effective. [31438]

The Solicitor-General: The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 lays down that there should be local partnerships for crime reduction, including antisocial behaviour. All key agencies, including the police, local authorities and the CPS work according to the "antisocial behaviour protocol". There has been guidance and joint training for all the agencies.

Prosecution Disclosure

39. **Ian Lucas:** To ask the Solicitor-General what plans she has to introduce legislation to reform prosecution disclosure in criminal cases. [31439]

The Solicitor-General: The Government have consulted on Lord Justice Auld's proposals for reform of prosecution disclosure in criminal cases. Following the consultation period which ended on January 31, we are considering our response and have said that our proposals will be set out in a White Paper in April. Any plans to legislate to reform prosecution disclosure in criminal cases will be made public in April.

Civil Service Pension Scheme

43. **Sue Doughty:** To ask the Solicitor-General what assessment has been made of the risk of the Government facing a legal action under the Human Rights Act 1998 regarding the civil service pension scheme. [31443]

The Solicitor-General: It is a long-standing convention enshrined in the Ministerial Code, that neither the fact that the Law Officers have advised on a matter, nor the content of any advice which they may have given, is disclosed outside Government other than in exceptional circumstances. This is to protect the confidentiality of the legal advice given to the Government. The Government, like everyone else, should be able to get the legal advice which they need to perform their functions, without having to explain or justify this to outsiders, or indeed to reveal that it has concerns about the legal position. This ensures that the Government seek, and get, frank advice where appropriate without having to worry about any political and presentational implications.

Domestic Violence

44. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make a statement on the role of her Department in dealing with domestic violence. [31444]

The Solicitor-General: The role of my Department in relation to domestic violence is to promote the safety of victims of abuse and to hold offenders accountable for their actions.

The work needed to address domestic violence issues extends far wider than any one Department's remit. This is why I have established with ministerial colleagues a Ministerial Committee on domestic violence.

We are working closely with colleagues across government to draw up a national strategy addressing domestic violence issues that relate not just to the civil and criminal courts, but also to matters of health, education, child protection, refuges and housing.

Fair Trade Fortnight

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Solicitor-General what steps she is taking to encourage participation by her Department in fair trade fortnight from 4 to 17 March. [33554]

The Solicitor-General: The Law Officers' Departments—the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, the Crown Prosecution Service, the Serious Fraud Office and the Treasury Solicitor's Department—have no plans to participate in fair trade fortnight.

The individual Departments are, however, always ready to consider fair trade products when these represent good value and all encourage ethical purchasing as an element in their purchasing policies.

IT Contracts

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Solicitor-General what has been the total expenditure of her Department on IT systems and support in each year from May 1997 to date; how many IT contracts have been let in each of those years; of the other main contracting party in each of those contracts, how many have been *(a)* companies whose registered office is in (i) England and Wales, (ii) Scotland and (iii) Northern Ireland and *(b)* foreign companies; and what are the names of the companies falling within category (a). [33692]

The Solicitor-General: I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Individual Learning Accounts

11. **Mr. Goodman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many arrests have been made in connection with fraud of the Government's individual learning accounts scheme. [31411]

John Healey: Forty-four arrests have been made in relation to allegations of fraud with the operation of the individual learning account programme. Twelve people have been charged, one of whom has been convicted.

13. **Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will announce the date on which the scheme to replace individual learning accounts will commence. [31413]

John Healey: We are determined to review thoroughly all aspects of the operation of the ILA scheme. During January and February we are conducting a consultation with providers, learners and other stakeholders. The results will be an important element in developing a successor scheme.

21. **Tony Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she expects to announce a replacement for individual learning accounts. [31421]

John Healey: We are determined to review thoroughly all aspects of the operation of the ILA scheme. During January and February we are conducting a consultation with providers, learners and other stakeholders to take their views. The results will be an important element in developing a successor scheme.

23. **Mr. Baron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures she will take to ensure that ILA providers are fully compensated following the closure of the scheme. [31423]

John Healey: The Department has no plans to compensate learning providers in relation to the closure of individual learning accounts.

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether Capita staff at the ILA computer centre have been *(a)* arrested and *(b)* investigated by the police in the last six months. [33984]

John Healey: There have been no arrests of Capita staff employed at the ILA centre. On Friday 23 November the Department called in police to investigate serious potential fraud and theft involving individual learning accounts. Details of the continuing investigations are a matter for the police. However, to date no evidence has been found to support any allegations that Capita employees have been involved in the abuse of ILAs.

Pupil Attainment

12. **Dr. Naysmith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the proportion of pupils in the last two years reaching the end of compulsory schooling without a qualification. [31412]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The proportion of pupils reaching the end of compulsory schooling without a qualification in 2001 fell for the sixth year in a row to 5.5 per cent. In 2000 the proportion of pupils leaving without a qualification was 5.6 per cent.

Student Loans

14. **Andrew Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on her plans for reviewing the operation of the system of student loans. [31414]

Margaret Hodge: We shall announce the outcome of the review of student finance when it is complete and we will consult on any proposals for change.

34. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she intends to publish a consultation document outlining options for a new system of student support; and if she will make a statement. [31434]

Margaret Hodge: We shall announce the outcome of the review of student finance when it is complete and we will consult on any proposals for change.

Modern Apprenticeships

16. **Mr. Challen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the introduction of modern apprenticeships in schools. [31416]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Government are working with the Learning and Skills Council to develop a pilot preparatory apprenticeship model for 16-year-olds and above in schools, who may progress to a full modern apprenticeship with an employer later. Further more detailed plans for strengthening the work-related learning element in schools, as part of our strategy for a more coherent and flexible 14–19 phase of education and training, will be published in due course.

University Research

17. **Mr. Khabra:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans the Government have to fund high-quality research in university institutions. [31417]

Margaret Hodge: The Government will continue to support high quality research in universities and colleges. The detailed distribution of public funds for research is a matter for the Research Councils, the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the other UK funding councils. The Department has made available an additional £30 million to fund high quality research next year.

Public Examinations

18. **Mr. Heath:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the operation of the public examination system. [31418]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Government are determined to maintain a rigorous and high-quality examination system that commands public confidence. We look to the regulatory body—the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority—to ensure that all awarding bodies meet the high standards that students and parents expect.

Ofsted Report (Gloucestershire)

19. **Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the recent Ofsted report into Gloucestershire's local education authority. [31419]

Mr. Timms: Officials in my Department have discussed the report with the Council's lead members and officers. I am assured that the authority recognises the weaknesses identified by Ofsted, and will be addressing the recommendations in the year ahead. I await the authority's post-Ofsted action plan, which will set out the action proposed.

Schools (Derbyshire)

20. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent representations she has received on the future of Dronfield and Diencourt schools in Derbyshire. [31420]

Mr. Timms: My Department has received an application from Derbyshire local education authority (LEA) to the targeted capital fund (TCF) for capital funding in respect of Dronfield School. TCF supports standards-focused projects which might not otherwise be supported through other capital programmes. TCF applications are currently being appraised and allocations will be announced in March 2002.

Post-16 Education

22. **Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance she has given to learning and skills councils on the financial support of post-16 education in schools. [31422]

Margaret Hodge: The Learning and Skills Council is required to disburse £1.35 billion for school sixth form provision in 2002–03. The Secretary of State's Grant Letter to the Learning and Skills Council for 2002–03 said that she expected the Council to secure a smooth transfer to the new funding arrangements for school sixth forms, and that it must ensure that the funding does not reduce in real terms relative to the amount they received in 2000–01, provided pupil numbers are maintained.

Reception Classes

24. **Mr. Wiggin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the proportion of four-year-olds in reception classes was in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2000; and if she will make a statement. [31424]

Margaret Hodge: The information is not available in the form requested.

The percentage of four-year-olds educated in classes that are not designated as nursery[1] in maintained primary schools in England was 53 per cent. and 57 per cent. in January 1997 and January 2000, respectively. Early Years Development and Childcare Plans demonstrate how, in every local education authority area, there is an early education place for every four-year-old whose parents want one in either the maintained, private or voluntary sector.

Latest figures on under fives provision in England were published in Statistical Bulletin "Provision for children under five years of age in England—January 2001", a copy of which is available from the Library or the Department's website www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics.

[1] Includes reception and other class provision for four-year-olds but excludes designated nursery classes.

Specialist Schools

25. **Mrs. Helen Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement about the criteria she applies when considering a school's application for specialist status. [31425]

Mr. Timms: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 903W.

31. **Mr. Laws:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many specialist schools there are in Yeovil constituency. [31431]

Mr. Timms: There is one specialist school in Yeovil.

Adult Education

26. **Sue Doughty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proposals the Government have to introduce an entitlement for all adults to paid tuition for Level 2 courses. [31426]

Margaret Hodge: Within my Department, we are currently conducting a review of financial support for adult learners aged 19 or over outside higher education, alongside our work in the Spending Review. We are looking at targeting financial assistance where it is most needed, and at the most cost effective way of doing this. Entitlement for all adults to paid tuition for Level 2 is one option that is being carefully explored.

We are also developing pilot arrangements that will test how free tuition together with employer compensation for time taken off by employees for learning can act as an incentive. The focus of the learning in these pilots will be basic skills and an initial Level 2 qualification. A small number of pilots will be run by local Learning and Skills Councils in their areas. The pilots will start in spring 2002 with learning opportunities available from September 2002.

29. **Paul Holmes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what strategy she has to increase participation in adult learning. [31429]

John Healey: The Government's strategy is to ensure that learning is available in a form and at a time and place that best suits the needs of adult learners; to provide targeted financial support to adult learners; and to extend the information, advice and guidance available on learning. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has a statutory duty to encourage adults to learn. It will publish its strategy for work force development by the end of March 2002. The National Target for Participation in Learning has been achieved one year early, with 500,000 additional learners since 1997.

School Worship

27. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement about acts of worship in schools. [31427]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: All registered pupils attending a maintained school should take part in a daily act of collective worship. This must be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character, though importantly, not distinctive of any particular Christian denomination. Schools of a religious character provide collective worship according to the tenets of their trust deed. They are not obliged to follow the Department's guidance in Circular 1/94, although they may find it helpful to do so.

Collective worship provides an important opportunity to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. We recognise its distinctive and unique contribution in teaching children about the beliefs and values underpinning our understanding of ourselves, what is right and wrong, our sense of belonging and respect for each other.

The Government have no current plans to remove the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship in schools as the law already allows much flexibility over the organisation, timing and content of worship.

School Exclusions

28. **Harry Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the trends in the numbers of school exclusions over the next two years and the underlying reasons; and if she will make a statement. [31428]

Mr. Timms: Many factors will affect the number of school exclusions over the next two years. We are taking forward a number of initiatives in this area, including more on-site learning support units; more Learning Mentors; and more Personal Advisers under the Connexions Service for pupils aged 13–19.

During the period from 1996 to 2000 the overall number of permanent exclusions has fallen—from around 12,700 in the 1996–97 school year to around 8,300 in the 1999–2000 school year. However, in the last school year (2000–01) the number of permanent exclusions is estimated to have risen to around 9,200 (provisional figure), though this is still 28 per cent. below the 1996–97 peak. We recently issued for consultation draft revised guidance on the appropriate use of exclusion. While this proposes to expand the categories of behaviour where permanent exclusion may be justified, given all the measures we are taking to bolster schools and headteachers with more resources to help them avoid the need for exclusion, we do not expect the new guidance to result in any significant increase in the numbers of exclusions.

Higher Education

30. **Mr. Carmichael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the difference in numbers of students entering higher education in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* Scotland in the last 12 months. [31430]

Margaret Hodge: The latest figures showing the number of students accepted for entry to undergraduate courses are given in the table. We welcome the continuing buoyant recruitment of students in England and Wales.

UK domiciled accepted applicants to full-time and sandwich undergraduate courses

	Year of entry		
	2000	*2001*	*Percentage change*
Institutions in:			
England and Wales	271,100	286,600	+5.7
Scotland	30,300	30,800	+1.9

Source:

Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)

Education Maintenance Allowance

32. **Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to extend education maintenance allowance. [31432]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We have no such plans at present. We will be taking decisions on any future extension of the scheme on the basis of the rigorous evaluation currently being conducted.

A-levels

33. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she has made an assessment of the impact on teachers and pupils of introducing a new A* grade at A-level. [31433]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: No. The Government currently have no plans to introduce an A* grade at A-level.

Secondary School Places (Eastbourne)

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures she will take to increase the number of secondary school places in Eastbourne. [31415]

Mr. Timms: It is for local education authorities to ensure that sufficient school places are available for the children in their area. Decisions about the organisation and supply of school places are made locally within a transparent decision-making framework. Where an authority can demonstrate a need for additional places it can approach my Department for funding through the annual capital allocation process.

Departmental Expenditure Limits

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on her Department's spending levels in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02, with reference to its expenditure limits. [33428]

Estelle Morris: For 2000–01 the comparison of provisional outturn against the departmental expenditure limit appears in the Public Expenditure 2000–01 Provisional Outturn White Paper (Cm 5243), published July 2001. Since July the outturn has increased by £56 million giving a final outturn of £17.705 billion, which is 93.2 per cent. of the total departmental expenditure limit (excluding welfare to work provision) of £18.998 billion.

For 2001–02 the initial departmental expenditure limit appears in the Departmental Report (Cm 5102), published March 2001, and subsequently changed following the Winter Supplementary Estimate (Cm 5335), published November 2001 to £20.224 billion. Comparison of spend to the departmental expenditure limits will be published in the Public Expenditure Outturn White Paper in July.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her estimate is of the Department's underspend on its expenditure limits in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [33429]

Estelle Morris: For 2000–01 underspends were reported in the Public Expenditure 2000–01 Provisional Outturn White Paper (Cm 5243), published July 2000. The underspends were based on a comparison of provisional outturn against the departmental expenditure limit. Since July the outturn has increased by £56 million thereby reducing the published underspend accordingly.

For 2001–02 the initial departmental expenditure limit appears in the Departmental Report (Cm 5102), published March 2001, and subsequently changed following the Winter Supplementary Estimate (Cm 5335), published November 2001 to £20.224 billion. Comparison of spend to the departmental expenditure limits will be published in the Public Expenditure Outturn White Paper in July.

IT Contracts

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what has been the total expenditure of her Department on IT systems and support in each year from May 1997 to date; how many IT contracts have been let in each of those years; of the other main contracting party in each of those contracts, how many have been *(a)* companies whose registered office is in (i) England and Wales, (ii) Scotland and (iii) Northern Ireland and *(b)* foreign companies; and what are the names of the companies falling within category *(a)*. [33680]

John Healey: The information that can be provided without disproportionate cost is as follows:

Number of contracts let and total expenditure of IT systems and support

Year	*Number*	*Total expenditure (£)*
1997–98	0	6,446,000.00
1998–99	5	8,000,000.00
1999–2000	3	8,400,000.00
2000–01	3	7,362,000.00
2001–02	1	5,975,000.00
Total	12	30,208,000.00

Number of companies whose registered offices is in:

	Number
England and Wales	11
Scotland	1
Northern Ireland	0
Foreign	0

Names of companies, whose registered office is in the United Kingdom

Axios Systems Ltd.

ISIS Ltd.

Peoplesoft UK Ltd.

NETG Ltd.

Hays Information Management

Electronic Data Systems Ltd.

British Telecommunications plc

CTP Information Management Ltd.

International Computers Ltd.

Xansa plc

Cap/Gemini/Ernst and Young

EduServ of University of Bath.

Accountancy Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total cost to her Department was for accountancy services in each of the last four years. [34176]

Estelle Morris: Information on the costs classified as accountancy services in the accounts of the Department for the last four years are as follows:

Year	*Value (£)*
1998–99	44,839
1999–2000	80,637
2000–01	702,133
2001–02[1]	493,947

[1] Nine months to December 2001

Union Learning Representatives

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will give a breakdown, by type of organisation, of the respondents to the consultation exercise on providing statutory rights for union learning representatives. [35051]

John Healey: There were 89 responses to the consultation. Of these:

31 (35 per cent.) were from trade unions or other worker representative organisations (16 being from employers);

24 (27 per cent.) were from trade unions or other worker representative bodies;

11 (12 per cent.) were from local learning and skills councils;

Nine (10 per cent.) were from other representative bodies (such as learning partnerships);

Nine (10 per cent.) were from individual union learning representatives;

Five (6 per cent.) were from individual employees.

The majority of respondents agreed strongly with the proposals in the consultation document that union learning representatives should qualify as such if elected or appointed according to the rules of the union and that they should undergo training within a specified period. That is why we have included a clause in the new Employment Bill that will give statutory backing to union learning representatives. It will reinforce the invaluable role that union learning reps are currently playing in the workplace to promote work force development and open up new training opportunities for their colleagues.

State Schools Performance (A-levels)

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent assessment she has made of the performance of state schools in delivering A-levels and the impact of Learning and Skills Councils on this process. [31410]

Margaret Hodge: Ofsted's December 2001 report on the first year of Curriculum 2000 indicated that most state sixth-forms are successfully delivering A-level programmes. This confirms QCA's recent finding that the A-level reforms are now bedding down after some initial problems in 2001.

The Learning and Skills Council is working closely with LEAs and schools to develop a detailed framework for driving up standards. It takes over responsibility for school sixth-form funding from April this year.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Free Basic Education

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much of the UK's total international aid budget is spent on basic education; and if she will make a statement. [33519]

Hilary Benn: In 2000–01 around £130 million of DFID's bilateral programme was spent on basic education (9 per cent. of the bilateral total). This shows an increase from 1998 when such expenditure represented 5 per cent. of the bilateral programme. However these figures do not fully represent our effort in this area as they exclude contributions to NGOs (both national and international) and multilateral organisations, none of which can be disaggregated to this level of detail.

Water Shortages

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what evidence her Department has collated of civil unrest resulting from water shortages in developing countries in the last 12 months. [33514]

Hilary Benn: The DFID strategy paper "Addressing the Water Crisis" identifies the increasing potential for conflict as water demand rises. In areas where water is scarce, increased competition for limited supplies can lead to local tensions, in some cases resulting in violent conflict.

In the past 12 months, DFID has witnessed this problem in Northern Kenya and Uganda. Different pastoralist groups, competing for water and grazing land, inhabit the area. During drought periods, the groups often come into conflict with one another. Since they are well armed this has led to deaths in the past year. Another example is in the Central Rift Valley in Kenya where protesters barricaded a road as a result of horticulturalists upstream depleting their irrigation water supplies.

While water shortage as a single issue does not generally result in large-scale civil unrest, it is important to try and satisfy competing demands for water to avoid local conflict. DFID aims to approach water problems from a livelihoods perspective to help ensure that all competing demands for water, and particularly the needs of the poor, are taken into account.

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations the Government have made to the United Nations regarding the decline in water tables in certain developing countries. [33512]

Hilary Benn: Unsustainable exploitation of groundwater aquifers, in a number of developing countries, is recognised by the UN relevant agencies. The United Nation Environment Programme's publication "Groundwater: A Threatened Resource" focuses on over-abstraction and pollution of groundwater aquifers. DFID's strategy paper "Addressing the Water Crises" also highlights the issue. We recently funded two World bank publications on sustainability of urban and rural groundwater, drawing on the results of DFID funded research. DFID also currently supports an expert to the World bank to identify groundwater issues in key World bank programme countries.

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with European Union Ministers regarding the decline in water tables in developing countries. [33513]

Hilary Benn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not had any discussions with European Union Ministers on this particular issue. At official level there is discussion with EC counterparts. DFID has also co-funded the European Commission Guidelines for Water Resources Development Co-operation, "Towards Sustainable Water Resource Management", which recognises the problem and provides guidance on sustainable management of groundwater.

Third World Debt

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action her Department has taken to eradicate third world debt; and what steps have been taken to encourage other European states to fulfil their role on this issue. [33490]

Hilary Benn: The Government have played a major role in tackling the unsustainable debt burden of the poorest countries. We led the way in securing the revision of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, which was agreed in September 1999. Up to US$100 billion debt could be written off for the 42 HIPC countries. So far, 24 countries have qualified for this exceptional relief, and these countries will receive more than $54 billion of debt relief, so reducing their debts by more than two-thirds on average. We hope that at least two more countries—Ghana and Sierra Leone—will qualify for debt relief in the coming months, but substantial further progress will be difficult, as many of the remaining HIPC countries are affected by conflict.

The UK is the second largest contributor ($306 million) to the HIPC Trust Fund to help the Multilateral Development Banks meet their share of HIPC costs. This figure includes our share ($85 million) of the substantial EC contribution of US$661 million for which we pressed. Most of our partner states in the European Union have also made bilateral contributions to the trust fund, on top of their share of the EC contribution. In addition, those member states that are major creditors deliver bilateral debt relief through the Paris Club of Official Bilateral Creditors to countries that have qualified for HIPC relief, with the majority—like the UK—providing 100 per cent. debt relief on their remaining bilateral debts.

Debt Relief

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she is making to the World bank to deliver deeper debt relief to countries with strong national education-for-all plans; and if she will make a statement. [33520]

Hilary Benn: The UK works closely with the World bank in implementing the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative. The revised framework provides faster, wider and deeper debt relief to poor countries committed to eradicating poverty. Up to US$100 billion debt could be written off for the 42 HIPC countries so reducing their debts by around two-thirds, on average, and freeing up resources for spending on poverty reduction. Last November, I met the World bank president, Jim Wolfensohn, at the annual meetings of the World bank and IMF, in Ottawa, to discuss debt and other development issues. I plan to hold further talks with both the bank and the Fund at the forthcoming spring meetings, in April.

The central focus of the Government's international development policy is a commitment to the Millennium Development Goals, which include universal access to primary education. Debt relief is a key element is meeting these goals. It is now widely recognised that there was a need to strengthen the link between debt relief and pro-poor policies. HIPC countries, and other poor countries, are now developing national poverty reduction strategies, setting out how they will tackle poverty and specifying how the debt relief savings, and other development resources—from multilateral and bilateral sources—will be used. For the 24 countries that have already qualified for HIPC debt relief, social expenditure is projected to rise by some $1.7 billion per year. On average, 40 per cent. of this increased social expenditure is being directed towards education. HIPC countries will spend much more on such priority social investments than on debt relief.

Secondments

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many staff were seconded between *(a)* PWC Consulting and PricewaterhouseCoopers, *(b)* Ernst & Young, *(c)* Deloitte & Touche, *(d)* KPMG and *(e)* Andersen and her Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33876]

Hilary Benn: No DFID staff have been seconded to these companies since 1999.

Education

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans the Government have to increase the aid budget to support education; whether the Government will press other countries to increase their aid budgets; and if she will make a statement. [31143]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

The Government remain focused on their long-term goal of helping to tackle global poverty, and achieve the internationally agreed millennium development goals by 2015 that include universal primary education for all children.

The UK Government have been at the forefront of the HIPC initiative that means the savings from debt relief can be used to develop comprehensive national poverty reduction strategies. Countries receiving HIPC debt relief have benefited from increased social spending of $1.7 billion in 2001–02, equivalent to 1.2 per cent. of GDP. And spending on education has accounted for 40 per cent. of the savings made on debt, equivalent to nearly $700 million in 2001–02.

The Government's commitment to poverty eradication means action beyond debt relief is needed, and they have increased the Budget of the Department for International Development (DfID) to £3.6 billion—a 45 per cent. increase in real terms between 1997–98 and 2003–04. Moreover, in his speech in New York and in his pre-Budget report speech, the Chancellor emphasised his commitment to ensuring further substantial increases in development assistance. The forthcoming Spending Review is an opportunity to consider plans for development spending beyond 2003–04, alongside other priorities and pressures.

The Government are also promoting a significant increase in development aid from all donor countries and international institutions to build capacity and address the long-term causes of poverty in the poorest countries. The Government have proposed an International Development Trust Fund to pool contributions and build on the work of the World bank, the International Monetary Fund and the regional development bank.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Power Pre-payment Meters

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many households in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* the Buckingham constituency have (i) electricity and (ii) gas pre-payment meters. [32185]

Mr. Wilson: Provisional estimates for the year 2001 (as at the end of September 2001) show there were 3.7 million electricity prepayment meter customers and 1.8 million gas prepayment meter customers in Great Britain. Of these, just under 3.2 million electricity prepayment meter customers and just over 1.6 million gas prepayment meter customers are in England and Wales.

The town of Buckingham falls in the east Midlands distribution network for electricity. There were 0.28 million electricity prepayment meter customers in this area as at September 2001. The town of Buckingham falls in the southern local distribution zone for gas. There were 0.09 million gas prepayment meter customers in this area as at September 2001.

The number of customers on gas and electricity prepayment meters in the Buckingham constituency will make up a small proportion of those on prepayment meters in the east midlands distribution network for electricity and the southern local distribution zone for gas. Data are not available to produce the numbers of customers on gas and electricity customers on prepayment meters in the Buckingham constituency.

Fuel Poverty

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the number of *(a)* people and *(b)* households in the Buckingham constituency that are in fuel poverty. [32183]

Mr. Wilson: Based on changes in incomes and fuel prices it is estimated that in 2000 there were 2.8 million households in fuel poverty in England (based on income including housing benefit and income support for mortgage interest), or 3.9 million households (based on income excluding housing benefit and income support for mortgage interest), representing falls of 15 per cent. and 13 per cent. respectively compared to 1998.

The following table presents estimates of the number of people and the number of households in England in fuel poverty in 1998, the latest year for which estimates of the number of people in fuel poverty are available. Figures are presented under both definitions of fuel poverty as set out in the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy, published on 21 November 2001.

Fuel poverty in England in 1998

Million

	People	*Households*
Fuel poverty defined using income including housing benefit and ISMI[1]	6.2	3.3
Fuel poverty defined using income excluding housing benefit and ISMI[2]	8.7	4.5

[1] Fuel poverty defined as when a household needs to spend more than 10 per cent. of its income (including housing benefit and income support for mortgage interest) on fuel in order to maintain a satisfactory heating regime.

[2] Fuel poverty defined as when a household needs to spend more than 10 per cent. of its income (excluding housing benefit and income support for mortgage interest) on fuel in order to maintain a satisfactory heating regime.

Source:

1998 Energy Follow Up Survey to the English House Condition Survey.

In 1998, it was estimated that 268,000 households in the region covered by the Government office for the south-east were in fuel poverty (based on income including housing benefit and income support for mortgage interest). This represents 8.3 per cent. of households in the south-east region and 8.2 per cent of all households in fuel poverty in England.

When income excluding housing benefit and income support for mortgage interest is considered, 406,000 households in the region covered by the Government office for the south-east were in fuel poverty (based on income including housing benefit and income support for mortgage interest). This represents 12.6 per cent. of households in the south-east region and 9.1 per cent. of all households in fuel poverty in England.

The numbers in fuel poverty in Buckingham will make up a small proportion of those in fuel poverty in the south-east Government office region. Data are not available centrally to produce estimates of fuel poverty in the Buckingham constituency.

Universal Bank

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what agreement has been reached with commercial banks on the charges to be levied on failed direct debits on basic bank accounts under the Universal bank. [32554]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* The banks have agreed to make their basic bank accounts accessible through post offices as part of universal banking services. Implementation of that agreement is now a commercial matter between Post Office Ltd. and the banks. The detailed features of these accounts are not part of the agreement on universal banking services. However, the Government have announced their intention to establish a benchmark CAT standard—covering charges, access and terms—for a basic bank account, and are still in discussion with the banks about these.

Miners' Compensation Scheme

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much money has been spent via the Miners' Compensation Scheme in every parliamentary constituency in Wales in each of the last seven months. [32848]

Mr. Wilson: The Department is not able to provide a constituency breakdown for each of the last seven months in the time available.

A breakdown of headline statistics for each constituency, as at the end of December 2001, is available on the Department's Coal Health Claims website www.dti.gov.uk/coalhealth. These figures are updated on a monthly basis.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much money has been spent via the Miners' Compensation Scheme in Wales in each of the last six months. [32850]

Mr. Wilson: As at 27 January 2002 the Department has paid out £121.6 million in Wales—£66.8 million on respiratory disease and £54.8 million on vibration white finger.

The breakdown for the previous six months is as follows:

£ million

	Respiratory disease	*VWF*	*Total damages paid in Wales*
During January 2002	4.8	2.4	7.2
During December 2001	2.8	1.6	4.4
During November 2001	6	2.4	8.4
During October 2001	4.5	3.8	8.3
During September 2001	2.9	2.9	5.8
During August 2001	3.1	2.1	5.2

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much money in the Miners' Compensation Scheme, allocated to be paid to successful applicants in Wales, was outstanding in each parliamentary constituency in Wales *(a)* this month and *(b)* in each of the previous six months. [32849]

Mr. Wilson: The coal compensation schemes do not have specific funds allocated to them. The Government have previously confirmed that they will meet the full cost no matter what the amount.

The Department expects the total cost of the liabilities for respiratory disease and vibration white finger, assumed from British Coal in January 1998, to be about £6 billion.

Employment Tribunal

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to introduce a fee for employees wishing to take their employers to an employment tribunal. [33005]

Alan Johnson: We have no plans to introduce such a fee. The Government Response to the "Routes to Resolution" consultation sets out the reasons for not taking forward the proposal to introduce a charging regime for employment tribunals. A copy of the Government Response has been lodged with the Libraries of the House.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the meetings she and her ministerial colleagues held with *(a)* Hugh Collum and *(b)* Norman Askew in 2001. [32237]

Mr. Wilson: Our records show that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry met Hugh Collum and Norman Askew on 13 March 2001, and Hugh Collum on 19 July 2001.

I met Hugh Collum and Norman Askew on the following dates in 2001:

Tuesday 13 March—Hugh Collum and Norman Askew
Wednesday 20 June—Hugh Collum and Norman Askew
Wednesday 18 July—Norman Askew only
Thursday 19 July—Norman Askew only
Tuesday 25 September—Hugh Collum and Norman Askew
Wednesday 31 October—Hugh Collum and Norman Askew
Thursday 15 November—Hugh Collum and Norman Askew
Tuesday 11 December—Hugh Collum and Norman Askew.

BNFL

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 15 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 153W, on BNFL, when officials in her Department first acquired information that BNFL was insolvent. [32796]

Mr. Wilson: 28 November 2001.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the results of ECGD's consultation on the establishment of a trading fund. [35050]

Ms Hewitt: In July 2000, the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced a target date for establishing a Trading Fund by 1 April 2002. In September, I launched a public consultation document on the establishment of a Trading Fund. I have today placed a copy of the report on the outcome of the consultation before the Libraries of both Houses.

The systems needed to operate the Trading Fund are not yet fully in place and have yet to be adequately tested. I have therefore decided that the original target date is no longer appropriate. In doing so, I have taken account of the responses received to the consultation, as well as a range of operational factors.

I remain committed to the preferred course of capitalisation in the longer term. In the meantime, ECGD is giving priority to its business and systems. I shall make a further announcement in due course.

Independent Petrol Retailers

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many independent petrol retailers have operated in England and Wales in each of the past five years. [32236]

Mr. Wilson: The Institute of Petroleum's (IP) annual "UK Retail Marketing Survey" (last published in March 2001) provides data on the total number of petrol retail outlets in operation in the UK.

The following table, using the IP data, shows the number of petrol retail outlets in operation in England and Wales which were not branded either by a major oil company or a hypermarket chain and thus provides some measure of the number of independent retailers. Dealers who sell major oil company branded fuel are excluded by this method. In the last three of these years, some sites have been identified as "unbranded", and are identified separately in the table. In the year 2000, no regional breakdown of the unbranded sites was given.

	Branded	*Unbranded*	*Total*
England			
1996	3,056	—	3,056
1997	3,741	—	3,741
1998	2,709	295	3,004
1999	2,860	468	3,328
2000	2,387	[1]468	2,855
Wales			
1996	359	—	359
1997	224	—	224
1998	239	112	351
1999	208	134	342
2000	172	[1]134	306

[1] On the 2000 survey, no regional breakdown of unbranded sites was given. As the UK total of unbranded sites was virtually unchanged, (1999:867, 2000:866), it has been assumed for the purposes of the table that the unbranded numbers in England and Wales were also unchanged.

Redundancy Payments

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans there are to increase the maximum weekly pay figure used when calculating redundancy payments in 2002. [33731]

Alan Johnson: The maximum amount of a week's pay to be taken into account for the calculation of statutory redundancy payments was increased from £240 per week to £250 per week from 1 February 2002.

Federal Mogul

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what Government assistance has been made available to Federal Mogul at *(a)* its UK plants and *(b)* its Sunderland plant in the last five years. [33739]

Alan Johnson: Regional Selective Assistance has been made available to the following:

(a) Federal Mogul Eurofriction Ltd. (Scotland), offered £300,000 in December 1999 and Federal Mogul Global Growth Ltd. (West Midlands), offered £1.2 million in September 2001.

(b) Federal Mogul TP Sunderland Ltd., offered £550,000 in January 2001, but no payments have been made.

In addition, payments have been made to Federal Mogul Eurofriction Ltd. for an offer made in 1995.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Women's Unit

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Minister for Women how many staff have been assigned to the Women's Unit. [33058]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The Women's Unit was created in 1998. Its staff for the first financial year of its existence (1998–99) was 45. The unit was renamed the Women and Equality Unit following last year's general election in order to recognise its new policy responsibilities across the United Kingdom for gender equality, co-ordination of sexual orientation policy and its sponsorship of the Equal Opportunities Commission. Its current staffing level stands at 63.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Recesses

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the President of the Council if he will make a statement on his proposals for the reform of the length and timing of parliamentary recesses. [32467]

Mr. Robin Cook: As I stated in my memorandum to the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons, I would like to see greater certainty about the timing of parliamentary adjournments, a closer relationship between adjournments and school holidays, and a rearrangement of business to reduce the length of the summer period during which Parliament does not sit, while maintaining the current balance between sitting and non-sitting weeks.

February Recess

Mr. Pope: To ask the President of the Council what *(a)* evidence he considered and *(b)* local education authorities he consulted on school half term holidays before announcing the dates of the February recess. [32172]

Mr. Robin Cook: Before announcing the dates of the February adjournment I consulted the Department for Education and Skills to establish which dates were likely to coincide with the majority of half term holidays. I recognise, however, that such holidays vary across the country, and regret it is impossible to satisfy all hon. Members.

Public Bodies (Contracts)

Mr. Forth: To ask the President of the Council if he will list the appointments made by his Department since 1 May 1997 of chairmen of *(a)* non-departmental public bodies, *(b)* commissions, *(c)* inquiries, *(d)* agencies and *(e)* task forces; and if he will list their (i) term of office, (ii) salary and (iii) known political affiliation (A) past and (B) present. [33878]

Mr. Robin Cook: My Department is not responsible for any NDPBs, commissions, inquiries, agencies or task forces and has not made any such appointments during the period mentioned.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Afghanistan

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his US counterparts regarding the treatment of al-Qaeda prisoners captured in Afghanistan. [28339]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are in close contact with the US as the detaining power. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary raised the treatment of those detained by the US in Afghanistan with Colin Powell during his visit to Washington on 31 January and 1 February, and again made it clear that detainees should be treated humanely and in accordance with international norms. The US authorities have said that the detainees are being treated humanely and consistently with the principles of the Geneva Convention.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people in his Department worked on Afghanistan in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000, *(c)* 2001 and *(d)* January 2002; and on what tasks and in which policy areas they were deployed. [33762]

Mr. Bradshaw *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* FCO staff working on core Afghanistan-related issues in 1999, 2000, 2001 and January 2002 were four, four, between 19 to 30 and 24 respectively. The staff were working mainly on political and economic matters.

An additional 235 FCO staff worked at various times on a variety of crisis-related work between 11 September and the end of 2001. This figure does not include staff already in the relevant front-line geographical and functional department. It is not possible to give a precise number given the cross-cutting nature of the crisis and the breadth of the FCO's response to it.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his European counterparts on the future of Afghanistan. [34004]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary maintains regular dialogue with his European counterparts on the future of Afghanistan. He met EU Foreign Ministers on 28 January at the General Affairs Council in Brussels, and is attending an informal meeting of EU Foreign Ministers on 8–9 February in Caceres, Spain.

Gibraltar

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the strategic importance of the United Kingdom retaining its existing role in Gibraltar. [31874]

Peter Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by the Minister of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram), to my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) on 14 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 741W.

EU Top Secret Documents

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to limit foreign travel by Commission officials with access to EU top secret documents; and if he will list the countries to which paragraph 6 of 19.6 of Com Doc 2001/844/EC refers. [illegible]2707]

Peter Hain: Com 2001/844 19.6 (d) refers to the rules governing travel by officials of the European Commission. The Commission does not currently hold any EU top secret documents.

There is no formal list of countries likely to present a risk to staff cleared for EU top secret access. As in the UK, decisions are taken at departmental level in the light of prevailing circumstances, and staff cleared to EU top secret would be warned to seek approval before travelling to any country likely to present a particular risk. At present the only travel advice given to officials concerns individual safety.

Liberia

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy toward Liberia; what assessment he has made of the impact of sanctions; and when he expects them to be lifted. [32716]

Mr. MacShane: Liberia continues to threaten stability in the Mano River sub-region and undermine progress towards lasting peace in Sierra Leone. A UN report published in December 2000 highlighted President Taylor's financial and military support for the RUF rebels trying to overthrow the Government of Sierra Leone. The UN demanded that Liberia cut its links with the armed rebel groups. In May 2001, with strong UK support, the UNSC imposed sanctions on Liberia including a renewed arms embargo, a ban on the export of uncut diamonds and a travel ban on President Taylor and his associates. We believe the sanctions should remain in place until there is clear evidence that Taylor has fundamentally changed his behaviour.

Turkey

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in how many business ventures British Trade International has assisted in Turkey during the last two years. [32984]

Mr. Straw: There are no complete records of companies who have benefited from British Trade International assistance in Turkey. The Turkey Trade Unit (TTU) of Trade Partners UK maintains a database of approximately 3,000 active records compiled initially from those companies who participated in the various activities of the "Turkey: Positioned for Business" promotional campaign, which occurred between 1998 and 2001.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what schemes exist to promote British investment in Turkey; and if he will make a statement as to their effect. [32985]

Mr. Straw: British companies are able to access the full range of Trade Partners UK services when developing their business overseas. Information on these services can be found on the Trade Partners website (www.tradepartners.gov.uk). These services make no distinction between companies which are trading and those which are seeking to invest.

UK trade with Turkey has developed into a two way business of approximately £3 billion a year. Exports were down in 2001 as a result of the Turkish economic slowdown but are still expected to be around £1.2 billion while imports are expected to reach £1.8 billion. The UK was the fifth largest foreign investor in Turkey in 2001, with an investment stock of some £2.3 billion.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what safeguards British Trade International has in place to protect the interests of British investors in Turkey. [32989]

Mr. Straw: The UK has an agreement for the promotion and protection of investments with the Republic of Turkey, which entered into force on 22 October 1996. That agreement provides British investors with certain rights in respect of their investments in Turkey, including the right to treatment no less favourable than that accorded by the Turkish Government to Turkish investments or the investment of the nationals in Turkey of any third state. In the event of a dispute arising between the Turkish Government and a British investor in respect of a British investment in Turkey, the British investor has the right to submit the dispute to international arbitration under the jurisdiction of the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many complaints the British embassy in Ankara has received from British *(a)* companies and *(b)* individuals investing in Turkey in the last two years. [32986]

Mr. Straw: The British embassy in Ankara has received very few complaints. The embassy and its consulates have, however, given advice and support to a number of British companies and individuals on how best to pursue administrative or licensing problems with the Turkish authorities, and referred such inquirers to independent legal advice when necessary.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many business ventures which were originally assisted by British Trade International are subject to legal proceedings in Turkey. [32988]

Mr. Straw: We do not know the numbers of business ventures originally assisted by British Trade International, which are subject to legal proceedings in Turkey, nor could such information be provided, if at all, except at disproportionate cost. Any companies who are likely to need to resort to law are encouraged to seek the advice of the British embassy in Ankara or its consulates where they may benefit from British Trade International assistance.

In the event of a commercial dispute the plaintiff is directed to seek independent legal advice and to pursue their claim through the appropriate channels.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans the Government have to promote British investment in Turkey. [32987]

Mr. Straw: The British Government give high priority to Turkey in their trade development activities but no special plans exist to promote Turkey as a destination for UK investment. HM Government have been assisting the Turkish Government with their plans to improve the environment for foreign direct investment in Turkey.

As part of this, in January 2002 the Deputy Director-General of Foreign Investment from the Turkish Treasury, Mrs. Emil, visited the UK as a guest of HM Government to look at UK experience of promoting inward investment and regional development.

Secondments (Energy Industry)

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many staff were seconded between *(a)* BP, *(b)* Shell, *(c)* Enron, *(d)* Exxon-Mobil, *(e)* Conoco, *(f)* Texaco and *(g)* TotalFinaElf and his Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33202]

Mr. MacShane: Three FCO officers were seconded to BP during 1999–2000, one officer from 2000–01 and one officer from 2001 to present date. A representative from Shell has been seconded to our embassy in Tripoli from June 2001 to June 2002 under the short-term business attachment scheme (STBAS). No officers were seconded to/from Enron, Exxon-Mobil, Conoco, Texaco or TotalFinaElf.

Iran

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with Iran. [33634]

Mr. Bradshaw: The UK has, through critical engagement, aimed to support reform in Iran while maintaining a robust dialogue on issues of concern.

EU Committee of the Regions

Mr. Hendrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the United Kingdom's representation on the European Union's Committee of the Regions. [34926]

Peter Hain: We have submitted to the Council Secretariat details of the United Kingdom's 24 nominees for full membership of the Committee of the Regions, along with 24 alternate nominees. They are:

UK delegation to the committee of the regions

Nominees	
Full members	
Muriel Barker	North East Lincolnshire (Unitary) District
Derek Boden	Leader of the North West Regional Assembly
Ken Bodfish OBE	Leader of Brighton and Hove city council
Sir Albert Bore	Leader of Birmingham city council
Keith Brown	Leader of Clackmannanshire council
Rosemary Butler AM	National Assembly for Wales, Newport West
Ruth Coleman	Executive Member of North Wiltshire county council
Michael Davey	Leader of Northumberland county council
Sir Simon Day	Chairman of Devon county council
Margaret Eaton	Leader of Bradford metropolitan borough council
Baroness (Joan) Hanham	London borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Lord Hanningfield	Essex county council
Gordon Keymer	Leader of Tanbridge district council
Christine May	Leader of Fife council

UK delegation to the committee of the regions

Nominees	
Peter Moore	Liberal Democrat Leader of Sheffield metropolitan borough council
Dermot Nesbitt MLA	Junior Minister in the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
Alban Maginness MLA	Northern Ireland Assembly
Irene Oldfather MSP	Scottish Parliament, Cunninghame South
Dame Sally Powell	London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham
Brian Smith	Torfaen county borough council
Nicol Stephen MSP	Scottish Deputy Minister for Education and Young People
The hon. Joan Taylor	Nottinghamshire county council
Lord Tope CBE	Liberal Democrat Leader of the Greater London Assembly
Milner Whiteman	Bridgnorth district council
Alternate members	
Jennette Arnold	Member of the Greater London Assembly
Joan Ashton	Independent Group Leader and Deputy Leader of Boston district council
Ruth Bagnall	Labour Group Leader of Cambridge city council
Olive Brown	Leader of Wear Valley district council
Diane Bunyan	Deputy Leader of Bristol city council
Flo Cluclas	Liverpool city council
Hugh Halcro-Johnston MSP	Convener, Orkney Islands council and Vice-President of COSLA
Dr. Ruth Henig CBE	Chair of Lancashire police authority
Jonathan Huish	Rhondda Cynon Taff county borough council
Elin Jones	Assembly Member for Ceredigion
Susie Kemp	Opposition Leader of West Berkshire county council
Lord Tarsem King	Mayor of Sandwell district council
Sue Sida Lockett	Conservative Group Leader of Suffolk county council
Corrie McChord	Leader of Stirling council
Jack McConnell MSP	First Minister
Irene McGugan MSP	Shadow spokesperson for children and education
Bob Neill	Member of the Greater London Assembly, Bexley and Bromley
Margaret Ritchie	District councillor, Down district council
George Savage MLA	Northern Ireland Assembly, Upper Bann
David Shakespeare	Leader of Buckinghamshire county council
Shirley Smart	Leader of Isle of Wight unitary council
Jim Speechley CBE	Leader of Lincolnshire county council
Liz Tucker	Liberal Democrat Leader of Worcestershire county council
Sir Ron Watson CBE	Sefton metropolitan borough council

DEFENCE

A400M

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will extend the deadlines for a final decision on the A400M. [33089]

Dr. Moonie: Representatives of the eight participating nations met on 31 January to discuss the latest position on A400M. We continue to work constructively with our partners on ways to bring the project to fruition as soon as possible. One option is to extend the deadline for Germany to secure its necessary approvals.

Nancekuke

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1118W, on Nancekuke, what anecdotal evidence he has implying nerve agent production plant built at Nancekuke contained equipment originating from Germany. [33694]

Dr. Moonie: As I indicated in my earlier answer of 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1118W, there are no surviving records which detail the origin of equipment and materials used at the Chemical Defence Establishment, Nancekuke.

However, it is known that equipment was brought back to the UK from Germany after World War II and that some of this was used to set up the nerve agent pilot plant at Sutton Oak. It is probable that some of this equipment was subsequently transferred to Nancekuke, but there is no surviving documentary evidence.

Public-Private Partnerships

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the PPPs in which his Department is engaged. [34399]

Mr. Ingram: PPPs cover a wide range of acquisition techniques from major partnering arrangements and PFI to a wide range of smaller scale service contracts. The Ministry of Defence only holds centrally comprehensive records for projects involving PFI.

To date 42 PFI deals have been signed as follows:

White Fleet (Support Vehicles) in Germany

Special Storage Facilities

Hazardous Stores Information System

Materials Handling Equipment

Training Administration and Financial Management System (TAFMIS)

RAF White Fleet (Support Vehicles)

Defence Helicopter Flying Training School

Tidworth Water and Sewerage

Hawk Aircrew Training Simulator

Electronic Messaging Service (Armymail)

Defence Fixed Telecommunications Services

Medium Support Helicopter Aircrew Training Facility

Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency
Joint Services Command and Staff College
RAF Lyneham Sewerage
RAF Fylingdales Power Supply
Yeovilton Family Quarters
RAF Mail
RAF Cosford/Shawbury Family Quarters
RAF Lossiemouth Family Quarters
Attack Helicopter Training
Light Aircraft Flying Training
Central Scotland Family Quarters
Naval Recruitment and Training Agency Fire Fighter Training
Tornado GR4 Aircrew Simulator Training
Army Foundation College
Defence Intelligence Service Information Technology
Commercial Satellite Communication Service
Tri-Service Materials Handling
Defence Animal Centre
RAF Sentry E3D Aircrew Simulator Training
Lynx Aircrew Simulator Training
Defence Electronic Commerce Service
Main Building Headquarters
Royal Navy Communications Service
Tri-Service White Fleet (Support Vehicles)
Wattisham Family Quarters
Defence Housing Executive Information System
Astute Class Submarine Crew Simulator Training
Bristol, Bath and Portsmouth Family Quarters
Heavy Equipment Transporter
Marine Support to Range and Aircrew Services.

Three other projects have reached the preferred bidder stage. These are as follows:

Colchester Garrison
Field Electrical Power Supplies
Roll-on Roll-off Strategic Sealift.

Invitations to negotiate have been issued for the following:

"C" (Earthmoving and Construction) Vehicles
Armoured Vehicle (Synthetic) Training Service
Army Training Estate Strategic Partnering
Devonport Support Services
Flight Simulation and Synthetic Trainers
Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft
Materials Handling Equipment (Follow on)
MOD-wide Water and Wastewater (Project Aquatrine)—Package A
Northwood Headquarters Support Services
Records Storage and Management (Hayes PPP Project)
Royal School of Military Engineers
Royal School of Signals
Skynet 5 Satellite Communications
Tri-Service Airfield Support Services.

The following projects have been advertised:

Accommodation Services on Cyprus
Air Traffic Control Services
Combined Aerial Target Service
Defence Sixth Form College
Interim Storage of Laid Up Submarines (ISOLUS)
MOD-wide Water and Wastewater (Project Aquatrine) Packages B and C
Pan Defence High Frequency Communications Service.

Nuclear Materials

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much *(a)* uranium and *(b)* plutonium is owned by this country. [31706]

Mr. Hoon: As stated in the Strategic Defence Review, Supporting Essay Five, the Ministry of Defence owns 21.9 tonnes of highly enriched uranium, 15,000 tonnes of other forms of uranium, and 7.6 tonnes of plutonium.

Army Cadet Force (South Tyneside)

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many recruits there were to the Army Cadet Force in south Tyneside in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [32094]

Dr. Moonie: Cadet recruitment figures are not held in the form requested. It is usual, however, for cadet detachments to recruit about 80 per cent. of their total strength each year. For the south Tyneside detachments this equates to approximately 100 new cadets each year.

Outreach Schemes

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what support his Department *(a)* is giving and *(b)* will give in future years to the schemes for young offenders run by the Army Cadet Force leadership as Outreach. [33302]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The Outreach Project is run by the Army Cadet Force Association (ACFA) and aims to provide vulnerable and problem youngsters with the chance to develop a better attitude towards themselves and their communities. The programmes are run through the Army Cadet Force, in partnership with schools, local authorities and the police service, and offer challenging, adventure based activities.

The Ministry of Defence is pleased to support such a worthwhile scheme and since its launch in 1996 we have given the project £114,400 annually. We will continue to provide support in the future. Last year the Home Office committed £60,000 annually to the project for at least the next two years and the Youth Justice Board is also giving the ACFA a one-off grant of £60,000 for facilities support. In addition, Army facilities are made available to the project at no cost.

Armed Forces Pension Scheme

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many local discussion groups were held to gather views and opinions on the proposed changes to the Armed Forces Pension Scheme up to 31 December 2001. [33700]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence held 17 focus groups during the initial research phase of the review. These took place in the south-east of England during November and December 1999 and covered all three services. During the consultation period (March 2001 to end July 2001), discussion groups took place at seven Army units, five Navy units and five RAF units throughout the country. Discussions were also held with ex-service organisations, such as the Confederation of British Service and Ex-Service Organisations (COBSEO), the Forces Pension Society, and the War Widows Association.

Warships

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if HMS Bulwark will have *(a)* a full crew complement, *(b)* full aircraft load, *(c)* vehicles and *(d)* a complete set of equipment when she comes into service; and if he will make a statement. [32158]

Dr. Moonie: At her planned in-service date of December 2003, HMS Bulwark will provide a significant improvement in capability over her predecessor.

She will have a crew complement to enable her to conduct her trials and work-up periods and to fulfil her design capability when she becomes operational.

There has never been a requirement for Bulwark to be equipped with her own organic aircraft. Aircraft will be embarked when they are required.

When she enters service Bulwark will have a complete set of the necessary equipment. She will also have four landing craft utility, four of the smaller landing craft vehicle and personnel and a hippo (the new armoured beach recovery vehicle which is due to enter service in 2003).

Arthur Andersen

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contracts he has with Arthur Andersen; when they were placed; how long they have to run; and what is their *(a)* individual and *(b)* total value. [33091]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has two current contracts with Arthur Andersen. Contract number DPT/2002 was placed in October 2000 and is due to complete in 2002. Contract number CP(PI)025/1 was placed in January 2002 and is due to complete in January 2006.

In addition, Andersen provides Secretariat support to the Review Board for Government Contracts. There are no plans to terminate this support, as the company provides crucial continuity to a review of the Government Profit Formula that is currently being undertaken by the Treasury.

Finally, there is some outstanding work for orders placed under a framework arrangement, for which the tasking period has now closed.

The values of individual contracts are withheld under Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, but the total value of the extant contracts is around £7 million.

RAF Bases

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the station operating budget was for each RAF base in the UK in the last year for which figures are available. [32445]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* The table shows the RAF operating budgets for each of the UK RAF stations for financial year 2001–02. It does not include former RAF stations that have retained their name but which have been transferred to the ownership of another part of the Ministry of Defence.

£ million

Station name	*Operating costs*
RAF Bentley Priory	5.9
RAF Boscombe Down (Support Unit)	5.6
RAF Boulmer	22.2
RAF Brampton/Wyton	24.6
RAF Brize Norton	144.7
RAF Buchan	19.9
RAF Coltishall	66.2
RAF Coningsby	56.6
RAF Cosford	62.3
RAF Cottesmore	55.4
RAFC Cranwell	97.3
RAF Donna Nook	0.30
RAF Fylingdales	15.7
RAF Halton	31.0
RAF Henlow	12.3
RAF Holbeach	0.66
RAF High Wycombe	15.8
RAF Honington	71.8
RAF Innsworth	14.0
RAF Kinloss	112.4
RAF Leeming	64.1
RAF Leuchars	60.5
RAF Linton-on-Ouse	29.0
RAF Lossiemouth	96.5
RAF Lyneham	126.3
FSCTE Manston	4.5
RAF Marham	95.6
RAF Neatishead	14.1
RAF Northolt	20.4
RAF Pembrey Sands	0.25
RAF Shawbury	21.7
RAF Spadeadam	7.0
RAF Stafford	31.4
RAF St. Mawgan	45.7
RAF Tain	0.93
RAF Uxbridge	11.1
RAF Valley	30.7
RAF Waddington	77.2
RAF Wainfleet	0.52
RAF Wittering	48.4
RNAS Yeovilton	16.6

The figures given in the table include the budget for any minor unit for which the station is responsible.

Long Service Pay

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to reduce the over 35 years of age restriction on accessibility to the long service advance of pay for Army and RAF personnel to over the age of 23. [33764]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* There are no plans at present to reduce the qualifying age for Army and RAF personnel, but the implications of doing so are being reviewed.

Tornado F3

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) where the Tornado F3s from RAF Coningsby will be based when 5 Squadron is declared down in January 2003; with which squadron they will be available for operational duty; and if he will make a statement; [33642]

(2) how many Tornado F3s will be based at *(a)* RAF Leeming, *(b)* RAF Leuchars, *(c)* RAF Coningsby and *(d)* other sites in February 2003; and if he will make a statement. [33641]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* Aircraft from 5 Squadron will be re-distributed across the balance of the Tornado F3 fleet. The specific details of where all these aircraft will be relocated have yet to be finalised. All aircraft will remain available for operational duty.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Tornado F3s are based at *(a)* RAF Leeming, *(b)* RAF Leuchars, *(c)* RAF Coningsby and *(d)* other sites; and if he will make a statement. [33643]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* The number of Tornado F3 aircraft allocated to the stations in question is currently: RAF Coningsby 37, RAF Leeming 28 and RAF Leuchars 28. Operational aircraft are not based at any other stations.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Tornado F3s are on loan to Italy; when they will be returned; where they will be based and with which squadron when returned; and if he will make a statement. [33644]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* There are 24 Tornado F3 aircraft on loan to Italy all of which will be returned by December 2004. Their future on return is yet to be decided.

HMS Gannet

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the current establishment of civil search and rescue capability will be maintained at HMS Gannet, Prestwick after MOD withdrawal from the site. [33936]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* The Ministry of Defence are not withdrawing from HMS Gannet at Prestwick. HMS Gannet will remain a base for Royal Navy Search and Rescue helicopters, which will respond to civil incidents when tasked by the Air Rescue Co-ordination Centre.

Afghanistan

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what instructions British special forces have received from his Department on the transfer of prisoners to US forces. [33608]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* I am withholding this information under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. Operational instructions are confidential, and are consistent with the United Kingdom's obligations under international law.

Aircraft

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 18 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 502W, whether C-17s have since then been used to transport cargo into Afghanistan; and whether another Antonov has been chartered since then. [34353]

Mr. Ingram: The C-17 aircraft has been used since 18 January to transport cargo into Afghanistan and, under current plans, will continue to do so for the duration of the operation. Given the time scale and size of the task, we have continued to charter Antonovs since 18 January to supplement the RAF's airlift effort to deploy the UK's contribution to the International Security Assistance Force.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what evidence he has of a threat to the C-130K in Afghanistan from small arms fire. [33099]

Mr. Ingram: While we have no recorded incidents of small arms fire being directed at C-130Ks flying into Afghanistan, such an incident cannot be ruled out. Force protection measures appropriate to this threat have therefore been put in place.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will fit lighting to the flight deck of the C-130Ks operational in Afghanistan which is compatible with night vision goggles; and what the cost is of fitting NVG compatible lighting to the C-130K. [33095]

Dr. Moonie: Details on the ability of the C-130K fleet to operate in low light could provide a potential adversary with information that could undermine our defence capabilities. This information is therefore withheld in accordance with Exemption 1 (Defence, Security and International Relations) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

The cost of fitting night vision goggle compatible lighting to the C-130K is of the order of £80,000 per aircraft (VAT exclusive).

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had about fitting flight deck armour to the C-130Ks operational in Afghanistan. [33093]

Mr. Ingram: The level of protection employed on the Hercules fleet could provide a potential adversary with information that could undermine our defence capabilities. I am therefore withholding this information in accordance with Exemption 1 (Defence, Security and International Relations) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to *(a)* lease further C-17s and *(b)* charter further Antonovs. [33090]

Mr. Ingram: We have no current plans to lease further C-17s. We will continue to charter Antonov 124 aircraft as our strategic transport requirements dictate.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost of fitting flight deck armour to the C-130K is. [33094]

Dr. Moonie: The cost is in the order of £150,000 per aircraft.

Jaguar Engine Upgrade

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the customer specifications requested for the upgrade of the Jaguar engine Adour 104; and if he will make a statement. [34019]

Mr. Ingram: The Jaguar Adour Mk 106 weapon system specification includes an extensive and detailed engine technical specification. Much of the content is provided by industry under a confidentiality agreement which prevents the Ministry of Defence releasing the information to any third party. The information requested is withheld in accordance with Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information which relates to third party commercial confidences.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will indicate in percentage terms the operational performance and operability of the *(a)* upgraded Jaguar engines Adour 104 and *(b)* the pre-upgraded Jaguar engines; and if he will make a statement. [34020]

Mr. Ingram: In percentage terms, taking the current Adour Mk 104 engine performance as 100 per cent., the upgraded Adour Mk 106 engine provides an increase in thrust generating a performance level of 105 per cent. This increase enables the Jaguar aircraft to operate more effectively in hot climates and improves engine reliability.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the upgrade of the Adour 104 engine will be sufficient for the current and projected weapons payload; if a further upgrade of the Jaguar engine will be required before the end of the projected in-service lifespan; and if he will make a statement. [34021]

Mr. Ingram: The Adour Mk 106 engine, which is the upgraded version of the Mk 104, will allow the Jaguar aircraft to meet its current and projected role for the remainder of its in-service life. No further engine upgrades are planned.

Departmental Underspend

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total underspend in his Department was on *(a)* capital and *(b)* non-capital expenditure in each financial year since May 1997. [34025]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the following appropriation accounts, which provide the data requested. Copies of these are available in the Library of the House.

Appropriation Accounts 1997–98 Vol 1: Class 1 MOD, 26 Nov 1998, pps 10, 11, 12, (Vote 1) pps 23 and 31 (Vote 2) and p 32 (Vote 3).

Appropriation Accounts 1998–99 Vol 1: Class 1 MOD, 19 Jan 2000, pps 10, 11, 12, (Vote 1) pps 23 and 29 (Vote 2) and p 30 (Vote 3).

Appropriation Accounts 1999–2000 Vol 6: Class VI MOD, 24 Jan 2001, pps 9–11 (Vote 1).

Appropriation Accounts 2000–2001 Vol 6: Class VI MOD, 23 Nov 2001, pps 11–14 (Vote 1).

KFOR

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military personnel, and of what nationalities, were *(a)* directly and *(b)* indirectly under British command in KFOR on 1 January each year since June 1999. [34110]

Mr. Ingram: The Commander of the Multi-National Brigade (Centre) is the senior British officer in KFOR. He had the following personnel under his operational control during the subject periods.

Countries	*1 January 2000*	*1 January 2001*	*1 January 2002*
United Kingdom	2,112	3,353	2,889
Canada	914	—	—
Czech Republic	162	170	168
Finland	680	816	957
Sweden	709	768	767
Norway	961	1,010	999
Latvia	—	5	10

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether members of the Royal Military Police are stationed in Kosovo. [34113]

Mr. Ingram: 45 members of 110 Provost Company are currently stationed in Kosovo.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British military personnel, and of what ranks, were directly under the command of personnel of other nationalities in KFOR on 1 January each year since June 1999. [34112]

Mr. Ingram: British military personnel in KFOR are under the operational command of the UK Chief of Joint Operations. Operational control of most elements of the UK contribution is delegated to Commander KFOR, who has not been a UK officer since October 1999. Some individuals are seconded to posts in the NATO chain of command, where they come under more direct day to day command of a non-UK officer. The information cannot be provided in the form requested, however the table gives details available from records held.

Year	*HQ KFOR Kosovo*	*HQ KFOR Fyrom*
September 2000	46	12
February 2001	48	17
January 2002	35	16

Details of rank are not available, but the majority will be officers.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the arrangements are for the command and control of British personnel seconded to UN policing duties in Kosovo; and if he will make a statement. [34114]

Mr. Ingram: There are no UK military personnel currently conducting UN policing duties in Kosovo. However, there are currently Ministry of Defence police officers deployed in Kosovo as part of the UK Government commitment to the United Nations International Civil Policing Mission (UNMIK). The command and control arrangements for these officers are the responsibility of the United Nations Police Commissioner in Kosovo.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many civilian personnel, and of what nationality, were contracted *(a)* directly and *(b)* indirectly to British forces in KFOR on 1 January each year since June 1999. [34111]

Mr. Ingram: The numbers of locally employed civilians engaged by UK forces in Kosovo are as follows:

Year	*Locally employed civilians*
1 January 2000	875
1 January 2001	628
1 January 2002	660

Records held do not indicate ethnic origin but the vast majority would be Kosovars.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Remuneration

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will estimate the number of individuals in his *(a)* Department, *(b)* related agencies and *(c)* related non-departmental public bodies whose annual remuneration including benefits in kind exceeded (i) £100,000 and (ii) £200,000 in each of the last four years. [26319]

Dr. Whitehead: Information on remuneration for senior staff is shown in the individually published audited accounts. Remuneration in respect of the financial year 2000–01 salaries are to be published in the DETR Resource Accounts, which are to be laid before Parliament by 31 January 2002.

In respect of *(a)* and *(b)* , in each of the three earlier years 1997–98 to 1999–2000, one individual in DETR and one individual in the agencies received more than £100,000 but less than £200,000. Annual remuneration includes basic salary, allowances, bonuses and taxable benefits in kind. It does not include pension benefits.

In respect of *(c)* on NDPBs, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 253W.

Ministerial Transport

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the cost of *(a)* ministerial cars and drivers and *(b)* taxis for his Department in each of the last four years. [27909]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 30 January 2002 by the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, *Official Report*, columns 405–06W.

Information on the cost of taxis by the Department is not held centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, officials should use the most cost effective method when travelling on official business.

Euro

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assistance has been made available to local authorities to issue the payment of *(a)* bills and *(b)* services in euros and what discussions he has had with (i) local government representatives and (ii) the Treasury to review the limit set for local authorities regarding collection of their income in non-sterling. [29693]

Dr. Whitehead: Details of the Government's preparations for the introduction of euro cash in the euro area from 1 January 2002 are contained in the Fifth Report on Euro Preparations. We recently drew local authorities' attention to the treatment of euro payments, making it clear that, as is the case with other major international currencies, it is a matter for individual authorities whether or not to accept payments for bills and services in non-sterling. There is no limit set for local authorities regarding the collection of their income in non-sterling.

Rail Strategic Plan

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether the £33.5 billion contribution to the costs of the SRA Strategic Plan by the public sector includes the public subsidy payments to the train operating companies. [30257]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) on 29 January 2000, *Official Report*, columns 177–78W.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West of 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 53W, what discussions he expects to have regarding aspects of the Strategic Rail Authority's strategic plan that directly relate to Scotland; [32607]

(2) pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West of 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 53W, whether the Strategic Rail Authority has sought to have discussions with him with regards to aspects of the Strategic Rail Authority's strategic plan that directly relate to Scotland. [32697]

Mr. Jamieson: Ministers and officials meet regularly with the Strategic Rail Authority to discuss rail issues including those that directly relate to Scotland.

Abandoned Vehicles

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects to publish the result of the recent consultation on abandoned vehicles. [31506]

Mr. Jamieson: The DTLR/DEFRA consultation closed on 31 January. The Government expect to publish the outcome of the consultation shortly.

Rail Delays

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what record is kept of the total length in minutes of service delays on Britain's railways; what plans there are to change the method of recording and reporting delays and cancellations; and what assessment is made of the total cost of Britain's railways in terms of *(a)* customer time and *(b)* cost to British business. [31523]

Mr. Jamieson: As to the first part of the question, Railtrack keep records of delay minutes. As to the second part, there are no plans to change the current method of recording and reporting delays and cancellations. As to the third part I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 734W.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 524W, if he will place in the Library information on how many trains for each train operating company running London commuter services arrived late by *(a)* more than five minutes and *(b)* more than 10 minutes in each four week period from May 1997 to January 2002, distinguishing between (i) peak and (ii) off-peak periods caused by *(a)* Railtrack and *(b)* train operating companies. [31478]

Mr. Jamieson: The information is not available in the form requested.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 524W, if he will place in the Library information on how many trains for each train operating company running London commuter services arrived late by *(a)* more than five minutes and *(b)* more than 10 minutes in each month from January 2000 to January 2002, distinguishing between (i) peak and (ii) off-peak. [31487]

Mr. Jamieson: The information is not available in the form requested.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 524W, if he will *(a)* place in the Library and *(b)* publish on the Strategic Rail Authority website the monthly punctuality of train operating companies; [31479]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 524W, if he will place in the Library information on how many trains for each train operating company arrived late by *(a)* more than five minutes and *(b)* more than 10 minutes in each four week period from May 1997 to January 2002, distinguishing between delays caused by (i) Railtrack and (ii) train operating companies. [31480]

Mr. Jamieson: The information is not available in the form requested.

Train Operating Companies

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 787W, on train operating companies, if he will provide details of the most recent advice from the Strategic Rail Authority to which his Department has had regard; and how often the Strategic Rail Authority monitors the performance of train operating company parent companies. [31592]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority monitors the performance of train operating companies, and their parent companies, on a continuous basis.

Public Highway Closures

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list those public highways which have been permanently closed without due process in the last five years. [31977]

Mr. Spellar: We have no record of cases over the last five years of public highways which have been permanently closed without due process.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions under what common law powers the police can permanently close a public highway to pedestrian and vehicular access. [31980]

Mr. Spellar: The police do not have powers to close a public highway permanently under common law. They do, however, have powers under section 67 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to close a road or restrict its use by vehicles for up to seven days in emergencies.

A highway may only be closed permanently by an order made by a magistrates court under section 116 of the Highways Act 1980 or, to facilitate development, by a competent authority under the provisions of sections 247 or 257 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

Government Offices (Access)

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) under what statutory powers it is possible to seek redress for the closure of pedestrian access between St. James's Park and Downing street; [31975]

(2) what public notice has been given by the Metropolitan police for the permanent closure of Downing street to pedestrian and vehicular access. [31950]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 538W.

Airport Rail Links

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) of 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 54W, on airport rail links, what involvement he plans to have in the detailed economic and engineering studies being led by the Scottish Executive. [32604]

Mr. Jamieson: The studies are for the Scottish Executive to take forward with the other organisations to which I referred in my previous answer.

Local Authority Housing

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the total amount of money spent in real terms was by local authorities on housing repairs in each of the last 10 years. [30476]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* Capital and revenue expenditure by local authorities in England on repairs, renovations and improvements to their own stock, and capital grants to support private sector renewal, is as follows.

Local authority expenditure on stock repairs, renovations and improvements: England

£ million in 2000–01 prices

	Local authority stock[1]		Registered social landlord stock	Private sector stock	
	Capital expenditure	Revenue expenditure	Capital expenditure	Capital expenditure	Total expenditure
1990–91	2,337	2,632	87	505	5,562
1991–92	1,720	2,529	69	536	4,854
1992–93	1,801	2,584	107	619	5,111
1993–94	2,059	2,580	133	679	5,451
1994–95	1,953	2,613	118	647	5,331
1995–96	1,857	2,560	149	584	5,150
1996–97	1,664	2,493	145	550	4,852
1997–98	1,495	2,370	145	464	4,473
1998–99	1,559	2,293	153	500	4,506
1999–2000	1,456	2,166	157	465	4,245
2000–01	1,787	2,074	200	423	4,485

[1] Local authority owned stock in this period declined from 3.9 million in March 1991 to just over 2.8 million in March 2001.

Notes:

1. Capital expenditure figures from 1994–95 onwards are expressed on an accruals basis: those for 2000–01 are provisional based on estimated components of reported total capital expenditure.
2. Totals may not be consistent with the sum of components because of rounding.
3. Elements of expenditure include:

Local authority stock: All capital improvement, conversion, adaption and renewal work on Housing Revenue Account dwellings. Revenue expenditure on local authority stock reflects spending on repairs direct from the housing revenue account and contributions to the housing repairs account.

Registered social landlord stock: Support for RSL schemes, including new-build projects, via LA social housing grant advances.

Private sector stock: Renovation grants, disabled facilities grants and payments in relation to minor works assistance, group repair and renewal areas.

Source:

DTLR annual Housing Investment Programme returns, and subsidy claim forms

Pedestrian Traffic Accidents

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which 10 local authority areas had *(a)* the highest and *(b)* the lowest number of pedestrian traffic accidents involving children in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and what percentage of the child population these figures represent in each case. [30574]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* The table shows the number of child pedestrians injured in road accidents, for the local authorities with the 10 highest and 10 lowest casualty numbers. The number of child pedestrian casualties in road accidents in any local authority can vary considerably from year to year, so the figures shown are averages for the most recent three years available.

Child pedestrian casualties by local authority: GB 1998–2000 average data

Local authority (Highway)	*Casualties*	*Percentage of child population injured*
Highest		
Birmingham	470	0.200
Lancashire	391	0.169
Kent	338	0.124
Glasgow City	315	0.269
Liverpool	297	0.308
Bradford	278	0.247
Leeds	274	0.189
Essex	246	0.096
Manchester	246	0.242
Hampshire	216	0.086
Lowest		
Monmouthshire	14	0.084
Powys	14	0.058
Moray	12	0.069
Ceredigion	11	0.091
Isle of Anglesey	11	0.083
Rutland	6	0.077
Eilean Siar[1]	4	0.075
City of London	3	0.391
Shetland Islands	1	0.026
Orkney Islands	1	0.025

[1] Formerly known as the Western Isles

Arthur Andersen

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on how many of his Department's PFI contracts Arthur Andersen has been an adviser; and if he will make a statement. [31718]

Dr. Whitehead: Andersen has not advised my Department on any of its PFI contracts.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on what dates since 7 June 2001 *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* special advisers in his Department have met employees of (i) Andersen and (ii) Accenture on official business; and if he will make a statement. [32100]

Dr. Whitehead: Ministers and civil servants meet many people as part of the process of policy development and analysis. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code, the Civil Service Code and Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists. Some of these discussions take place on a confidential basis, and in order to preserve confidentiality, it is not the normal practice of Governments to release details of specific meetings with private individuals or companies.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many contracts have been let to Arthur Andersen by his Department since 1997 on *(a)* matters relating to the railways and *(b)* other matters; [33045]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 584W, on departmental consultants, on what matters relating to Railtrack his Department is continuing to receive advice from Arthur Andersen. [33046]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* Individual Government Departments are responsible for taking decisions on the goods and services they acquire, whether through the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) or other procurement routes, taking into account the Government's policy of seeking value for money for the taxpayer. The public sector as a whole has signed hundreds of contracts, covering the delivery of a range of services.

The number of contracts that have been let to Arthur Andersen since 1997 are as follows;

(a) Two—on accountancy and taxation issues relating to the administration process and on the restructuring of Railtrack plc;

(b) Three—two are framework agreements (framework agreements do not guarantee work; each firm on the agreement has to bid for individual tenders). One housing research project was also completed in 1999.

Rail Passengers

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 534–55W, on measurement of passenger overcrowding, in what year the Strategic Rail Authority, or its shadow predecessor, began publishing annual results of "Passengers in Excess of Capacity"; for what reasons annual "Passengers in Excess of Capacity" information published on the SRA website is available only for selected years; and if he will place in the Library all available annual statistics on "Passengers in Excess of Capacity". [32416]

Mr. Jamieson: These figures are available on the Strategic Rail Authority's website, except those for 1997 which were the first to be published and which pre-date the launch of the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising (Opraf) website. The figures for 1997 are:

Percentage

Company	*PIXC*
Chiltern	2.0
Connex South Central	4.8
Connex South Eastern	3.0
Great Eastern	3.3
LTS	0.6
Silverlink	1.9
South West Trains	3.8
Thames Trains	2.1
Thameslink	4.4
WAGN	0.6

These figures have been published in Opraf and SRA annual reports, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Rail Safety

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 789W, on rail safety, if he will list those industry representatives with whom officials have had discussions, and their suggestions for action. [32695]

Mr. Jamieson: As part of continuing action to track progress with the recommendations in the Southall action plan, officials from the Health and Safety Executive have had contact with Railtrack plc (in administration), Railway Safety and the Association of Train Operating Companies. The Health and Safety Commission will be publishing the action reported by industry in its next progress report.

Rail Franchise Operators

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 529W, on the rail industry, with what frequency the Strategic Rail Authority is required to publish its regular bulletin describing the performance of franchise operators; and what performance indicators the bulletin is required to describe. [32418]

Mr. Jamieson: The draft directions and guidance which were put out for consultation on 29 June 2001 require the authority to

> " . . . publish a six-monthly bulletin describing, in terms that reflect the experience of passengers, the operating performance of franchise operators for the preceding period and their customer satisfaction levels."

Rail Track Conditions

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the inspection schedule used by Railtrack in their assessment of track conditions; what progress had been made towards completing the schedule since October 2000; and if he will make a statement. [32523]

Mr. Jamieson: This is an operational matter for Railtrack, who say that all of their track has been inspected during 2001; and will be inspected in the current year. The frequencies and methods of inspection reflect the speed and annual tonnage of trains using the track and are set out in Railway Group Standard GC/RT 5021.

Transport Investment

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will provide a breakdown of the *(a)* public investment expenditure, *(b)* public resource expenditure, *(c)* private investment, *(d)* public expenditure supporting private investment and *(e)* public spending from local charging revenue planned for each year 2001–02 to 2010–11 as adjusted for changes in spending as a consequence of the publication of the Strategic Rail Authority Plan, subdivided between (i) strategic roads, (ii) rail, (iii) local transport, (iv) London, (v) other transport areas and (vi) unallocated at (A) outturn prices and (B) 2000–01 prices. [32297]

Mr. Jamieson: The breakdowns requested are shown in Tables A to D, expressed in outturn prices, and in Tables E to H, expressed in 2000–01 prices.

No decision has been made on the allocation of spending from local charging revenues, however a year by year breakdown for the period 2001–02 to 2010–11 is shown in Tables B (outturn prices) and F (2000–01 prices).

10 year plan public expenditure and private investment—Table A: Public investment

£ million outturn prices

	2001–02	*2002–03*	*2003–04*	*2004–05*	*2005–06*	*2006–07*	*2007–08*	*2008–09*	*2009–10*	*2010–11*	*2001–02 to 2010–11*
Strategic Roads	1,000	1,135	1,150	1,239	1,132	1,291	1,462	1,682	1,725	1,745	13,560
Rail	625	1,448	2,521	2,438	2,934	2,671	2,212	1,312	1,221	1,245	18,627
Local Transport	1,326	1,517	1,658	1,923	1,907	2,085	2,180	2,189	2,202	2,231	19,218
London	1,015	762	932	894	730	689	700	687	698	715	7,822
Other	119	62	62	62	62	62	62	62	62	63	681
Unallocated	0	0	0	70	71	59	659	1,546	1,978	2,301	6,685
Total	4,085	4,924	6,323	6,626	6,837	6,858	7,275	7,478	7,887	8,299	66,592

Table B: Public resource expenditure excluding revenue support for private investment

£ million outturn prices

	2001–02	*2002–03*	*2003–04*	*2004–05*	*2005–06*	*2006–07*	*2007–08*	*2008–09*	*2009–10*	*2010–11*	*2001–02 to 2010–11*
Strategic Roads	415	433	479	536	550	499	522	513	505	525	4,975
Rail	1,589	1,361	1,382	1,401	1,333	1,150	1,005	1,035	856	788	11,900
Local Transport	2,733	2,864	2,932	2,996	3,044	3,095	3,135	3,191	3,239	3,293	30,521
London	613	689	727	757	760	767	772	781	788	777	7,431
Local Charging Revenue	0	0	0	153	313	359	399	452	502	508	2,686
Other	132	128	135	149	151	153	155	157	159	161	1,480
Unallocated	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	5,482	5,475	5,656	5,991	6,150	6,022	5,988	6,128	6,048	6,051	58,992

Table C: Private investment

£ million outturn prices

	2001–02	*2002–03*	*2003–04*	*2004–05*	*2005–06*	*2006–07*	*2007–08*	*2008–09*	*2009–10*	*2010–11*	*2001–02 to 2010–11*
Strategic Roads	173	223	242	150	325	425	400	300	200	200	2,638
Rail	3,655	3,747	3,787	3,956	3,158	3,147	3,116	3,168	3,254	3,359	34,347
Local Transport	559	675	781	862	953	1,049	1,058	1,045	995	995	8,971
London	722	704	657	610	1,047	1,440	1,632	1,475	1,251	825	10,364
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unallocated	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	5,109	5,349	5,467	5,578	5,483	6,061	6,205	5,988	5,700	5,379	56,320

Table D: Revenue support for private investment

£ million outturn prices

	2001–02	*2002–03*	*2003–04*	*2004–05*	*2005–06*	*2006–07*	*2007–08*	*2008–09*	*2009–10*	*2010–11*	*2001–02 to 2010–11*
Strategic Roads	206	220	239	261	353	447	454	517	604	609	3,910
Rail	0	12	50	101	187	337	430	531	633	726	3,007
Local Transport	0	0	8	27	57	102	162	237	312	387	1,292
London	0	0	0	28	29	29	30	33	48	50	246
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unallocated	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	206	232	297	417	626	915	1,076	1,318	1,597	1,772	8,455

Table E: Public investment

£ million outturn prices

	2001–02	*2002–03*	*2003–04*	*2004–05*	*2005–06*	*2006–07*	*2007–08*	*2008–09*	*2009–10*	*2010–11*	*2001–02 to 2010–11*
Strategic Roads	976	1,080	1,068	1,122	1,000	1,113	1,230	1,380	1,381	1,363	11,714
Rail	610	1,378	2,341	2,209	2,593	2,303	1,861	1,077	978	973	16,322
Local Transport	1,294	1,444	1,540	1,742	1,686	1,798	1,834	1,797	1,763	1,743	16,639
London	990	725	865	809	645	594	589	564	559	559	6,900
Other	116	59	58	56	55	54	53	51	50	49	601
Unallocated	0	0	0	63	63	51	555	1,269	1,584	1,797	5,382
Total	3,985	4,687	5,872	6,002	6,043	5,913	6,121	6,138	6,315	6,483	57,559

Table F: Public resource expenditure excluding revenue support for private investment

£ million outturn prices

	2001–02	*2002–03*	*2003–04*	*2004–05*	*2005–06*	*2006–07*	*2007–08*	*2008–09*	*2009–10*	*2010–11*	*2001–02 to 2010–11*
Strategic Roads	405	412	445	485	486	430	439	421	404	410	4,337
Rail	1,550	1,295	1,283	1,269	1,178	992	845	849	685	616	10,564
Local Transport	2,667	2,726	2,723	2,714	2,690	2,669	2,637	2,619	2,593	2,572	26,610
London	598	656	675	686	672	661	650	641	631	607	6,476
Local Charging Revenue	0	0	0	139	277	310	336	371	402	397	2,230
Other	129	122	126	135	133	132	130	129	127	126	1,289
Unallocated	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	5,349	5,211	5,252	5,428	5,436	5,193	5,037	5,030	4,843	4,727	51,506

Table G: Private investment

£ million outturn prices

	2001–02	*2002–03*	*2003–04*	*2004–05*	*2005–06*	*2006–07*	*2007–08*	*2008–09*	*2009–10*	*2010–11*	*2001–02 to 2010–11*
Strategic Roads	169	212	225	136	287	366	337	246	160	156	2,294
Rail	3,566	3,566	3,517	3,584	2,791	2,714	2,621	2,600	2,606	2,624	30,189
Local Transport	546	642	725	781	842	905	890	858	797	777	7,762
London	704	670	610	553	926	1,242	1,373	1,211	1,002	644	8,935
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unallocated	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	4,985	5,091	5,077	5,053	4,846	5,226	5,220	4,915	4,564	4,202	49,180

Table H: Revenue support for private investment

£ million outturn prices

	2001–02	*2002–03*	*2003–04*	*2004–05*	*2005–06*	*2006–07*	*2007–08*	*2008–09*	*2009–10*	*2010–11*	*2001–02 to 2010–11*
Strategic Roads	201	209	222	236	312	385	382	424	484	476	3,332
Rail	0	11	46	92	165	291	362	436	507	567	2,477
Local Transport	0	0	8	24	50	88	136	195	250	302	1,053
London	0	0	0	26	25	25	25	27	38	39	205
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unallocated	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	201	221	276	378	553	789	905	1,081	1,279	1,384	7,067

Southall Rail Inquiry Recommendations

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the Health and Safety Commission will issue its next progress report on its action plan to implement the recommendations of the Southall Rail Accident Inquiry report. [32108]

Mr. Jamieson: The HSC aims to publish by mid-April a report on the industry's progress on the action plan to February 2002. This will cover the two year period proposed by Professor Uff for implementing the report's recommendations.

Integrated Transport Policy

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 536W, on Transport Direct, what research has been conducted for his Department's reviewing policy on *(a)* travel information and *(b)* retailing; and if he will make a statement. [32409]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 536W.

London Underground

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much was spent in each of the last five years by London Underground Ltd. on renewal and improvement of train signals and related equipment; what is the extent of signal renewal necessary over the next five years; what he expects will be undertaken and completed; and if he will make a statement. [33380]

Mr. Jamieson: London Underground advise that the following has been spent on the renewal and improvement of train signals and related equipment in each of the last five years:

Year	*£ million*
1996–97	16.7
1997–98	14.4
1998–99	27.9
1999–2000	30.1
2000–01	25.7

The Tube Modernisation plans are designed to achieve a comprehensive modernisation of the entire underground network. This is necessarily a long-term programme and there is a limit on the amount of work that can be done simultaneously without causing excessive disruption to

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the service to the public. The overall requirements have therefore been specified by London Underground to renew signalling equipment over time, prioritised to deliver the greatest benefits as quickly as possible. The detailed requirements will be published by London Underground shortly.

Geraint Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the London Underground PPPs. [34640]

Mr. Byers: The Board of London Regional Transport has today announced that it is minded to proceed with its plans for the modernisation of London Underground. It will now consult the Mayor of London and Transport for London as required under the terms of S298 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999. At the request of the Mayor and Transport for London, London Regional Transport has offered to extend the period of consultation until 8 March.

The Board of London Regional Transport has undertaken a thorough evaluation of the bids to assess whether they are likely to provide value for money. It is confident they would do so and that the proposed contracts would provide an appropriate basis for the future management of the London underground infrastructure.

The contracts envisage a long-term partnership between London Underground and three private sector infrastructure companies who will take over responsibility for maintaining and upgrading the network. The private sector will be committed, under contract, to deliver specific improvements and will be incentivised appropriately. If they fail to do so they will be penalised. Persistent inability on the part of infrastructure companies to meet their obligations could lead to their contracts being terminated.

I have taken separate independent advice from Ernst and Young. Ernst and Young have confirmed to me that the process followed by London Underground's evaluation team has been suitably robust and that London Underground's recommendation that the PPP proposals deliver value for money is a subjective one which is supported by its analysis. A copy of Ernst and Young's report has been placed in the Library of the House and is available on my Department's website.

I will of course take full account of Ernst and Young's findings. In particular, I agree with Ernst and Young that the Arbiter, whom I will appoint in accordance with the Greater London Authority Act 1999, should be resourced to be fully effective, and I will ensure that is the case. And I agree with Ernst and Young that the final decision to go ahead should be conditional upon, among other things, the final prices and risk transfer proposals submitted by the bidders not altering materially prior to financial close.

Depending on the outcome of the statutory consultation, the Board of London Regional Transport would be likely to take a final decision on whether or not to proceed with its modernisation plans for the London underground in the middle of March.

The safety case still has to be accepted by the Health and Safety Executive. The proposals will not proceed unless this acceptance is obtained.

Ordnance Survey

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on *(a)* the current and *(b)* the planned proportions of Ordnance Survey's investment in the Digital National Framework which are based on (i) partnerships with the private sector and (ii) National Interest Mapping Services Agreement funding. [32840]

Ms Keeble: Ordnance Survey's partnership arrangements with the private sector have not contributed to the investment in the Digital National Framework (DNF). Ordnance Survey's plans include working with the private sector in developing the content of the DNF in future.

By the end of 2001–02, funding under the terms of NIMSA will have contributed approximately half of the investment in the DNF. This has enabled complete national coverage with accelerated delivery. No further NIMSA contribution is planned.

National Air Traffic Services

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the advice provided to his Department by the Civil Aviation Authority on the sale of National Air Traffic Services. [33359]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 327W.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received from the Airline Group on the funding requirements for the future of air traffic control services. [33357]

Mr. Jamieson: Officials from my Department and the Treasury have been, and continue to be, involved in discussions with the Airline Group and other relevant parties about the financial position of National Air Traffic Services.

Air Traffic

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the change in air traffic in the UK since 11 September. [33358]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department has not made an estimate and the latest available published monthly traffic data from the Civil Aviation Authority, which is the most comprehensive UK source, is October for airports and September for airlines. However, more recent data are available for some airports and airlines, primarily BAA airports and BA. The most appropriate measure of change is that over the same period in 2000. These show that there has been a recovery in passenger numbers, but not air transport movements, in December 2001.

Traffic changes in 2001 compared with same period in 2000

Percentage

	BAA		*BA*
	Passengers	*Air transport movements*	*Passengers*
April-August	1.4	4.0	−2.5
September	−6.0	0.8	−11.0
October	−12.0	0.3	−14.6
November	−10.6	−4.0	−11.5
December	−6.4	−4.8	−8.5
September-December	−8.8	−1.8	−11.7

The impact has not been uniform across all segments of the market, with transatlantic services experiencing the most severe decline. The low cost carriers have continued to experience passenger growth since 11 September.

City Challenge

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many of the dwellings built or improved under the city challenge scheme for 1992 to 1998 are still occupied. [33656]

Ms Keeble: Under the former City Challenge programme, which operated from 1992 to 1998, over 110,000 dwellings were improved or completed in the 31 partnership areas. Information on how many of these dwellings are still occupied is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate expense.

Railtrack

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 321W, ref 26291, what specialist credentials Schroder Salomon Smith Barney have that rendered them suitable for this work; and what tendering process took place to select advisers. [33410]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* Schroder Salomon Smith Barney has a well established track record advising companies and the UK Government on a wide range of corporate finance transactions including corporate restructuring. Regarding the tendering process, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) on 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1103W.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 30 January 2002, Ref 28541, *Official Report*, column 320W, if he will list the schemes that have been previously identified and those which have not. [33404]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The information is not available in the form requested.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 30 January 2002, ref 30241, *Official Report*, column 320W, which SRA officials are participating in the bid team; and on what contractual basis. [33411]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* No SRA officials are participating in the bid team.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions where information is *(a)* held and *(b)* presented, regarding the total weekly rail delays, in minutes, caused by (i) Railtrack and (ii) train operating companies. [31584]

Mr. Jamieson: Railtrack keep records of delay minutes.

Congestion Scheme

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment his Department has made of the impact of the proposed Central London congestion scheme on public transport and road congestion in areas immediately outside London. [32952]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The Department's assessment in relation to trunk roads and motorways is that effects outside the Greater London boundary are likely to be small.

Assessment of the effects on other roads are for the local traffic authorities concerned to consider in the first instance.

Data Protection Act

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many requests the Department has received under the Data Protection Act 1988 for *(a)* electronically held information and *(b)* paper documentation. [33584]

Dr. Whitehead: The central Department has received, all told, nine external requests for electronically held personal data and one for manually held records.

The Department's policy with regard to subject access requests from members of staff is to provide subject access to both manual and electronic records for every such request. Fifty-three subject access requests have been received to date from members of the Department's staff.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what administration fees are charged by the Department for information requests made under the Data Protection Act 1998. [33463]

Dr. Whitehead: The standard administration charge made by the Department for information requests from members of the public is £10. There is no charge for requests by present and former members of staff for access to their personal records.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what the Department's procedure is for responding to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998; if he will place a copy in the Library; and if he will make a statement; [33484]

(2) what the policy of the Department is for ensuring responses to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 are completed within 40 days; and what their procedure is to achieve this. [33477]

Dr. Whitehead: All external subject access requests to the Department are routed to a central unit responsible for co-ordinating responses. From the information accompanying each request, the request is then forwarded to those parts of the Department which are considered likely to be in possession of personal data of the sort requested. The request will be accompanied by an instruction to trawl through electronic and, where specified, appropriately structured manual records held in those areas of the Department, and return to the co-ordinating unit copies of all personal references uncovered in the course of the trawl.

These references generally provide a certain amount of context to make them intelligible. The co-ordinating unit finally combines these individual references into a single set of attachments to a covering reply letter, deleting all references to third parties (where permission to reveal such third party references has not been forthcoming) in the document copies being supplied to the applicant.

All internal subject access requests from staff members are sent to a focal point in Human Resources. Action is initiated by the Data Protection Officer on the day the application is received. An appointment is arranged usually within two weeks of the application for the member of staff to have access to his or her records. Performance is monitored daily to ensure compliance with the set period.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many responses the Department has completed to requests for information made under the Data Protection Act 1998 for *(a)* electronically held information and *(b)* paper documentation. [33577]

Dr. Whitehead: The central Department has completed six external requests for electronically held personal data and one for manually held records. The Department's policy with regard to subject access requests from members of staff is to provide subject access to both manual and electronic records for every such request. 51 subject access requests from members of the Department's staff have been completed to date.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the longest period of time elapsed is between receiving *(a)* the administration fee and providing the information requested and *(b)* a request for information and providing the information requested, under the Data Protection Act 1998. [33456]

Dr. Whitehead: In respect of *(a)* 82 days and in respect of *(b)* 98 days.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many responses to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 have been completed *(a)* within 40, *(b)* between 40 and 60 and *(c)* over 60 days after receiving the original letter; and how many are outstanding. [33434]

Dr. Whitehead: As regards external subject access requests, two responses have been completed within 40 days, three between 40 and 60 days, and two over 60 days, after receipt of the original request letter. In addition, one is outstanding.

Of 53 subject access requests received from members of the Department's staff, 50 have been responded to within 40 days. Two are outstanding.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what percentage of responses to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 the Department has completed *(a)* within 40 days of receipt of the £10 fee, *(b)* between 40 and 60 days of and *(c)* over 60 days after receiving the administration fee. [33470]

Dr. Whitehead: 83 per cent. of external subject access requests have been completed within 40 days, and the remaining 17 per cent. in over 60 days, after receipt of the administration fee. No administration fee is charged for requests from members of the Department's staff.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his estimate is of the average cost of processing each information request under the Data Protection Act 1998. [33438]

Dr. Whitehead: Costs are incurred in a number of areas of the Department and vary widely between requests. It is therefore not possible to give an average cost of processing each information request.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many responses to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 the Department has completed *(a)* within 40 days of receipt of, *(b)* between 40 and 60 days of receiving and *(c)* over 60 days after receiving the £10 administration fee. [33565]

Dr. Whitehead: As regards external subject access requests, five responses have been completed within 40 days, and one over 60 days, after receipt of the administration fee. One case is outstanding.

No fee is charged for requests by present and former members of staff for access to their personal records. Of 51 completed subject access requests from members of the Department's staff, 50 have been responded to within 40 days.

Transport 10-Year Plan

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) when the total transport 10-year plan financial envelope was increased from £179.7 billion to £181.9 billion; and when and by what means the increase was first announced; [33767]

(2) pursuant to his oral statement of 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 149, on the 10-year plan financial envelope, if he will bring forward a supplementary estimate; and if he will make a statement. [33769]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* My Department will seek the resources necessary to deliver the 10-year plan through the normal supply procedures.

The bulk of the additional £2.2 billion was agreed and announced to the House on 2 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 8. A number of other changes to the 10-year plan expenditure envelope have been made since publication of the plan, resulting in the overall increase to £181.9 billion announced to the House on 29 January 2002.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he secured an additional £2.2 billion of funding from the Treasury for the 10-year transport plan; and if he will make a statement. [33927]

Mr. Spellar: My Department will seek the resources necessary to deliver the 10-year plan through the normal supply procedures.

The bulk of the additional £2.2 billion was agreed and announced to the House on 2 April 2001, *Official Report,* column 8. A number of other changes to the 10-year plan expenditure envelope have been made since publication of the plan, resulting in the overall increase to £181.9 billion announced to the House on 29 January 2002.

Liquid Petroleum Gas

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to extend the eligibility for transport action powershift grants for converting cars over five years old to use LPG. [33949]

Mr. Spellar: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 6 February 2002 [33622].

Agricultural Buildings

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to review the rating of agricultural buildings to ensure that those who perform more than 10 per cent. of their activities as contract farmers on other farms are rated on their agricultural building. [33898]

Dr. Whitehead: On 16 February 2001 we published a consultation paper on extending the agricultural exemption from non-domestic rates to cover all land and buildings used for contract farming, share farming and machinery rings, as well as such land and buildings used by farmers in connection with their own farm. In the Local Government White Paper "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services", published 11 December 2001, we said that we would implement those proposals, subject to the necessary primary legislation, which we will introduce when parliamentary time allows.

Urban Green Spaces Taskforce

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if the final report from the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce will be published in April this year as planned; [33977]

(2) what progress has been made since the publication of the interim report from the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce; and if he will make a statement. [33978]

Ms Keeble: Since the publication of its interim report, the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce has made good progress in carrying out its work as programmed in the report. Our current plans are to publish the final report of the task force in April, which will be followed by the Government's policy response in July.

Planning Applications

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the average time was to process planning applications by each planning authority in England over the last 12 months. [34412]

Ms Keeble: The information needed to determine the average time for planning applications to be processed is collected centrally only for a small number of applications mainly relating to mineral extraction and waste disposal (known as "county matters"). These applications, which account for less than 1 per cent. of all planning applications, are often complex and take some time to determine.

The speed at which decisions are made for the vast majority of planning applications, ie all except "county matters", is measured in terms of the proportion of decisions determined within eight weeks and within 13 weeks. In the year ending September 2001, 63 per cent. of these applications in England were determined within eight weeks and 83 per cent. within 13 weeks.

More detailed information for each local authority in England on how quickly they process planning applications (using the eight and 13 week criteria) is published by the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions in its quarterly Statistics of Planning Applications Bulletin and its annual Development Control Statistics Report. Copies are available in the Libraries of the House.

Debt

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much British Railways' debt was extinguished by the Government in the six months before rail privatisation. [34279]

Mr. Spellar: On 29 March 1996 £1,229 million of debt owed by Railtrack to the National Loans Fund was cancelled and on 30 March 1996 Railtrack's obligations in respect of a further £230 million owed to the Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs) were transferred to DoA Ltd., a company wholly owned by the Secretary of State for Transport. Also, on 29 March 1996 Railtrack issued debentures acknowledging indebtedness to HM Government of £589 million. With the exception of a £4 million repayment of debt, these debentures were subsequently sold by HM Government in the bond markets.

Open Skies Agreement

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether the Government retain the right to negotiate an open skies agreement to the USA following the ruling of the European Court; and if he will make a statement. [34615]

Mr. Spellar: We do not yet have a ruling from the European Court of Justice. That is probably some months away. What we do have is the Opinion issued on 31 January by the Advocate General which comprises his advice to the Court. According to his Opinion it remains open to member states to negotiate and conclude open skies agreements with the United States subject to meeting their obligations under Community law.

Policy Development Grants

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he intends to make an order empowering the Electoral Commission to make payments of policy development grants to eligible parties; and if he will make a statement. [34816]

Dr. Whitehead: I have today laid before Parliament an order, making provision for a scheme, which gives effect to recommendations, submitted by the Electoral Commission to the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on 4 October 2001, but with modifications agreed with the Commission. The amount of money available for allocation by the Commission in each year for which the scheme has effect is £2 million.

KCC Speed Interactive Signs

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when his Department will issue type approval for KCC speed interactive signs; and if he will make a statement. [34155]

Mr. Spellar: We hope to be in a position to resolve the type approval issues and issue guidance on the use of speed activated signs later in the year.

Business Rates (Farms)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how the amount that farmers incur in business rates when undertaking contractual work is calculated. [33930]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The amount farmers incur in business rates, if they undertake contract farming work, is calculated by reference to the rateable value, as determined by the Valuation Officer, multiplied by the business rate poundage (currently 43.0 pence in the pound).

The Valuation Officer calculates rateable values in accordance with the definition contained within the Local Government Finance Act 1988. Broadly speaking, this is the rental value of the property, vacant and to let, at the valuation of 1 April 1998. The Valuation Officer will base his or her valuation on rental evidence of similar buildings in the local area or by reference to the closes comparison.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Parthenon Marbles

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent representations she has received from the Government of Greece concerning the return to Athens of the Parthenon marbles; and if she will make a statement. [27146]

Tessa Jowell: I received a letter from the Greek Minister for Culture, Mr. Evangelos Venizelos, in June 2001 to which I replied emphasising the importance of cultural connections between Britain and Greece. In connection with the Parthenon Sculptures I reminded the Minister of the position of Her Majesty's Government, which had recently been restated by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, namely that it is our view that the sculptures were acquired legally and that they are best housed in the British Museum in a multi-cultural context, seen free of charge by up to 5 million visitors a year.

It may also be helpful to be clear about the responsibility of the British Museum for the Sculptures. The Trustees have a statutory duty to protect their collections and this duty could only be over-ridden by primary legislation amending Section 5 of the British Museum Act 1963, relating to the disposal of objects in the collections.

Overseas Trips

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list each of the overseas trips made by herself and other members of her ministerial team in each of the last four years specifying the purpose and cost of each trip. [30186]

Dr. Howells: I refer the hon Member to the answer given to him by my right hon Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on Monday 4 February, *Official Report,* column 707W.

Export Licences

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions she has had with the European Commission about raising the sterling threshold for the requirement for export licences for cultural goods; and if she will make a statement. [29967]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Arts and DCMS officials use every available opportunity to press for the limits to be updated at least in line with inflation, as provided in Council Regulation (EEC) 3911/92 on the export of cultural goods. We have also welcomed the Commission's new initiatives to contribute to the effective functioning of the mechanisms set up by the Regulation, including making the maximum use of new technologies to improve its implementation.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the estimated projected annual increase is in the number of export licences for cultural goods consequential on the decision by the EU Commission to leave the EU monetary threshold unchanged. [29966]

Dr. Howells: The effect of the EC Commission's decision to leave the thresholds unchanged has been to increase the number of licences issued by 69 per cent. between 1993 and 2000.

Sporting Events

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to put in place a strategy to implement her Department's role in attracting world class sporting events. [30376]

Mr. Caborn: The PIU have been asked by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to carry out a joint study with DCMS examining long term sports policy. It will consider the roles and responsibilities of Government, the private and voluntary sectors in helping sport better achieve the objectives of increased grassroots participation in sport and elite sporting excellence. The

PIU project team will seek to clarify the roles and responsibilities and interventions of Government to help sport better achieve its own objectives and develop an overall strategy for guiding Government's decisions on sports policy, including major events; in the context of Government's own wider objectives.

Millennium Experience

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what methods were considered to dispose of items from the millennium experience; [30014]

(2) if she will list the items from the millennium experience that were disposed of other than by sale by the New Millennium Experience Company, stating for each one *(a)* its original purchase price, *(b)* its estimated value at time of sale, *(c)* the amount it was sold for, *(d)* its method of disposal and *(e)* the reason for that method of disposal; [30011]

(3) if she will list the items from the millennium experience offered for sale by the New Millennium Experience Company stating for each *(a)* the original purchase price, *(b)* the estimated value at time of sale, *(c)* the number of bids received, *(d)* the amount of the highest bid, *(e)* whether the item was sold to the highest bidder and where it was not to give a reason and *(f)* the amount it was sold for; [30012]

(4) how many bids for items from the millennium experience offered for sale by the New Millennium Experience Company were *(a)* not honoured and *(b)* bogus; [30013]

(5) if she will publish the total *(a)* estimated value of and *(b)* final price received for, the items from the millennium experience offered for sale by the New Millennium Experience Company. [30015]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 24 January 2002]:* Some 17,000 items were offered for sale by NMEC in an auction organised by Henry Butcher International held between 27 February and 2 March 2001. Henry Butcher valued these items at a total of £2 million. Around 10,500 of these items were sold in the auction and these were sold to the highest bidders in each case. As is the case at many auctions. a small proportion of the items were not paid for, and hence not collected, by successful bidders. Total income received from auction sales which were concluded was £3.5 million. Some 450 items were withheld from the sale because they were felt to be of use to a future owner of the dome. It was subsequently decided to sell these items, and items which had not sold in the auction, by private treaty. It was felt that this was more cost effective than seeking to hold a second auction. Henry Butcher International was retained to advise on the private treaty sales and benchmarked rates against auction prices in order to ensure value for money and tenders were sought for major items. Sales by private treaty realised £1 million. A feature of NMEC's balance sheet was that many assets purchased or developed for the millennium experience were unique to the dome. The costs to develop or buy these bespoke assets were much higher than the subsequent realisable values and it was always recognised that the auction would cover only a fraction of those creation costs. The total received by NMEC for the sale of assets in the auction and by private treaty was therefore £4.5 million. A further £1.3 million was achieved by the sale of certain assets to original suppliers under terms of contracts with NMEC. Not all the detailed information requested about the individual assets is available. The remainder is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Free Television Licences

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how many pensioner households in England and Wales receive a free television licence; [32720]

(2) what was the cost of providing free television licences to pensioner households in England and Wales in the last 12 months. [32718]

Dr. Howells: TV Licensing, which administers for the BBC as Licensing Authority the free television licence concession for the over-75s, is not able to provide a breakdown by nation of the number of free licences currently in force in the United Kingdom. However, in the 12 months to December 2001, 3.398 million free licences were issued in England and Wales. The cost of these licences was £335 million, excluding administrative costs.

The cost of administering the concession in England and Wales cannot be disaggregated from the total for the United Kingdom, since much of it is systems-related and applies to the scheme as a whole. The estimated cost of administering the scheme throughout the United Kingdom in the months to December 2001 was £10.1 million.

Departmental Retirement Ages

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the retirement ages that apply to the employees of her Department and its agencies, including how many and which categories of employees are affected by each; and if she will make a statement on her Department's policy on flexible retirement. [32814]

Dr. Howells: The normal retirement age for all staff in the Department is 60. In the Royal Parks Agency the normally retirement age for staff is 60, except for the following:

Staff with reserved rights, covered by the 20/60 rule whereby they can stay until they have completed 20 years services or reached age 65, whichever is the earlier:

Royal Parks Police: eight

Non-uniformed staff: four

Staff covered by reserved rights, following non-industrialisation of posts, to remain employed until their 65th birthday:

Wildlife Officers: five

Where there are management reasons justifying an extension beyond the 60th birthday, not normally for more than a year. Management Board level approval is required:

Non-uniformed staff: one.

DCMS and its agency are reviewing their retirement policy following the recommendations of the PIU "Winning the Generation Game" report.

Ticket Sales (London)

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made as to the effect of the events of 11 September on (*a*) theatre ticket and (*b*) museum ticket sales in the Cities of London and Westminster; and if she will make a statement. [33704]

Dr. Howells: I have asked the Society of London Theatres, National Gallery, Tate Britain and Museum of London to provide this information. When it is available, my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for the Arts will write to the hon. Member, and place a copy of her letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

Fair Trade Fortnight

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to encourage participation by her Department in fair trade fortnight from 4 to 17 March. [33549]

Dr. Howells: The Department has no specific formal participation in fair trade fortnight although some NDPBs may be publicising the event within their own activities. My Department centrally supports the aim of fair trade and seeks to influence the supply chain to utilise fair trade produce wherever possible. A display is being considered for our own staff restaurant and the caterers have been encouraged to mark the event with more than their usual fair trade menus.

Arts Funding

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will respond to the progress report she received on 29 November 2001 about the Arts Council of England's proposals to merge the regional arts boards to create a single organisation for arts funding; and if she will place a copy of her response in the Library. [33310]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for the Arts responded on behalf of the Secretary of State to the Arts Council's latest proposals for a single organisation for arts funding on 21 December 2001. I am arranging for copies of the letter to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Special Advisers

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the responsibilities of her special advisers. [33126]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The responsibilities of my special advisers are set out in the model contract for special advisers. Special advisers are employed to help Ministers on matters where the work of Government and the work of the Government Party overlap and it would be inappropriate for permanent civil servants to become involved. They are an additional resource for the Minister providing advice from a standpoint that is more politically committed and politically aware than would be available to a Minister from the civil service.

IT Contracts

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what has been the total expenditure of his Department on IT systems and support in each year from May 1997 to date; how many IT contracts have been let in each of those years; of the other main contracting party in each of those contracts, how many have been (*a*) companies whose registered office is in (i) England and Wales, (ii) Scotland and (iii) Northern Ireland and (*b*) foreign companies; and what are the names of the companies falling within category (a). [33685]

Dr. Howells: Total expenditure on IT systems and support broken down annually from May 1997 is as follows:

	£ million
1997–98	1.9
1998–99	2.1
1999–2000	3.3
2000–01	3.6
2001–02	3.1

The number of IT contracts let and relevant companies per year is as follows:

	Company	*Number*
1997–98	BT, Maine and Vodafone	4
1998–99	BT, and Project Telecom	2
1999–2000	BT	2
2000–01	BT	1
2001–02	BT	3

Contracts

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many contracts were let by her Department and agencies for which she is responsible to (*a*) PWC Consulting or PricewaterhouseCoopers, (*b*) Ernst & Young, (*c*) Deloitte & Touche, (*d*) KPMG and (*e*) Andersen for consultancy services for the financial years (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000, (iv) 2000–01 and (v) 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available, indicating the remuneration in each case. [33844]

Dr. Howells: My Department has let the following contracts:

Year	*Consultancy*	*£*
1998–99	Deloitte & Touche	227,000
1998–99	KPMG	23,000
1999–2000	PricewaterhouseCoopers	68,000
2000–01	PricewaterhouseCoopers	61,000
2000–01	PricewaterhouseCoopers	22,000
2001–02	PricewaterhouseCoopers	96,000

Royal Parks Constabulary

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what legal advice she has sought on the policy in the Royal Parks constabulary to set retirement age levels depending on length of service; [32659]

(2) whether it is her policy to permit some officers in the Royal Parks constabulary to work until 65 years of age and not others; and if she will make a statement. [32655]

Dr. Howells: Responsibility for the subject of these questions has been delegated to the Royal Parks Agency and I have asked its Chief Executive, William Weston, to reply.

Letter from William Weston to Mr. Chris Grayling, dated 7 February 2002:

I have been asked by the Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport to reply to your Parliamentary Questions about the retirement age of officers of the Royal Parks Constabulary, as this is an operational matter which has been delegated to the Royal Parks Agency.

Prior to 1st January 1994 the normal retirement age for officers was 60, but those with less than 20 years service can work until they have completed 20 years service or reached the age of 65, whichever is the sooner, subject to continued satisfactory performance.

Under an agreement with the Trade Union, all officers recruited after 1st January 1994 retire at the age of 60, regardless of their length of service, in line with the standard conditions for non-uniformed staff in the Agency.

The Agency has not sought legal advice on this matter.

Lost/Stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list those items valued at less than £50 each which have been stolen or lost from her Department in each of the last four years. [34224]

Dr. Howells: All thefts and losses by fraud are immediately reported as security breaches. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has only had cause to report the theft of six SIMM memory modules in 2001 and one mobile telephone charger in 2002. There have been no reported losses of lower value items other than those stated.

Rugby League/Rugby Union (Funding)

Andy Burnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much funding has been received from the National Lottery by *(a)* rugby league and *(b)* rugby union since its inception. [32880]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* Total funding received from the National Lottery for *(a)* Rugby League is £12,557,073 and for *(b)* Rugby Union is £38,044,111.

Youth Hostel Association

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent representations she has received from the Youth Hostel Association; and what recent discussions she has had with the Youth Hostel Association on help to individual youth hostels affected by foot and mouth related loss of business. [34472]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs and I met the Chief Executive of the Youth Hostels Association (England and Wales) on 7 February. On 5 February, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs announced a countryside access recovery fund that will be available to support projects to promote access to and/or understanding of the countryside by not-for-profit organisations, such as the Youth Hostels Association.

Private Medical Insurance

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many employees in *(a)* her Department and *(b)* her Department's agencies and non-departmental public bodies have had private medical insurance provided for them in each year since 1997–98; what the total cost is; and if she will make a statement. [32315]

Dr. Howells: No employees in the Department or in the Royal Parks Agency have had private medical insurance provided for them in any year since and including 1997–98.

Information relating to the Department's non-departmental public bodies is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Non-League Football

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she last met representatives from the *(a)* Nationwide Conference, *(b)* Doctor Martens' league, *(c)* Unibond league and *(d)* Ryman league. [34102]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not met with representatives from the Doctor Martens' league, Unibond league or Ryman league.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport met the chairman and chief executive of the Nationwide Conference on 16 July 2001 to discuss a range of non-league football issues.

Archives

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to improve access to archives. [34561]

Dr. Howells: In January last year my Department published social inclusion policy guidance for archives in the document "Libraries, Museums, Galleries and Archives for All" in January 2001. We are now working with Resource, the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries, and the National Council on Archives to ensure local authority archives recognise their role in achieving greater access and inclusion. With our encouragement, the National Council on Archives has set up a network of Regional Archive Councils which published Archives Strategies for each region in 2001. We have also been working with the Inter-Departmental Archives Committee (IDAC) to create an Action Plan for Archives which will help to encourage greater awareness of and better access to archives. This will be published later in the year.

Royal Parks

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what rights and conditions of public access to the Royal parks are observed by those bodies responsible for their upkeep and administration; [34363]

(2) what the area of each Royal park is; and what the conditions are on what trading in the Royal parks is permitted; [34362]

(3) which buildings in the Royal parks are not the responsibility of the Royal Parks Agency; [34364]

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(4) what grants are paid to *(a)* the Royal Parks Agency and *(b)* other bodies for their work in administering and maintaining the Royal parks; [34366]

Dr. Howells: Responsibility or the subject of these questions has been delegated to the Royal Parks Agency and I have asked its chief executive, William Weston, to reply.

Letter from William Weston to Mr. Andrew Turner, dated 7 February 2002:

I have been asked by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to reply to your Parliamentary Questions about public access and other matters relating to the Royal Parks.

The Royal Parks are part of the hereditary possessions of the Crown. The public do not have any legal right to use the Parks, public access depends on the grace and favour of the Crown, although there may be public rights of way across the land. The Royal Parks Agency manages the Royal Parks under powers derived from s22 Crown Lands Act 1851. As part of its statutory management function the Agency permits the public to use the Parks for recreational purposes, subject to regulations issued under the Parks Regulation Acts 1872–1926 which are considered necessary to secure proper management, preserve order and prevent abuse within the Parks. The current regulations are the Royal Parks and Other Open Spaces Regulations 1997.

The Royal Parks Agency receive grant-in-aid under a funding agreement with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport for carrying out the Secretary of State's management responsibilities under the Crown Lands Act.

The area covered by each of the Royal parks is as follows

	Hectares
Hyde Park	140
Kensington Gardens	111
Regent's Park (incl. Primrose Hill)	197
St. James's Park	34
Green Park	16
Greenwich Park	73
Richmond Park	955
Bushy Park	450

The Parks are intended to provide a respite from the surrounding urban landscape and commercial activities are therefore generally not allowed in the Royal Parks. Where it is necessary or desirable to provide amenities for park visitors, for example refreshments, boating or deckchairs they are provided under licence from the Secretary of State by private contractors following competitive tender.

The following buildings in the Royal Parks are not the responsibility of the Royal Parks Agency.

Bushy Park

Upper Lodge

Bushy House

Hawthorne Cottage

Barton's Cottage

Richmond Park

Thatched House Lodge

White Lodge

Pembroke Cottage

Greenwich Park

Royal Observatory

Kensington Gardens

Kensington Palace

The Orangery

Regent's Park

Winfield House

St John's Lodge

The Holm

Regent's Lodge

London Zoo

Restoration Studio.

Osborne Estate Act

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to *(a)* implement and *(b)* amend the Osborne Estate Act 1902; and when the premises of the former King Edward VII Convalescent Home for Officers will be returned to use in accordance with the provisions of that Act. [34365]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is considering how she should meet her responsibilities under the Osborne Estate Act 1902 to devote part of Osborne House for the benefit of members of the armed forces and civil service until such time as she is able to secure legislation to repeal the statutory requirement.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Child Support Agency

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the total amount of money collected by the Child Support Agency was in each of the last seven years. [25017]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Doug Smith to Mr. Chris Ruane, dated 6 February 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply by me.

You asked what the total amount of money collected by the Child Support Agency was in each of the last seven years.

The table on Annex 1 shows those amounts collected and arranged for the last seven years.

Amounts shown as collected are amounts which are paid via the Agency, while amounts shown as arranged are paid directly between the non-resident parent and the parent or person with care following a CSA assessment.

I hope this is helpful.

Annex 1: Maintenance collected and arranged

£ million

Year	*Collected*	*Arranged*
1994–95	79.422	133.233
1995–96	133.508	136.913
1996–97	214.911	153.291
1997–98	317.576	202.987
1998–99	409.819	225.854
1999–2000	473.609	238.633
2000–01	516.979	240.551

Source:
Child Support Agency Annual Reports and Accounts

Pensions Education Campaign

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many television advertisements were paid for by expenditure on the revised Pensions Education Campaign. [18981]

Mr. McCartney: The Pensions Education campaign promotes the Government's aim to combat poverty and promote security and independence in retirement for future pensioners. The campaign encourages future pensioners to save for their retirement where they can afford to, and provides impartial information on their pension options to help them make informed decisions. The television advertisements are part of this wider activity.

Five different television advertisements (two 40-second advertisements, two 20-second advertisements and a 10-second advertisement) were paid for out of expenditure on the Pensions Education (Working Dogs) campaign.

Television advertising started again on 19 January 2002 as part of wider campaign activity and will run until the end of March.

Regulations

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many regulations his Department has proposed to Parliament since June; what regulatory impact assessments have been made for those regulations his Department has implemented; and what plans his Department has to reduce the number of regulations affecting small businesses. [21972]

Mr. McCartney: The Department has introduced 37 statutory instruments, including 15 commencement orders, between 1 June and 31 December 2001. A Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) has been published in respect of provisions in one of these—the Disability Discrimination (Providers of Services)(Adjustment of Premises) Regulations 2001 which comes into force on 1 October 2004. A copy of the RIA is available in the Library. No other instruments introduced in this period impact on business.

The Department's policy is to eliminate unnecessary regulation and to minimise the burdens imposed by necessary regulation. We aim to ensure that regulations are necessary; give effective protection; balance benefit, cost and risk; are fair and command public confidence.

The Department is also committed to reducing, wherever possible, existing regulatory burdens, and is contributing to the Government's regulatory reform action plan, that includes delivering reforms which are beneficial to small businesses and the citizen.

Lone Parent Families

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of people living in lone parent families in each year since 1997 were in *(a)* the bottom 30 per cent., *(b)* the bottom 40 per cent. and *(c)* the bottom 50 per cent. of the income distribution. [27765]

Malcolm Wicks: The information available is in the table.

Following our reforms of the tax and benefit systems to help make work pay, we are seeing a steady reduction in the number of lone parents at the lower end of the income distribution. Results for 1999–2000 are the latest available. They will not include the full impact of the working families tax credit, further increases in allowances for children or improvements in the labour market that have occurred since; these will have increased the incomes of lone parent families.

Percentage of individuals living in lone-parent families in the bottom 30, 40 and 50 per cent. of the income distribution, including the self-employed is in the table.

Percentage of individuals below percentiles of the income distribution

	Bottom 30 per cent.	*Bottom 40 per cent.*	*Bottom 50 per cent.*
Income before housing costs			
1994–95	60	74	84
1995–96	59	73	83
1996–97	65	78	86
1997–98	63	76	84
1998–99	63	77	86
1999–2000	61	75	84
Income after housing costs			
1994–95	67	79	87
1995–96	67	78	85
1996–97	71	81	87
1997–98	69	79	85
1998–99	69	80	87
1999–2000	67	79	85

Notes:

1. All figures are estimates and are taken from the Households Below Average Income (HBAI) data set which is derived from the Family Resources Survey (FRS). The FRS does not include Northern Ireland.

2. The income measure used in HBAI is weekly net (disposable), equivalised household income (that is to say income that is adjusted to reflect the composition of the household).

3. The estimates are sample counts, which have been adjusted for non-response using multipurpose grossing factors that control for region, council tax band and a number of other demographic variables. Estimates are subject to both sampling error and to variability in non-response. All proportions are rounded to the nearest per cent.

4. The estimates are presented on both a Before Housing Costs income (BHC) and an After Housing Costs income (AHC) basis in line with HBAI conventions.

Source:

FR

Pension Credit

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will provide figures on the same basis as tables 3 and 4 of "The Pension Credit: long-term projections", showing *(a)* the cost of the basic state pension if increased in line with earnings, *(b)* the additional cost of increasing the basic pension in line with earnings and *(c)* the additional yield of national insurance contributions if they remain the same proportion of contributors' earnings as in 2002–03; [30394]

(2) if he will provide figures on the same basis as tables 1 and 2 of "The Pension Credit: long-term projections", showing the effect on the cost of the pension credit if the proportion of relevant income disregarded were reduced from 60 per cent. to *(a)* 50 and *(b)* 40 per cent., assuming

that the guarantee credit is uprated in line with average earnings and the savings credit threshold is uprated in line with prices. [30395]

Mr. McCartney: "The Pension Credit: Long-term projections" sets out the Department for Work and Pensions' illustrative projections of the future cost and coverage of the Pension Credit under various assumptions. These projections should be treated as broad-brush illustrations of the effect of various assumptions rather than firm forecasts of potential costs. The results can be thought of as providing broad lower and upper ranges of potential costs.

The projections set out in the paper are sufficient to inform the Department's policy making and to provide assurance that the Government's spending on pensions remains sustainable in the long term. The further analysis requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Private Pension Funds

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if, pursuant to the answer of 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 855W, he will list the means-tested state benefits that attribute income from individual private pension funds not yet annuitised or drawn down; and how many *(a)* claimants and *(b)* unsuccessful claimants have been subject to such pension tariff in the last 12 months. [31454]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows. The following state benefits take into account income from occupational or personal pensions:

Income support (or minimum income guarantee)

Jobseeker's allowance (income based)

Housing benefit

Council tax benefit.

Basic State Pension

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of (i) men and (ii) women over pension age who are entitled to a full rate of basic state pension. [33774]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* The information requested is in the table:

Number of men and women over state pension age who are entitled to a full basic pension of £67.50 at 31 March 2001: Great Britain

	Male	Female
Number of recipients of full basic pension (thousand)	3,458.5	3,275.5
Percentage entitled to basic state pension	92	49

Notes:

1. All 5 per cent. samples are subject to sampling error.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest 100, percentages to the nearest whole per cent.
3. Figures exclude Channel Islands and overseas cases.

Source:

Pensions Strategy Computer System at 31 March 2001 based on a 5 per cent. sample

Housing Benefit

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what changes he proposes to make to housing benefit when pension credit is introduced. [35156]

Malcolm Wicks: The Government's aim in introducing pension credit is to guarantee pensioners a decent income in retirement and, for the first time, to reward those with savings rather than penalise them. Housing benefit makes a vital contribution to this strategy, by allowing pensioners to access affordable housing.

Under pension credit, most pensioners over 65 will be asked for a statement of their circumstances every five years. Housing benefit awards will follow the same timings. From 2003, we will no longer ask pensioners to make a repeat claim for housing benefit every year.

This will reduce burdens on pensioners, simplify administration and allow local authorities to focus more resources on targeting fraud, rather than processing routine renewal claims.

We believe that it would be wrong to deny housing benefit recipients the extra support that pension credit will provide. We will therefore raise the housing benefit income threshold by the maximum amount of the pension credit savings reward, to an expected level of £113.80 for single pensioners in 2003. In addition, we will treat pensioners' capital more generously, taking into account £1 for every £500 instead of every £250 of qualifying savings.

As a result of these changes, 1.9 million pensioner households will get more help, or help for the first time, through housing benefit.

SCOTLAND

Air Traffic Control (Prestwick)

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what steps her Department has taken to monitor the UK Airline Group's capability to fulfil its commitment to build a new Air Traffic Control Centre at Prestwick; [33939]

(2) what contingency plans Her Majesty's Government have to ensure that the new Air Traffic Control Centre for Prestwick goes ahead if the UK Airline Group cannot raise the necessary capital. [33938]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answers 6 February 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The Airline Group is contractually committed to the construction, completion, commissioning and entry into full operational service of the new Scottish centre at Prestwick as part of the public-private partnership deal for National Air Traffic Services.

Boundary Commission

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the allocation of the programmed expenditure of £0.3 million referred to on page 16 of her Department's 2001 annual report. [24770]

Mrs. Liddell: The programme expenditure is in respect of the Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Scotland. The Commission is currently undertaking the 5th review of parliamentary constituencies in Scotland.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the reason for the extent of the change from *(a)* 1999–2000 to 2000–01 and *(b)* 2000–01 to 2001–02 to the costs of the Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Scotland. [24764]

Mrs. Liddell: The costs of the Boundary Commission for Scotland have changed in these years due to preparation for and work involved in undertaking the 5th review of parliamentary constituencies in Scotland, which was formally commenced on 29 June 2001.

Civil Service

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on progress with her Department's action plan to address *(a)* the relevant elements of the Modernising Government White Paper and *(b)* the more detailed proposals for Civil Service reform. [24769]

Mrs. Liddell: The Department is continuing to address the various components of the Modernising Government programme and civil service reform in conjunction with the Cabinet Office and the Scottish Executive.

Departmental Underspend

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of the Department's budget in each of the last four years was not spent in the year for which it was allocated. [24774]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. In 1999–2000 the Department spent 96.1 per cent. of its budget and in 2000–01 it spent 95.9 per cent.

Departmental IT

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the change in costs resulting from her Department's IT strategy. [24767]

Mrs. Liddell: The Department's information systems are kept under review by staff as part of their normal duties. Any changes in costs in the current year are expected to be small: the costs of any future changes are not yet known.

Depreciation and Capital Charges

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the reasons for the extent of the change in the costs of depreciation and capital charges from 1999–2000 to 2000–01. [24765]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. The figures for depreciation and capital charges for 1999–2000 are therefore for a nine month period.

For my Department, the cost of capital arises mainly from the occupancy of Dover House in Whitehall. The building was professionally revalued on 31 March 1999 and, under current accounting procedures, is due to have a professional revaluation every five years. Depreciation of other assets is by equal instalments over their estimated useful life.

Administration Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the administration costs to her Department in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [24772]

Mrs. Liddell: The running costs provision of the Scotland Office was unchanged between 2000–01 and 2001–02. The Department took additional provision of £334,000 in 2001–02 to meet the cost of electoral publicity associated with the 2001 General Election. The provision for the Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Scotland rose from £170,000 in 2000–01 to £300,000 in 2001–02 as the Commission began work on the 5th review of parliamentary constituencies in Scotland.

Whole of Government Accounts Project

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the financial implications for her office of its participation in the Whole of Government accounts project. [24773]

Mrs. Liddell: Work on the Whole of Government accounts project will be undertaken by staff as part of their normal duties and I expect any additional costs to be small.

Departmental Operating Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the reasons for the extent of the change in the operating costs of the Department from 1999–2000 to 2000–01. [24766]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. The operating costs of the Department for 1999–2000 were for a nine month period.

Departmental Payments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) in what proportion of cases the Department has paid accounts within 30 days of receipt of a valid invoice in 2001; [24778]

(2) in what proportion of contractual agreements the Department has made payments in accordance with the agreed timetable. [24779]

Mrs. Liddell: In 1999–2000 my Department paid 98.4 per cent. of its accounts within 30 days. In 2000–01 the figure was 99.33 per cent.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the target to provide any readily available free published information within five working days of receipt of a request applies to anything other than the Department's Service Delivery Agreement. [24781]

Mrs. Liddell: No.

Efficiency Savings

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the efficiency savings declared by her Department in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [24771]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. The financial provision for 2000–01 and 2001–02 was set at a constant level and the Department will absorb any inflationary pressures from within its budget.

Management Information Systems

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on progress with the consolidation of financial and management information systems referred to on page 16 of the 2001 departmental report. [24768]

Mrs. Liddell: Progress with consolidation of the Department's financial and management information systems is continuing.

Staff Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of the increased public expenditure in Scotland between now and 2003–04 is expected to be accounted for by staff costs. [24775]

Mrs. Liddell: Public expenditure on staff costs is a matter for the relevant bodies or departments operating in Scotland. The proportion of staff costs to other expenditure by the Scotland Office is expected to remain broadly unchanged.

Concordats

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with members of the Scottish Executive about the resource implications of the *(a)* bilateral and *(b)* multilateral concordats agreed with UK Government Departments. [24776]

Mrs. Liddell: The Memorandum of Understanding and supplementary texts are agreements between the Government and the devolved Administrations on how they intend conducting relations between the Administrations. The Memorandum of Understanding reflects best practice on issues such as co-operation, exchange of information, correspondence and parliamentary business. Supplementary texts add more detail for the international and EU fields, statistics and financial assistance to industry.

A revised version of the Memorandum of Understanding was published on 18 December 2001 as Command Paper 5240. Three hundred copies were printed, at a cost of £3,851. These costs were met from the Cabinet Office budget. The main distribution medium will be via the Cabinet Office's website: www.cabinet-office.gov.uk.

Scotland Act

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if she will make a statement on the cost to public funds of the implementation of the Scotland Act 1998 (Modifications of Schedule 5) Order 2000; [24784]

(2) if she will make a statement on the costs to public funds of the implementation of the Scotland Act 1998 (Transfer of Functions by the Scottish Ministers etc.) Order 2001; [24782]

(3) if she will make a statement on the cost to public funds of the Scotland Act 1998 (Consequential Modifications) Order 2000; [24787]

(4) if she will make a statement on the cost to public funds of the implementation of the Scotland Act 1998 (Cross-Border Public Authorities) (British Wool Marketing Board) Order 2000; [24791]

(5) if she will make a statement on the cost to public funds of the implementation of the Scotland Act 1998 (Cross-Border Public Authorities) (Adaptation of Functions etc.) Order 2000; [24792]

(6) if she will make a statement on the cost to public funds of the implementation of the Scotland Act 1998 (Cross-Border Public Authorities) (Adaptation of Functions etc.) (No. 2) Order 2000; [24785]

(7) if she will make a statement on the cost to public funds of the implementation of the Scotland Act 1998 (Modification of Functions) Order 2000; [24790]

(8) if she will make a statement on the cost to public funds of the implementation of the Scotland Act 1998 (Transfer of Functions to the Scottish Ministers etc.) (No. 2) Order 2000; [24783]

(9) if she will make a statement on the cost to public funds of the implementation of the Scotland Act 1998 (Modifications of Schedule 4) Order 2000; [24788]

(10) if she will make a statement on the cost to public funds of the implementation of the Scotland Act 1998 (Transfer of Functions to the Scottish Ministers etc.) Order 2000; [24789]

(11) if she will make a statement on the cost to public funds of the Scotland Act 1998 (Agency Arrangements) (Specification) (No. 2) Order 2000; [24786]

Mrs. Liddell: There is no separately identifiable cost to public funds for the implementation of any of these orders, but I would expect it to be minimal in each case.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Wye Navigation Order

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when discussions on the Wye Navigation Order began. [34148]

Mr. Meacher: The National Rivers Authority applied for an order under the Transport Works Act 1992 on 21 March 1996. Its application was subsequently taken over by the Environment Agency.

Noise Pollution

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to reduce noise pollution in the UK. [33736]

Mr. Meacher: Much has been done to address noise from transport and industry including: reducing the level of noise generated by individual vehicles and aircraft;

traffic management schemes; resurfacing roads with low noise surfaces; and addressing noise at the planning stage of new noise generation or noise sensitive developments. Such action has considerably reduced the output of noise from individual sources but has often failed to reduce the overall ambient noise because of other factors, such as the growth in the number of vehicles on our roads. We are developing a strategic approach to build on the progress already made. A consultation seeking views on the first steps towards an Ambient Noise Strategy in England was launched on 20 December last year. A significant part of this strategic approach will be an exercise to build on the noise mapping already carried out of the major transport and industrial noise sources across England. The first stage of this exercise, for which £13 million has been set aside, will start later this year. The strategy will also act as a foundation to the implementation of the forthcoming European directive on the assessment and management of environmental noise which will address ambient noise across the whole of the UK.

Dibden Bay Public Inquiry

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what role the Department has in the Dibden Bay Public Inquiry; and if she will make a statement [31631]

Mr. Meacher: It will be for the inquiry inspector to consider all issues pertaining to the proposed development and then to make a recommendation to the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. Applications for licences for the dredging, and disposal of dredged waste, associated with the proposed development have been made to the Department under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985. The issues raised at the inquiry will, in part, inform the decision-making process in respect of those consents.

Foot and Mouth

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the risk assessments that support the relaxing of controls over livestock markets, animal movements and countryside activities. [35049]

Alun Michael: I am today placing in the Library of the House copies of a document setting out the veterinary basis for the interim livestock movements regime, along with Veterinary Risk Assessments on Markets, Sheep Shearing, Sheep Dipping and Scanning, Footpaths and Hunting; and a preliminary risk analysis of the 20-day standstill rule carried out by the Veterinary Laboratories Agency.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Departmental Secondments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many staff in his Department have been seconded to jobs in the *(a)* private and *(b)* public sector in each of the last four years. [31774]

Mr. Leslie: Information on secondments of civil servants to other sectors (interchange) is recorded separately by the individual Departments to which they belong and is collated by the Cabinet Office as detailed in the table which has been placed in the Library.

Civil Service Entrants

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what percentage of administrative fast stream entrants to the Civil Service in each of the last four years has been *(a)* female, *(b)* members of ethnic minority groups, *(c)* from independent schools and went to Oxford and Cambridge and *(d)* have (i) arts and (ii) science degrees. [34045]

Mr. Leslie: Our aim is to increase awareness and attract applications from a diverse range of candidates to the Fast Stream Development Programme. We do not collate data on the schools that entrants have attended. The information on gender, ethnicity, Oxford and Cambridge and arts and science degrees is as follows:

	2000–01	*1999–2000*	*1998–99*	*1997–98*
Female				
Percentage	47.7	50	38.7	39
Number	203	153	91	108
Ethnic minority				
Percentage	6.8	5.9	3.4	2.5
Number	29	18	8	7
Oxbridge				
Percentage	32.2	30.1	34.5	34.3
Number	137	92	81	95

Percentage

	Arts	*Science related*	*Other*
2000–01	70	22	8
1999–2000	74	20	6
1998–99	76	19	5
1997–98	72	21	7

HOME DEPARTMENT

Remand Centres

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reintroduce purposeful activity for the inmates of remand centres. [33715]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 5 February 2002]*: It is not necessary to reintroduce purposeful activity for young offenders in remand centres, as such activity has not ceased. Prisoners in young offender establishments, including remand centres, spent an average of 23.1 hours a week in purposeful activity in 2000–01. The Government are committed to building on their youth justice reforms to improve the standard of custodial accommodation and programmes for 18 to 20-year-olds. This is expected to increase the purposeful activity available to remand and sentenced prisoners in that age group.

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications to the Criminal Cases Review Commission in each of the last two years concerned convictions from a magistrates' court; and what proportion this is of the total conviction applications from all courts. [32471]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Criminal Cases Review Commission does not collect routinely the statistics requested, and they could be obtained only by disproportionate cost. However following the introduction of an electronic case database from 1 April 2001 recent data are available.

In the period 1 April 2001–31 December 2001, 616 applications were received of which 31 (5 per cent.) were applications concerning convictions from magistrates courts.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of applicants to the Criminal Cases Review Commission have the assistance of *(a)* legal aid and *(b)* legal advice and assistance. [32481]

Mr. Keith Bradley: It is not known what proportion of applicants have the assistance of legal aid. 51 per cent. of applicants, whose cases were under review, had some form of legal representation.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average times were *(a)* in 2001 and *(b)* in 2002 between the lodging of an application in respect of a crown court conviction to the CCRC and the issuing of a referral or of a minded-to-refuse letter. [32487]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Criminal Cases Review Commission does not collect routinely the statistics requested, and they could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Immigration

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the *(a)* staff numbers and *(b)* funding have been of (i) the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (ii) the Joint Entry Clearance Unit for each of the last five years; and what levels are planned for the next two years. [30989]

Angela Eagle: The staff numbers in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (actual and estimated) are shown in the table:

	Staff numbers
April 1997	5,697
April 1998	5,160
April 1999	5,750
April 2000	6,582
April 2001	9,757
April 2002	10,878
April 2003	12,500
April 2004	12,900

On the funding of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 18 January 2002, to my hon. Friend, the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love), *Official Report,* column 546W.

The Joint Entry Clearance Unit (JECU) was established in June 2000 with an establishment of 59 staff. This was increased to 76 in the following year but there are no plans for further staff increases.

Details of JECU's costs and funding (past and future plans) are given in the Foreign and Commonwealth Department Report, copies of which are available in the Library.

Asylum Seekers

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department why his Department is considering using the RAF Turnhouse site to build an accommodation centre for asylum seekers. [32517]

Angela Eagle: The Royal Air Force (RAF) Turnhouse site is one of eight potential sites presently under consideration for the building of trial accommodation centres for asylum seekers.

Criteria used for the selection of potential sites included; sites with the capacity to cater for several hundred residents plus facilities either as a new-build or conversion, and a reasonable geographical spread beyond the south-east of England.

Women Murderers

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the women convicted of murder who are the subject of applications to the Criminal Case Review Commission are still serving custodial sentences. [32502]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Criminal Cases Review Commission does not collect routinely the statistics requested. However, the introduction of a new electronic database with effect from 1 April 2001 means the Commission can provide recent data. Of the 80 applications concerning offences of murder received from 1 April to 31 December 2001, five were from women. We are unable to say how many of these five are still in custody because of the disproportionate cost involved in obtaining this information.

Life Sentences

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under what powers, and by what criteria he sets the tariff for persons serving life sentences. [33081]

Beverley Hughes: The Secretary of State sets tariffs only for adults convicted of murder. He does so under the discretionary powers presently contained in section 29 of the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997, and in accordance with the administrative arrangements set out in the written answer of 30 November 1983, *Official Report,* column 505, by the then Home Secretary, Mr. Leon Brittan, and a number of subsequent parliamentary statements.

In setting the tariff in a particular case the Secretary of State gives consideration to all the circumstances relating to the offence, any mitigating and aggravating factors, the recommendations made by the trial judge and the Lord Chief Justice, and any relevant representations made about the case.

Cemeteries

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in implementing the recommendations accepted in the Government response to the Select Committee on Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs report on cemeteries. [33653]

Beverley Hughes: The first meeting of the new advisory group was held in December 2001. A draft work plan to take forward work arising from the Committee's recommendations, some of which fall to other Government Departments and agencies, is now under consideration by group members.

The findings of a research project commissioned last year to provide information about the condition and management of cemeteries in England and Wales will be available shortly.

I understand that in December 2001 the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions jointly published "The Historic Environment: A Force for Our Future", reporting the Government's review of policies towards the historic environment.

I also understand that action has been taken by the Health and Safety Executive to address memorial safety and, together with English Heritage, the management of risks within the historic environment. English Heritage is planning to produce its guidance on the care and maintenance of historic cemeteries in April 2002.

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people are *(a)* in custody and *(b)* on bail following charges connected with the fraudulent misuse of individual learning accounts; [33084]

(2) how many people in each police authority have been *(a)* arrested and *(b)* charged for offences relating to fraud concerning the individual learning accounts programme; [33082]

(3) how many arrests have been made since 13 December 2001 concerning individual learning account fraud; [33263]

(4) how many prosecutions have been taken out against people accused of fraud relating to individual learning accounts; [33083]

Beverley Hughes: The information held centrally by my Department on fraud, whether relating to persons held in custody, arrested, or proceeded against, does not allow fraud in connection with individual learning accounts to be distinguished from other types of fraud, as the circumstances of each offence are not collected.

Immigration Appeals

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what instructions he has given to immigration staff about serving appeal decisions; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [27187]

Angela Eagle: The personal serving of appeals determinations is a new process and instructions to staff are constantly being refined in the light of operational experience. It is not advisable to publish these at present but arrangements will be made to place a copy in the Library once operational procedures have been fully evaluated and instructions finalised.

Asylum Accommodation Centres

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will state the criteria used to identify the eight sites for the proposed asylum accommodation centres. [31730]

Angela Eagle: Eight potential sites have so far been identified. The criteria used for their selection included: sites with the capacity to cater for several hundred residents plus facilities either as new-build or conversion and a reasonable geographical spread beyond the south east of England. The criteria for selection for the final sites has yet to be decided.

Racism and Xenophobia

Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has for implementing the EU Council Framework decision on combating racism and xenophobia as it relates to *(a)* religion or belief and *(b)* national origin. [32836]

Angela Eagle: Negotiations on the European Commission's proposal for a Council Framework Decision on Combating Racism and Xenophobia are at a very early stage. The Government will consider proposals for implementing the framework decision once a final text has been agreed.

Drugs

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the volume of *(a)* heroin and *(b)* cocaine imported into the United Kingdom in each of the past 10 years. [33029]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: On the basis of a study published last year we broadly estimate the size of the United Kingdom market as about 22 tonnes for cocaine and crack and 31 tonnes for heroin. Estimates for earlier years are not available.

Police Reform

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individual representations he has received from police officers about his White Paper on Police Reform. [26077]

Mr. Denham: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 5 February 2002 to the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey), *Official Report*, column 869W.

Witness Support Schemes

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals there are to *(a)* publicise the work of witness support schemes and *(b)* secure recruits for them locally. [32683]

Mr. Keith Bradley: All victims of reported crime are given or sent the "Victims of Crime" leaflet. This includes information about the Witness Service. Those called to appear as witnesses are sent the "Witness in Court" leaflet, which provides a variety of useful information, including details of the Witness Service and contact information.

The Witness Service is provided through the organisation Victim Support. The Home Office grant to Victim Support in the current financial year is £25 million, an increase of £6 million on last year's figure. The extra money has enabled Victim Support to replicate in magistrates' courts the witness support services they already provide in the Crown court. Local victim support schemes publicise their work and recruit volunteers in a variety of ways.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Complaints

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what systems are in place for monitoring complaints from members of the public about the service provided by her Department; and if she will make a statement. [30849]

Ms Rosie Winterton: There are various arrangements for dealing with and monitoring time to deal with complaints in different parts of the Department. These involve a range of time limits and targets. For example, complaints about the service provided by the Lord Chancellor's Department Headquarters are recorded and monitored by the Departmental Correspondence Unit which aims to deal fully with complaints within 20 working days. The Public Record Office and HM Land Registry aim to respond to complaints within 10 working days and five working days respectively. In the Court Service, written customer complaints are recorded by civil courts on the Business Management System and records are kept of those dealt with by Crown courts and at regional offices, and also by Court Service Headquarters. However, from April 2002 a computerised system will be introduced for all courts, regional offices and Court Service Headquarters to record and analyse all complaints from court users. This will include verbal, telephone and e-mail complaints, as well as those in writing.

Details about the complaints procedures produced by the Lord Chancellor's departments and agencies are published on the relevant websites. The procedures make it clear that complainants who are not satisfied with the response they receive can ask for the matter to be reviewed. If the complainant remains dissatisfied following the review then he or she may ask his or her Member of Parliament to raise the matter with the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration.

The judiciary are of course independent of the Department but the Lord Chancellor, as head of the judiciary, is responsible for investigating complaints about the personal conduct of Judges. He cannot consider complaints about judicial decisions. As a general rule he will investigate any complaint that a member of the judiciary has behaved in a way that falls short of the standards that both he and the public expects.

International Legal Services

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the impact of EU enlargement on international legal services. [33355]

Mr. Wills: The UK is committed to working for further opening up of the market in international legal services, which generate significant sums of foreign earnings. This aim will be furthered by enlargement of the EU, where the free movement and practice of lawyers is guaranteed.

Reporting Procedures

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what reporting procedures exist between the Law Commission and his office. [33340]

Mr. Wills: The Law Commission submits an annual report on the Law Commission's work to the Lord Chancellor who then lays it before Parliament. The Lord Chancellor's Director General of Policy Group has line management responsibilities for the Secretary of the Law Commission and reports on his or her performance annually.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what reporting procedures exist between the Council on Tribunals and her office. [33290]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Council on Tribunals makes an annual report to the Lord Chancellor, the Scottish Ministers and the National Assembly for Wales, which is laid before Parliament.

Community Legal Service

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what additional training is made available to paralegal staff in the Community Legal Service. [33301]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Legal Services Commission funds a number of initiatives to support additional training for both lawyers and paralegals. This includes training to cover issues in relation to the CLS Quality Mark as well as support for training in specific categories of law, such as that provided through the expansion package aimed at increasing the number of trained immigration and asylum law advisers. The Partnership Innovation Budget is also being used to support a range of training initiatives, and this was a key feature of a number of the successful bids announced last September.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many reports or submissions the Community Legal Service have produced since it was first established; and if she will list them. [33292]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information in the form requested is not readily available and could be compiled only at disproportionate cost.

The Community Legal Service does not of itself produce reports and submissions. However, the Legal Services Commission, which has a statutory responsibility to establish, maintain and develop the Community

Legal Service, the Lord Chancellor's Department, and Community Legal Service Partnerships, have all produced a range of publications since the launch of the Community Legal Service in April 2000. These cover a range of subject areas, such as the Community Legal Service Quality Mark and Partnership Innovation Budget, but also extend to include individual strategic plans published by Community Legal Service Partnerships.

Legal Services Commission

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department who *(a)* sits on and *(b)* appoints members of the Legal Services Commission; and what criteria are used to select those who sit on it. [32565]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Legal Services Commission has a chair and 10 members, appointed by the Lord Chancellor. Eight members are non-executives, who work for a number of days a year, and two are executives, senior members of the Legal Services Commission's staff. The current Chair is Peter G. Birch, CBE and the non-executive members are Anthony Edwards, Philip Ely, Juliet Herzog, Sheila Hewitt, Yvonne Mosquito, Richard Penn, Margaret Richards and Jim Shearer. The two executive members are Steve Orchard, CBE (Chief Executive) and Brian Harvey (Director of Resources and Supplier Development).

Section 1 (5) of the Access to Justice Act 1999 requires the Lord Chancellor in appointing to have regard to the desirability of Commission members having between them experience and knowledge of: (a) the provision of services which the Commission can fund as part of the Community Legal Service or Criminal Defence Service; (b) the work of the courts; (c) consumer affairs; (d) social conditions; and (e) management. Further essential criteria set out in the information pack sent to people responding to public advertisements for the non-executive posts are: (a) ability to make a significant contribution at both strategic and policy levels; (b) potential to rise to the challenges that will be faced by the new Commission and to commit to an organisation driving through significant change; (c) sensitivity to the political and social policy issues facing the Commission and to the needs of the legal end users: (d) breadth of experience, vision and interest; (e) excellent communication skills; (f) a willingness to work with others to develop consensus, including working with sub-groups; (g) the ability to command respect and influence as an individual; (h) an understanding of the nature of working within the public sector; and (i) an understanding of the need to maintain high standards of probity, integrity and discretion.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many reports or submissions the Legal Services Commission has produced since it was first established; and if she will list them. [33293]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Legal Services Commission produced 70 reports and consultation papers between its inception in April 2000 and 30 November 2001. Details are set out as follows in their order of publication:

1. Merseyside Regional Report
2. Legal Services Commission (LSC) General Civil Contracting—review of contracts draft for consultation
3. Guidance for Community Legal Service Partnerships Draft for Consultation
4. South Eastern Regional Legal Services Committee (RLSC) Strategy
5. West Midlands RLSC Strategy Report
6. Eastern RLSC Report and Review
7. Merseyside Regional Report
8. Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Report
9. Draft amendments to franchise category definitions, clinical negligence and actions against detaining authorities, help at court in family cases and family franchise category, June 2000
10. Legal and Franchise Quality Standard: Solicitors
11. Legal and Franchise Quality Standard: Not for profit
12. General Civil Contract (Not for Profit)—Contract Documentation
13. Legal Aid Board Annual Report 1999–2000
14. Merseyside Regional Report
15. Assessing Means Assessment: A summary of the first phase of the means assessment research project
16. Family Graduated Fees Consultation Paper
17. Community Legal Service (CLS) Funding, contracting for all civil representation, Draft for consultation
18. General Criminal Contract—Draft for Consultation July 2000
19. An Evaluation of the Legal Services Commission's Pilot Project on Contracting Criminal Legal Advice and Assistance—Executive Summary
20. A Report on the Evaluation of the Legal Services Commission's Pilot Project on Contracting Criminal Legal Advice and Assistance—Quality in Criminal Defence Services
21. A report on the Evaluation of the Legal Services Commission's Pilot Project on Contracting Legal Advice and Assistance—Work Patterns and Costs under Criminal Contracting
22. Duty Solicitor Arrangements 2001—Draft for consultation July 2000
23. LSC Corporate Plan 2000–01 to 2003–04
24. Tameside Community Legal Service Partnership (CLSP) Strategic Plan
25. Salford CLSP Strategic Plan
26. North Western CLSP Update
27. Salaried Defender Service Research Specifications
28. Merseyside Regional Report
29. General Criminal Contract Proposed Payment Rates and Monthly Payment Rules
30. North Western RLSC Report and Review
31. London RLSC Report and Review of Regional Strategy
32. Criminal Contracting Documentation—December 2000
33. General Civil Contracts from 1 April 2001 (Solicitors)
34. General Civil Contracts from April 2001 (Not for Profit)
35. Local Legal Need
36. Report of the Findings of the LSRC Equal Opportunities Survey, 2000
37. North Western CLSP Update
38. Yorkshire and Humberside RLSC Report and Review
39. LSC Manual Release 3—(Update 1 of 2001) Consultation Exercise
40. Means Assessment: Options for Change
41. A proposed Quality Mark Standard for Websites
42. Proposed amendments to the Funding Code and decision-making guidance on family mediation
43. Housing Possession Court Duty Scheme Pilot—Proposals
44. LSC Legal Advice and Assistance at Police Stations Register Arrangements 2001

45. South Western RLSC Report and Review
46. East Midlands RLSC Report and Review
47. Duty Solicitor Manual 2001
48. Transaction Criteria—Ancillary relief and Children Act booklets
49. LSC Corporate Plan 2001–02 to 2003–04
50. West Midlands Community Legal Issue Report
51. Housing Possession Court Duty Scheme Pilot—Proposals: Summary of Responses and Conclusions
52. Warwickshire CLS Report
53. London RLSC Annual Report 1 April 2000—31 March 2001
54. Eastern RLSC Annual Report
55. Mediation Quality Mark Standard
56. Family Advice and Information Networks Project
57. CLS Consultation on range of proposed amendments for the Commission's documentation
58. CLS—changes to the financial conditions for funding by the Commission
59. Merseyside Regional Report
60. Quality Mark for the Bar
61. Step by Step Guide to the Quality Mark
62. Criminal Bills Assessment Manual—draft for consultation
63. Police and Criminal Evidence Act Guidance on Costs Assessment Manual—draft for consultation
64. Client Feedback Questionnaire
65. Casework for Students
66. Cost under the General Civil Contract
67. Derby Strategic Plan
68. Northampton Strategic Plan
69. Derbyshire Strategic Plan
70. Stockton-on-Tees Strategic Plan.

Statutory Publications Office

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many publications the Statutory Publications Office has in storage; and if he will list the buildings where they are stored. [33295]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Statutory Publications Office does not hold any publications in storage. All publications held by the Statutory Publications Office are held within the Statutory Publications Office, Lord Chancellor's Department, Selborne House central London. These publications include Acts of Parliament and Statutory Instruments that are used for the purpose of updating the Statute Law Database.

Judges

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many complaints he has received since taking office concerning the conduct of individual judges. [33353]

Mr. Wills: The principle of judicial independence, which is central to our constitutional arrangements, means that it is not open to the Lord Chancellor or his Department to consider complaints about judicial decision. However, as Head of the Judiciary the Lord Chancellor does consider complaints about the personal conduct of individual judges and other judicial office holders. The names of the complainant and the judge are confidential. However, in the period between August 1998 (when new internal arrangements for handling such complaints came into force) and December 2001, the Lord Chancellor received a total of 6,679 complaints about members of the judiciary. The majority of these related to judicial decisions. Of the remainder, 1,227 related to personal conduct and were taken forward for investigation by seeking the complainant's consent for the complaint to be copied to the judge. In 1,034 cases consent was received and the Lord Chancellor then approached the judge concerned for his or her response to the allegations and relayed these to the complainant. On 23 occasions he saw fit to take further action, either by writing to the judge or by arranging for him or her to be seen by officials. Comparable figures for the period before August 1998 are unavailable.

Mr. Watts: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proposals she has to reduce the retirement age of judges. [33748]

Ms Rosie Winterton: There are currently no proposals to reduce the retirement age for judges.

Family Court Casework

Matthew Green: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many family court cases have been heard in *(a)* magistrates courts and *(b)* county courts in each of the last five years. [32998]

Mr. Wills: Figures relating to the total number of family court cases for the five year period 1996 to 2000 are provided in the table. Figures for 2001 are currently being compiled. The figures represent the numbers of orders made under the Children Act 1989, the Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act 1976 and the Family Law Act 1996 (Part IV). In addition the county court figures include the number of petitions for divorce filed.

Family court cases

	Magistrates courts[1]	*County courts*
1996	57,904	298,409
1997	56,233	278,605
1998	70,984	312,086
1999	56,112	290,506
2000	87,977	305,107

[1] Estimated figures—contain imputed data

Official Visits

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when a Minister from his Department last visited *(a)* the Isle of Man and *(b)* the Channel Islands on an official basis. [32405]

Mr. Wills: The dates of the last official visits by a Lord Chancellor's Department Minister were *(a)* the Isle of Man on 27 June 2001, *(b)* Guernsey on 20 September 2001, Alderney and Sark on 27 September 2001 and Jersey on 19 November 2001.

Auld Report

Mr. Watts: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what his policy is on the Auld proposal for district judges to sit with panels of JPs. [33723]

Mr. Wills: The Government have taken no decisions on the report of Sir Robin Auld's Review. The period for comment closed on 31 January. The Government are now considering the recommendations in detail, taking account of the comments received. The Government will announce their conclusions by way of a White Paper in the spring.

Promotional Video

Mr. Watts: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much her Department has spent on *(a)* producing and *(b)* distributing the video to persuade people to become judges; and if she will list the people and organisations to whom it has been distributed. [33744]

Ms Rosie Winterton: On 1 February the Lord Chancellor released 'All Rise', a video showing the part-time judicial selection process from application through to appointment. It is aimed at encouraging the widest possible spectrum of qualified lawyers to apply for part-time judicial office across the range of offices in the courts and tribunals.

Copies of the video have been sent to local and regional law societies, barristers' chambers, lawyers' representative organisations, the media and individuals with an interest. Over 600 copies of the video have been distributed so far.

Production costs, including copying costs, to 1 February are expected to total £38,375.50.

Distribution costs, including the cost of postage and envelopes, to 1 February are expected to total approximately £445.00.

Leggatt Report

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement on the Government's response to the Leggatt report on tribunal justice. [31442]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government are currently considering their response to the Leggatt review and will make a statement at an appropriate time later in the year.

The Government's response will take into account the public consultation exercise completed in December 2001, which generated over 350 responses.

TREASURY

Income Tax Yield

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the *(a)* annual income tax yield in each year from 1975–76 to 2001–02 and *(b)* annual real increase in the income tax yield in each year from 1975–76 to 2001–02. [30559]

Dawn Primarolo: Income tax receipts for every year after 1977–78 are published in Inland Revenue Statistics 1.2. This is available on the internet at http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/tax_receipts/g_t02_1.htm.

Income tax statistics for 1975–76 to 1977–78 are as follows:

£ million

	Income tax receipts
1975–76	15,041
1976–77	17,014
1977–78	17,420

The Treasury publishes GDP deflators on the internet at http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/Economic_Data_and_Tools/GDP_Deflators/data_gdp_inde x.cfm.

Child Care Tax Credit

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans the Government have to extend the child care tax credit to parents in part-time work. [33013]

Dawn Primarolo: Child care tax credit is already available to parents who work part time. It can be claimed by lone parents who work at least 16 hours a week and by couples where both of them work at least 16 hours a week.

Tax Credits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a breakdown of his estimate in paragraph 11 of his summary of responses to the New Tax Credit Consultation (November 2001) of childless people in households with someone in work with household income below 60 per cent. of the median, between *(a)* childless couples, *(b)* single people over 25 years of age working 30 hours per week or more and *(c)* other single people. [32611]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* There are around 1 million single people or people in childless couples living in households with incomes below 60 per cent. of the median (after housing costs) who are working 16 hours or more a week. Around half of these are over 25 years of age and working 30 hours or more a week.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out the basis for his calculation on replacement rates for childless couples, reported in paragraph 9 of his summary of responses to the New Tax Credit Consultation (November 2001); and if he will provide separate estimates for *(a)* renters and *(b)* homebuyers with mortgages. [32612]

Dawn Primarolo: The replacement rates referred to are based on a couple with someone working 35 hours a week at £5 an hour. Using this assumption, a couple without children paying rent is around £20 a week better off in full-time work than on benefit. A couple without children with a mortgage is around £55 a week better off in work than on benefit, (assuming they are not receiving any income support to cover mortgage interest). These gains to work correspond to replacement ratios before housing costs of 88 per cent. for the couple paying rent and 63 per cent. for the couple with a mortgage.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many claims for working families tax credit and disabled persons tax credit have been *(a)* investigated, *(b)* dealt with by way of penalty or caution, *(c)* made the subject of a prosecution and *(d)* made the subject of a prosecution or conviction in each year since the WFTC and DPTC commenced. [25102]

Dawn Primarolo: The table gives the information requested on applications for WFTC and DPTC since the start of these tax credits in October 1999.

Period	*WFTC*	*DPTC*
(a) Number of applications investigated		
October 1999 to March 2000	3,893	110
April 2000 to March 2001	28,930	644
April 2001 to December 2001	14,361	657
Total	47,184	1,411
(b) Number dealt with by Penalty		
October 1999 to September 2000	106	1
October 2000 to September 2001	401	8
October 2001 to December 2001	128	1
Total	6335	10
(c) and (d) Number of prosecutions		
October 1999 to March 2000	0	0
April 2000 to March 2001	12	0
April 2001 to December 2001	16	0
Total	28	0

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what guidance he has given to the Inland Revenue in respect of their compliance work on tax credits. [25101]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue approaches non-compliance relating to tax credits very seriously. It has issued extensive guidance to staff carrying out tax credit compliance work on individual applications and on employers who pay tax credits through the payroll.

The principal guidance on tax credit compliance for Inland Revenue officers is the Applicant Compliance Guide. This Guide has been published and the text is available to the public at all Inland Revenue inquiry centres. Guidance on tax credit aspects of employer compliance is being consolidated in an updated Employer Compliance Handbook. This will be published on completion. Specialist compliance sections within the Tax Credit Office and at Special Compliance Office operate under internal guidance not available to the public.

Inland Revenue officers carry out tax credit applicant compliance and employer compliance work in accordance with the relevant Codes of Practice. A Code of Practice is issued at the opening of an inquiry, explaining why the Inland Revenue inquires into some cases and what happens during an inquiry. It also sets out the rights and responsibilities of both the customer and the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many appeals have been made to the High Court and the Court of Session under the provisions of *(a)* subparagraph (5) of paragraph 3 and *(b)* subparagraph (4) of paragraph 4 of the Tax Credits Act 1999 in each year since the commencement of the Act. [25983]

Dawn Primarolo: From the information available, to date there have been no appeals to the High Court and the Court of Session under the provisions of Schedule 4 of the Tax Credits Act 1999 following Inland Revenue penalty proceedings.

International Aid

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to press other Governments to *(a)* increase their total international aid budget and *(b)* secure the abolition of education charges in the developing world by 2005. [33516]

Mr. Boateng: In his speech in New York in November the Chancellor called on all rich nations to commit further substantial increases to development assistance.

The Government are committed to the principle that primary education should be made free. No child should be denied access to a basic education because the costs, either direct or indirect, cannot be met by the household. School fees are an example of a direct cost, but there may be indirect charges for books, uniforms and exams, which can make education unaffordable to many.

The equitable financing of education is a key issue for achieving our goal of Universal Primary Education by 2015. In their dialogue with partner governments, the international community, and civil society on poverty reduction and education sector programmes, the Government will continue to argue for the reduction of financial barriers that exclude large numbers of the poorest children.

Economic Models

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what use is being made by his Department of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research's global economic model; and if he will make a statement. [33612]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* The Treasury is in contact with outside organisations on a wide range of issues.

PFI Deals

Ian Stewart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the Government's latest estimate is for the financial years 2001–02 to 2003–04 of the *(a)* capital spending by the private sector resulting from private finance initiative deals signed in those years, *(b)* likely value of capital spending by the private sector resulting from private finance initiative deals reaching preferred bidder stage in those years and *(c)* estimated value of payments made by the Government under private finance initiative contracts to private sector providers. [34925]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The current position is as follows:

Table A: Departmental estimate of capital spending by the private sector resulting from deals signed in the following years

£ million

Department	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
Defence	225	200	100
FCO and Overseas Development	7	9	8
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	2	16	3
Trade and Industry	38	31	19
Transport, Local Government and the Regions	865	1,015	1,011

Table A: Departmental estimate of capital spending by the private sector resulting from deals signed in the following years

£ million

Department	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
Education and Skills[1,2]	28	9	0
Home Office	34	0	0
Legal Departments	17	13	15
Culture, Media and Sport	0	0	0
Health	536	309	120
GCHQ	159	42	7
Work and Pensions	18	67	14
Scotland	364	93	19
Wales	47	0	0
Northern Ireland	31	16	10
Chancellor's Departments	83	15	4
Cabinet Office	0	0	0
Local Authorities[3]	1,052	1,580	1,800
Total	3,506	3,415	3,130

[1] Excludes private finance activity in education institutions classified to the private sector. Includes projects in the voluntary aided schools sector only.

[2] PFI activity in local authority schools is included in the local authorities line.

[3] Figures represent estimated spend on projects supported by central Government through Revenue Support Grant.

Table B: Estimated aggregated capital value of projects at preferred bidder stage

£ million

Department	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
Defence	150	270	260
FCO and Overseas Development	0	0	0
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	0	0	0
Trade and Industry	0	0	0
Transport, Local Government and the Regions[1]	10	21	21
Education and Skills[2]	0	0	0
Home Office	80	80	40
Legal Departments	5	47	8
Culture, Media and Sport	0	0	0
Health	0	0	0
GCHQ	0	0	0
Work and Pensions	0	0	0
Scotland	164	25	0
Wales	23	76	53
Northern Ireland	27	54	27
Chancellor's Departments	0	0	0
Cabinet Office	2	4	4
Local Authorities[3]	0	0	0
Total	461	577	413

[1] In addition, substantial private investment is levered in through housing, urban regeneration and other programmes.

[2] Excludes PPP/PFI activity in the further and higher education (FHE) sectors, which are classified to the private sector. Includes projects in the voluntary aided schools sector only.

[3] PFI activity in local authority schools is included in the local authorities line.

Table C: Estimated payments under PFI contracts (signed deals)

	£ million
2000–01	2,809
2001–02	3,981
2002–03	4,548
2003–04	4,875
2004–05	4,899
2005–06	4,926
2006–07	4,939
2007–08	5,014
2008–09	4,845
2009–10	4,769
2010–11	4,569
2011–12	4,426
2012–13	4,179
2013–14	4,116
2014–15	3,949
2015–16	3,961
2016–17	3,956
2017–18	3,894
2018–19	3,340
2019–20	3,346
2020–21	3,461
2021–22	3,066
2022–23	3,062
2023–24	3,033
2024–25	3,064
2025–26	2,681

Note:

Table C shows a forecast of the estimated payments for services flowing from new private investment over the next 25 years. Payments may be lower than estimated because of deductions from the service payments, caused either by the supplier's failure to make the service available or by a failure to meet the required performance standards. In addition, variances may occur because of changes in the service requirements agreed during the course of the contract. Payments may also vary as a result of the early termination of a contract triggering contractual arrangements for compensation on termination.

Income Tax Liability

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the change in income tax liability for each year since 1997 of the *(a)* top one per cent., *(b)* top five per cent., *(c)* top 10 per cent., *(d)* bottom 75 per cent., *(e)* bottom 50 per cent., and *(f)* bottom 10 per cent., of taxpayers. [26278]

Dawn Primarolo: The changes in total income, total income tax liability, and total tax as a percentage of total income, by the groups requested for each year since 1997–98, are shown in the table.

Change in total income between

£ billion

Group of taxpayers	*1997–98 and 1998–99*	*1998–99 and 1999–2000*	*1999–2000 and 2000–01*	*2000–01 and 2001–02*
Top 1 per cent.	8.4	4.2	6.2	2.0
Top 5 per cent.	15.6	8.0	10.0	4.4
Top 10 per cent.	21.8	11.1	12.5	6.1
Bottom 75 per cent.	29.5	13.2	8.2	10.9
Bottom 50 per cent.	14.1	7.0	3.0	6.4
Bottom 10 per cent.	1.7	0.4	0.2	0.9
All taxpayers	64.3	29.9	25.6	20.7

Change in total tax liability between

£ billion

Group of taxpayers	*1997–98 and 1998–99*	*1998–99 and 1999–2000*	*1999–2000 and 2000–01*	*2000–01 and 2001–02*
Top 1 per cent.	2.8	1.3	2.3	0.6
Top 5 per cent.	4.7	2.1	3.3	1.3
Top 10 per cent.	5.6	2.8	3.5	1.7
Bottom 75 per cent.	1.6	0.5	0.7	–0.3
Bottom 50 per cent.	0.7	–0.2	0.2	–0.2
Bottom 10 per cent.	0.0	–0.1	0.0	0.0
All taxpayers	8.5	4.0	4.8	1.2

Income tax liability as percentage of total income

Percentage

Group of taxpayers	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Top 1 per cent.	35	35	34	35	34
Top 5 per cent.	30	30	30	30	30
Top 10 per cent.	27	27	27	27	27
Bottom 75 per cent.	13	12	11	11	11
Bottom 50 per cent.	9	9	8	8	8
Bottom 10 per cent.	2	2	1	1	1
All taxpayers	18	18	17	18	17

These estimates are based on the Survey of Personal Incomes and are consistent with the pre-Budget report 2001.

Census Forms

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the National Assembly for Wales concerning their role in agreeing the content of future census forms in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [33522]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Simon Thomas, dated 7 February 2002:

As National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales I have been asked to reply to your recent question about discussions with the National Assembly for Wales concerning their role in agreeing the content of future census forms in Wales. (33522)

Discussions are currently taking place between officials from the Office for National Statistics and the National Assembly for Wales (NAW) with a view to ensuring that the NAW has a more formal role in the planning, and content of, future Censuses in Wales. I will make a statement when an agreement has been reached.

Manufacturing Jobs

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many manufacturing jobs in central London have been lost since 1 April 2001. [33701]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Mark field, dated 7 February 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question about how many manufacturing jobs in central London have been lost since 1st April 2001. (33701)

Data for employee jobs in Central London are only collected by the Annual Business Inquiry (ABI). ABI data are available on Nomis, which is accessible through the House of Commons Library. The most recent data available related to December 2000 and were released in December 2001. Data for December 2001 will be published in December 2002.

Data Protection Act

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the longest period of time elapsed is between receiving *(a)* the administration fee and providing the information requested and *(b)* a request for information and providing the information requested, under the Data Protection Act 1998. [33457]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information is as follows:

	Longest period of time between providing information requested and receiving:	
Department	*Administration fee*	*Request for information*
HM Treasury	91	110
Customs and Excise	n/a	172
Inland Revenue	n/a	55

Customs and Excise

(a) The Department does not charge a fee for processing subject access requests.

(b) The longest period elapsing between receiving a request and completing all action relating to its is 172 calendar days.

Inland Revenue

(a) The Inland Revenue does not charge an administration fee for responding to requests under the Data Protection Act 1998.

(b) For completed requests, the longest period of time elapsed between receiving a request for information and providing the information requested under the Data Protection Act 1998 is 55 days. For outstanding requests, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him today in respect of his question 33435.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many requests the Department has received under the Data Protection Act 1988 for *(a)* electronically held information and *(b)* paper documentation. [33585]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information is as follows:

	How many data protection requests have been received for:	
	Electronically held information	*Paper document*
HM Treasury	n/a	n/a
Customs and Excise	19	n/a
Inland Revenue	11,988	421

HM Treasury

The Treasury has generally included paper records in its searches wherever possible, and therefore makes no distinction in its records.

Customs and Excise

The requests that the Department receives do not normally differentiate between the ways in which data are held.

Inland Revenue

	Number
Electronically held information	11,988
Paper documentation	421
Total	12,409

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many responses to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 have been completed *(a)* within 40, *(b)* between 40 and 60 and *(c)* over 60 days after receiving the original letter; and how many are still outstanding. [33435]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information is as follows:

	HM Treasury	*Customs and Excise*	*Inland Revenue*
Total number of requests	32	76	12,409
Completed within 40 days	17	25	12,356
Completed between 40 and 60 days	6	16	10
Completed over 60 days	3	22	2
Still outstanding	6	13	41

HM Treasury

The outstanding requests relate to either security vetting issues which have only recently been solved, or to 'all records' requests which have necessitated lengthy paper as well as electronic searches.

Customs and Excise

These figures relate to a period when HM Customs and Excise was undergoing fundamental restructuring and was introducing, as a consequence, revised procedures for dealing with subject access requests. The new procedures, coupled with further measures to increase staff awareness, should have a beneficial effect on future response times.

Inland Revenue

Of the 41 outstanding subject access requests under the Data Protection Act 1998, 39 requests are within the 40 day time limit set out in the Act. In two cases, clearances are awaited from the Inland Revenue's medical advisers for the release of sealed medical records covered by doctor/patient confidentiality. All other records were released to the individuals within 40 days.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of responses to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 the Department has completed *(a)* within 40 days of receipt of the £10 fee, *(b)* between 40 and 60 days of and *(c)* over 60 days after receiving the administration fee. [33471]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The answer is as follows:

	HM Treasury[1]	*Customs and Excise*[2]	*Inland Revenue*[3]
Percentage of requests completed within 40 days of receipt of £10 fee	18.2	18.2	18.2
Percentage of requests completed between 40 and 60 days of receipt of £10 fee	n/a	n/a	n/a
Percentage of requests completed over 60 days of receipt of £10 fee	n/a	n/a	n/a

[1] The percentage reflects the relatively small number of cases involved and the relative difficulty of responding to them.

[2] The Department does not charge a fee for processing subject access requests.

[3] The Inland Revenue does not charge an administration fee for responding to requests under the Data Protection Act 1998.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what administration fees are charged by the Department for information requests made under the Data Protection Act 1998. [33464]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information is as follows:

HM Treasury

The Department charges the standard £10 administration fee on all subject access requests except those made by current Treasury staff.

Customs and Excise

The Department does not charge a fee for processing subject access requests.

Inland Revenue

The Inland Revenue does not charge an administration fee for responding to requests under the Data Protection Act 1998.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the period of time elapsed is for the oldest outstanding request for information under the Data Protection Act 1998, since receipt of the *(a)* original request and *(b)* administration fee. [33448]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information is as follows:

Days

	Longest outstanding request on receipt of:	
	Original letter	*£10 fee*
HM Treasury	364	182
Customs and Excise[1]	131	n/a
Inland Revenue[2]	90	n/a

[1] The Department does not charge an administration fee for processing subject access requests

[2] The Inland Revenue does not charge an administration fee for responding to requests under the Data Protection Act 1998

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many responses the Department has completed to requests for information made under the Data Protection Act 1998 for *(a)* electronically held information and *(b)* paper documentation. [33578]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information is as follows:

Department	*Responses completed for:* *Electronic information only*	*Paper information only*
HM Treasury	n/a	n/a
Customs and Excise	19	n/a
Inland Revenue	11,988	380

HM Treasury

The Treasury has generally included paper records in its searches wherever possible.

Customs and Excise

The Department does not differentiate between electronic and manual data for responses supplied since 24 October 2001, since to do so would require disproportionate effort. Responses completed prior to 24 October 2001 related only to data held electronically; 19 were completed up to that time.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many responses to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 the Department has completed *(a)* within 40 days of receipt of, *(b)* between 40 and 60 days of receiving and *(c)* over 60 days after receiving the £10 administration fee. [33566]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information is as follows:

	HM Treasury	*Customs and Excise*	*Inland Revenue*
Total number of requests	11	n/a	n/a
Completed within 40 days	2	n/a	n/a
Completed between 40 and 60 days	2	n/a	n/a
Completed over 60 days	2	n/a	n/a
Still outstanding	5	n/a	n/a

HM Treasury

The administration fee is not charged to current Treasury staff inquiring on their own records.

Customs and Excise

The Department does not charge a fee for processing subject access requests.

Inland Revenue

The Inland Revenue does not charge an administration fee for responding to requests under the Data Protection Act 1998.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the policy of the Department is for ensuring responses to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 are completed within 40 days; and what their procedure is to achieve this; [33478]

(2) what the Department's procedure is for responding to requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998; if he will place a copy in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [33485]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information is as follows.

HM Treasury

The Department's policy is to comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998, and wherever possible to respond with the information requested well within the 40-day time limit. Under the Data Protection Act 1984, when virtually no requests were received, annual test-requests were processed to make sure that the system was compliant. Since the 1998 Act came into force, there have been a few occasions where open-ended demands for information have exceeded the normal channel's ability to respond promptly. The Department is currently resourcing a team to ensure timely responses to all requests for the Department's information.

Customs and Excise

The Department's policy is to comply with the requirements of the Act. Following its recent restructuring it has been necessary to introduce revised procedures for dealing with subject access requests. The new procedures, coupled with further planned measures to increase staff awareness, should have a beneficial effect on future response times. The Department has also increased the staffing of the central unit whose role is to co-ordinate responses to subject access requests. This unit acts as a focal point for incoming requests, initiates the necessary searches, collates the information received and issues a single response to the applicant.

Inland Revenue

The Inland Revenue is very conscious of its obligation to meet the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998. The Department aims to respond to requests for information under the Act well within the 40-day time limit. The Department has in place a small central unit whose role is to co-ordinate, manage and oversee the response to all requests for information under the Data Protection Act 1998. supported by an extensive structure of data protection officers across the Department, the unit collates the relevant electronic and paper records to produce a single response to the data subject on behalf of the Inland Revenue. Staff are provided with detailed guidance, and where necessary, training to ensure that the Inland Revenue fully complies with its legal obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the average cost of processing each information request under the Data Protection Act 1998. [33437]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information is as follows:

HM Treasury

The Department does not maintain figures on this, and to supply them would involve disproportionate cost. The cost required to fulfil subject access requests may vary greatly from case to case, depending on the volume and ownership of records to be searched. The Department is planning to centralise and develop its facilities in order to improve the efficiency of these searches, and reduce the time taken.

Customs and Excise

The Department does not record the information required to produce these figures because to do so would involve disproportionate cost, given the relatively small number of subject access requests received.

Inland Revenue

The average cost to the Inland Revenue of processing each information request under the Data Protection Act 1998 could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

HEALTH

Fire Safety

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of hospital beds are in wards which do not comply with fire safety statutory requirements. [12716]

Ms Blears: The annual returns received from national health service trusts stating their position in relation to Firecode compliance are not submitted in a form to allow the number of hospital beds to be identified in wards which do not comply with fire safety statutory requirements.

Methyl Tertiary Butyl Ether

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants is considering the possible effects on *(a)* animal health and *(b)* human health of the use of methyl tertiary butyl ether in petrol; and if he will make a statement. [13226]

Yvette Cooper: The Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants (COMEAP) advises the Chief Medical Officer on the possible effects of air pollutants on human health. No advice is provided on animal health.

COMEAP has considered the possible effects on human health that might occur as a result of exposure to concentrations of methyl tertiary butyl ether (MTBE) that may be produced as a result of the addition of MTBE to petrol as an octane enhancer. The concentrations likely to be produced are low and no significant effects on public health are expected. The COMEAP statement on this topic has been placed in the Library.

Teenage Pregnancy

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in implementing the recommendations of the Social Exclusion Unit's report on teenage pregnancy. [15152]

Yvette Cooper: All of the 30 action points set out in the Social Exclusion Unit's report on Teenage Pregnancy are being implemented and over a half have been completed.

Early indications are that the implementation of the strategy is yielding positive results towards the two main goals of halving the rate of under-18 conceptions by 2010 and increasing the participation of teenage parents in education, training and employment. The under-18 conception rate has been on a downward trend for the last eight quarters for which data are available, and fell by 4 per cent. during the first year of implementation. The proportion of teenage mothers aged 16 to 19-years in education or work increased from 16 per cent. in 1997 to 31 per cent. in 2000.

Recombinant Factor 8

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of haemophiliacs *(a)* over 16 years and *(b)* in (i) England, (ii) Wales, (iii) Scotland and (iv) Northern Ireland receive recombinant Factor 8. [16849]

Yvette Cooper: The latest information from the United Kingdom Haemophilia Centre Doctors Organisation shows that in England patients aged 20 or younger (approximately 43 per cent. of all patients) are eligible to receive recombinant clotting factors. These patients may not currently be receiving recombinant clotting factors due to the recent world wide shortage but supplies are returning to normal and they will be put back onto recombinant clotting factors as soon as possible. Questions relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for the devolved Administrations.

We are giving careful consideration to the case for providing recombinant clotting factors for all haemophilia patients in England.

Human BSE

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research the Government have recently commissioned *(a)* on the risks of contracting human BSE from surgical instruments and *(b)* on how the NHS should deal with patients exposed to such risk through medical treatment; and when the results will be published. [18909]

Yvette Cooper: The Department published a report entitled "Risk assessment for the transmission of vCJD via surgical instruments" on 16 March. This is available on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/cjd/riskassessmentsi.htm.

On 10 October 2001 the Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease Incidents Panel published for consultation a framework document setting out proposals on the management of incidents involving possible exposure to CJD via surgery or donated blood, organs or tissues. The document is available on the Department's website at http://www.doh.gov.uk/cjd/consultation.

Since 1998 the Department has allocated nearly £4 million to research on risk and decontamination of surgical instruments, and hopes to commission further contracts worth over £2 million in 2002. This work is carried out in major Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy research centres such as the Medical Research Council's prion unit in London and the National Creutzfeldt-Jakob Diseases surveillance unit in Edinburgh. Scientists at the Universities of Cambridge, London and Southampton are also involved, as well as those at Government research centres such as the Centre for Applied Microbiology and Research and the Institute for Animal Health.

A list of Government funded research on Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies is published on the Medical Research Council's website at http:/www.mrc.ac.uk/tse_tb2c.htm.

Heart Disease

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will call for a report from the Chief Medical Officer about vulnerability to heart disease from *(a)* high cholesterol, *(b)* cholesterol levels normally deemed safe but which are sensitive at this lower level for particular individuals and ethnic groups, *(c)* insulin-resistant metabolic syndrome and *(d)* non-cholesterol related causes; whether there are targeted remedies other than quitting smoking and excessive alcohol intake and improving diet and exercise; and if he will make a statement. [20003]

Yvette Cooper: There are no immediate plans to issue a specific report about the links between cholesterol levels and coronary heart disease. There is a requirement within the National Service Framework (NSF) for Coronary Heart Disease that all general practitioners and primary health care teams should identify all people with established cardiovascular disease, and those who are at significant risk of cardiovascular disease but who have not yet developed symptoms. They should offer them appropriate advice and treatment to reduce their risks. This includes specific dietary advice to lower serum cholesterol concentrations.

The NSF also sets out the policy for the prescribing of statins. The first priority is to ensure that people with established CHD are treated with statins to lower their cholesterol level. The next step is the treatment of those without diagnosed CHD but whose risk of a cardiac event is greater than 30 per cent. over 10 years.

Insulin-resistant metabolic syndrome is an underlying condition in many people with Type 2 diabetes. Diabetes is a major risk factor for coronary heart disease. Prevention of Type 2 diabetes, which is achievable mainly by lifestyle change, will be addressed in the forthcoming Diabetes National Service Framework.

In addition to smoking, poor diet, and physical inactivity, other modifiable risk factors for CHD include obesity and hypertension. The Department is taking action to address these risk factors through the NHS Plan, Cancer Plan and NSFs for Coronary Heart Disease, Older People and the forthcoming one on Diabetes.

Polysaccharide Vaccine

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department *(a)* has commissioned and *(b)* plans to commission in respect of polysaccharide vaccine; when it was commissioned; when it will report; which (i) persons and (ii) organisations are undertaking the research; and what the (A) remit and (B) aims of the research are. [21393]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 10 December 2001]:* The Department has commissioned the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) to undertake studies on the safety and immunogenicity of pneumococcal conjugate polysaccharide vaccines in infants and young children. The studies are under the direction of Dr. Elizabeth Miller, Head of Immunisation at PHLS. The studies were started in 2001 and results are expected in 2002 and 2003. Further studies in infants or the elderly will be considered in response to suitable applications.

Nutrition

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the cost of malnutrition per annum *(a)* to the NHS and *(b)* to public funds by (i) region and (ii) health authority in the last five years for which figures are available; [24036]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 13 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 682–83W, on nutrition, if he will list *(a)* the specific targets and *(b)* the dates his Department has set under the hospital nutrition policy for the reduction of under nutrition; and if these targets take into consideration (i) age and (ii) regional differences in malnutrition. [24042]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 19 December 2001]:* Figures on the number of episodes of hospital in-patients with a primary diagnosis relating to malnutrition show that the incidence of malnutrition leading to hospitalisation is rare but increases with age. Information on costs is not centrally located. The total cost of malnutrition would be extremely difficult to calculate as it is often associated with another disease—either as a result of the disease or only diagnosed during the treatment for the disease.

There are a number of measures and strategies in place to specifically manage, monitor and screen patients for under-nutrition in hospitals, residential care and the wider community. This includes the Better Hospital Food programme and the introduction of ward housekeepers in hospital, as outlined in the NHS Plan. In addition, from April 2002 all care homes will be regulated in accordance with national minimum standards, including nutrition.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what screening methods are in place and on what frequency *(a)* in England and *(b)* by health authority to monitor nutritional levels in people aged (i) 0–15, (ii) 16–59, (iii) 60–75 and (iv) 75 years and over; and what his policy is on a standard national nutritional screening policy. [24037]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* There is no standard national policy on screening for malnutrition in hospitals. It is a matter for individual trusts. However, in February 2001, we released the essence of care toolkit to be used for local clinical governance activity, and in which best practice standards include the need for nutritional screening and assessment of all patients.

Nutritional screening is also recommended for the care of specific groups, such as those outlined in the National Service Framework for Older People. As highlighted in the response to previous inquiries to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in November 2001, a number of strategies are in place to manage, monitor and screen patients for under-nutrition in hospitals, residential care and the wider community. These were outlined previously.

Guidance on the single assessment process for older people was issued for consultation in August 2001. The assessment will identify the health and social care needs of people over 65 years, including difficulties with diet and nutrition.

Infection Control

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to include a hospital's compliance with its infection control policy within the Commission for Health Improvement inspection programme. [24668]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* We have asked the Commission for Health Improvement to independently review and monitor the uptake of national controls assurance standards for Hospital Acquired Infection during their routine reviews of an organisation's systems and processes for monitoring and improving services.

Medical Services

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were working in *(a)* endoscopy, *(b)* therapy radiography, *(c)* breast screening, *(d)* cytoscreening and *(e)* histopathology in each of the past five years. [27248]

Mr. Hutton: Information is not collected centrally on the number of staff performing endoscopy. A range of staff (surgeons, physicians and nurses) may carry out the procedure, depending on how and where the patients present.

The number of qualified therapy radiography staff is shown in the table.

Information is not collected centrally on the number of staff who carry out breast screening. Figures are provided for the number of qualified diagnostic radiography staff, some of whom perform breast screening as part of their job.

Cytoscreeners are medical laboratory scientific officers (MLSOs) or medical laboratory assistants (MLAs) possessing a suitable certificate in cervical cytology. It is not possible to disaggregate them from other staff collected within the pathology grouping in the non-medical workforce census. In the table MLA cytoscreeners are included within total unqualified staff working in pathology. MLSO cytoscreeners are included within qualified staff working in pathology.

The number of hospital medical staff within the histopathology area of work is shown in the table.

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS): Qualified scientific, therapeutic and technical staff within the specified areas of work and hospital medical staff within the histopathology[1] area of work as at 30 September each year

Headcount

	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Radiography (diagnostic)	10,260	10,360	10,640	10,840	11,040
Radiography (therapeutic)	1,310	1,410	1,470	1,490	1,450
All Healthcare Scientist Pathology staff	23,320	23,000	23,170	910	24,240
of which:					
Qualified	15,900	15,540	15,480	15,510	15,580
Unqualified	7,420	7,460	,690	8,400	8,660
Medical staff working in Histopathology	940	940	1,030	1,080	1,160

[1] In years 1996 to 1998 this specialty was titled Morbid Anatomy and Histopathology

Note:

Figures are rounded to the nearest 10

Source:

Department of Health non-medical workforce census

Department of Health medical and dental workforce census

Healthy Workplace Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* companies, *(b)* voluntary organisations and *(c)* public sector organisations based in the Buckingham constituency have signed up to the Healthy Workplace Initiative; what information they have received, and at what cost to public funds. [27781]

Ms Blears: Nationally to date approximately 30,000 small and medium size enterprises have "signed up" to the Healthy Workplace Initiative. Members receive a free newsletter four times a year and join the national on-line community at www.signupweb.net, which provides access to information and support on occupational health. In addition, several regions have set up local networks of businesses to share information and experiences. The total cost of the initiative from its launch in 1999 to date has been approximately £1.4 million. Registrations to the database are not sorted by parliamentary constituency so isolating membership figures for Buckingham would involve disproportionate costs.

Community Pharmacists

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide additional support to community pharmacists. [28304]

Ms Blears: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) on 24 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1079W.

Environmental Appraisals

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what procedures his Department has to ensure environmental appraisals are undertaken prior to *(a)* administrative and *(b)* policy decisions being made; [29025]

(2) how many officials from his Department have attended the Environmental Appraisal and Integration into Policy training course run by the Civil Service College; [29027]

(3) how many environmental appraisals have been published by his Department since 1 January 2001; and if he will list the last four; [29023]

(4) when the last occasion was on which he requested an environmental appraisal before making a policy decision. [29024]

Yvette Cooper: Departmental guidance on environmental policy appraisal (including a screening tool) is available to all staff on the department's intranet. This is linked to the Cabinet Office policy maker's checklist. In raising staff awareness of sustainable development attention has been drawn to the importance of carrying out environmental policy appraisals. This has also been drawn to the attention of agencies and arm's length bodies.

The Department is assisting the Cabinet Office in developing an integrated appraisal tool. This is a good practice tool designed to assess the impact—including environmental impacts—of policy proposals.

The civil service college course on "Environmental Appraisal and Integration into Policy" has been advertised widely in the Department and one person has attended the course. There are a number of bodies that provide environmental training and staff will choose a course that best meets their overall needs.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what equipment has been stolen from his Department since 1 May 1997; and what the approximate value of each item was. [26833]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 January 2002]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

Item(s)	*Number of items*	*Total loss (£)*
Losses and thefts 1997–98		
NEC Vodaphone mobile phone	1	25.85
SNI Pentium CPU only	1	880.00
NEC P3 mobile phone	1	16.30
NOKIA 232 mobile phone package	1	96.88
HP870 colour printer	1	0.00
Ericsson EH237 mobile phone	1	0.00
BT Jade mobile phone	1	0.00
BT Response 50 ansaphone	1	56.22
SNI PC-4Nd laptop	1	1,488.73
SNI PCD-AT Tower PC	1	1,151.50
Laserjet 4 toner cartridge	1	79.54
SNI PCD-4ND laptop	1	1,488.73
Laptop	1	1,488.73
HPL4 printer	1	415.95
BT Response ansaphone	1	56.22
Motorola Mobile, spare battery, carrycase	3	92.26
Intercity pager	1	252.63
BT Jade mobile phone	1	0.00
PSION series 3C Organiser 2MB and leather case and travel modem for 3C	3	624.89
Ericsson Hotline mobile phone	1	22.00
Siemens Nixdorf PCD 4NE laptop	1	1,488.73
Access VBA for Office 97 reference manual	1	622.75
PC Anywhere version 7.5 user guide	1	108.04
Desktop calculator	1	15.00
Toshiba palmtop portable PC and lead	1	1,880.00
Compaq Armada 1520 laptop	1	1,488.73
Toshiba Satellite-pro Laptop, disk extension and SecureNet key	3	1,638.73
Compaq Armada 1520 laptop	1	1,488.73
Compaq Laptop	1	1,488.73
Nokia mobile phone	1	0.00
Compaq Armada notebook computer	1	0.00
SNI 4ND 486/DX2 50 20 with 20 MB RAM and Xircon network adapter	2	3,000.00
RAM 32 MB from a PC	2	175.00
RAM 16 MB from a PC	1	93.00
Compaq contura laptop, mobile phone and a charger unit	3	0.00
Toshiba laptop	1	1,500.00
BT charge card	1	0.00
SNI 4NC laptop, with REMS kit, Xircom adapter, SNKey and carrying case	4	2,606.15
BT Response 50 ansaphone	1	50.00
MS mouse	1	27.00
Compaq laptop	1	3,777.00
Compaq Armada laptop	1	2,105.60
Compaq Armada laptop	1	2,105.60
Compaq Armada 4131T, 1120T, Ethernet card and modem	4	5,640.00
Motorola mobile phone	1	64.63
Compaq Armada 1120 laptop	1	1,521.63
Compaq Armada 1120 and Compaq Armada 7750 laptops	2	3,500.00
Microsoft mouse	1	27.00
Total for 1997–98	65	44,648.48
Losses and thefts 1998–99		
Iomega zip drive	1	90.00
Compaq Armada portable PC	1	1,521.63
Compaq Armada 1520 Laptop, PCMCIA card, SNK key, mobile phone and battery	5	2,395.30
HiNote 2000 digital laptop	1	4,995.00
Psion 3 organiser	1	350.00
Motherboard, P233 MHZ processor 3.2 GB Harddisk, and 64 MB RAM	4	1,500.00
Siemens Nixdorf laptop	1	1,521.63
Siemens Nixdorf Scenic [illegible]epad, 486 PC	1	1,521.63
Hard disk and two [illegible] RAM from a PC	3	328.00
Siemens Nixdorf 486SX laptop	1	0.00
Motorola D460 mobile phone	1	6.00

Item(s)	*Number of items*	*Total loss (£)*
Nokia 2110 mobile phone	1	0.00
Mobile phone	1	7.05
Mobile phone	1	22.71
SNI 486 laptop	1	1,656.75
SNI 4ND laptop and modem	2	1,829.73
Nokia 5110 mobile phone	1	6.00
Compaq Armada 1560 laptop	1	0.00
Psion 3a series personal organiser	1	386.58
Nokia mobile phone	1	7.05
NEC digital phone	1	156.66
SNI PCD 4ND laptop	1	1,656.75
Nokia 232 mobile phone	1	6.00
SNI PCD 4ND laptop	1	1,656.75
Compaq Armada 1592DT laptops	4	7,000.00
Compaq Armada 1592DT laptops and TDK V34 GSM modem	2	1,841.23
Siemens Nixdorf colour notebook	1	1,694.35
Nokia 2110 mobile phone	1	7.05
Compaq V70 monitor	2	600.00
Multitech MULMT5600ZZDX 56k modem	1	100.00
Microphone	1	250.00
Compaq Armada 1560 laptop	1	1,468.75
Compaq laptop	1	1,468.75
Compaq Contura 4/25	1	1,468.75
Nokia 8110 mobile phone	1	74.32
Laptop computer	1	1,468.75
Compaq Armada 1700 laptop	1	1,620.00
Mapinfo software	1	1,866.00
Nokia 5110 mobile phone	1	7.05
Compaq Armada laptop and modem	2	1,641.48
Nokia mobile phone	1	7.05
Total for 1998–99	57	44,204.75
Losses and thefts 1999–2000		
Compaq Armada 1560 laptop	1	0.00
Psion 3C organiser and Nokia 5110 mobile phone	2	257.05
Toshiba 100CT Liberato palmtop, bag, battery and PCMCIA modem	4	2,000.00
Panasonic AG450 camcorder and panasonic F15/8 camera	2	3,400.00
Compaq Armada laptop	1	2,056.25
Nokia mobile phone	1	7.05
Compaq laptop	1	1,956.38
Nokia mobile phone	1	7,05
Compaq Armada 1700 laptop	1	0.00
Ansaphone	1	64.63
Nokia mobile phone	1	7.05
Compaq 1560 laptop	1	1,956.38
Nokia mobile phone	1	7.05
Compaq laptop	1	1,956.38
Compaq laptop	1	1,956.38
Compaq laptop	1	1,948.00
400 mhz Pentium processor	1	250.00
Nokia 5110 mobile phone	1	7.05
Compaq Armada laptop	1	0.00
Toshiba Tecra 8000CDT laptop and HP 340C printer	2	0.00
Compaq Armada 1700 laptop	1	2,113.68
BT charge card	1	0.00
Nokia 8110 mobile phone	1	7.05
Charger for a Nokia phone	1	24.51
BT Response 85 digital answering machine	1	55.00
Compaq Armada R4883 laptop	1	2,113.68
Compaq Armada 1120 laptop	1	1,948.00
Compaq Armada 1120 laptop	1	1,948.00
Charger for a Nokia phone	1	32.09
Charger for a Nokia phone	1	32.09
Compaq Armada 1560 laptop	1	2,113.68
Compaq Armada 1750 laptop	1	2,113.83
Compaq Armada 1750 laptop	1	1,948.15
Compaq Armada 1120 laptop	1	1,948.15
Compaq Armada 1120 laptop	1	2,100.00
16Mb DIMM	1	24.00
Compaq laptop	1	2,193.41
Compaq Armada 1560 laptop	1	1,880.00
Total for 1999–2000	44	40,432.02

Item(s)	*Number of items*	*Total loss (£)*
Losses and thefts 2000–01		
Maltron dual handed keyboard	1	411.25
Compaq Armada 1700	1	1,948.15
Nokia 5100 mobile phone	1	7.05
Nokia 5110 mobile phone	1	7.05
Compaq Armada 1700	1	2,395.13
Nokia mobile phone	1	7.05
Nokia 5110 mobile phone	1	180.95
Nokia 5110 mobile phone	1	7.05
Nokia 5110 mobile phone	1	7.05
Compaq Armada 1560 laptop	1	2,702.50
Compaq Armada 1560 laptop	1	2,395.06
Dell Latitude Cpt500S laptops	2	4,460.00
Epson 5500 projector	1	3,744.00
Vodaphone phone and motorola pager	2	433.48
Nokia 5110 mobile phone	1	180.95
Compaq Armada M700 laptop	1	0.00
Nokia mobile phone	1	7.05
Compaq Armada M700 laptops and 32 Speed Ext. CD-ROM drive	3	4,055.00
Toshiba Tecra 8000CDT laptop	1	0.00
Compaq Armada M700 laptop	1	2,200.00
Compaq laptop with ROIS	1	2,378.85
Compaq DeskPro EN 6600 P111 and 56k fax modem	2	844.83
Compaq Armada M700 laptops	2	440.00
Compaq Armada 1560 laptop	1	2,300.00
Sony laptop	1	2,394.65
Compaq Armada 1700 laptop	1	2,382.90
Ericsson A1018s mobile phone	1	30.00
PC motherboard with CPU and 64MB RAM	2	400.00
Compaq Armada 1560 laptop	1	1,762.50
Compaq Armada 1150 laptop	1	1,761.20
Compaq laptop with ROIS	1	2,328.85
Nokia mobile phone	1	7.05
Nokia 5110 mobile phone and charger	2	43.24
Nokia mobile phone	1	7.05
Nokia 5110 mobile phone	1	7.05
Compaq Armada laptop, Motorola pager, Nokia 5110 mobile phone	3	2,482.78
Compaq laptop with ROIS	1	2,328.85
Total for 2000–01	47	47,048.57
Losses and thefts 2001–02		
Ericsson GA318 mobile phone	1	32.90
Compaq E500 laptop	1	1,761.20
64 Mb DIMM memory chip	1	61.60
Compaq Armada M700 laptop	1	2,321.80
Compaq Armada 1110 laptop	1	2,321.80
Compaq Armada laptop	1	1,915.25
Compaq M700 laptop	1	2,321.80
Compaq Spacesaver 866 base unit, keyboard and mouse	3	821.33
Nokia 5110 mobile phone	1	7.05
Palm Pilot 3	1	158.63
Nokia mobile phone	1	7.05
Compaq Armada M700 laptop	1	2,184.33
Compaq laptop	1	2,184.33
Compaq Armada 1750 laptop	1	2,184.33
Compaq Armada 1592 laptop	1	1,684.33
HP colour laser jet 4550 printer	1	1,800.10
Compaq Armada M700 laptop	1	1,995.15
Compaq laptop	1	1,995.15
Nokia mobile phone	1	7.05
Nokia mobile phone	1	0.00
Compaq Armada 500 laptop	1	0.00
Compaq laptop and Psion 5MX series	2	2,367.05
Compaq Armada E500 laptop	1	1,835.94
Compaq Armada E500 laptop	1	1,835.94
Compaq Armada 1120 laptop	1	1,835.94
Pager	1	176.25
Nokia mobile phone	1	50.00
Total to date for 2001–02	30	33,866.30

Child Protection Committees

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which area child protection committees have arrangements with each of the immigration detention and reception centres at *(a)* Oakington, *(b)* Tinsley House, *(c)* Yarls Wood, *(d)* Harmondsworth and *(e)* John Gavell; and if he will place in the Library copies of the protocols and working agreements. [29607]

Jacqui Smith: Oakington Reception Centre, and Tinsley House, Yarl's Wood and Harmondsworth Removal Centres have all made links with their local Area Child Protection Committee.

Oakington's child protection policies and procedures have been endorsed by Cambridgeshire Area Child Protection Committee.

Tinsley House conforms to West Sussex Area Child Protection Committee's child protection procedures and has a nominated child protection adviser to assist with child protection training, advice and liaison.

Guidance on child protection arrangements for Yarl's Wood has been incorporated into Bedfordshire and Luton Area Child Protection Committee's Manual of Procedures, and protocols have been agreed with Group 4, who are contracted to manage the centre.

Draft child protection procedures for Harmondsworth have been the subject of a report to Hillingdon Area Child Protection Committee and a subsequent conference involving the NSPCC, UKDS—who are contracted to manage the centre, relevant local authorities and the voluntary sector.

I understand that my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for the Home Department, is arranging for copies of the child protection policies for these centres to be placed in the Library.

Dungavel Removal Centre in Strathaven, South Lanarkshire is a matter for the devolved Administration.

Departmental Sponsorship

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the financial resources and initiatives sponsored by his Department in the last 12 months for Dorset which are additional to the Government SSA grants. [29891]

Ms Blears: The table lists the type and amount of funding made available to Dorset county council by the Department in 2000–01 and 2001–02, which is additional to the standard spending assessment.

£000

	2000–01	*2001–02*
AIDS Support Grant	40	48
Mental Health Grant	933	1,044
Training Support Programme	300	334
Partnership Grant[1]	1623	—
Prevention Grant[1]	232	—
Promoting Independence Grant[1]	—	2,320
Carers' Grant	362	507
Children's Grant	479	1,190
Improving Information Management Grant[2]	—	16,666
Deferred Payments Grant[2]	—	194
Young People's Substance Misuse Planning Grant[2]	—	18
Building Care Capacity Grant[2]	—	613
Drugs and Alcohol Specific Grant[2]	50	0
Supplementary credit approvals:		
Mental Health	160	124
AIDS/HIV	0	0

[1] The Partnership and Prevention Grants were amalgamated into the Promoting Independence Grant from 2001–02

[2] The grant commenced in 2001–02

NHS Dentists

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Government plans to set a minimum number of hours to be spent by dentists on NHS patients. [30387]

Ms Blears: Dentists who are independent contractors are free to choose how much time they wish to devote to the provision of national health service dental services. There are no plans to introduce a requirement for a minimum number of hours that dentists should spend providing NHS treatment. We are committed to the provision of NHS dental care, and have invested £100 million over two years in the form of incentives and grants to modernise services and encourage increased commitment to the NHS. We will continue to work with the profession and other stakeholders on future arrangements for NHS dentistry.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what incentives the Government plans to encourage the establishment of new NHS dentists' practices in North Shropshire; [30403]

(2) what local initiatives the Government plans to increase *(a)* recruitment and *(b)* retention of NHS dentists in North Shropshire. [30402]

Ms Blears: There are no immediate plans to alter existing arrangements for dentists joining the general dental service. However, discussions are underway nationally, with the profession and other stakeholders, to consider future arrangements for national health service dentistry. Workforce issues are included in those discussions.

Historically Shropshire has had difficulty attracting sufficient dentists offering NHS treatment. In partnership with the two Staffordshire health authorities and the local NHS Workforce Confederation, the HA is commissioning an extensive review of the key employment issues facing local dental teams. This review will also identify local solutions.

Every HA in England has in place a dentistry action plan. These identify local issues and develop solutions. In 2001–02 Shropshire HA was allocated, from national funds, £50,000 to enable general dental service practitioners to register and treat more NHS patients. More recently, an additional £50,000 has been allocated to provide support to practitioners who wish to establish, or expand, NHS practice. Since June 2001 HAs have had powers to use their own resources to address shortfalls in local availability of NHS dentistry.

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were registered with a NHS dentist in the Hillingdon health authority in each of the last seven years. [31447]

Ms Blears: The number of adult and child patients registered with a general dental service (GDS) dentist in Hillingdon health authority at 30 September for each of the years 1995 to 2001 is shown in the table.

In September 1996, the registration period for new adult and child registrations was shortened to 15 months. Previously adult registrations lasted for 24 months and child registrations expired at the end of the following calendar year. This affected registration numbers from December 1997 onwards. Data for 1995, 1996 and 1997 are not comparable with later years.

Some patients that are not registered with a GDS dentist choose to attend occasionally.

General dental service: Number of adult and child registrations[1] *Hillingdon health authority*

September each year	*Adults*	*Children*	*Total*
1995[1]	106,346	32,957	139,303
1996[1]	104,213	33,604	137,817
1997[1]	106,233	35,163	141,396
1998	90,010	31,741	121,751
1999	86,234	32,186	118,420
2000	85,422	32,853	118,275
2001	82,137	32,681	114,818

[1] Affected by the change in registration periods to 15 months.

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists were accepting NHS patients in the Hillingdon health authority in each of the last seven years. [31446]

Ms Blears: The total number of general dental service (GDS) dentists that carry out the majority of their work in Hillingdon health authority at 30 September for each of the years 1995 to 2001 is shown in the table.

The total number of dentists covers principals on a HA list, their assistants and vocational dental practitioners. Although the number of dentists continues to rise, their level of commitment to the GDS varies, mainly due to an increase in private working.

General dental service: Total number of dentists[1] *providing national health service treatment, 1995 to 2001—Hillingdon health authority*[2]

September each year	*Total dentists*
1995	90
1996	89
1997	91
1998	95
1999	98
2000	107
2001	104

[1] Data cover principal dentists on a health authority list, their assistants and vocational dental practitioners.

[2] Dentists who do the majority of their work in Hillingdon HA. Excludes dentists in the Hillingdon HA area who do most of their work in other HAs.

Performance Improvement Payments

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money was distributed to the south-east region in performance improvement payments in 2001–02; and which trusts in the south-east region received payments. [30764]

Ms Blears: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Private Hospitals

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information on standards of patient care the NHS requires from private sector hospitals carrying out operations on behalf of the NHS. [30855]

Mr. Hutton: There are two important safeguards in place.

First, from 1 April 2002 the National Care Standards Commission will take over from health authorities the regulation of private health care services, including private hospitals. For the first time they will be required to comply with regulations and meet national minimum standards. Also for the first time, owners, managers and others registered as being responsible for the day-to-day running of the hospital will be held responsible for the quality of care and treatment provided.

Second, national health service commissioners are responsible for ensuring that all services and treatment provided for patients are high quality. Patients receiving treatment in private hospitals paid for by the NHS remain NHS patients. Therefore, when commissioning treatment from the independent sector, NHS commissioners must be satisfied that the treatment will be of a high standard, for example, by paper evidence of performance and visits. Quality requirements can also be set out in contracts between the NHS and the independent sector.

Independent Complaints Reviews

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines exist with respect to tape recording the proceedings of independent complaints reviews; and if he will make a statement. [31069]

Ms Blears: It is for the lay chairman, in consultation with the other panel members, to decide how an independent review panel will operate. This can involve the tape recording of the panel's proceedings with the agreement of all concerned.

Hospital Meals

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average cost per hospital meal is *(a)* before and *(b)* after the implementation of the Government's Better Hospital Food programme; and if he will make a statement. [31331]

Ms Blears: The Better Hospital Food programme, announced in the NHS Plan, is designed to improve the quality and availability of food in hospitals for all patients and is a long-term programme. An additional £38.5 million has been made available to support this programme.

The first stage is to ensure that all sites are brought up to the required level. As the 31 December 2001 target date for implementation has only just passed, precise information will not yet be available, and will vary from site to site according to historic levels of investment, the type of system in operation and patient choice. We expect that detailed costings information will be available as the programme becomes established.

Chiropody Services

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of chiropody services in the Hillingdon health authority. [31361]

Mr. Hutton: It is for local statutory bodies, Hillingdon Primary Care Trust in this instance, to determine the services they provide in the light of their knowledge of local needs and priorities.

Ashford and St. Peter's Hospital NHS Trust

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds were available for use within the Ashford and St. Peters hospital NHS trust on 1 January *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000, *(c)* 2001 and *(d)* 2002. [31588]

Ms Blears: The number of beds available for use on the 1 January for the requested years at Ashford and St. Peter's hospitals national health service trust is not centrally available.

An average daily number of available beds in each financial year is collected and the information for the trust is given in the table. An available bed is defined as open and staffed at midnight and is ready to take a patient or has a patient occupying the bed.

Average daily number of available beds, wards open overnight[1], *Ashford and St. Peter's Hospital NHS Trust, 1998–99 to 2000–01*

Year	*Total number of available beds*
2000–01	633
1999–2000	612
1998–99	612

[1] ie 24 hours

Source:

KH03—Bed availability and occupancy

Health Authority Expenditure

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will rank each health authority in England by the percentage change in health spending per head of population between 1997–98 and 2002–03. [31820]

Mr. Hutton: Expenditure per head cannot be reliably compared between health authorities or between different years.

Expenditure data for 2000–01 are the latest available, therefore the increase in expenditure per weighted head of population has been calculated as the percentage change between 1997–98 and 2000–01. These are shown in the table.

Health Authority	*Percentage increase 1997–98 to 2000–01*
Morecambe Bay	51.60
Sefton	45.04
Dorset	43.56
Bromley	39.82
Camden and Islington	39.34
Croydon	37.75
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	33.70
Barnet	32.69
Tees	32.54
Nottingham	31.73
Liverpool	31.62
Doncaster	31.17
Dudley	30.88
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	30.85
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	30.81
Salford and Trafford	30.47
Wirral	30.25
Barnsley	29.79
East London and The City	29.66
East Kent	29.51
South Essex	29.48
Northamptonshire	29.42
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	29.41
Bexley and Greenwich	29.36
Avon	29.24
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	29.00
North Essex	28.87
Enfield and Haringey	28.22
Rotherham	28.15
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	27.58
East Surrey	27.56
Berkshire	27.44
Northumberland	27.19
Barking and Havering	26.99
Calderdale and Kirklees	26.92
Oxfordshire	26.83
Bedfordshire	26.71
Sunderland	26.49
Coventry	26.45
West Pennine	26.40
South and West Devon	26.17
Somerset	26.04
North and Mid Hampshire	25.70
Manchester	25.59
Wigan and Bolton	25.54
North West Lancashire	25.53
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	25.40
Walsall	25.40
Newcastle and North Tyneside	25.32
Wolverhampton	25.31
East Riding and Hull	25.29
West Sussex	25.23
Isle of Wight	25.19
Norfolk	25.17
Wiltshire	24.73
Cambridgeshire	24.23
Stockport	24.10
North Cumbria	24.05
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	23.97
North Nottinghamshire	23.97
West Surrey	23.86
County Durham and Darlington	23.60
South Cheshire	23.56
Leeds	23.18
Suffolk	23.12
West Kent	23.11
North Yorkshire	23.02
St. Helens and Knowsley	22.83
Southampton and South West Hampshire	22.79
Gloucestershire	22.72
Sandwell	22.48
North Staffordshire	22.34
Bury and Rochdale	22.27
Bradford	22.08
North Cheshire	21.80
North and East Devon	21.67
Gateshead and South Tyneside	21.66
South Lancashire	21.62
Brent and Harrow	21.60
Shropshire	21.59
Birmingham	21.56
West Hertfordshire	21.54
South Staffordshire	21.44
Hillingdon	20.93
East and North Hertfordshire	20.90

Health Authority	*Percentage increase 1997–98 to 2000–01*
Leicestershire	20.80
East Lancashire	20.60
Buckinghamshire	20.56
Sheffield	20.52
Worcestershire	19.91
South Humber	19.32
Lincolnshire	19.26
Wakefield	18.65
Kingston and Richmond	18.05
North Derbyshire	17.94
Southern Derbyshire	17.67
Warwickshire	16.43
Herefordshire	13.26
Solihull	13.16

Notes:

1. In many health authorities there are factors which distort the expenditure per head. These include: the health authority acting in a lead capacity to commission health care or fund training on behalf of other health bodies; asset revaluations in NHS Trusts being funded through health authorities; and some double counting of expenditure between health authorities and primary care trusts within the health authority area. Allocations per weighted head of population provide a much more reliable measure to identify differences between funding of health authorities.

2. Expenditure is taken from health authority and primary care trust summarisation forms and accounts which are prepared on a resource basis and therefore differ from allocations in the year. The expenditure is the total spent by the health authority and by the primary care trusts within each health authority area. The majority of General Dental Services expenditure is not included in the health authority or primary care trust accounts and is separately accounted for by the Dental Practice Board.

3. Health authorities and primary care trusts should account for their expenditure on a gross basis. This results in an element of double counting where one body acts as the main commissioner and is then reimbursed by other bodies. This affects the results for 2000–01 in particular but the effect of this double counting within the answer cannot be identified.

4. Cambridgeshire and Norfolk health authorities were established on 1 April 1999 from the merger of three former health authorities. Expenditure figures for 1997–98 have been calculated from the relevant proportions of the three health authorities in the new bodies.

Source:

Health Authority annual accounts 1997–98
Health Authority summarisation forms 2000–01
Primary Care Trust summarisation schedules 2000–01
Weighted population estimates 2000–01

Residential Children's Services

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when residential children's services will be registered in Herefordshire and Worcestershire under the new requirements governing residential child care. [31674]

Jacqui Smith: The new National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) will register residential children's services when its powers, as set out in the Care Standards Act 2000, come into force on 1 April 2002. Until that date, applications for registration will continue to be dealt with by the local council in which area the proposed residential service is situated. Applications that have not been processed by councils by the end of March 2002 will have their applications transferred to NCSC.

Children's residential services, which are already registered with local councils, will have their current registration transferred to the NCSC on 1 April 2002. Councils are currently compiling the necessary information to ensure that transfer of registration takes place on that date.

Mental Health

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how the Government's proposals stemming from *(a)* the White Paper on Mental Health, and *(b)* the policy statement on mental capacity, Making Decisions, will address the House of Lords judgment in the Bournewood case which relates to patients who lack capacity to consent; [32754]

(2) what safeguards he plans to introduce for people who do not actively object to mental health treatment in hospital but lack the capacity to consent to it. [32750]

Jacqui Smith: The ruling of the House of Lords in the Bournewood case upheld the lawfulness of the current position whereby patients who lack capacity to consent to treatment for their mental disorder, as long as they do not show resistance, can be treated without the use of formal compulsory powers in the Mental Health Act 1983. Concerns, however, were raised about these patients.

We are committed to reforming the 1983 Mental Health Act and a Bill will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time allows. As proposed in the White Paper, Reforming the Mental Health Act (December 2000), new legislation will provide the following safeguards for adult patients who have a long-term incapacity to consent and who are in a hospital or nursing home receiving treatment for a serious mental disorder:

care and treatment overseen by a new commission for mental health;

representation by a nominated person;

an individual care plan, with external scrutiny by an independent member of the new expert panel;

the right to go to the new mental health tribunal to challenge lawfulness of detention or for review of the care plan; and

the right of access to independent specialist mental health advocacy.

We are also committed to bringing forward legislation on mental incapacity as soon as Parliamentary time allows. The 1999 policy statement "Making Decisions" proposes a range of measures aimed at clarifying the decision-making process on behalf of mentally incapacitated adults, including the introduction of a new system of continuing powers of attorney. These proposals will be complementary to those for mental health legislation.

Royal Shrewsbury Hospital

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement of progress made on a new building at the Royal Shrewsbury hospital to replace the Copthorne South building. [32586]

Yvette Cooper: The vacation of acute services currently on the Royal Shrewsbury hospital Copthorne South site and achieving its closure is a recognised priority both locally and regionally. The Royal Shrewsbury Hospital national health service trust and the Princess Royal hospital NHS trust have now completed the full business case and this has been submitted to the NHS west midlands regional office for approval.

Care Homes

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* nursing home beds and *(b)* residential care home beds were available per 1,000 people aged over 65 in each county of England in (i) 1997, (ii) 1999 and (iii) 2001; and what the county average is. [32702]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the number of registered nursing care beds per 1,000 population aged 65 and over in (i) 1997, (ii) 1999 and (iii) 2001 is shown by health authority in table 1; information on the number of residential care places per population aged 65 and over in (i) 1997, (ii) 1999 and (iii) 2001 is shown by local authority in table 2, which have been placed in the Library.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the cost to the East Riding of Yorkshire Council of the administration of the registration of care homes under the National Care Standards Commission. [32097]

Jacqui Smith: Local authorities will have to pay in 2002–03 registration fees of £1,100 for each home they own and registration fees of £300 for each home manager. This is to bring local authority owned homes on to the same charging basis as homes owned by voluntary or private organisations. The total cost of this is for the East Riding of Yorkshire council to calculate themselves. Currently their own registration unit should be charging themselves annual fees for the local authority owned homes they are inspecting. In 2002–03 the National Care Standards Commission will not be charging any annual fees for homes that have to be registered for the first time as part of the transition process under the Care Standards Act. Annual fees for such homes will be introduced in 2003–04.

Bristol Royal Infirmary

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recommendations from the Kennedy report into the Bristol Royal infirmary case the Government will adopt to improve treatment of congenital heart disease. [32538]

Mr. Hutton: The Paediatric and Congenital Cardiac Services Review Group has been established to consider the recommendations from the Kennedy Report that specifically relate to health care services and treatment for children with congenital heart disease. The group has also been asked to recommend quality standards for the paediatric and congenital cardiac service and to advise on any configuration issues that arise from those standards. The review group will report in 2002.

Road Traffic Accidents (NHS Charges)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will withdraw the Road Traffic (NHS Charges) Amendment Regulations S.I., 2002/4030. [34978]

Ms Blears: Following representations received from the noble Lord, Lord Hunt of Wirral, and the Association of British Insurers, arrangements are now being made to revoke the Road Traffic (NHS Charges) Amendment Regulations, which came into force on 28 January 2002. Amendment Regulations will be laid before the House shortly.

"Making It Happen"

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much money was spent on promoting mental health in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01; [9508]

(2) what was the cost of the new guide "Making it Happen"; and how many copies were printed; [9509]

Jacqui Smith: Expenditure on centrally funded initiatives on promoting mental health is provided in the table.

	£ million
1997–98	1.4
1998–99	1.2
1999–2000	1.8
2000–01	1.3

Information on specific spend in health authorities is not collected.

However, following the inclusion of a mental health promotion standard in the National Service Framework for Mental Health, health and social services have been set a target to develop and agree local mental health promotion strategies by March 2002. To help support the delivery of this target the Department commissioned the development of national guidance "Making it Happen: a guide to mental health promotion", published in August 2001. This guidance cost £204,000 including publishing and distribution. 5,000 copies of "Making it Happen" were printed and distributed. The guidance is also available on the Department's website.

Drugs

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the range of daily dosages in milligrams of methadone normally recommended for use in drug control treatments. [19712]

Ms Blears: The guidance from the Department on this issue, detailed in "Drug misuse and dependence—guidelines on clinical management" (1989) makes clear that the actual dose given for an individual patient must be assessed and determined by the prescribing doctor.

The clinical guidelines recommend that depending on the individuals tolerance levels the range for the initial dose should be between 10mg and 40mg.

If a follow-up dose is required it should not exceed 30mg. However, a supplementary dose should only be considered where there is evidence of persistent opioid withdrawal. These cases need to be assessed by an experienced medical practitioner.

As far as the subsequent stabilisation period is concerned any increases in dosage should not exceed 10mg per week up to a final total of between 60 and 120mg.

Cancer

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future provision of cancer services in Hertfordshire. [32301]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* The Steering Group for the Long Term Review of Mount Vernon Cancer Network and Centre has met on 30 January 2002 to consider an interim report. The Steering Group reviewed feedback that they had received since the publication of its preliminary report in September 2001, the proposed clinical model, progress on site surveys and access issues.

The Steering Group is working towards a major decision that will ensure the best possible cancer services for the population in Hertfordshire and others that use the Mount Vernon Cancer Centre. There is a great deal to consider, including the many different viewpoints of patients and communities. The Steering Group wishes to be confident of its findings before making any final recommendations later in the year.

Surgical Instruments

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost of re-stocking with re-usable instruments for tonsillectomy following the hazard notice of October 2001. [32777]

Yvette Cooper: The estimated cost of re-stocking with re-usable instruments would have been no more than £1.4 million.

This estimate is based on 150 trusts undertaking tonsillectomy operations, with eight sets of instruments per trust at an average cost per set of £1,200. However, feedback from trusts indicates that a significant percentage of them have retained their original re-usable sets. Therefore, the actual figure may be much less.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he had with surgeons on the acceptability of the disposable instruments purchased for tonsillectomy in 2001. [32782]

Yvette Cooper: The National Health Service Purchasing and Supply Agency undertook the procurement process with the support of the British Association of Otorhinolaryngolygists (BAO), whose members were regularly consulted about the acceptability and quality of the products.

In February 2001, all BAO members were invited to attend an inspection of the sample instruments that had been submitted. The feedback from this event was used to determine a shortlist of suppliers.

Instruments from short listed companies were used and evaluated by surgeons selected at random before final decisions were made about which products would be supplied.

Waiting Lists

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been waiting *(a)* more than six months and *(b)* more than 12 months for treatment in the 10 health authority areas that receive (i) the highest and (ii) the lowest weighted expenditure per head of population. [32963]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* For the reasons set out in the notes to the table, expenditure per head cannot be reliably compared between health authorities, nor necessarily be correlated with waiting times information.

The 10 health authorities with the highest and lowest expenditure per weighted head of population in 2000–01 are shown in the table. The numbers of people waiting for more than six and 12 months for in-patient and for out-patient treatment are shown both as total numbers waiting and also as the numbers waiting per 1,000 head of weighted population.

Health authorities with highest expenditure per capita

		Number of patients waiting for in-patient treatment			
Name	*Expend per capita (£)*	*Over six months*	*Per 1,000 head of weighted population*	*Over 12 months*	*Per 1,000 head of weighted population*
Morecambe Bay HA	1,346.04	1,085	3.44	112	0.36
Camden and Islington HA	1,067.88	1,147	2.28	236	0.47
Sefton HA	1,040.25	1,811	6.06	385	1.29
Dorset HA	1,023.69	47	0.07	11	0.02
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster HA	1,011.24	838	1.66	92	0.18
Bromley HA	971.74	1,913	6.54	301	1.03
Barnet HA	959.87	1,298	3.93	217	0.66
East Surrey HA	958.66	3,009	7.89	874	2.29
Sheffield HA	956.59	1,868	3.26	57	0.10
Croydon HA	925.44	2,145	6.55	625	1.91

Health authorities with lowest expenditure per capita

		Number of patients waiting for in-patient treatment			
Name	*Expend per capita (£)*	*Over six months*	*Per 1,000 head of weighted population*	*Over 12 months*	*Per 1,000 head of weighted population*
Stockport HA	759.28	1,389	4.96	192	0.69
Solihull HA	756.17	473	2.44	17	0.09
Buckinghamshire HA	755.09	3,419	5.60	681	1.12
Hillingdon HA	753.76	987	3.98	200	0.81
St. Helens and Knowsley HA	749.06	1,782	4.72	329	0.87
West Pennine HA	746.22	1,939	4.02	279	0.58
North Derbyshire HA	744.33	1,649	4.53	35	0.10

Health authorities with lowest expenditure per capita

		Number of patients waiting for in-patient treatment			
Name	*Expend per capita (£)*	*Over six months*	*Per 1,000 head of weighted population*	*Over 12 months*	*Per 1,000 head of weighted population*
East Lancashire HA	740.66	2,405	4.28	91	0.16
County Durham And Darlington HA	738.32	1,852	2.76	23	0.03
Wigan and Bolton HA	732.65	2,638	4.29	395	0.64

Notes:

1. In many health authorities there are factors which distort the expenditure per head. These include:

the health authority acting in a lead capacity to commission health care or fund training on behalf of other health bodies;

asset revaluations in NHS trusts being funded through health authorities; and

some double counting of expenditure between health authorities and primary care trusts within the health authority area.

Allocations per weighted head of population provide a much more reliable measure to identify differences between funding of health authorities.

2. Expenditure is taken from health authority and primary care trust summarisation forms which are prepared on a resource basis and therefore differ from allocations in the year. The expenditure is the total spent by the health authority and by the primary care trusts within each health authority area. The majority of General Dental Services expenditure is not included in the health authority or primary care trust accounts and is separately accounted for by the Dental Practice Board.

3. Health authorities and primary care trusts should account for their expenditure on a gross basis. This results in an element of double counting where one body acts as the main commissioner and is then reimbursed by other bodies. The effect of this double counting within the answer cannot be identified.

Sources:

Health authority summarisation forms 2000–01

Primary care trust summarisation schedules 2000–01

Weighted population estimates 2000–01

QF01/QMO8R Waiting times data quarterly returns, end March 2001

Maternity Units

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on the size of maternity units in the NHS. [32965]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The national health service provides care for women during pregnancy and childbirth in various types and sizes of maternity units. This will vary from large units in hospitals to small midwife led units. It is for local health authorities, trusts and communities to decide on the pattern of service provision taking into account the needs of local service users, evidence of effectiveness and available resources.

Emergency Services (Pay and Conditions)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the pay and conditions of control room staff in the *(a)* ambulance, *(b)* police and *(c)* fire services under the new combined working arrangements. [33052]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The pay and conditions of ambulance control room staff will continue to be determined in accordance with national health service pay arrangements. For staff on national contracts, negotiations on pay for 2002–03 will start shortly.

Employment arrangements for staff working in the police and fire services are the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions respectively.

Herceptin

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement relating to the availability to patients in the west midlands of Herceptin prior to the publication of NICE guidance. [33535]

Yvette Cooper: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the National Assembly for Wales have asked the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) to appraise Herceptin for the treatment of advanced breast cancer, and to issue guidance on its use to the national health service in England and Wales. NICE expects to issue guidance on Herceptin in spring 2002.

Data on the number of health authorities in England and Wales currently authorising the use of Herceptin are not collected. However, as with all newly licensed treatments in advance of a NICE appraisal, the Department's advice is that funding authorities should consider the clinical evidence available for a specific treatment before making any decision.

Care Workers

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding has been allocated to train care workers to NVQ level 2 standard as set out in the domiciliary care standards; and if he will make a statement. [34435]

Jacqui Smith: Provision has been made in the personal social services standard spending assessment (PSS SSA) in 2002–03 and 2003–04 for the training of care workers to NVQ level 2 standard as set out in the draft domiciliary care standards. The PSS SSA is unhypothecated, and it is for individual councils to consider how much to spend on this training in the light of local circumstances.

Clozophine

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time has been for schizophrenic patients who have been prescribed clozophine to receive the drug in the last six months. [34018]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Epsom Hospital

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many births there have been in Epsom hospital's maternity unit; and what the average number was in maternity units in England and Wales in the last five years. [33705]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* Information about the average number of births in maternity units is not collected centrally.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 8 February 2002

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

Peter Bottomley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, when the Commission's media adviser first met the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. [33364]

Mr. Kirkwood: On Tuesday 22 January, at her request.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, when the Chairman of the House of Commons Commission received complaints from *(a)* members of the public and *(b)* hon. Members about the work of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. [33360]

Mr. Kirkwood: I understand that Mr. Speaker has received a number of letters from members of the public and from hon. Members, both in the previous Parliament and the present Parliament, about matters relating to the system of self-regulation and standards. However, so far as formal complaints to the House of Commons Commission are concerned, the position remains as set out in my reply to the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 331W.

Press Cuttings Service

Peter Bottomley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, whether the Commission receives a press cuttings service. [33366]

Mr. Kirkwood: No. Officials bring relevant items to the attention of the Commission as necessary.

Media Adviser

Peter Bottomley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, whether the Media Adviser's term of appointment is for a specific period and for a known number of days. [33365]

Mr. Kirkwood: The appointment is for an initial period of three months, subject to review. The number of days worked varies.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, how many candidates were on the short list before Mr. John Stonborough was chosen as media adviser. [33362]

Mr. Kirkwood: The House of Commons Commission considered two possible candidates before selecting Mr. Stonborough on a short-term contract to work with the House's communications adviser.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, which persons participated in the selection process for the Commission's media adviser. [33363]

Mr. Kirkwood: The selection was made by the House of Commons Commission.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Director's Pay

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what were the total amounts paid to *(a)* executive directors and *(b)* non-executive directors in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01. [20423]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is in the table.

£000

Financial year	*Executive directors*	*Non-executive directors*
1997–98	855	25
1998–99	819	41
1999–2000	913	59
2000–01	[1]1,192	121

[1] In 1999–2000 the Department decided to designate some existing senior civil service posts as Executive Directors. The costs for 2000–01 reflect these changes.

New Deal

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many new deal candidates have participated in the customised job preparation programme in preparation for jobs in the Civil Service; if he will list the Government Departments for which such programmes *(a)* exist and *(b)* do not exist; and how many requests are outstanding from Government Departments and agencies for such programmes. [25977]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: A new deal gateway specifically designed to prepare new deal candidates for work in the Civil Service was piloted last year in Edgware, London. 16 participants completed the pilot, which led to job opportunities with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department for Trade and Industry. In addition, a customised new deal gateway pilot was also developed for the Benefits Agency in east London. This resulted in job offers in the agency for all 21 participants. These job preparation programmes were designed to be pilot schemes that responded directly to localised employer-led demand.

There are no outstanding requests from Government Departments and agencies for customised gateways at present. However, given the success of the first programmes, further gateways are being considered for the Benefits Agency in London and the north-west. The Employment Service is continuing to promote the Civil Service new deal gateway and the employment of new deal clients within Departments and their agencies.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of participants in the new deal for young people from non-white ethnic minorities found *(a)* jobs and *(b)* sustained jobs in each year since 1997; and if he will give a breakdown by different ethnic minorities. [25984]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The available information is in the table.

Proportion of young people from ethnic minorities starting on the new deal for young people who had gained a job[1,2]

	1998	*1999*	*2000*
Black-Caribbean			
All jobs	46	47	50
Sustained	32	34	36
Black-African			
All jobs	38	40	42
Sustained	26	28	30
Black-Other			
All jobs	46	48	50
Sustained	32	34	36
Indian			
All jobs	52	51	53
Sustained	41	41	43
Pakistani			
All jobs	45	46	47
Sustained	35	35	38
Bangladeshi			
All jobs	47	48	47
Sustained	38	40	39
Chinese			
All jobs	43	45	45
Sustained	36	38	38
Other			
All jobs	45	44	44
Sustained	35	35	35
Total			
All jobs	45	46	48
Sustained	34	35	37

[1] Ethnicity details are not available for all participants in the new deal for young people.

[2] Many participants leaving the new deal for young people are recorded as leaving for unknown destinations. Research has shown that over 50 per cent. of these people are actually leaving to take up employment.

[3] Figures for 2001 are not yet available.

Jobcentre Plus

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the incident that took place at the Jobcentre Plus office at Harlesden on 18 January. [32613]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* A jobseeker's allowance customer attending Harlesden Jobcentre Plus office on Friday 18 January was refused an immediate payment. Later that day he returned to the office and damaged computer equipment. Prompt action by security guards meant that the man was arrested within minutes and subsequently charged by the police.

This was a distressing incident. However, no members of staff or other customers were physically assaulted or threatened. A further health and safety risk assessment review is being conducted and lessons learned or action recommended will be implemented.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Angola

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development for what reason her Department's total aid programme for Angola has been halved over the last five years; and what resources her Department will commit to achieving the aims of the Peace Building and Civil Society in Angola report published by her Department. [33946]

Hilary Benn: Angola has been in a state of renewed conflict since the breakdown of the Lusaka Peace Protocol in 1998. It is for this reason that it has not been possible to establish a long-term partnership for the development of the country. We continue however to provide humanitarian assistance.

Angola needs peace and the Government continue to support the United Nations sanctions against UNITA while calling for both sides to seek a peaceful solution to the conflict. My Department sees a role in encouraging the Angolan Government to use their substantial resources to alleviate the dire poverty in the country. DFID are currently funding a series of seminars on the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) process which have brought together representatives of the Government, Parliament and civil society. We welcome the recent report and are considering how best to build on our existing work on peace building with civil society.

Accountancy Services

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the total cost to her Department was for accountancy services in each of the last four years. [34175]

Hilary Benn: Most of the accountancy work in DFID is carried out by our own in-house staff. We paid £100,815 for external accountancy advice in 2000–01 as part of the preparation for the CDC public-private partnership, and we have paid £17,102 to date in 2001–02 for external accountancy advice in relation to resource accounting and budgeting. These are the only costs for additional accountancy services which we can readily identify in the past four years.

Public Bodies (Chairmen)

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the appointments made by her Department since 1 May 1997 of chairmen of *(a)* non-departmental public bodies, *(b)* commissions, *(c)* inquiries, *(d)* agencies and *(e)* task forces; and if she will list their (i) term of office, (ii) salary and (iii) known political affiliation (A) past and (B) present. [33885]

Hilary Benn: The following chairmen were appointed by my Department.

(a) Non-departmental public bodies

Name	*Term*	*Salary*	*Political affiliation*
Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC)			
Lord Cairns	For 3 years from July 1998, but appointment cut short when CDC became a public limited company in December 1999. Lord Cairns then became chairman of the new organisation	£30,000 a year	No known political affiliations
Commonwealth Scholarship Commission			
Geoffrey Caston	For second 3 year term from December 1999	No remuneration	No known political affiliations
Commonwealth Scholarship Commission			
Ms T. Harpham	For a 3 year term from December 2001	£5,000 a year	No known political affiliations

Our remaining non-departmental public bodies have, or had, as their chairmen either Ministers or civil servants who fill the roles in an ex-officio capacity.

(b) Commissions

Commission on Intellectual Property Rights

Professor John Barton. April 2001 to June 2002.

A per diem of £500 (approximately £9,500 a year)

No known political affiliations.

No chairmen have been appointed to inquiries, agencies or task forces.

Free Basic Education

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to secure the abolition of education charges by 2005. [33517]

Hilary Benn: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) on 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 604W.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps are being taken to launch a global initiative to achieve free basic education for all; and if she will make a statement. [33518]

Hilary Benn: At the Education for All (EFA) High-Level Group meeting in Paris in October, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development made clear that the international response to the Dakar Framework for Action has been slow and has lacked effective co-ordination. She called for international action to be stepped so that we can accelerate current progress and ensure that we meet the target of quality primary education for all children by 2015. DFID's "Children out of school" paper sets out these proposals and urges much greater international energy and co-operation in taking them forward.

Achieving universal primary education (UPE) can happen only through reform and action at country level. A key indicator of commitment is the rapid abolition of user fees and other direct cost barriers to education. Other indicators are the development of sound national education policies, closely linked to the country's poverty reduction strategies; the resources allocated to education, and specifically to primary education; and evidence of efforts to promote gender equality.

Where countries are making these commitments, the international community must deliver the additional resources they require. We believe this is best achieved through analysis and action at the country level. The Dakar resource pledge should be incorporated into all country level negotiations on poverty reduction strategies. It will also require a change in the level of international financing to support and sustain UPE, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Development agencies and the multilateral development banks, including the World bank, must increase the resources committed to helping reforming Governments deliver UPE.

The Government are involved in three major international initiatives focusing on implementing the commitments made at Dakar. They are: the UNESCO and the EFA High-Level Group; the World bank (which is preparing a paper for its spring meeting); and the G8 (whose education task force will report to this year's summit in Canada).

Botswana

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action her Department has taken in relation to the forced relocation of the Bushmen of the Kalahari of Botswana to New Xhade. [34766]

Hilary Benn: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) on 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 311W. Further to this, our high commissioner to Botswana met the Minister for Local Government on 22 January. He advised that the severance of essential supplies, such as water, cuts across previous assurances and will provoke criticism from the international community.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Afghanistan

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the treatment of UK citizens who have been captured in Afghanistan and held by US forces, with special reference to *(a)* when consular officials will have access to them, *(b)* when the International Committee of the Red Cross will have access to them, *(c)* whether they will have legal representation, *(d)* whether they are prisoners of war under the Geneva conventions and who made the determination as to their status and *(e)* whether the UK citizens will be treated in accordance with the Geneva conventions. [28334]

Mr. Bradshaw: A team of British officials visited Guantanamo Bay between 17 and 20 January and saw three British detainees. We continue to investigate reports of a small number of individuals detained in Afghanistan

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who might be British. We are aware of two British nationals who are detained in Kandahar by the US authorities.

The International Committee of the Red Cross have established a presence at Guantanamo Bay and their officials have access to the detainees at any time. They also have access to detainees held by the US authorities in Afghanistan.

We have asked the US to clarify what access the detainees will have to legal representation.

Whether any individual is a prisoner of war depends on the facts of each individual case. It is for the US as the Detaining Power in the first instance to take a view. The US authorities have said that the detainees are being treated humanely and consistently with the principles of the Geneva conventions.

Israel

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he *(a)* last met and *(b)* intends to meet the Israeli Foreign Secretary. [31684]

Mr. Straw: I met the Israeli Foreign Secretary in Israel on 25 September 2001 and in Brussels on 10 December 2001. We are due to meet again on 13 February when I visit Israel.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Road Noise Reduction

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what targets the Government have set for resurfacing the strategic road network with noise-reducing surfaces; what funding has been earmarked for this work; and what percentage of this financial year's earmarked funding has been spent to date. [27024]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 14 January 2002]:* The Government's 10-year plan for transport tasked the Highways Agency with installing quieter surfaces on more than 60 per cent. of the motorway and trunk road network including all concrete stretches. Funding will be allocated over the period as part of the agency's roads renewals budget. This financial year, the agency plans to spend around £250 million. To date, they have spent nearly 74 per cent. (£184 million) and they expect to spend to budget.

Road Tax

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions the Minister of Transport and his officials have had with their Austrian counterparts regarding Austrian road tax charges at point of entry. [27717]

Mr. Spellar: My Department takes a close interest in developments in lorry road-user charging throughout Europe, including the scheme operated by the Austrian Government and regular discussions are held with national Administrations, including Austria.

Railtrack

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 783–84W, on the company limited by guarantee as a model for Railtrack, if he will list *(a)* the failures of the existing regime from which lessons have been learned and *(b)* the tried and tested cases of companies limited by guarantee to which he refers. [31596]

Mr. Spellar: Railtrack failed in a number of key areas. These include lack of knowledge of the company's assets, failure to manage projects and contracted-out work effectively, an inadequate skills base and a lack of customer focus.

A company limited by guarantee is a suitable vehicle for a wide range of activities. For example, many national charities are set up as companies limited by guarantee. Companies limited by guarantee are also frequently used for the not-for-profit promotion of education, sport or commerce. Examples of companies limited by guarantee in commerce include the British Phonographic Industry Ltd., City Disputes Panel Ltd., the National Readership Surveys Ltd., British Venture Capital Association, BioIndustry Association, Lloyd's Register of Shipping Trust Corporation Ltd. and Glas Cymru Cyfyngedig.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the dedicated unit within Railtrack which is aimed at identifying and more speedily addressing problems and faults with the railway infrastructure was set up; how many people are employed within the unit; and what its remit is. [33044]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* Railtrack advise that there is currently no dedicated unit as described. However, the company has identified as a priority the need to improve the management and operation of the railway infrastructure and this is currently being taken forward.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of *(a)* public money and *(b)* the private finance set out in the 10-year plan for the railways is for Railtrack in administration and its successor company. [33995]

Mr. Spellar: Railtrack in administration and its successor company will continue to receive income from grant and other sources as set out in the regulator's October 2000 periodic review and in the 2 April agreement between Government and Railtrack.

Gypsy/Traveller Camps

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects to publish a revision of the Good Practice Guide on Managing Unauthorised Camping by gypsy and travellers; and if he will make a statement. [32466]

Ms Keeble: Work is in hand to produce a revised version of the Good Practice Guide on Managing Unauthorised Camping.

Rail Safety

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 225W, on the rail industry, if he will list *(a)* each of the health and safety issues contained in railway safety cases and *(b)* for each train operator the address of the premises at which railway safety cases are available for public inspection. [32693]

Mr. Jamieson: The health and safety issues contained in railway safety cases are included in the schedules of the Railway (Safety Cases) Regulations 2000. They are: risk assessments, health and safety management systems, developing and maintaining staff competence, specifications and procedures, infrastructure, train operation, train integrity assurance and maintenance, station operation, control of contractors, incident investigation, compliance with safety cases, emergency response arrangements, safety case change control, additional criteria for infrastructure controllers.

The address where the safety case is available for inspection can be obtained from train operators. Contact details for passenger train operators are given on the Strategic Rail Authority website at www.sra.gov.uk.

Rail Industry Group

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the members of the Strategic Rail Authority's cross-industry working group; when this group *(a)* first met and *(b)* subsequently met; what are the terms of reference of this group; and what outcomes have emerged to date as a result of the work of the group. [32610]

Mr. Jamieson: The Rail Industry Group (RIG) was formed in early 2001 building on the successful collaborative arrangements developed following the Hatfield crash. RIG is chaired by the SRA and its membership includes senior representatives from ATOC, Railtrack, EWS, infrastructure maintenance contractors and the Rail Passengers Council. Observers from the DTLR, Office of the Rail Regulator, Health and Safety Executive and Rail Industry Association attend meetings. The group meets on an ad hoc basis depending on circumstances.

The purpose of the RIG is to bring the SRA and industry leaders together to discuss, agree and then implement changes to Britain's railway. The work of the RIG has been wide ranging, including co-ordinating changes to the possessions regime and setting up groups to address skills shortages.

The new chairman of the SRA, Richard Bowker, has been asked by the Secretary of State to review existing arrangements to determine if changes are needed to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

London Underground

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received on the proposed public-private partnership for London Underground; and if he will make a statement. [33037]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport to the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) on 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 176–77W.

Ministerial Meetings

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if *(a)* he and *(b)* other Ministers have met the Rail Regulator in the last month. [33367]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 789W.

Millennium Dome

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if financial responsibility for the upkeep of the millennium dome will be transferred to Meridian Delta upon completion of the contract. [32804]

Ms Keeble: Yes.

Congestion Charging

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if the Government will consider the likely net revenues of the Mayor of London's proposed congestion charging scheme against the opportunity cost of the scheme when assessing whether the spending plan represents value for money. [33741]

Ms Keeble: It is the Mayor of London's responsibility to consider the costs and benefits of the proposed congestion charging scheme before deciding whether or not to confirm the scheme order.

My right hon. Friend will have regard to the relevant statutory requirements in deciding whether to approve the spending plan.

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what criteria he will use when assessing whether the Mayor of London's plan for spending congestion charging revenues represents value for money. [33742]

Ms Keeble: My right hon. Friend will consider the final version of the spending plan when he receives it in the light of the statutory requirements. Paragraph 16(1) of Schedule 23 to the Greater London Authority Act 1999 provides that the net proceeds of a charging scheme shall be available for "relevant transport purposes". These purposes are defined by paragraph 1 as any purpose which directly or indirectly facilitates the implementation of any policies or proposals set out in the Mayor's transport strategy. And paragraph 16(5) provides that the net proceeds of charging schemes may only be applied for purposes which provide value for money. My right hon. Friend will wish to satisfy himself that the spending plan is consistent with the Mayor's transport strategy which he has considered at an earlier stage.

Strategic Rail Plan

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations the Strategic Rail Authority has made on the achievability of the 50 per cent. target for passenger growth in the 10-year plan. [32936]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The SRA has made no representations on this issue to the Department.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of the public funding for investment in the railways in the 10-year plan is uncommitted. [32944]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* Currently around £8.1 billion remains contractually uncommitted out of a total budget of £18.6 billion.

Data Protection Act

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the period of time elapsed is for the oldest outstanding request for information under the Data Protection Act 1998, since receipt of the *(a)* original request and *(b)* administration fee. [33447]

Dr. Whitehead: In respect of *(a)* 97 days, and in respect of *(b)* 46 days. The 40-day deadline for this case is not technically due to expire for a further two weeks since the further information required by the Department to respond to it was not supplied by the applicant for some time following receipt of the original request and administration fee.

Councillors

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* county, *(b)* district and *(c)* unitary councillors there are in England; and what the average amount they draw in allowances and expenses was in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [34040]

Mr. Raynsford: The total number of members of the following types of council in England as of May 2001 was:

(a) County: 2,140

(b) District: 10,715

(c) Unitary: 2,413

Source:

The Municipal Yearbook, 2002 Edition

My Department does not collect information from councils on the allowances and expenses paid to council members.

The average allowances of council members of local authorities who have made the information available to the Improvement and Development Agency, by local authority type, as of 4 December 2001, are as follows:

Average allowances

£

	Basic	*Leader*	*Executive member*
Met district	7,380	20,737	10,155
Shire county	7,548	21,701	11,643
Shire district	3,122	8,454	4,466
Unitary	5,273	15,426	7,732

Source:

"www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk". Member Allowance Summary Survey

Colne to Skipton Railway

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will ask the Strategic Rail Authority to commission a study on the *(a)* feasibility and *(b)* benefits of re-opening the Colne to Skipton railway line. [34280]

Mr. Spellar: The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) has no current plans to consider the possibility of re-opening this line. The relevant local authority could take forward such a study if they saw benefit in doing so. If funding for such a study were required it might be available through the SRA's Rail Passenger Partnership scheme, which has been extended to include the possibility of funding feasibility work.

Aviation Industry

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many meetings have taken place in the last year between *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* civil servants and representatives from the aviation industry; [34135]

(2) how many meetings have taken place in the last year between *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* civil servants and representatives from non-governmental organisations regarding the environmental impact of the aviation industry. [34134]

Mr. Spellar: Ministers and civil servants meet many people as part of the process of policy development and analysis. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code, the Civil Service Code and Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists. Some of these discussions take place on a confidential basis, and in order to preserve confidentiality, it is not the normal practice of Governments to release details of specific meetings with private individuals or companies.

National Parks

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether he plans to exclude national park authorities from the proposed parliamentary procedures for major infrastructure projects. [34827]

Mr. Byers: We are still consulting on the proposals contained in our document "Major Infrastructure Projects: Delivering a Fundamental Change". The closing date for comments is 22 March 2002.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to retain the Silkin test for major developments in national parks. [34825]

Mr. Byers: The 'Silkin test' for major developments in national parks forms part of the national guidance to local planning authorities set out in paragraph 4.5 of Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) note 7 on the Countryside. We have no plans to change this policy.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of the arrangements for pre-planning application discussions operated by the national park authorities. [34824]

Mr. Byers: The Department has not carried out an assessment of these discussions, which are not a part of the statutory planning process. We encourage pre-application discussions between planning applicants and local planning authorities. These can help to guide applicants through the planning process, clarify what is required and help them to formulate their proposals.

Local Authority Debt

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the level of *(a)* on-balance sheet and *(b)* off-balance sheet debt for each local authority in each year since 1997. [34822]

Mr. Byers: Local authority off-balance sheet information is not collected by DTLR. Figures for local authority outstanding debt at 31 March 1997 and 31 March 2000 have been placed today in the Libraries of the House. Outstanding debt is equivalent to on-balance sheet debt. Figures for 1998 and 1999 are not available centrally. Outstanding debt for individual authorities as at 31 March 2001 will be published shortly on the DTLR website www.dtlr.gov.uk/finance/stats.

It should be noted that authorities with high levels of debt are generally those which have undertaken capital investment and that long-term borrowing to finance capital expenditure is regulated by Government through the issue of credit approvals.

A40

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with the Highways Agency regarding the de-trunking of the A40 into Cheltenham; and if he will make a statement. [34637]

Mr. Spellar: The Secretary of State has asked the Highways Agency to discuss the proposed de-trunking of the A40 through Cheltenham with the relevant local authorities. These discussions are continuing.

An announcement will be made when draft orders for the de-trunking are published.

Travel Concessions Bill

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer (ref. 33646), *Official Report*, column 838W, if he will estimate the cost to local authorities of implementing the Travel Concessions Bill. [34672]

Ms Keeble: The additional cost to local authorities of implementing the Travel Concessions (Eligibility) Bill in England is estimated at £50 million per year.

PRIME MINISTER

UK OECD Delegation

Mr. Miliband: To ask the Prime Minister if he will announce the membership of the United Kingdom delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. [35530]

The Prime Minister: I have appointed 13 representatives from the Parliament of the United Kingdom to act as the United Kingdom delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. The next meeting of the Assembly will take place in Vienna on 21–22 February 2002. The delegation will consist of eight members of the Labour party, three members of the Conservative party and two members of the Liberal Democrat party. I have also appointed a number of substitute delegates.

The appointment of Conservative and Liberal Democrat party representatives and substitutes have been made on the basis of nominations by the parties concerned.

Representatives from the Government benches will be: the hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley), the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis), the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) who will act as Leader, the Baroness Hilton of Eggardon, the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay), the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope), the hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) and the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Rachel Squire).

Representatives from the Conservative party will be: the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames), the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor) and the Earl of Northesk.

Representatives from the Liberal Democrat party will be: the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) and the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath).

The following substitutes have been appointed to act as necessary on behalf of the delegates:

From the Government benches the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Janet Anderson), the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) and the Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede.

From the Opposition benches the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge).

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

InvestoSave

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on what InvestoSave bids are relevant to the rate of use of sub-post offices for electronic communication and transfer; and what progress is being made in this field. [25689]

Mr. Alexander: The Post Office is involved with three projects under the joint HM Treasury/Cabinet Office initiative, InvestoSave, namely the national geospatial data framework, the change of address project and extension of websites of Norfolk local authorities. It is too early to say to what extent work on these projects will impact on business of the sub-post office network.

Beer and Cider

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the organisations from which she has received complaints regarding short measures in the sale of beer and cider in each year since 1997, including those made in response to consultations. [27605]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Since 1997 the following organisations have submitted complaints to the Department alleging short measures in the sale of draught beer:

Crosby Constituency Labour party
Hartlepool borough council
Walsall metropolitan borough council
City of York Environment and Development Services
Redcar and Cleveland borough council
CAMRA (Campaign for Real Ale)—north Sussex branch
Devon county council
Newport borough council
West Yorkshire Trading Standards
Campaign for Real Ale
Campaign for Real Ale—north Hertfordshire branch
Metropolitan borough of Wirral
Glasgow city council
East Renfrewshire council
South Ayrshire council
Shropshire county council
Wolverhampton Trading Standards
Conwy county borough council
Stoke-on-Trent council
LACOTS (Local Authorities Co-ordinating Body on Trading Standards)
Durham county council
West Yorkshire Trading Standards
Pontypridd council
JR Hardings—Drinks, Dispense and Cooling Consultants
Birmingham city council
Lewisham council
North Lincolnshire council.

The following organisations indicated to the Department their concern about alleged short measures in the sale of draught beer and cider in response to the Department's consultation paper "Fair Measure" (issued in June 1999):

Ulster Unionist party
Midlands Coordinating Group on Trading Standards
Angus council
Scottish Metrology Liaison Group
Southend-on-Sea borough council
Norfolk county council
Scottish Borders council
Metropolitan borough of Wirral
Argyll and Bute council
Luton borough council
Renfrewshire borough council
Midlothian council
South Ayrshire council
Dorset county council
Somerset county council
Croydon council
Birmingham city council
Humber authorities
ERCOTS (Eastern Region Coordinating Body on Trading Standards) Metrology SFG
North West Metrology Panel
Northern Counties
Institute of Trading Standards Administration
AGMA Metrology Panel
South East Trading Standards Authorities
Society of Directors of Public Protection—Wales
Crossing The Boundaries Metrology Group
Inner London Metrology Liaison Group
St. Helens Metropolitan borough council
North East Trading Standards Liaison Group
South Yorkshire Chief Trading Standards Officer Liaison Group
West Sussex county council
ITSA (Institute of Trading Standards) Scottish Branch
Lancashire county council
Inverclyde Council Trading Standards Service
Durham county council
Redcar and Cleveland borough council
West Dunbartonshire council
Sefton council
London borough of Sutton
West Yorkshire Trading Standards Service
Hertfordshire county council
Gateshead metropolitan borough council
Solihull metropolitan borough council
Fife council
Glasgow city council
East Riding of Yorkshire
University of Teesside
LACOTS (Local Authorities Co-ordinating Body on Trading Standards)
Northern Ireland Co-Op
Co-operative Union Ltd.
CAMRA (Campaign for Real Ale).

The following organisations indicated to the Department their concern about alleged short measures in the sale of draught beer and cider in response to the Department's consultation paper "Measures of Draught Beer and Cider" (issued in December 2000):

Brewing, Food and Beverage Industry Suppliers Association
Independent Society of Brewers
Hallamshire Brewery Services Ltd.
Campaign for Real Ale
Campaign for Real Ale—Peterborough branch
National Federation of Consumer Groups
Cheshire Trading Standards
Isle of Anglesey Trading Standards
Surrey county council
Merton Environmental Services
South West England Regional Co-ordination of Trading Standards
Durham county council
Gwynedd council
Worcestershire county council
West of Scotland Metrology Group
West Yorkshire Trading Standards
South East Trading Standards
Trading Standards Institute
Unitary authorities of Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, Stockton-on-Tees, and Hartlepool
LACOTS (Local Authorities Co-ordinating Body On Trading Standards)
Metropolitan borough of Wirral
Food Standards Agency.

Overseas Trips

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list each of the overseas trips made by herself and other members of her Ministerial team in each of the last four years, specifying the purpose and cost of each trip. [30172]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on 4 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 707W.

Consumer Protection

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to introduce consumer protection legislation in the next 12 months. [30747]

Miss Melanie Johnson: We announced our intention, in the Queen's Speech, to introduce the Enterprise Bill during the current session, subject to available parliamentary time. The Bill would benefit consumers by strengthening the competition regime, introducing measures to take tough action against traders who harm consumer interest and clamping down on anti-competitive practices.

Insolvency Service

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the minister responsible for the Insolvency Service will meet with the hon. Member for Leicester, East to discuss the insolvency of BCCI. [31859]

Miss Melanie Johnson: A letter dated 22 November offered a meeting. The hon. Member's office contacted the Department recently and a meeting has been arranged for 7 March 2002.

Enron

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the role played by *(a)* Enron Europe, *(b)* the Enron Corporation and *(c)* executives of those firms in the PIU Energy Review. [31936]

Mr. Wilson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 4 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 689W.

Fossil Fuel Projects

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the fossil fuel energy projects that the ECGD is supporting including the *(a)* project name, *(b)* country the project is situated in, *(c)* the UK companies in receipt of support, *(d)* the type of plant and *(e)* start and completion dates of the projects. [31834]

Ms Hewitt: The table lists the project name, country, UK exporter, fuel type and the ECGD guarantee issue and final loan draw-down dates of the fossil fuel energy projects for which ECGD has provided guarantees since 1997.

In addition, ECGD has provided Overseas Investment Insurance and other insurance for 11 fossil fuel power projects with a total generating capacity of around 8,700MW. Details of these projects are commercially confidential.

ECGD does not normally hold information on project start and completion dates, but the guarantee issue date should correspond approximately to the start of project construction and the final loan draw-down date (where applicable) should correspond to the start of operations.

For most of the projects listed, the UK exporter is one of several contractors and ECGD is guaranteeing only part of the total project financing.

Power project supported by ECGD since 1997

Project name	*Goods/service provided*	*Country*	*UK company*	*Fuel Type*	*Guarantee issue date*	*Final draw-down date*
Shandong	Boilers	China	Mitsui Babcock Energy Ltd.	Coal	1/5/1998	1/10/2004
Bulawayo	Refurbishment	Zimbabwe	Mitsui Babcock Energy Ltd.	Coal	13/1/1998	31/12/1999
Manjung	Engineering and construction	Malaysia	Alstom Power Ltd.	Coal	9/8/1999	30/8/2003
Afsin-Elbistan	Steel structures	Turkey	Corus UK Ltd.	Coal	26/4/2000	31/3/2005
AK Enerji	10 gas turbines	Turkey	Alstom Power Ltd.	Gas	20/7/2000	31/5/2001
Bilkent	Steam turbine	Turkey	Allen Steam Turbines	Gas	6/10/1998	30/9/1999
Manzanillo	Spares and services	Mexico	Howden Power Ltd.	Gas/Coal	7/6/2000	30/9/2000
St. Kitts Power	Generating sets	St. Kitts and Nevis	Mirrlees Blackstone Ltd.	Oil	21/8/1998	7/2/2000
Elege Alimentos	Diesel generators	Brazil	F. W. Wilson Ltd.	Oil	11/5/1998	28/2/1999

Power project supported by ECGD since 1997

Project name	*Goods/service provided*	*Country*	*UK company*	*Fuel Type*	*Guarantee issue date*	*Final draw-down date*
Anguilla Electricity	Diesel generators	Anguilla	Mirrlees Blackstone Ltd.	Oil	10/8/1998	15/9/1999
Ghubrah	Engineering and construction	Oman	Weir Westgarth Ltd.	Oil	2/11/1999	[1]—
San Pedro	Engineering and construction	Dominican Republic	Motherwell Bridge Engineering Ltd.	Oil	18/4/2000	28/2/2003
Magnesita	4 diesel generating sets	Brazil	Man B&W Diesel Ltd.	Oil	27/11/2001	30/4/2003
Outer Islands Power	Plant extension	Indonesia	Allen Power Engineering Ltd.	Oil	3/12/1997	31/10/2001

[1] For certain ECGD insurance products a final draw-down date is not applicable

Departmental Leave Entitlement

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the average annual leave entitlement of staff in her Department in each of the last four years. [31751]

Ms Hewitt: In the years ending 31 July average annual leave entitlement has been:

Year	*Days*
1998	26.9
1999	27.2
2000	27.6
2001	28.4

Sub-Post Offices

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many sub-post offices closed between May 1997 and the latest available date in Greater London. [33015]

Ms Hewitt: I am informed by Post Office Ltd. that for the year ending March 2001 in the London region, there were 10 net closures; to the end of December 2001, there were nine net closures. I understand from Post Office Ltd. that historic data on the post office network before the year ending March 2001 are not held on a regional basis.

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many sub-post offices have closed in the London borough of Hillingdon in each of the last four years. [34096]

Ms Hewitt: I am informed by Post Office Ltd. that post office closure figures are not collated in the form requested.

For the year ending March 2001, there were 10 net closures in the London region. Before the year ending March 2001, historic data on the post office network are not held on a regional basis.

Medical Schools

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps have been taken to ensure new medical schools receive research support money. [33430]

Ms Hewitt: Under the £1 billion Science Research Investment Fund (SRIF), a partnership between Government and the Wellcome Trust, £675 million has already been allocated to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to fund improvements in infrastructure, such as new or refurbished buildings and new equipment. Some HEIs have deployed SRIF to support their new medical schools.

Researchers at all medical schools and faculties of medicine are eligible to apply to the Medical Research Council for research funds. Proposals are accepted in the same way as those from any other eligible institution. The MRC welcomes high quality applications for support into any aspect of human health and these are judged in open competition with other demands on funding. Awards are made according to their scientific quality and importance to human health.

I understand that the impact on NHS research support budgets of the new medical schools has been assessed. NHS R&D funding will be made available to NHS care organisations to defray the NHS costs that they incur in supporting eligible research generated by the schools.

Broadband

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the publicity given to the Broadband Fund by the South-West Regional Development Agency between 8 October 2001 and 20 December 2001 in raising awareness within the private sector; [33726]

(2) how much funding has been provided to broadband projects in the south-west by the Broadband Fund since its announcement; [33754]

(3) if she will make a statement on *(a)* the regulations for application and *(b)* the application process for applicants seeking funding from the Broadband Fund. [33760]

Mr. Alexander: The Government made a well-publicised announcement on the fund on 9 October 2001, and referred inquiries to the relevant body. The UK Broadband Fund was established to support the RDAs and devolved Administrations in taking forward innovative schemes to meet local requirements for extending broadband networks. There was no 'application process', since the fund was not established to assist individual businesses.

£3.78 million has been allocated to the South-West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA). Use of funds, along with publicity within the south-west, is a matter for SWRDA, who carry out the projects in accordance with the action plan agreed with Government and the guidance laid down in October.

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what part mapping of existing broadband service availability in the UK forms of her strategy for broadband deployment; to what extent mapping has been completed; and to what extent the mapping data is available in the public domain; [33750]

(2) if she will make a statement on deployment of broadband on a region by region basis in the UK. [33752]

Mr. Alexander: The Government have a rolling programme of research into the broadband market, including assessment of availability of broadband services across the UK. A map showing geographical availability of technologies is contained in the second annual UK Online report (http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk/ukonline/progress/anrep2001/default.htm) and has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Departmental Budget

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total running costs budget is for *(a)* her Department in 2001–02 and *(b)* the public bodies reporting to her Department. [33990]

Ms Hewitt: The Department of Trade and Industry's Expenditure Plans Report (Cm 5112) shows, in Table B9, the total planned administration cost expenditure for the Central Department for 2001–02 is £483 million. This includes the expenditure of: ACAS, Employment Tribunal Service, Insolvency Service, British Trade International, National Weights and Measurement laboratory and Radiocommunications Executive Agency.

Table B9 also shows the total planned administration cost expenditure for Regulators, while Table C5 shows the planned administration cost expenditure for NDPBs and together these amount to £560.6 million, excluding the ACAS total which has already been included in the central Department.

Lost/Stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list those items valued at less than £50 each which have been stolen or lost from her Department in each of the last four years. [34209]

Ms Hewitt: The Department of Trade and Industry's log of missing items is a mix of lost, stolen or misplaced items belonging to the Department or its work force. In the majority of cases the value of items is not recorded and it is not possible to answer this question in detail without incurring disproportionate cost.

Spectrum

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will publish the United Kingdom Spectrum Management report submitted by Professor Martin Cave. [33309]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* My right hon. Friends the Chancellor of the Exchequer and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry have just received the report. We will make a further announcement shortly.

Employment Tribunals

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in how many cases an employment tribunal awarded costs to *(a)* the employer and *(b)* the employee in each of the past five years. [34370]

Alan Johnson: The information requested is displayed in the table.

Costs awarded

	To applicant (employee)	*To respondent (employer)*
2000–01	80	167
1999–2000	61	125
1998–99	85	136
1997–98	136	140
1996–97	[1]—	[1]—

[1] Due to changes to the database system of the ETS in 1996, statistics for 1996–97 are not available.

Source:

Employment Tribunals Service

Ispat International

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from employees or directors of Ispat International between May 1997 and December 2001; and if she will list them by date and subject. [33111]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry received no representations from employees or directors of Ispat International between May 1997 and December 2001.

Miners' Compensation

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many compensation claims by former miners living in *(a)* St. Helens, South and *(b)* St. Helens metropolitan authority (i) have yet to be settled and (ii) have been paid their final sum. [28698]

Ms Hewitt *[pursuant to the reply 22 January 2002, Official Report, c. 742W]:* The information I gave regarding the number of settled claims for respiratory disease in St. Helens, South was unfortunately incorrect.

The correct figure should be 69.

Food Supplements Directive

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many specialist health food *(a)* retailers and *(b)* manufacturers there are in England and Wales; what figures she has collated on turnover of these sectors in the last year for which figures are available; what assessment she has made of the impact upon the profitability of these businesses of the forthcoming EU food supplements directive; and if she will make a statement. [21689]

Yvette Cooper: I have been asked to reply.

I am advised that there are no separate figures for retailers or manufacturers of specialist health food products as these estimates, although collected by the Office for National Statistics as part of the annual business inquiry, are combined with other specialist retailers and manufacturers.

The Food Standards Agency, which is responsible for negotiating this directive on the Government's behalf, has consulted widely on its likely impact. There would be labelling costs falling on manufacturers of all food supplements, but these would be substantially offset by a two year transitional period. For the specialist food supplement sector and consumers of these products any additional impact would depend on future developments on lists of permitted nutrients and maximum limits.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Environmental Conservation

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what resources are being put towards teaching school children about environmental conservation; and if she will make a statement. [31614]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I have been asked to reply.

Pupils' statutory entitlement to sustainable development education is supported, as are other areas of the National Curriculum, through the Government's local funding for schools. Overall, the Education Standard Spending Assessments for 2002–03 have been increased by £1.3 billion for 2002–03; the standards fund grant has been increased by almost £160 million; and the direct grant for schools by 2.75 per cent.

The revised National Curriculum, which we introduced in September 2000, provides the framework for sustainable development education in schools. Sustainable development is specifically included in Geography and Science, together with Citizenship, which will be introduced in September this year. Pupils learn about the connections between environmental, social and economic issues and about the consequences of the choices they make for the environment and other people. We have also sponsored the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority to provide online resources for teachers (available at http://www.nc.uk.net/esd/). The Environmental Action Fund (£4.2 million) is this year funding 21 projects out of 115 to advance education for sustainable development for young people, while next year education will be one of only two priorities for the fund. The Growing Schools initiative (£0.5 million), which launched in September, will promote farming and growing as an education resource.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Press Officers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many press officers there were in her Department in each of the last four years; and what was the annual cost of their remuneration over that period. [27470].

Dr. Howells: Numbers of press officers over the past four years in my Department (at 1 April in each year), and their remuneration are as follows:

Date	*Number*	*Remuneration (£)*
1998	[1]9	207,619
1999	8	236,150
2000	9	245,039
2001	8	265,631

[1] Includes two staff working part-time.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list her Department's total expenditure by month in each financial year since 1997–98. [32786]

Dr. Howells: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury on 4 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 692W.

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many Queen's Golden Jubilee Medals will be struck; to whom they will be distributed; what the total cost of this exercise will be; and if she will make a statement. [34050]

Tessa Jowell: The estimated requirement is for 370,000 medals. Around 185,000 will be issued to serving members of the armed forces and Royal Fleet Auxiliary with a minimum of five years' reckonable service on 6 February 2002. Around 185,000 will be issued under the same criteria to members of the emergency services accessed by dialling 999.

The total cost to Government are estimated at £7.8 million (including the cost of the ribbon, delivery and an element for administration).

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the impact of (1) recent legislation and regulations on the organising of street parties and other celebrations for the Queens' Golden Jubilee; [34153]

(2) the Human Rights Act 1998 on the organising of street parties and other celebrations for the Queen's Golden Jubilee. [34152]

Tessa Jowell *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* I can see no reason for the Human Rights Act 1998 to obstruct the organisation of street parties and other celebrations. Apart from the proposed regulatory reform order to extend licensing hours on the night of 3 June, no legislation is being enacted specifically to apply to the Golden Jubilee celebrations. I would expect those organising parties and other Jubilee events, including local authorities where street parties are being held, to consider the impact of all relevant legislation which will apply during the Jubilee celebrations as at any other time.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how the Government plans to mark the occasion of the Queen's Golden Jubilee. [34049]

Tessa Jowell: I refer the hon. Member to the announcements made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 23 November 2000 and 22 June 2001. Also relevant is the joint Home Office and Ministry of Defence press notice of 15 February 2001, in which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced the Golden Jubilee commemorative medal.

After taking on responsibility for the Golden Jubilee celebrations, I announced on 3 August 2001 details of the extended bank holiday 'Jubilee Weekend' over the period 1 to 4 June 2002. On 4 December 2001, I announced that the distribution of the Golden Jubilee medal had been widened beyond the armed forces and Royal Fleet Auxiliary to include the emergency services. Copies of both press notices are in the Library of the House.

DEFENCE

NATO Budget

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from the NATO Secretary General regarding NATO member contributions to the 2002 NATO budgets for *(a)* civil, *(b)* military and *(c)* security and investments; and if he will make a statement. [33191]

Mr. Hoon: I talk regularly to the NATO Secretary General on a range of issues, including the NATO budgets. I have received no specific representations from the NATO Secretary General regarding national contributions to the two NATO budgets that are a matter for the Ministry of Defence, namely the Military Budget and NATO's Security Investment Programme. Issues concerning NATO's Civil Budget are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

RAF Aircraft Maintenance and Spares

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total cost was of RAF aircraft maintenance and spares on a fleet-wide basis in the last year for which figures are available. [32444]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Service Personnel (Scotland)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many aircrew in the United Kingdom forces were born in Scotland; how many are pilots of *(a)* combat aircraft, *(b)* transport aircraft and *(c)* helicopters by arm of the service; and how many are other aircrew, by (i) arm of service and (ii) function. [32440]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Homelessness

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research his Department has commissioned into the incidence and causes of homelessness among ex-service personnel; and what recent changes he has made to policy and practice to assist ex-service personnel. [32666]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* The Ministry of Defence does not itself monitor homelessness among ex-service personnel. The Social Exclusion Unit report, published in 1998, identified that between one quarter and one fifth of rough sleepers had been in the armed forces at some stage, predominantly as national servicemen. The MOD has, therefore, been working in partnership with the Rough Sleeper's Unit (RSU) and the charitable sector to reduce some of the most acute cases of homelessness, those sleeping rough on the streets. In particular, preventative mechanisms have been put in place at pre-discharge, point of discharge and post-discharge to help the more vulnerable make a smoother transition to civilian life. Measures taken by RSU and its partners to date have reduced levels of rough sleeping by at least two-thirds in line with the Prime Minister's target and DTLR have confirmed that interim analysis of rough sleeping data collected in November 2001 shows that the percentage of rough sleepers with an armed forces background has decreased markedly since the 1998 SEU report. We welcome this as evidence of what is being achieved through closer co-operation within Government and with the voluntary sector.

We recognise that there is further work to be done in this area and, in particular, as part of the Veterans' Initiative, are looking at how we can improve resettlement arrangements for the most vulnerable service leavers. This would include addressing the risk of homelessness.

Service Women

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what duties have been extended to women members of each service since 1997; and what has been the cost of implementing those extensions. [34831]

Mr. Ingram: From April 1998, all posts in the Royal Artillery, Royal Engineers and Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers were opened to women. From July that year, some 1,300 specialist posts attached to the Royal Marines were also opened to women. No costs associated with these extensions are identifiable.

Tomahawk Cruise Missile

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made on joint-design work between the Royal Navy and the US Navy on the torpedo tube-launched Tomahawk cruise missile; and if he will make a statement. [32891]

Dr. Moonie: The Block IIIC Tomahawk missiles currently in service with the Royal Navy are launched from submarine torpedo tubes. The next generation, Tactical Tomahawk Block IV, missile is currently designed for vertical launch only. Jointly funded UK-US studies to assess the feasibility of launching the Block IV missile from submarine torpedo tubes have been successfully completed, and further development work is planned to start later this year, subject to completion of contractual negotiations.

Spearfish Torpedo

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in upgrading the Royal Navy's Spearfish torpedo; and if he will make a statement. [32890]

Dr. Moonie: Spearfish is currently in the process of replacing Tigerfish as the Royal Navy's Heavy Weight Torpedo. Contracts for Concept work for a Mid Life Update of the Spearfish torpedo have been placed with QinetiQ and BAE Systems Electronics Ltd. Underwater Weapons Division, Waterlooville. The contracts have been let progressively from November 1998 and work is on-going.

Manpower

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the manpower of each service was in each year since 1997; and how many vacancies were reported. [34834]

Mr. Ingram: The manpower strength of each of the services since 1 April 1997 and the surplus/deficit against the trained requirement are as follows.

UK full-time personnel: UK Regulars, FTRS[1] and Gurkhas

	1 April 1997		*1 April 1998*		*1 April 1999*	
Service	*Trained strength*	*Surplus/(deficit)*	*Trained strength*	*Surplus/(deficit)*	*Trained strength*	*Surplus/(deficit)*
All services	197,390	–8,325	193,914	–8,025	190,506	–8,732
Naval Service						
Total	41,680	–1,231	40,356	–1,581	39,071	–1,872
UK Regulars	—	—	—	—	—	—
FTRS	—	—	—	—	—	—
Army						
Total	101,514	–4,845	100,881	–4,594	99,674	–5,597
UK Regulars	97,756	–5,597	97,452	–5,080	96,300	–6,089
FTRS	—	—	—	—	—	—
Gurkhas	3,758	752	3,429	586	3,374	492
Royal Air Force						
Total	54,196	–2,249	52,677	–1,850	51,761	–1,263
UK Regulars	—	—	—	—	—	—
FTRS	—	—	—	—	—	—

UK full-time personnel: UK Regulars, FTRS[1] and Gurkhas

	1 April 2000		*1 April 2001*		*1 January 2002*	
Service	*Trained strength*	*Surplus/(deficit)*	*Trained strength*	*Surplus/(deficit)*	*Trained strength*	*Surplus/(deficit)*
All services	190,419	–8,000	189,026	–9,438	187,789	–9,397
Naval Service						
Total	38,877	–986	38,539	–1,358	37,578	–2,189
UK Regulars	38,535	–1,328	38,023	–1,874	36,930	–2,837
FTRS	342	342	516	516	648	648
Army						
Total	100,334	–6,062	100,381	–6,592	100,914	–6,059
UK Regulars	96,475	–6,611	96,285	–7,641	96,373	–7,553
FTRS	486	486	646	646	919	919
Gurkhas	3,373	63	3,450	403	3,622	575
Royal Air Force						
Total	51,208	–952	50,106	–1,488	49,297	–1,149
UK Regulars	50,993	–903	49,847	–1,517	48,995	–1,186
FTRS	215	–49	259	29	302	37

[1] FTRS: Full Time Reserve Service, ie for Naval Service and Army FTRS individuals serve in vacant regular posts and there is therefore no separate requirement for these. RAF FTRS strength figures comprise Full Commitment (FC), Limited Commitment (LC) and Home Commitment (HC). FC individuals in the RAF serve in vacant regular posts, whereas LC and HC establishments are shown as a separate requirement.

Note:

Figures are for UK Full Time Personnel and therefore exclude the Home Service battalions of the Royal Irish Regiment, mobilised reservists, Gibraltar Permanent Cadre and Naval Activated Reservists.

Taliban and al-Qaeda Prisoners

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Taliban and al-Qaeda prisoners taken by allied Afghan forces subsequently escaped from Afghanistan to Pakistan; by what means; and if he will make a statement. [33261]

Mr. Bradshaw: I have been asked to reply.

No firm information is available as the situation on the ground is very difficult. HMG take seriously the need to prevent escaped fighters from pursuing terrorist activities.

TREASURY

Advance Corporation Tax Relief

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact which the abolition of advance corporation tax relief has had on the annual savings gap of £27 billion between what people need to save and what they actually save for their retirement outlined in FSA Consultation Paper 121, paragraph 3.54. [33957]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government recognise the importance to individuals of saving, including as a way of providing comfort in retirement. The Government's strategy for encouraging more people to save is set out in "Helping People to Save", published in November 2000. The Government monitor closely developments in the savings market.

Consumers should benefit from increased choice under the FSA proposals.

Financial Products

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to limit the amount of product provided through an intermediary by a shareholder in that intermediary as part of the implementation of the proposal for abolishing limits on product-provider investment in FSA Consultation Paper 121. [33958]

Mr. Andrew Smith: This is an issue which is addressed in FSA Consultation Paper 121, in particular paragraphs 4.41 to 4.46.

Polarisation

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what impact he forecasts the abolition of polarisation will have on long-term trends in the savings ratio. [33960]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The polarisation proposals are designed to ensure increased choice and competition for consumers in the tied market for packaged investment products.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what measures he will consider using to ensure that abolishing polarisation does not lead to a strengthening of the position in the marketplace of larger tied distributors of financial products such that there are adverse consequences for competition; [33952]

(2) what measures he will consider using to ensure that the abolition of polarisation does not result in major tied distributors operating commission bias in the provision of packaged products. [33959]

Mr. Andrew Smith: This is an issue which is addressed in FSA Consultation Paper 121, in particular paragraphs 4.22 to 4.28, and in the proposals for enhanced disclosure in Part 5.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from consumers' representatives regarding FSA Consultation Paper 121 on the impact on the interests of consumers arising from a consolidation in the position of larger tied financial distributors as a result of the abolition of polarisation. [33955]

Mr. Andrew Smith: None.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many IFAs are registered as operating in the UK; and what he estimates will be the number in operation five years after abolishing polarisation. [33954]

Mr. Andrew Smith: 6,018 IFA firms were individually "grandfathered" into the FSA at 1 December 2001, of which 4,692 had previously been regulated by the Personal Investment Authority and 1,416 were regulated by recognised professional bodies. In addition, there are about 6,500 appointed representative IFA businesses that are mainly members of the larger IFA networks. At the same time (in the run up to N2) 32,181 registered individuals worked for firms that were registered with the PIA.

The FSA Consultation Paper 121 analyses the likely impact of these proposals on the IFA sector at paragraphs 4.19 to 4.21.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what role the Universal bank will play in meeting the goals set out in FSA Consultation Paper 121. [33956]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Under the proposals for universal banking services, the Post Office Card Account will provide an electronic payment service for paying benefits and tax credits. Investments will not be part of universal banking services, so the polarisation proposals are not relevant.

Sports Clubs

Kate Hoey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those sports in which community amateur sports clubs would have difficulty in qualifying for charitable status because they are *(a)* not considered healthy, *(b)* considered dangerous and *(c)* considered too costly. [34339]

Mr. Boateng: Eligibility for charitable status is a matter for the Charity Commission to decide. Sports' representative bodies are working closely with the Charity Commission in the development of guidelines for charitable status.

Kate Hoey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the estimated cost is of the tax exemptions for the Inland Revenue proposals contained in Promoting Sport in the Community. [34335]

Mr. Boateng: Cost will depend on any finalised tax package and subsequent take-up.

Kate Hoey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those sports recognised by the Sports Council which are eligible for the Inland Revenue CASC tax concessions. [34340]

Mr. Boateng: The list of sports eligible for any separate Inland Revenue administered tax package would be finalised in due course, when decisions are made as part of the normal Budget process.

Kate Hoey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the estimated cost is of the tax exemptions for the Charity Commission proposals contained in the consultative paper Promoting Sport in the Community. [34336]

Mr. Boateng: The cost of the Charity Commission decision will depend on take-up by sports clubs. Community amateur sports clubs are able to apply immediately and there have been a significant number of inquiries from sports clubs interested in taking advantage of the new charitable purpose.

Kate Hoey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the cost will be of granting mandatory rate relief to community amateur sports clubs as set out in Annexe B in the consultation paper; [34338]

(2) what the cost of granting 80 per cent. mandatory rate relief to community amateur sports clubs based on the criteria set out in Annexe A of Promoting Sport in the Community would be. [34337]

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost of providing 80 per cent. mandatory relief from business rates for *(a)* those community amateur sports clubs (CASCs) which achieve charitable status and *(b)* those CASCs which qualify for his proposed tax relief package. [34509]

Mr. Boateng: The cost of granting 80 per cent. mandatory relief to community amateur sports clubs eligible for charitable status will depend on the take-up of charitable status. 80 per cent. mandatory rate relief is not part of the proposed Inland Revenue tax package set out in Annexe A of the "Promoting Sport in the Community" consultation document.

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many written responses have been received to the Treasury consultation paper, "Promoting Sport in the Community". [34510]

Mr. Boateng: A number of responses to the consultation document "Promoting Sport in the Community" have been received from a wide range of sports clubs and representative bodies. Views expressed will be considered before decisions on the best way to support community amateur sports clubs are made.

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to respond to the consultation document on "Promoting Sport in the Community". [34508]

Mr. Boateng: Decisions on the best way to support community amateur sports clubs that make a positive contribution to their local communities will be made as part of the normal Budget process.

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many copies of the Treasury consultation paper, "Promoting Sport in the Community", were *(a)* printed and *(b)* circulated. [34511]

Mr. Boateng: 5,000 copies of the "Promoting Sport in the Community" consultation document were printed and it was also available on the Treasury public internet site. The consultation document was circulated to sports clubs and their governing bodies, Sport England and the Central Council of Physical Recreation. Given the diversity of the sector, the Government have been keen for as many interested parties as possible to have the opportunity to respond.

Credit Unions

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the Saving Gateway proposal on credit unions. [34351]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government set out their latest proposals for the Saving Gateway in "Delivering Saving and Assets", published in November 2001. The Government announced their intention to pilot the Saving Gateway in a number of locations, to understand better how the Saving Gateway might work in practice. Many decisions about the operation of the Saving Gateway remain to be taken, so it is not possible to say how it might affect credit unions, although credit unions might be expected to benefit from an increase in awareness and understanding of the benefits of saving. A number of credit unions have expressed an interest in being involved in elements of the Saving Gateway, including financial education.

The Government welcome the continued involvement of all interested parties, including credit unions, in the development of the proposals for the Saving Gateway, including responses to "Delivering Saving and Assets for All".

Lost/stolen Property

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those items valued at less than £50 each which have been stolen or lost from his Department in each of the last four years. [34223]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information from HM Treasury's database of reported thefts is as follows:

Item	*Number*
1998	
Dictating machines	5
Answerphones	2
Wall clock	1
Briefcase	1
1999	
Dictating machine	1
Computer memory chip	1
2000	
Desklamps	2
Deutschmarks	100
2001	
Computer mouse	1
Pack of Duracell Ultra batteries	1

Our policy is that all thefts and losses, no matter how small, should be reported to security. It is, however, likely that the loss of very low value items will not be reported consistently.

Transport Funding

Tom Brake: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he has met the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions since 1 January to discuss funding for the *(a)* London Underground and *(b)* Strategic Rail Authority plan published on 14 January 2001; and what the subject of the meetings was. [34644]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Treasury Ministers and officials hold meetings with colleagues in other Departments to discuss a variety of issues on a regular basis.

Money Laundering

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* UK banks and *(b)* banks registered in the UK have signed up for the Wolfsberg AML Principles on money laundering. [34668]

Mr. Andrew Smith: While the Government welcome commitments from private institutions to strengthen their anti-money laundering systems, detailed data on the number of banks who have signed up to the Wolfsberg Principles are not held centrally.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

Scotland Office

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Advocate-General on how many occasions the Scotland Office has been a client of the Office of the Solicitor to the Advocate-General in terms of requests for legal services. [33398]

The Advocate-General *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The Office of the Solicitor to the Advocate-General regularly provides legal advice and other legal services, including the drafting of statutory instruments, to the Scotland Office. Providing legal advice and services is an on-going process and no record is kept of the number of requests for advice or other services.

Devolution

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Advocate-General if she co-operated with the Scottish Executive with respect to the development of her role under the Scotland Act 1998. [33403]

The Advocate-General *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* There is good communication and co-operation between the Scottish Executive and the Government, including my office, both in the exchange of information the discussion of issues arising under the Scotland Act 1998.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Advocate-General which UK Government departments she has consulted prior to making a determination as to whether her intervention in devolution issue cases before the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council is necessary. [33400]

The Advocate-General *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* Prior to deciding whether or not to intervene in devolution issue cases before the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, or another court, I consult any United Kingdom Government Department which I consider has an interest in the issue under consideration.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Advocate-General according to which criteria she determines whether her intervention in devolution issue cases before the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council is necessary. [33399]

The Advocate-General *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* In my answer of 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1124W, on devolution I explained my approach to intervention in devolution issue cases. Where cases reach the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, intervention may be particularly apt because that is the final authority.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Advocate-General if she will break down by subject area the 1,300 devolution issue cases that have been intimated to her office since May 1999. [33397]

The Advocate-General *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The number of devolution minutes raising devolution issues intimated to me since May 1999 is 1,480. The figure of 1,375 is the number of devolution issue cases intimated and the reason for the difference is that sometimes a number of minutes relating to the same case are intimated to me. Approximately 85 per cent. of the devolution minutes involve claims of a breach of Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which concerns the right to a fair trial. These claims involve a range of different legal arguments of varying importance. Article 8, which concerns the right to respect for private and family life, is the next most commonly referred to Article with approximately 5 per cent. of the minutes intimated referring to it. The remainder cover a variety of different issues.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Advocate-General which parties have a right of audience in devolution issue cases before the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. [33401]

The Advocate-General *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The relevant rules relating to both appeals and references are found in Part II of the Judicial Committee (Devolution Issues) Rules Order 1999. In appeals and references from another court Law Officers have an additional right to enter appearance and become a party to proceedings before the Judicial Committee, even when they have not been a party to the original proceedings.

In references from other courts to the Judicial Committee any party to the proceedings in the court making the reference, including a Law Officer who is a party, may participate in the proceedings before the Judicial Committee by entering appearance. In appeals, parties to the original proceedings, including a Law Officer who is a party, have a right to appear before the Judicial Committee. Which of the Law Officers have this right depends on the circumstances as set out in the rules.

In addition, in references by a Law Officer under paragraph 34 of Schedule 6 to the Scotland Act 1998, any other Law Officer may enter appearance and become a respondent to the proceedings.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Advocate-General with which UK Government Departments she co-operates with respect to the development of her role under the Scotland Act 1998. [33402]

The Advocate-General *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* I co-operate closely with the other United Kingdom Law Officers and with other ministerial colleagues who are concerned with constitutional matters or with particular subject matters under consideration.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Advocate-General in what special circumstances she would intervene in devolution issue cases as a UK Law Officer in fora other than the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. [33420]

The Advocate-General *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* In my answer of 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1125W, on devolution, I explained my approach to intervention in devolution issue cases.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Advocate-General on how many occasions she has met *(a)* the First Minister, *(b)* Scottish Executive Ministers, *(c)* the Lord Advocate, *(d)* the Solicitor-General for Scotland and *(e)* the Law Society of Scotland since 20 May 1999. [33396]

The Advocate-General *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* Since May 1999 I have had regular meetings with the Lord Advocate and Solicitor General for Scotland and meetings with other Scottish Executive Ministers as appropriate. In addition, I also meet with representatives of the Law Society of Scotland.

Legal Services

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Advocate-General with respect to which subject areas the Office of the Solicitor to the Advocate-General has provided legal services to the Department for Work and Pensions. [33418]

The Advocate-General *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* The Office of the Solicitor to the Advocate-General provides legal services to the Department for Work and Pensions and its agencies (other than the Employment Service) in the following subject areas: social security; child support; pensions; and employment. A full range of legal services is provided including court and tribunal work, primary and subordinate legislation and general advisory work.

Office Budget

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Advocate-General what is the budgetary provision for the total cost of her office in 2001–02. [33419]

The Advocate-General *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* In my answer of 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1127W on departmental costs I explained that the Office of the Advocate-General for Scotland forms part of the Scotland Office with the Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland. Not all the costs of the Scotland Office can be separately allocated to each of these two offices and no separate budgetary provisions are made.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Learning and Skills Councils

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what was *(a)* the total bill for salaries and expenses for board members, *(b)* the administrative operating costs and *(c)* the total annual budget in the latest year for which figures are available for each of the learning and skills councils in England. [30196]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The administrative operating costs and the total annual budget for the latest year for which figures are available, for each of the learning and skills councils in England, are detailed in the table.

The amount of salary and expenses paid to LSC Board members is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council.

Learning and Skills Council Budget Data 2001–02

	LSC/National Office Directorate	*Admin budget*	*Programme budget*	*Budget total*
East Midlands	Derbyshire	2,961,207	84,199,461	87,160,668
East Midlands	Nottinghamshire	3,471,336	126,235,090	129,706,426
East Midlands	Lincolnshire and Rutland	2,000,523	43,099,739	45,100,262
East Midlands	Leicestershire	2,595,228	88,082,684	90,677,912
East Midlands	Northamptonshire	2,028,258	46,143,926	48,172,184
East of England	Norfolk	2,308,116	58,646,515	60,954,631
East of England	Cambridgeshire	2,669,927	55,396,126	58,066,053
East of England	Suffolk	1,853,759	45,350,782	47,204,541
East of England	Bedfordshire and Luton	2,072,032	47,448,103	49,520,135
East of England	Hertfordshire	2,389,925	69,363,760	71,753,685
East of England	Essex	3,526,304	125,324,915	128,851,219
Greater London	London North	2,849,098	114,039,787	116,888,885
Greater London	London West	4,212,485	125,480,762	129,693,247
Greater London	London Central	4,945,555	210,772,438	215,717,993
Greater London	London East	4,838,360	213,164,413	218,002,773
Greater London	London South	3,464,543	118,194,063	121,658,606
North East	Northumberland	1,603,832	18,299,048	19,902,880
North East	Tyne and Wear	4,658,853	137,312,786	141,971,639
North East	County Durham	2,261,677	46,739,421	49,001,098
North East	Tees Valley	3,015,845	98,659,567	101,675,412
North West	Cumbria	1,952,868	42,691,367	44,644,235
North West	Lancashire	3,931,820	166,715,753	170,647,573
North West	Greater Merseyside	4,417,319	172,348,608	176,765,927
North West	Greater Manchester	6,264,609	306,386,007	312,650,616
North West	Cheshire and Warrington	2,561,104	75,273,022	77,834,126
South East	Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire	3,368,112	94,250,521	97,618,633
South East	Berkshire	2,755,023	61,423,348	64,178,371
South East	Hampshire and Isle of Wight	4,309,889	180,221,626	184,531,515
South East	Surrey	2,886,200	78,874,210	81,760,410
South East	Sussex	3,410,021	116,510,117	119,920,138
South East	Kent and Medway	3,499,610	107,634,064	111,133,674
South West	Devon and Cornwall	3,769,338	144,983,848	148,753,186
South West	Somerset	1,755,420	54,263,188	56,018,608
South West	Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole	2,441,213	50,060,473	52,501,686
South West	West of England	3,119,672	86,833,647	89,953,319
South West	Wiltshire	2,120,452	58,677,976	60,798,428
South West	Gloucestershire	2,334,200	43,87[illegible],871	46,211,071
West Midlands	Shropshire	1,535,707	45,273,080	46,808,787
West Midlands	Staffordshire	2,687,697	101,759,898	104,447,595
West Midlands	Black Country	4,070,795	132,672,736	136,743,531
West Midlands	Birmingham and Solihull	4,159,367	176,594,243	180,753,610
West Midlands	Herefordshire and Worcestershire	2,586,116	64,093,095	66,679,211
West Midlands	Coventry and Warwickshire	2,625,394	92,396,130	95,021,524

Learning and Skills Council Budget Data 2001–02

	LSC/National Office Directorate	*Admin budget*	*Programme budget*	*Budget total*
Yorkshire and The Humber	North Yorkshire	2,402,925	63,883,458	66,286,383
Yorkshire and The Humber	West Yorkshire	5,736,359	190,682,080	196,418,439
Yorkshire and The Humber	South Yorkshire	4,674,720	133,142,449	137,817,169
Yorkshire and The Humber	Humberside	2,921,390	96,114,879	99,036,269
Sub-total		148,024,204	4,809,590,080	4,957,614,284
National	National Office	91,975,798	498,375,920	590,351,718
Total		240,000,002	5,307,966,000	5,547,966,002

Important notes: As at 31 January 2002

The Administration Budget is the latest negotiated position with DfES and includes £27 million transitional costs. The Programme Budget has been taken from version two of the budget data. Version three totals are not as yet broken down by individual LSC. The LSC has yet to complete a full financial year therefore budget data rather than actual expenditure has been provided.

Primary Pupils (Expenditure)

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list for each local education authority ranked in order of total spend in 2000–01 the money spent per primary age pupil on their education *(a)* by the local education authority, *(b)* by central Government, allocated direct to schools, to local authorities and other agencies and *(c)* in total in (i) 1996–97 and (ii) 2000–01. [30622]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is not collected in the way it has been asked for. Data collected from section 52 and RO1 returns do not distinguish between what local authorities spend and how grants provided by central Government are spent. The following table includes figures using data taken from Net Current Expenditure (after recharges) per pupil per LEA:

LEAs ranked by per pupil spend 1999–2000

	Pre-primary/primary			
LEA name	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
England	2,130	2,070	2,190	2,340
City of London	5,280	5,080	5,190	5,930
Isles of Scilly	3,160	3,190	3,160	4,140
Westminster	3,100	3,180	3,430	3,850
Kensington and Chelsea	3,450	3,510	3,510	3,720
Hackney	3,260	3,110	3,210	3,610
Lambeth	3,660	3,120	3,230	3,460
Camden	3,110	3,000	3,160	3,450
Tower Hamlets	3,190	3,160	3,250	3,380
Hammersmith and Fulham	2,950	2,950	2,950	3,370
Southwark	3,030	2,960	3,010	3,290
Islington	2,810	2,880	3,060	3,270
Greenwich	2,820	2,660	2,820	3,140
Wandsworth	2,620	2,680	2,790	3,110
Lewisham	2,900	2,880	2,940	3,030
Haringey	2,910	[illegible]	2,840	3,020
Waltham Forest	2,460	[illegible]	2,390	2,990
Birmingham	2,340	2,310	2,520	2,760
Brent	2,500	2,520	2,720	2,750
Hounslow	2,510	2,410	2,560	2,730
Harrow	2,580	2,440	2,460	2,710
Newham	2,330	2,180	2,320	2,690
Barking and Dagenham	2,450	2,350	2,510	2,590
Barnet	2,470	2,370	2,540	2,580
Ealing	2,450	2,380	2,470	2,580
Slough	—	—	2,260	2,560
Nottingham City	—	—	2,390	2,540
Merton	2,300	2,400	2,490	2,530
Sutton	2,280	2,200	2,310	2,530
Enfield	2,330	2,290	2,400	2,520
Croydon	2,370	2,250	2,340	2,500
City of Bristol	2,220	2,210	2,280	2,490
Rutland	—	2,240	2,420	2,470
Coventry	2,150	2,210	2,370	2,460
Gateshead	2,180	2,130	2,170	2,460
Portsmouth	—	2,180	2,290	2,460
Southampton	—	2,200	2,280	2,450
Sandwell	2,210	2,200	2,310	2,430
York	1,900	1,900	1,980	2,420
Windsor and Maidenhead	—	—	2,190	2,420
Blackburn	—	—	2,190	2,420
Luton	—	2,250	2,340	2,400

LEAs ranked by per pupil spend 1999–2000

LEA name	*Pre-primary/primary* *1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
Newcastle upon Tyne	2,270	2,320	2,320	2,390
North East Lincolnshire	2,050	1,930	2,150	2,390
Isle of Wight	2,120	2,170	2,300	2,390
Bromley	2,060	2,010	2,210	2,380
Richmond upon Thames	2,330	2,290	2,330	2,380
Bath and North East Somerset	2,200	2,100	2,180	2,380
Kingston upon Thames	2,190	2,130	2,210	2,370
Wolverhampton	2,210	2,140	2,210	2,370
Oldham	2,080	2,040	2,170	2,370
Sheffield	2,020	1,970	2,060	2,370
Bradford	2,220	2,540	2,570	2,360
Stockton-on-Tees	1,930	1,880	2,080	2,360
Leicester	—	2,180	2,140	2,360
Suffolk	2,170	2,100	2,190	2,360
Knowsley	2,150	2,130	2,230	2,350
Liverpool	2,010	2,010	2,170	2,350
Thurrock	—	—	2,170	2,350
Cumbria	2,160	2,170	2,240	2,350
Barnsley	2,010	1,970	2,080	2,340
Leeds	2,140	2,000	2,180	2,340
North Tyneside	2,030	1,990	2,110	2,330
Durham	—	2,060	2,180	2,330
Halton	—	—	2,180	2,330
Hillingdon	2,360	2,180	2,270	2,320
Bolton	2,090	2,010	2,240	2,320
Manchester	2,170	2,100	2,210	2,320
Kirklees	2,100	2,000	2,160	2,320
Salford	2,040	1,970	2,020	2,310
Doncaster	2,140	2,190	2,160	2,310
Reading	—	—	2,110	2,310
Kent	—	—	2,110	2,310
Oxfordshire	2,030	2,000	2,150	2,310
Brighton and Hove	—	2,130	2,160	2,300
Cornwall	2,100	2,000	2,130	2,300
Bedfordshire	—	2,030	2,100	2,280
Stoke on Trent	—	1,930	2,130	2,280
Blackpool	—	—	1,970	2,280
Rotherham	1,940	1,860	2,010	2,270
Sunderland	1,990	1,960	2,110	2,270
City of Kingston-upon-Hull	2,060	1,990	2,180	2,270
East Sussex	—	1,940	2,050	2,270
Redbridge	2,150	2,090	2,130	2,260
Wirral	2,020	1,900	2,100	2,260
Plymouth	—	—	2,150	2,260
Nottinghamshire	—	—	2,190	2,260
Havering	2,060	2,000	2,100	2,250
St. Helens	2,050	2,030	2,160	2,250
Redcar and Cleveland	1,950	2,000	2,100	2,250
North Lincolnshire	2,240	2,120	2,220	2,250
Milton Keynes	—	1,970	2,080	2,250
Bracknell Forest	—	—	2,100	2,250
Rochester and Gillingham	—	—	2,090	2,250
Shropshire	—	—	2,120	2,250
Northumberland	2,070	1,950	2,110	2,250
Surrey	2,110	2,060	2,190	2,250
Calderdale	2,030	1,970	2,110	2,240
North Yorkshire	2,000	1,960	2,050	2,240
Derby	—	1,950	2,130	2,240
Southend	—	—	2,030	2,240
South Tyneside	1,970	1,900	2,050	2,230
The Wrekin	—	—	2,070	2,230
Sefton	2,080	2,020	2,100	2,220
North Somerset	2,120	2,100	2,220	2,220
Hampshire	—	2,020	2,040	2,220
Devon	—	—	2,050	2,220
Essex	—	—	2,140	2,220
West Sussex	2,020	2,000	2,070	2,220
Bexley	1,970	1,880	2,040	2,210
Lancashire	—	—	2,080	2,210
Somerset	1,910	1,950	2,030	2,210
Dudley	1,890	1,830	2,070	2,200

LEAs ranked by per pupil spend 1999–2000

	Pre-primary/primary			
LEA name	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
Rochdale	1,960	1,940	2,000	2,200
West Berkshire	—	—	2,000	2,200
Cambridgeshire	—	—	2,100	2,200
Torbay	—	—	2,020	2,200
Norfolk	1,950	2,060	2,090	2,200
Warwickshire	2,060	1,960	2,100	2,200
Walsall	2,100	2,030	2,130	2,190
South Gloucestershire	1,990	1,950	2,110	2,190
Cheshire	—	—	2,100	2,190
Herefordshire	—	—	2,080	2,190
Wakefield	2,010	1,900	2,030	2,180
Leicestershire	—	1,910	2,080	2,180
Wokingham	—	—	1,890	2,180
Dorset	—	2,030	2,150	2,170
Tameside	1,920	1,910	2,010	2,150
Middlesbrough	1,990	1,980	1,980	2,150
Bournemouth	—	1,860	2,100	2,150
Wiltshire	—	1,980	2,000	2,150
Hertfordshire	2,130	1,980	2,070	2,150
Northamptonshire	1,970	1,870	1,990	2,150
Buckinghamshire	—	1,970	2,050	2,130
Darlington	—	1,890	2,070	2,130
Gloucestershire	1,940	1,910	2,020	2,130
Wigan	1,940	1,870	2,010	2,120
Warrington	—	—	2,010	2,120
Solihull	2,020	1,900	2,000	2,110
Bury	2,040	1,860	1,900	2,100
Trafford	1,880	1,830	1,940	2,090
Poole	—	1,850	1,930	2,090
Peterborough	—	—	2,140	2,090
Worcestershire	—	—	2,010	2,070
Lincolnshire	2,000	1,910	1,930	2,060
Derbyshire	—	1,900	1,980	2,050
Stockport	1,930	1,800	1,930	2,040
Hartlepool	1,810	1,830	1,990	2,040
Staffordshire	—	1,770	1,870	2,030
East Riding of Yorkshire	1,990	1,910	1,890	2,020
Swindon	—	1,820	1,880	1,880
Pre LGR Bedfordshire	2,100	—	—	—
Pre LGR Buckinghamshire	2,040	—	—	—
Pre LGR Derbyshire	1,980	—	—	—
Pre LGR Dorset	1,980	—	—	—
Pre LGR Durham	2,060	—	—	—
Pre LGR East Sussex	2,070	—	—	—
Pre LGR Hampshire	2,120	—	—	—
Pre LGR Leicestershire	1,980	—	—	—
Pre LGR Staffordshire	1,840	—	—	—
Pre LGR Wiltshire	1,980	—	—	—
Pre LGR Berkshire	2,030	1,890	—	—
Pre LGR Cambridgeshire	2,120	2,030	—	—
Pre LGR Cheshire	1,970	1,970	—	—
Pre LGR Devon	1,980	1,930	—	—
Pre LGR Essex	2,090	1,990	—	—
Pre LGR Hereford and Worcester	2,020	1,940	—	—
Pre LGR Kent	2,030	1,990	—	—
Pre LGR Lancashire	1,990	1,950	—	—
Pre LGR Nottinghamshire	2,150	2,100	—	—
Pre LGR Shropshire	1,930	1,920	—	—

Notes:

1. Information for 2000–01 is not yet available.
2. Figures for 1996–97 to 1998–99 include grant maintained schools. Figures for 1990–2000 include ex-GM schools.
3. All figures are in real terms at 2000–01 prices (using GDP deflators published by Treasury on 20 December 2001), and rounded to the nearest £10.
4. Expenditure data for 1990–2000 are taken from section 52 outturn statements completed by local education authorities and returned to DfES.
5. A number of LEAs have yet to submit clean section 52 outturn data for 2000–01. Full information for 2000–02 is therefore not yet available.
6. Data for previous years are taken from DTER's Revenue Outturn Returns.
7. Pupil numbers used in calculating per pupil figures are financial year averages, based on January Annual School Census returns.
8. Per pupil amounts are shown for years in which LEAs existed—local government re-organisation affected a number of LEAs between 1996–97 and 1998–99.

Autism

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to his answer on 3 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 77W, on autistic spectrum disorders, what the change in the number of children diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorders has been since 1980; and if she will increase funding for children with SEN, with specific reference to autistic spectrum disorders. [32915]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department does not collect education data on the number of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders, though we are examining whether data on different types of special educational needs could be collected, probably from January 2004. The Medical Research Council's recently completed review of the epidemiology and causes of autism notes that in recent years there has been a widespread perception that the number of people with autism coming to clinical attention has greatly increased. It states that the apparent increase in prevalence of autism is likely to have resulted from better diagnosis and clearer definition as well as increased awareness. Direct comparisons are, however, complicated by the different definitions and methodologies used in research studies in the past.

Funding is not made available for specific categories of special educational need. Rather, funding is allocated and distributed via local education authorities (LEAs), who have a duty to provide appropriately for all children in their area. This includes the duty to identify children's individual special educational needs and to deliver the most appropriate provision to meet those needs.

Overall funding for education, including for pupils with special educational needs, is increasing. Details of provisional 2002–03 Education Standard Spending (ESS) allocations for each LEA were announced in December, with an overall increase of more than £1.3 billion compared to the current year. Alongside this we have also made £91 million of supported expenditure available for special educational needs in next year's Standards Fund (2002–03), an increase from the £82 million available this year. The fund can be used for a range of activities including training for staff in special educational needs. By 2003–04 average recurrent funding per pupil will have increased by over £760 in real terms since 1997–98.

Departmental Secondments (Energy Industry)

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many staff were seconded between *(a)* BP, *(b)* Shell, *(c)* Enron, *(d)* Exxon-Mobil, *(e)* Conoco, *(f)* Texaco and *(g)* TotalFinaElf and her Department in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) April 2001 to the latest date for which figures are available. [33206]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: There have been no staff seconded between BP, Shell, Enron, Exxon-Mobil, Conoco Texaco or TotalFinaElf and this Department in any of the periods described.

Classroom Assistants

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many classroom assistants were employed in *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools on (i) 31 December 1997 and (ii) 31 December 2001. [33034]

Mr. Timms: The available information is shown in the table.

Full time equivalent number of teaching assistants[1,2] in maintained primary and secondary schools[3], England (January each year)

	1997	*1998*	*2001*
Primary[3]	39,751	42,727	63,176
Secondary[3]	7,821	8,973	15,467

[1] Includes both full-time and the full-time equivalent of part-time non-teaching staff.

[2] Includes nursery assistants, special needs support staff, minority ethnic pupil support staff and non-teaching assistants.

[3] Includes middle schools as deemed.

Source:

Annual Schools' Census

Budgets

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of *(a)* secondary school and *(b)* sixth-form college budgets are accounted for by the Standards Fund in 2001–02. [33036]

Mr. Timms: Two separate Standards Fund are in operation: one paid by the Government to local education authorities, most of which is passed on by them to schools; the other administered by the learning and skills council and is paid to further education institutions.

School budget statements for 2001–02 indicate that the Standards Fund represents 6.9 per cent. of secondary school budgets.

The largest element of funding for sixth form colleges is from the learning and skills council's participation funding. In addition, they receive grant from the Standards Fund managed by the learning and skills council. It is estimated that the Standards Fund will account for 4.8 per cent. of these two funding streams in 2001–02. Sixth-form colleges may receive other funding in their budgets, but details of these are not available centrally.

Examination Marking

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many requests for re-marks in England and Wales of *(a)* A-level, *(b)* A-S level and *(c)* GCSE papers in 2001 were refused because of the loss of the relevant exam scripts; and what the corresponding (i) A-level and (ii) GCSE figures were for the previous four years. [33103]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Awarding bodies do not refuse requests for re-marks where scripts are lost. If a script cannot be found after an exhaustive search, the awarding body will make a special award based on careful consideration of the other assessment evidence of the candidate's performance. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority does not as part of its monitoring exercise collect figures on the incidence of such cases.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many re-marked *(a)* A-level, *(b)* A-S level and *(c)* GCSE papers there were in England and Wales during 2001 by subject; if he will list each figure as a percentage of the overall number of relevant subject papers; and if he will list the corresponding (i) A-level and (ii) GCSE figures for the previous four years. [33104]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Figures are not normally collated by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority at subject level as quality assurance focuses on qualification type and awarding body performance.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average length of time taken by exam boards limits in England and Wales during 2001 was to re-mark *(a)* an A-level script, *(b)* an A-S level script and *(c)* a GCSE script; and what the corresponding (i) A-level and (ii) GCSE figures were for the previous four years. [33102]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) has been collecting data since 1999 on the percentage of re-marks completed by the awarding bodies within the agreed target periods. Reports for 1999 and 2000 are available on the QCA website. The report for 2001 will be published on 25 March 2002.

QCA does not collect information on exactly how many days any particular re-mark took. In the table, the percentage of remarks completed within the target time is given for 1999 and 2000 by all awarding bodies offering GCSEs in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland:

Percentage

	A/AS-level	*GCSE*
1999	82	68
2000	95	93

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils in England and Wales were subject to the remarking of *(a)* A-level, *(b)* AS-level and *(c)* GCSE papers in 2001; what the total of these figures is as a percentage of the total number of pupils; and what the corresponding (i) A-level and (ii) GCSE figures were for the previous four years. [33105]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Data are only collected with respect to candidates. The data for 2001 are currently being collated by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and will be included in the authority's annual report to be published on 25 March. Figures have been collated only since 1999; the figures for 1999 and 2000 are set out as follows.

	2000	*1999*
A-level		
Number of candidates subject to remarks	29,640	25,983
Percentage of candidates subject to remarks	3.8	3.3
AS-level		
Number of candidates subject to remarks	1,149	1,005
Percentage of candidates subject to remarks	1.5	1
GCSE		
Number of candidates subject to remarks	57,772	26,371
Percentage of candidates subject to remarks	1	0.5

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many re-marked *(a)* A-level, *(b)* AS-level and *(c)* GCSE papers in England and Wales during 2001 resulted in upgrades; what percentage these figures were of the total number of papers; and what the corresponding (i) A-level and (ii) GCSE figures were for the previous four years. [33108]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Data for 2001 are currently being collated by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and will be included in the Authority's annual report to be published on 25 March 2002. Figures have been collated only since 1999; the figures for 1999 and 2000 are set out as follows.

	2000	*1999*
A-level		
Number of remarks resulting in an upward grade change	4,644	3.476
Percentage of total number of papers	0.6	0.4
GCSE		
Number of remarks resulting in an upward grade change	6,601	2,960
Percentage of total number of papers	0.1	0.06

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools in England and Wales asked for *(a)* A-level, *(b)* AS-level and *(c)* GCSE papers to be re-marked in 2001; and what the corresponding (i) A-level and (ii) GCSE figures were for the previous four years. [33109]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The monitoring of progress and outcomes of a remark is at candidate level rather than school or college level. It is not possible within the current systems to collate information about individual candidates across awarding bodies to produce cumulative data for schools.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many of the re-marked *(a)* A-level, *(b)* AS-level and *(c)* GCSE papers in England and Wales during 2001 were upgraded by two or more grades; what the total of these figures is as a percentage of the total number of re-marked papers; and what the corresponding (i) A-level and (ii) GCSE figures were for the previous four years. [33107]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Information on remarks resulting in upgrades by two grades or more is not available. The data collated by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority focus on the number of grade changes made by the awarding bodies rather than the degree of change.

Faith Schools

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children in *(a)* each metropolitan district council area and *(b)* England receive their full-time education in (i) Roman Catholic, (ii) Church of England, (iii) Jewish and (iv) Muslim private schools. [33281]

Mr. Timms: The available information is shown in the table.

Full-time pupils in independent Muslim and Jewish schools in each metropolitan district in England[1]

	Muslim	*Jewish*
England	10,265	9,205
Barnet	[2]—	1,319
Birmingham	1,051	[2]—
Bolton	598	[2]—
Bradford	562	[2]—
Brent	864	24
Bromley	131	[2]—
Bury	410	178

Full-time pupils in independent Muslim and Jewish schools in each metropolitan district in England[1]

	Muslim	*Jewish*
City of Westminster	[2]—	172
Coventry	65	[2]—
Ealing	790	57
Gateshead	[2]—	713
Hackney	377	4,420
Hammersmith & Fulham	166	[2]—
Islington	[2]—	195
Kensington & Chelsea	109	[2]—
Kirklees	705	[2]—
Lambeth	29	[2]—
Leeds	85	46
Manchester	494	234
Newham	90	[2]—
Salford	[2]—	1,392
Sheffield	44	[2]—
Tower Hamlets	422	[2]—
Waltham Forest	96	[2]—
Wandsworth	322	[2]—

[1] Similar information on Roman Catholic and Church of England independent schools is not collected.

[2] Data not available.

Source:

Independent Schools Registration Team, DfES

Drug Awareness

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action she is taking to promote drug awareness in schools [33735]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: All schools are required to deliver drugs education as a statutory part of the national curriculum. In addition, three years of focused effort has raised the profile of drug education and increased drug awareness by: the production of guidance for schools; the launch of the joint Department of Health and Department of Education and Skills National Healthy School Standard (NHSS) in October 1999, of which drug education is a key component; and the publication of the Personal, Social, and Health Education Framework (PSHE) in November 1999.

£15 million is available this year to all LEAs through the Standards Fund to support drug education. It will help teachers deliver a drug education programme, which equips them with the knowledge and awareness to recognise the dangers of drug misuse and make informed choices. It will also fund drug advisers to work directly with schools, the training of Connexions personal advisers for 13 to 19-year-olds and ensure that key partners are engaged in developing drug education programmes relevant to the needs of the local community.

Teacher Retention

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what research she has commissioned into the reasons for teachers leaving the profession. [34005]

Mr. Timms: The Department has commissioned Professor Alan Smithers and Dr. Pamela Robinson, from the University of Liverpool, Centre for Education and Employment Research to undertake research into the factors affecting teachers' decisions to leave the profession. The research commenced in December 2001 and we expect the report to be published in March 2003.

Further/Higher Education (Romford)

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of 16-year-olds in Romford have opted to continue into further and higher education in each of the past five years. [34143]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Data on the proportion of 16-year-olds continuing in post-compulsory education is not calculated for areas smaller than LEAs as reliable estimates cannot be made.

The percentage of 16-year-olds participating in full-time and part-time education for Havering LEA, which includes Romford, in the latest five years for which data are available is as follows:

Percentage of 16-year-olds participating in full-time and part-time education[1]*: Havering LEA*

	Full-time	*Part-time*
1995–96	74	5
1886–97	71	4
1997–98	73	10
1998–99	71	4
99–2000	72	4

[1] Includes participation in schools, sixth form colleges and further education colleges.

Participation rates by LEA for 16 and 17-year-olds are published in an annual statistical bulletin, "Participation in Education and Training by Young People Aged 16 and 17 in Each Local Area and Region, England".

Figures for the number of school leavers who later go on to higher education are not collated centrally on a constituency basis.

Post-16 Provision (Funding)

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action she is taking to equalise the per capita funding for post-16 provision in colleges with school sixth forms. [34502]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Government are firmly committed to bringing up the level of funding for colleges towards that of school sixth forms. As we have repeatedly made clear, this will take time and must be done as resources allow. We are considering this issue as part of the current spending review.

Value-added School League Tables

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what progress she is making in introducing value-added school league tables; and if she will make a statement. [34564]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We are committed to supplementing the information already published in performance tables with information about how far schools help their pupils to progress between the various stages of their education.

In November last year, we published the results of a pilot programme for the calculation of value added measures for secondary schools, showing the progress made from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 and from Key Stage 3 to GCSE/GNVQ. An evaluation of the pilot and further consultation that will take place shortly, will inform decisions on the publication of these two measures for all secondary schools in the 2002 performance tables.

We also intend to run a pilot this year on the calculation and presentation of a value added measure from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 with a view to publishing this measure for all schools in the primary tables in 2003.

Asthma (Schoolchildren)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what guidelines she issues to ensure that children at school *(a)* are not exposed to asthma triggers and *(b)* have quick access to their medication; [34590]

(2) what recent measures she has taken to ensure that all schools have an asthma plan and members of staff who know what to do if a child has a serious attack. [34589]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department for Education and Skills, along with the Department of Health, has produced "Supporting Pupils with Medical Needs: a good practice guide" to encourage local education authorities and schools to draw up medical support policies and put in place effective management systems to support pupils with medical needs, such as asthma. The guide and its availability on the web, at www.dfes.gov.uk/medical, were promoted last year in the Department's Spectrum publication, sent to all local education authorities and schools in England.

Cortical Visual Impairment

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children aged up to 10-years-old suffer from cortical visual impairment *(a)* in England, *(b)* in the north-west and *(c)* in Lancashire; and what provision is made for young people suffering from cortical visual impairment in each of the counties of England. [32922]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

A study undertaken by the Institute of Child Health in Liverpool in 1996 estimated the prevalence of children affected by cortical visual impairment at 5.8 per 10,000. I understand that many children have additional disabilities. The Special Educational Needs (SEN) framework provides for individual children's educational needs to be identified, assessed and catered for as quickly as possible. For children with severe or complex needs, local education authorities carry out a multi-professional statutory assessment and issue a statement of SEN setting out each child's needs in detail and the provision to be made for meeting those needs by the education and health services.

Examination Results (Children in Care)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children who *(a)* did not gain any GSCEs and *(b)* gained fewer than 5 A*-C GCSEs were in care in each of the years (i) 1996–97, (ii) 1997–98, (iii) 1998–99, (iv) 1990–2000 and (v) 2000–01. [32847]

Jacqui Smith: I have been asked to reply.

Educational achievements of children looked after by local councils have only been collected by the Department since 1 April 1999. These data relate to the educational achievements of children leaving care aged 16 or over.

Number of children who ceased to be looked after during the years ending 31 March 2000 and 2001, aged 16 and over, by level of qualifications achieved

England

	Year ending 31 March:	
	2000	*2001*
Number with		
No GCSE passes	4,900	4,200
Fewer than 5 GCSE passes at grade A*-C	5,530	6,200
Percentage with		
No GCSE passes	71	64
Fewer than 5 GCSE passes at grade A*-C	96	95

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Emergency Planning

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what responses he has received to the recent discussion document on the future of emergency planning in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [35593]

Mr. Leslie: Over 260 responses to the discussion document were received, of which over half were from local government. Copies of the responses have been placed in the Library together with a summary analysis of them by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat. This summary will also be placed on the secretariat's website, www.ukresilience. info. I am working with officials to develop proposals on the next steps, including the need for new legislation in this field. This will be done in consultation with local government and other stakeholder groups and we will take full account of the points made in the course of debate on the Civil Defence (Grant) Bill. I shall keep the House fully informed of the progress of this important exercise.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Data Protection Registrar

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent representations he has received over the Data Protection Registrar's involvement in parliamentary correspondence between hon. Members and Government Departments. [33285]

Mr. Wills: I have received no such representations. However, in an adjournment debate in Westminster Hall on 31 October 2001, *Official Report*, 304–10WH, my hon. Friends the Members for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) and for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham) raised the question of the effect of the Data Protection Act 1998 upon hon. Members' constituency work. The hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Sir Michael Spicer) also raised the matter during Business Questions on 29 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 1110.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many hon. and right hon. Members are registered with the Data Protection Registrar. [33284]

Mr. Wills: The Data Protection Registrar became the Data Protection Commissioner when the Data Protection Act 1998 came into force in March 2000. She was renamed the Information Commissioner on 30 January 2001. The registration requirement of the Data Protection Act 1984 was replaced by a notification requirement under the 1998 Act.

The Commissioner exercises her functions independently of Government, but I understand from her that 271 Members of Parliament are currently registered in their capacities as such. This figure includes notifications made under the 1998 Act and register entries made under the now-repealed 1984 Act which are still valid.

Courts Service

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many cases were handled by the Courts Service for each year since 1992. [33354]

Mr. Wills: Information concerning the number of cases dealt with in the criminal and civil courts under the administration of the Lord Chancellor's Department, 1992 to 1994, and then the Court Service, 1995 to 2000, are published annually in the departmental annual report "Judicial Statistics". Copies of the publication can be found in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what his policy is on the reorganisation of the Courts Service. [32403]

Mr. Wills: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 4 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 712W, to his question number 32053. The Government are considering the recommendations in Sir Robin Auld's report and intend to publish a White Paper in the spring.

The Court Service as an executive agency of the Department is currently undergoing a quinquennial review. That report will also be published in the spring and its recommendations will be carefully considered by the Department.

Law Commission

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many reports or submissions the Law Commission has completed since it was first established; and if he will list them. [33291]

Mr. Wills: The Law Commission has completed 161 consultation papers, 274 reports and 25 other publications since it was first established in 1965. A list of these publications has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Land Registry

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what training is made available to administrative staff in the Land Registry. [33300]

Mr. Wills: The Land Registry is committed to providing all staff with appropriate training and development to enable them to do their jobs effectively. A range of training is available including induction courses for new entrants, job skills training and management training. The opportunity to study for an accredited qualification in land registration practice is also available.

Judges (Transport)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the average annual cost per judge of providing transport in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [33683]

Mr. Wills: The average annual cost, for the period April 2000 to March 2001, of providing transport to High Court judges was £6,284 per judge. The average annual cost of travel and subsistence payments, for the same period, for circuit, district and part-time judges is £1,311 per judge. Separate figures for travel costs alone are not collected in a format which can answer the question. To do so would incur disproportionate costs to the Department.

Public Record Office

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many categories of record the Public Record Office hold; and if she will list the numbers held in each category. [33294]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Public Record Office is charged with the selection, preservation and provision of public access to records created by Government bodies. The categorisation of the records is based on the Department of state or other Government body that created them. There are currently 353 categories.

No statistics are held of the number of records in each category and it would not be possible to obtain them without incurring disproportionate cost.

The PRO catalogue, which is accessible on-line through the PRO's website at www.pro.gov.uk, lists over 9 million separate pieces. A piece can be a single document or a file or a volume. The catalogue can be searched in a variety of ways from simple keyword to advanced Boolean.

Parking Spaces

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what car parking spaces are provided for staff employed in the Land Registry; and what the average annual cost is of providing such spaces. [33659]

Mr. Wills: The Land Registry currently provides 4,705 parking spaces for use by its staff. A further 253 spaces are available for visitors and disabled drivers.

The Land Registry is unable to provide specific information on the cost of providing car parking spaces at its offices as costs are not separately identified in the processes of acquisition or maintenance of Land Registry property.

IT Contracts

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what has been the total expenditure of his Department on IT systems and support in each year from May 1997 to date; how many IT contracts have been let in each of those years; of the other main contracting party in each of those contracts, how many have been *(a)* companies whose registered office is in (i) England and Wales, (ii) Scotland and (iii) Northern Ireland and *(b)* foreign companies; and what are the names of the companies falling within category (a). [33674]

Mr. Wills: The following shows the total expenditure of the Lord Chancellor's Department on IT systems and support in each year from May 1997 to date and details of IT contracts let in each of those years.

Expenditure

Lord Chancellor's Department	*£ million*
IT systems/support	
1997–98	5.38
1998–99	12.84
1999–2000	21.03
2001–01	49.98
2001–02	36.88
Total	126.11

Contracts

Supplier	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
England and Wales					
Albany Software	—	—	—	—	1
AMP Limited	—	1	—	—	—
Assetware Technology Limited	—	—	—	1	—
Business Information Technologies	—	—	—	1	—
Cable and Wireless	—	—	—	—	1
Computers in personnel	1	—	—	—	—
Cyberscience Corporation	—	—	—	—	1
Dunnett Shaw and Partners	—	—	—	—	1
Edis International	1	—	—	—	—
MEC Europe Limited	—	3	—	—	—
Financial Times Info Limited	—	—	2	—	—
Guardian IT Group	—	—	—	—	1
ICL	—	1	1	—	—
Information Initiatives	2	1	1	1	—
Network Associates	—	—	—	—	1
One Zero	1	—	—	—	—
PC Associates	—	—	2	—	—
Pixel	—	—	1	—	—
Respond	—	1	—	—	—
Taxsoft	—	1	—	—	—
Tower Perrin	—	1	—	—	—
Total England and Wales	5	9	7	3	6
Scotland					
Total Scotland	0	0	0	0	0
Northern Ireland					
Total Northern Ireland	0	0	0	0	0
Foreign					
Total Foreign	0	0	0	0	0

In addition to the above the Lord Chancellor's Department also let a PFI contract to CSL Group Ltd. The contract is for the provision of accounting, financial, human resources/payroll and management information services. It was awarded in December 1997 and runs until 4 January 2007. The services have IT elements and are delivered using a corporate IT infrastructure provided through the contract. However, the IT elements of the contract are not separable from the accounting, financial, human resources/payroll or management information service provision elements. Therefore, cost information is expressed for the contract as a whole. Since contract award, in response to new requirements from the Department, there have been a number of significant variations to the services provided within the scope of the contract.

Current estimated total service charges for the life of the contract amounts to £118.05 million.

Legal Aid Firms

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many legal aid firms Ministers in his Department have visited since 7 June 2001. [31863]

Mr. Wills: The Department's Ministers occasionally visit law centres, solicitors' firms and barristers' chambers. In December 2001, as part of one such visit, the Lord Chancellor visited a Birmingham solicitors' firm which holds a contract to carry out publicly funded criminal work. In addition, the Legal Services Commission, for which the Lord Chancellor has ministerial responsibility, visits firms which carry out publicly funded work on an on-going basis, for development and audit purposes.

Fair Trade Fortnight

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps he is taking to encourage participation by his Department in Fair Trade Fortnight from 4 to 17 March. [33537]

Mr. Wills: Within the context of the Department's limited opportunity to buy free trade goods, we take every opportunity to encourage their purchase in line with Government policy.

For instance, at our headquarters building, our caterers currently offer fair trade coffee and are investigating the future sale of fair trade tea. In additional, our caterers in our courts in the northern, north-eastern and north Wales regions offer both fair trade tea and coffee.

Regarding Fairtrade Fortnight, at the Department's suggestion both these caterers have agreed to support this important and worthwhile event and in the coming weeks will be producing marketing literature and advising customers of a number of linked promotions.

Census Online

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much taxpayers' money is in the possession of the Public Record Office as pre-payment for Census Online. [32144]

Ms Rosie Winterton: No taxpayers' money is in the possession of the Public Record Office as a pre-payment for Census Online.

Remuneration

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will estimate the number of individuals in her *(a)* Department, *(b)* related agencies and *(c)* related non-departmental public bodies whose annual remuneration including benefits in kind exceeded (i) £100,000 and (ii) £200,000 in each of the last four years. [26318]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The number of individuals whose annual remuneration (i) exceeds £100,000 (including basis salary, allowances and bonuses, but excluding overtime and pensions benefits) is as follows:

As at 1 April 2001

(a) LCD Headquarters: 4

(b) The Court Service, the Public Guardianship Office, the Northern Ireland Court Service, the Land Registry and the Public Record Office: 2

As at 1 April 2000

(a) 2

(b) 0

As at 1 April 1999

(a) 2

(b) 0

As at 1 April 1998

(a) 2

(b) 0.

(ii) There are no individuals whose annual remuneration exceeds £200,000.

As regards *(c)* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 252W.

Ministerial Transport

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what her estimate is of the cost of *(a)* ministerial cars and drivers and *(b)* taxis for her Department in each of the last four years. [27911]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Regarding part *(a)*, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 30 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 405–06W.

As for part *(b)*, expenditure against the departmental taxi service contract has been as follows:

1 July 1998 to 31 March 1999: £30,596

1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000: £53,852

1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001: £71,828

1 April 2001 to 16 January 2002: £50,175.

The existing contract commenced on 1 July 1998 and determining taxi expenditure before that date would involve disproportionate cost.

The figures exclude any amounts spent on taxi hire outside of the departmental contract and reclaimed by officials as travel and subsistence expenditure.

Ministerial Trips

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list each of the overseas trips made by the Lord Chancellor and other members of her ministerial team in each of the last four years, specifying the purpose and cost of each trip. [30179]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 707W.

HEALTH

Dentists

Ms Munn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to change the way in which dentists are remunerated in order to encourage greater preventive care. [17959]

Ms Blears: While there are no immediate plans to change the way dentists are remunerated, we are continuing to work with the profession and other stakeholders to modernise national health service dentistry and to improve systems of delivery for NHS dentistry.

Taunton and Somerset NHS Hospital Trust

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the standard retirement age is for *(a)* doctors and *(b)* consultants in the Taunton and Somerset NHS hospital trust; how many in each category were compulsorily retired for age reasons in each of the last five years. [18402]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chair of Taunton and Somerset national health service trust for this information.

NHS Direct

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many calls NHS Direct has received. [20016]

Ms Blears: Since NHS Direct was launched in March 1998 it has handled around 9,000,000 calls. NHS Direct currently averages 120,000 calls a week.

Orthodontist Services

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children and young people under the age of 16 years in England were waiting for an appointment to see an orthodontist *(a)* at the latest available date and *(b)* in March 1997. [24710]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* Information on waiting times for orthodontic treatment is not held centrally.

Health Care (Isle of Wight)

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients on the Isle of Wight waited over one hour for treatment in casualty in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000 and *(e)* 2001; and what percentage each figure represents of total casualty attendances. [20380]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 4 December 2002]:* The information requested is not collected centrally.

The latest available figures for national health service trusts in the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South-East Hampshire health authority area for accident and emergency attendances are 2001–02—Quarter 2 and are given in the table.

Accident and emergency services activity for Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South-East Hampshire health authority area, 2001–02 Q2

	Attendance		
Org ID/NHS organisation name	*First*	*Subsequent*	*Total*
5FD East Hampshire PCT	1,305	324	1,629
RHU Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust	29,670	1,879	31,549
RR2 Isle of Wight Healthcare NHS Trust	9,827	887	10,714
Total attendances for health authority area	40,802	3,090	43,892

Source:
KH09Q—Out-patients and accident and emergency services

Nursing and Residential Home Beds

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nursing and residential home beds there were in *(a)* Hampshire and *(b)* in the Portsmouth, Isle of Wight and south east Hampshire health authority in (i) 1993, (ii) 1998, (iii) 1999 and (iv) 2000. [22376]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 December 2001]:* The table shows the number of residential and nursing care home beds in *(a)* Hampshire and *(b)* the Portsmouth, Isle of Wight and south-east Hampshire health authority.

	(a) Hampshire[1]		*(b) Portsmouth, Isle of Wight and south-east Hampshire health authority*	
At 31 March	*Residential*	*Nursing*	*Residential*[2]	*Nursing*
1993[3]	[4]—	3,659	[4]—	2,096
1998	12,181	5,436	[2]4,015	2,174
1999	11,859	4,820	[2]3,925	2,229
2000	11,485	5,027	[2]3,829	2,027
2001	12,109	5,140	[2]3,606	2,045

[1] Information is presented for the geographical area covered by Hampshire shire county and Portsmouth and Southampton unitary authorities and the north and mid-Hampshire, Portsmouth and south-east Hampshire and south-west Hampshire health authorities. The Isle of Wight is excluded.

[2] Information on residential places is for Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight unitary authorities only. Information for the south-east Hampshire health authority area is not available centrally.

[3] Nursing bed figures for 1993 were collected at the time of main inspection between 1 October 1992 and 31 March 1993.

[4] Not available

Source:
Department of Health's annual returns

Strategic Health Authorities

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the appointments to be made of the chairs and other members of the boards of the strategic health authorities in England. [24637]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* The names of 27 of the new health authority chairs were announced by the national health service appointments commission on 19 December 2001. The appointment of the remaining chair was announced on 21 December 2001. The Commission expects to appoint the non-executive members between January and April this year.

Community Health Councils

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many representations he has received from members of community health councils supporting their abolition; [24625]

(2) how many representations he has received urging the Government not to abolish community health councils. [24723]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* The listening exercise on "Involving Patients and the Public in Health Care" generated a large number of responses from a wide range of sources—including community health councils, members of the public, the voluntary sector, the national health service and local government. We were not consulting on whether CHCs should be abolished—that is our intention and is currently subject to parliamentary scrutiny. We were seeking views on the how the replacement arrangements should work.

The Association of Community Health Councils in England and Wales and the majority of CHCs accept that the system of patient and public involvement in the NHS needs to be modernised and that the new system has many advantages. We continue to work with the Association for

Community Health Councils in England and Wales and other key stakeholders to ensure that what replaces CHCs builds on the best of CHCs and secures improved patient and public involvement in the NHS.

Paramedics

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many paramedics are on long-term sick leave in England as a result of *(a)* work-related injuries and *(b)* being physically assaulted by the general public in the line of work. [24332]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 January 2002]:* Information on levels of sickness absence resulting from work-related injuries or violence at work, by individual staff group, is not collected centrally, but may be held at a local level by individual national health service employers.

The Department conducted a survey of NHS trusts in England in 1998–99. The survey found that, on average, seven violent incidents were recorded each month per 1,000 staff. This is equivalent to approximately 65,000 violent incidents against NHS trust staff each year. The average monthly accident rate for NHS ambulance trusts was 38 per month per 1,000 staff. Details of the survey can be found in Health Service Circular 1999/229: 'Managing Violence, Accidents and Sickness Absence in the NHS', a copy of which is in the Library.

The average sickness absence rate for staff directly employed by NHS ambulance trusts in 1999 was 6.6 per cent.

Patient Confidentiality

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the NHS guidelines and rules regarding patient confidentiality. [31221]

Ms Blears: Guidance on patient confidentiality was issued to the national health service in March 1996 entitled 'The Protection and Use of Patient Information'. This has been supplemented by guidance to NHS staff responsible for advising their organisations on patient confidentiality—Caldicott Guardians—in the form of a manual entitled 'Protecting and Using Patient Information: A manual for Caldicott Guardians' issued in March 1999. A strategic framework for improving confidentiality as part of wider work to modernise the NHS was published in December 2001 entitled 'Protecting and Using Patient Information: A strategy for the NHS'.

Primary Care Budgets

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will state for each primary care organisation in England at the most recent date for which figures are available *(a)* the prescribing budget for 2001–02, *(b)* the forecast outturn for 2001–02, *(c)* the projected overspend or underspend and *(d)* the projected overspend or underspend as a percentage of budget. [32306]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 1 February 2002]:* A table setting out the prescribing budgets notified to the Prescription Pricing Authority (PPA) by each primary care trust or primary care group has been placed in the Library. They are practice level prescribing budgets. They do not necessarily reflect the total resource set aside locally for prescribing as primary care trusts, primary care groups and health authorities may hold contingency reserves. The forecast outturns are based on prescribing data up to and including November 2001.

Surgical Instruments

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the value of the re-usable instruments destroyed following the advice of the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee on their use. [32778]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what factors were used to inform purchasing decisions for single-use instruments for tonsillectomy in 2001. [32781]

Jacqui Smith: The following criteria were used to evaluate suppliers and their products to make sure that single use instruments were acceptable to the national health service:

The instruments had to be of high quality; fit for purpose and clinically acceptable

The suppliers had to be able to supply sterile instruments and were certified by the Medical Devices Agency standards to do so

The instruments had to comply with the Medical Devices Directive 93/42/EEC (CE marking)

Suppliers had to have manufacturing quality systems in place

Price

Suppliers had to be capable of supplying the required volumes within the short timescales

Suppliers had to have a risk management policy in place.

Road Traffic Accidents

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patient stays in the last three years in NHS hospitals were subject to recovery of costs because the individual concerned had been involved in a motor accident; and how much revenue arose *(a)* by entitlement to recovery and *(b)* by actual repayment. [32462]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* Since April 1999 the recovery of national health service charges following road traffic accidents has been undertaken centrally by the Compensation Recovery Unit (CRU) on behalf of the Secretary of State for Health. Charges are recoverable where a road traffic accident victim is treated at a NHS hospital and subsequently makes a successful claim for personal injury compensation. The CRU collects charges from insurers and pays them direct to NHS trusts when the compensation claim settles. CRU is responsible only for recovery on claims that settle on or after 5 April 1999.

The amount of income potentially owing to NHS trusts in England for patient stays since 5 April 1999 is £71.7 million and the total amount paid to NHS trusts is £74.9 million. These figures do not represent the full amounts potentially owing or paid to NHS trusts as they relate only to patient stays since 5 April 1999. Although the CRU can only recover costs where a personal injury compensation payment settles on or after 5 April 1999, there are a large number of cases where the accident and patient's hospital treatment will have occurred before this date.

Out-patients

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 29 January 2002 (ref 27681), *Official Report*, column 272W, what the figure would have been for *(a)* 1999 and *(b)* 2000 if the counting procedures had been corrected in those years. [32858]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* As a result of the changes in the counting procedures it would not be possible to calculate with any degree of accuracy the corrected number of out-patients waiting for treatment for 1999 and 2000.

Beta Interferon

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when a decision is expected on funding arrangements for beta interferon; [33128]

(2) what progress is being made on discussions with the drugs companies on the provision of beta interferon. [33129]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* I am pleased to announce that in line with the recommendation from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence we have concluded an agreement with five companies on an innovative scheme which allows patients with multiple sclerosis meeting the criteria of the Association of British Neurologists to be treated cost-effectively with disease modifying therapies on the national health service. The companies have agreed terms for the supply of their products under the scheme. Patients will be monitored to confirm whether the drugs are working. Prices will be reduced if patients do not benefit as expected.

The scheme starts on 6 May 2002. NHS bodies are expected to fund any treatment within this scheme prescribed by clinicians for eligible patients, in accordance with statutory directions. Consultant neurologists, in consultation with patients, will have a choice of treatments within the scheme taking into account expected benefit and potential side effects. The products included in the scheme are Avonex (Biogen), Betaferon (Schering), Copaxone (Teva/Aventis), Rebif 22mg and 44mg (Serono).

Patients whose condition does not come within the ABN guidelines and who are currently receiving treatment with these drugs will continue to do so in line with NICE's recommendation on this point. I am also taking steps to ensure that those patients who have funded their treatment privately because the drug was not available to them locally on the NHS will have the costs of their prescription met from today.

Copies of the Health Service Circular issued to the NHS to explain the scheme have been placed in the Library.

Social Care Recruitment Campaign

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the calls to the help line and visits to the website resulted in job applications in respect of the first phase of the social care recruitment campaign announced on 19 October 2001. [32660]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* The main aim of the social care recruitment campaign is to raise the number of people applying for social work training by 5000 by 2004. As the current social work training takes two years, and the earliest that someone reacting to the campaign could join a course is autumn 2002, we would not expect the campaign to cause an increase in job applications until summer 2004 at the earliest.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what outcome measures have been set for each phase of the social care recruitment campaign announced on 19 October. [32672]

Jacqui Smith: *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* The overall aim of the social care recruitment campaign is to raise the number of people applying for social work training by 5,000 by 2004. We will monitor numbers applying for training through the figures provided by the Social Work Admissions Service. The figures for autumn 2002 (the first year to be affected by the campaign) will be publicly available in December 2002.

The target for the first phase of the campaign (19 October 2001 to 30 November 2001) was to generate at least 9,000 calls to the help line. This target was exceeded by over 60 per cent., with over 14,000 calls to the help line as well as over 11,000 visitors to the campaign website.

Medicines Control

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what statistical information is collected by the Medicines Control Agency to enable it to monitor the adverse effects associated with inappropriate use and overuse of medication. [32661]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* Reports of adverse effects to medicines are collated by the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) and the Committee on Safety of Medicines (CSM) through the spontaneous reporting scheme, the Yellow Card Scheme. Although the main focus of this scheme is the early detection of previously unrecognised adverse reactions to medicines in normal clinical use, the Yellow Card Scheme does collect reports of adverse events arising from overdose or maladministration. A number of articles have been published in the regular bulletin "Current Problems in Pharmacovigilance" to alert health professionals to concerns in relation to specific medicines.

Guidance on the use and side effects of medicines is provided to patients in the "Patient Information Leaflet" which accompanies the medicine. The MCA and the CSM continually monitor the safety of all medicines to ensure that the product information contains appropriate and up-to-date guidance on safe, correct use at the recommended dose and warnings about side effects.

Expenditure (Somerset and Dorset)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the expenditure by weighted head, in real terms using 2000–01 prices, by health authorities and primary care trusts in *(a)* Somerset and *(b)* Dorset for each year from 1985–86 to 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [32559]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 8 February 2002]:* For the reasons set out in the notes to the table, expenditure per head cannot be reliably compared between health authorities.

The expenditure per weighted head of population in for 1996–97 to 2000–01 in real terms is shown in the table. Data prior to 1996–97 are not comparable owing to the reorganisation of the national health service on 1 April 1996.

Expenditure per weighted head in cash terms

£

	Health authority	
	Dorset	*Somerset*
1996–97	662.77	670.89
1997–98	619.23	654.16
1998–99	661.42	680.07
1999–2000	758.69	734.63
2000–01	1,023.69	825.30

Notes:

1. In many health authorities there are factors which distort the expenditure per head. These include:

the health authority acting in a lead capacity to commission health care or fund training on behalf of other health bodies;

asset revaluations in national health service trusts being funded through health authorities; and

some double counting of expenditure between health authorities and primary care trust within the health authority area.

Allocations per weighted head of population provide a much more reliable measures to identify differences between funding of health authorities.

2. Expenditure is taken from health authority and primary care trust summarisation forms which are prepared on a resource basis and therefore differ from allocations in the year. The expenditure is the total spent by the health authority and by the primary care trusts within each health authority area. The majority of General Dental Services expenditure is not included in the health authority or primary care trust accounts and is separately accounted for by the Dental Practice Board.

3. Health authorities and primary care trusts should account for their expenditure on a gross basis. This results in an element of double counting where one body acts as the main commissioner and is then reimbursed by other bodies. The effect of this double counting within the answer for 2000–01 cannot be identified.

Sources:

Health authority accounts 1996–97 to 1998–99
Health authority summarisation forms 1999–2000 and 2000–01
Primary Care Trust summarisation schedules 2000–01
Weighted population estimates 1996–97 to 2000–01

Correspondence

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons he has not replied to the letter from Somerset county council, dated 29 November 2001, to his Department on social services funding; and if he will make a statement. [32875]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* The Department has no record of receiving the original letter from Chris Davies, corporate director of Somerset county council. A duplicate copy of this letter was received on 1 February 2002. A reply will be sent as soon as possible.

Hospital Waiting Times (Somerset and Dorset)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been waiting for more than *(a)* three months, *(b)* six months, *(c)* nine months, *(d)* 12 months, *(e)* 15 months and *(f)* 18 months for (i) in-patient and (b) out patient treatment in (A) Somerset and (B) Dorset health authorities; and if he will make a statement. [32562]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* The latest published information on waiting times in Somerset and Dorset health authorities is shown in the tables.

Patients waiting for ordinary and day case admissions at 30 September 2001

	Somerset HA	*Dorset HA*
0–5 months	8,558	8,684
6–11 months	2,659	73
12–17 months	406	1
18 months plus	0	0

Source:

Hospital in-patient waiting list statistics, England, population based: The "Yellow Book".

Patients waiting for a first out-patient appointment at 30 September 2001

	Somerset HA	*Dorset HA*
13–25 weeks	2,370	604
26 weeks plus	818	35

Source:

Waiting times for first out-patient appointment, England, population based: The "Purple Book".

NHS Appointments

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 269–70W, on NHS appointments, how many people in each year since 1996 who have been appointed to a position within the NHS have declared a political interest, broken down by political parties; and what proportion of the total number of appointees this represents for each political party. [34156]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

	1996		*1997*		*1998*		*1999*		*2000*		*2001*	
	Number	*%*	*Number*	*%*	*Number*	*%*	*Number*	*%*	*Number*	*%*	*Number*	*%*
Conservative	90	7.15	18	3.14	49	3.90	30	3.51	57	4.61	71	4.14
Labour	103	8.19	139	24.30	247	19.67	145	16.98	229	18.53	358	20.86
Liberal Democrat	16	1.27	22	3.85	27	2.15	9	1.05	39	3.16	69	4.02
Independent	5	0.40	2	0.35	7	0.56	7	0.82	9	0.73	18	1.05
Other	9	0.72	2	0.35	6	0.48	3	0.35	5	0.40	8	0.47
None	1,035	82.87	389	68.01	290	73.25	660	77.28	897	72.57	1,192	69.47
Total	1,258	100.00	572	100.00	1,256	100.00	854	100.00	1,236	100.00	1,716	100.00

Delayed Discharges

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital beds were unavailable in each quarter in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001 to incoming patients from the Buckingham constituency as a result of their occupation by (i) delayed discharge patients who were awaiting social services funding and (ii) delayed discharge patients who had fully funded social services packages arranged. [17856]

Jacqui Smith: Information is not collected centrally in the format requested.

Quarterly information for Buckinghamshire health authority, for patients aged 75 and over, has been placed in the Library.

Lord Mayor Treloar Hospital

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date the commencement of the demolition of Lord Mayor Treloar Hospital in Alton, Hampshire was decided; and who gave the instruction. [31341]

Ms Blears: Demolition is currently under way on the site of the Lord Mayor Treloar Hospital. The land was sold by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to a private developer in November 2001. The demolition of existing buildings and the future development of the site is in the control of the new owner.

Departmental Savings

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the saving to public funds in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 is from the abolition of 14 administrative forms, referred to on page 17 of the 2001 departmental report. [14910]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not hold information on the savings to public funds from this measure. The 14 forms abolished were administrative forms which the Department issued in respect of applications for grants, licences, registrations etc. These forms were abolished in pursuance of Government policy to reduce regulatory burdens on business, charities and voluntary organisations including reducing the burdens of form filling where this can be done without removing the necessary controls.

Pharmacists

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure that pharmacists are represented on each of the primary care trusts when they are fully established. [25535]

Ms Blears: Current legislation allows for the inclusion of all family health service contractors, including pharmacists, to be members of the primary care trust. Professional membership of the PCT has to reflect the services for which it is responsible.

Staff to Beds Ratio

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the ratio of administration staff to total number of beds operating in the national health service was for each of the last 10 years. [14342]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 13 November 2001]:* The information requested is in the table. Comparative figures for 2001 are not yet available. Between 1996–97 and 2000–01 NHS management costs have fallen by £848 million and we remain on course to meet our manifesto commitment of £1 billion savings by 31 March 2002.

	Administration and estates staff[1]	*Total daily average of NHS Beds*[2]	*Ratio*[3]
1991	189,710	258,550	0.7
1992	200,610	246,080	0.8
1993	199,980	236,170	0.8
1994	203,330	224,380	0.9
1995	197,840	217,510	0.9
1996	196,530	212,680	0.9
1997	196,700	210,520	0.9
1998	198,540	206,410	1.0
1999	204,620	203,340	1.0
2000	212,020	199,730	1.1

[1] Figures are the headcount of Administration and Estates staff collected on 30 September each year in the Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

[2] Total Daily Average of NHS beds are the overnight beds, ie beds in wards open overnight. All NHS operating beds, includes other categories of beds such as beds that are in day only wards and NHS residential care beds, which are nursing home beds managed by the NHS. Source of data is Korner return KHO3 "bed availability and occupancy".

[3] Ratios have been rounded to one decimal point.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Child Abduction

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what discussions his Department has had with the Romanian authorities regarding abduction of children from that country; [26490]

(2) how many cases of children abducted from Romania have been investigated by police in the last five years; [26491]

(3) what assessment he has made of the incidence of children abducted in Romania being brought to the UK. [26492]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I have been asked to reply.

The United Kingdom and Romania are both parties to the 1980 Hague convention on the civil aspects of international child abduction. In total we have received four requests for the return of children allegedly abducted from Romania, of which two are currently outstanding. Other than the liaison between the respective central authorities in relation to these cases, there have been no recent discussions between my Department and the Romanian authorities on the subject of child abduction. My Department does not have information about police investigations into alleged child abduction cases.

Wolvercote Clinic

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Wolvercote clinic will move out of Epsom by the end of March according to schedule; and if he will make a statement. [33717]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 5 February 2002]:* The lease on the site at Horton hospital for the Wolvercote clinic has been extended to 30 April 2002.

Drugs

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy that the unlawful possession of a significant quantity of a controlled drug should constitute prima facie evidence of intent to supply; and if he will make a statement. [34778]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The intent to supply may be proved in a number of ways, for example by the circumstances, an admission, or the evidence of a witness. The quantity of the drug found is often an important consideration, but it is not always conclusive; drug dealers do not always carry large quantities. The Government and the police believe that the circumstances of the arrest are more important and that introducing a threshold would limit the effectiveness of enforcement action against drug dealers.

Arranged Marriages

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the regulations on arranged marriages. [34150]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* The immigration rules relating to marriage are applied equally to all applicants. There are no regulations which relate specifically to arranged marriages.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 23 November 2001 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Mrs. F. Qamar. [29964]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 6 February 2002.

Age Discrimination

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action his Department has taken to tackle discrimination against older people. [16330]

Mr. Blunkett: The Home Office Older Volunteers Initiative was launched in January 1999. Its aim is to improve the quality and quantity of volunteering for those aged 50 and over. £1.5 million has been committed over three years. Eighteen projects have been completed while eight are still ongoing. As part of the initiative the Home Office's Active Community Unit has produced a resource pack, "Lifelong Action", to promote good practice in attracting and retaining older volunteers. The initiative is being evaluated by a team from the University of Surrey at Roehampton and their evaluation report is due to be published and distributed by March 2002.

Following the recommendation of the Winning the Generation Game report, the Home Office has established the Experience Corps to encourage more people aged 50 plus, specifically those aged between 50 and 65 years old, to become involved in their local community through volunteering. The Home Office is providing the Experience Corps with £19 million over three years. Formed in March 2001 and chaired by Baroness Sally Greengross, the Experience Corps is aiming to have 120,000 volunteers in place by March 2004. The company started the roll out of this initiative in the north west, north east and Yorkshire and Humberside regions in November 2001 and in the London region in January 2002. Details of the Experience Corps are at www.experiencecorps.co.uk.

The Home Office's employment policy on discrimination is set out in our equal opportunities statement. It gives the Department's commitment that staff and job applicants will not be discriminated against on the basis of any 'irrelevant factor', which would normally include age. The statement is currently being updated.

Asylum Seekers

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost has been to Government Departments of airline tickets for the deportation of failed asylum seekers to Zimbabwe in each of the last 12 months for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [27844]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 16 January 2002]:* For the period 1 January to 31 December 2001 £162,868 was spent on public expense removals to Harare. This figure includes the cost of any escorts that might have been needed. The following figures cover asylum and non-asylum removals:

Month	£
January	5,283
February	7,815
March	9,056
April	9,691
May	10,703
June	11,584
July	15,371
August	9,260
September	21,031
October	19,644
November	10,524
December	32,906

Records do not differentiate between asylum and non-asylum removals.

Where we can identify the inbound carrier the cost of removal will fall to be met by the company responsible for bringing the person to the United Kingdom.

Arthur Andersen

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what dates since 7 June 2001 *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* special advisers in his Department have met employees of (i) Andersen and (ii) Accenture on official business; and if he will make a statement. [32102]

Mr. Blunkett: Home Office Ministers and civil servants meet many people as part of the process of policy development and analysis. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the ministerial code, the civil service code and guidance for civil servants: Contacts with Lobbyists.

Some of these discussions take place on a confidential basis, and in order to preserve confidentiality, it is not the normal practice of Governments to release details of specific meetings with private individuals or companies.

Police

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if police officers in areas other than London receive *(a)* an additional allowance and *(b)* weighting allowance. [33121]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 4 February 2002]:* Following a recommendation by the Police Negotiating Board (PNB), the statutory regulating body for police pay and conditions, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, while Home Secretary, approved an allowance for officers in eight forces surrounding London who were appointed on or after 1 September 1994 and are not in receipt of housing allowance. The allowance was awarded in recognition of the recruitment and retention problems associated with the higher cost of living in the south-east.

Qualifying officers in Essex, Hertfordshire, Kent, Surrey and Thames Valley receive an additional £2,000 a year, while qualifying officers in Bedfordshire, Hampshire and Sussex receive an additional £1,000 a year.

Police officers in London receive London weighting of £1,773 a year. Police officers in areas other than London do not receive a weighting allowance.

North London Mosque

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what search warrants have been *(a)* requested and *(b)* executed relating to a North London Mosque in the last two years; and if he will make a statement. [25186]

Mr. Blunkett: I am informed by the Metropolitan police that no search warrants have been executed in respect of the North London Central Mosque in the last two years. I am aware that there are at least 75 mosques in north London and the information requested could be obtained only in respect of every mosque at disproportionate cost. Records of search warrants requested are not held centrally.

Departmental Entertainment

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much his Department *(a)* budgeted to spend and *(b)* spent in each of the last six years on entertaining; and if he will break down these figures into categories. [32676]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 6 February 2002]:* The Department has spent in 1996–97 to 2001–02 the following amounts on entertaining official visitors and guests:

Financial years	*Expenditure (£)*
1996–97	58,346
1997–98	67,459
1998–99	84,468
1999–2000	77,822
2000–01	143,269
2001–02	[1]54,106

[1] To end January

The figures for 2001–02 exclude the Fire and Emergency Planning Directorate and the Fire Service College as responsibility for fire and emergency planning transferred to the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) and the Cabinet Office respectively as part of Machinery of Government charges.

Race Hatred

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the enforcement of the law on incitement to race hatred. [34076]

Angela Eagle: The enforcement of the law on the incitement to racial hatred is an operational matter for the police and the Crown Prosecution Service. The Government, while not involved in individual cases, have urged the police and the CPS to work more closely together on these cases and to pool experience relating to the sometimes complex issues surrounding incitement to racial hatred.

The Government have also strengthened the law on incitement to racial hatred. The Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 extended the scope of the offences to hatred directed against members of racial groups outside Great Britain and increased the maximum penalty for the offences from two to seven years imprisonment.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 379**

SESSION 2001–2002

28th January—8th February 2002

Printed indexes to Hansard

The volume index is one of three printed indexes to Commons Hansard produced from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Indexing Service (POLIS). It contains references to material in the bound volumes of Hansard. The other indexes produced are:

- The fortnightly index to Hansard. This covers the same date range as the volume index but references are to the column numbering in the daily parts and weekly edition of Hansard.
- The sessional index to Hansard. This contains references to material in the bound volumes for a whole session.

Indexes on the Parliamentary website

Fortnightly, volume and sessional indexes covering material from the beginning of the 1999/2000 session will also appear on the Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk with links to the full text of Hansard.

SCOPE

The indexes include entries covering:

- The content of all material recorded in Hansard, including debates, procedural motions and questions.
- The names of all Members contributing to the Parliamentary business recorded in Hansard.
- The names of some types of Parliamentary business whenever they occur in Hansard. These are 'Ministerial statements', 'Business statements', 'Opposition days' and 'Estimates days'.

ARRANGEMENT

- All headings are in one word-by-word alphabetical sequence, with Members' contribution entries distinguished from other entries by italics.
- Where a Member contributes to Parliamentary business and is the subject of Parliamentary business there are separate contribution and subject entries, the subject entry coming first.
- Entries beginning 'Mac' and 'Mc' are sorted in one sequence as 'Mac'.
- 'St', when abbreviated for Saint, is filed as 'Saint'.
- Numbers are filed as if spelt out, e.g. '10 Downing Street' as if 'Ten Downing Street'.

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Choice of headings

- *Specificity*—Entries summarise the overall content of a debate or question as specifically as the various POLIS thesauruses allow. For example, Education, Higher education, Universities or the name of a particular university is used depending on the breadth of the item.
- *Name headings*—Specific entries are included for the names of people, places, institutions, organisations, committees, programmes, initiatives, publications and legislation when these constitute the overall subject of an item.
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- *Subject headings*—Subject headings are assumed to refer to the whole of England, Great Britain or the United Kingdom unless otherwise stated.
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- *Places within the UK*—Material about specific towns, areas and institutions is entered under the name of the specific town, area or institution.
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Parliamentary material and business

- *Material about Parliament*—This is indexed under 'Parliament', the names of the two Houses, the 'Palace of Westminster' and parts of the Parliamentary estate (such as 'Portcullis House').
- *Committees*—Material about committees is indexed under 'Committees', types of committee (such as 'Select committees') and the names of individual committees (such as 'Home Affairs Select Committee').
- *Parliamentary proceedings/procedures*—Material discussing these is indexed under the specific type of proceeding (such as 'Parliamentary questions' or 'Oral questions'), procedure (such as 'Calling of Members') or issue (such as 'Unparliamentary expressions').
- *Legislation*—Entries for Parliamentary proceedings on bills and statutory instruments are entered under their titles. Where the lead word of the bill or statutory instrument does not provide a full or clear indication of the subject there are additional subject entries when the bill or instrument is debated. For example, debates on the 'Child Support Pensions and Social Security Bill' have entries under 'Pensions' and 'Social security benefits' as well as under the title of the Bill.
- *Members' names*—These are given in the form by which the Member prefers to be known.
- *Speaker and Chair*—Contributions by the Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker and deputies'. Contributions from the chair during Committees of the Whole House are brought together under 'Chairman of Committee of the Whole House'. Significant rulings and statements (as opposed to routine comments) are indicated by the sub-heading 'Rulings and statements' in both cases.

Guidance on headings

- *Cross references*—'See' references indicate all the material has been entered under another heading. 'See also' references indicate that additional information may be found under another heading.
- *Concept thesaurus*—A copy of the subject thesaurus to POLIS, listing the concept entries used in the index, is available on the Parliamentary website. A hard copy is available from the Head of the POLIS Unit, House of Commons Library, 1 Derby Gate, London, SW1A 2DG (020 7219 6456).

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- References in the indexes are to columns rather than pages.
- References to debates, but not questions, are accompanied by the date of the item.
- There are separate sequences in Hansard for the material taken on the floor of the House, Westminster Hall sittings and written questions:
  - References consisting of a number by itself indicate material taken on the floor of the House.
  - References ending in 'wh' indicate Westminster Hall sittings.
  - References ending in 'w' indicate written questions.
- References under all headings except the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in one numerical sequence irrespective of whether the material is taken on the floor of the House, is discussed at a Westminster Hall sitting or is a written question.
- References under the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in numerical sequence under the following headings:
  - *Debates etc.* (which includes interventions and points of order as well as significant contributions to debates);
  - *Sittings in Westminster Hall* (covering all debates held as part of the Westminster Hall sittings); and
  - *Questions* (which includes written, oral and private notice questions).

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in connection with the progress of bills:

- 1R=First reading
- 2R=Second reading
- Com=Committee stage
- Rep=Report stage
- 3R=Third reading
- res=resolution
- amendt(s)=amendment(s)
- *=matter taken formally without debate or division.

Parliamentary background

- The Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk contains a range of information about Parliament and the full text of some Parliamentary papers and proceedings including Hansard.
- Information on current Parliamentary business is provided in the House of Commons Information Office *Weekly Information Bulletin*, available on the website and from The Stationery Office (020 7873 8499).
- Further information on Parliamentary proceedings and procedures is available from the House of Commons Information Office (020 7219 4272).

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